

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Rock of Ages

Chris D'Arienzo

Selladoor Worldwide, Dan Looney, Adam Paulden, Jason Haigh-Ellery and Gavin Kalin

Grand Opera House, York

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The words 'guilty' and 'pleasure' figure largely in the press surrounding *Rock of Ages*. This is hardly surprising, however, when we consider that the show's soundtrack consists entirely of '80s rock hits we're too ashamed to admit liking such as "The Final Countdown" and "Don't Stop Believin".

A huge hit on Broadway and later in the West End, *Rock of Ages* has delighted audiences for years with its singalong tunes and escapist storytelling. In these troubled times, who wouldn't want to watch a show where love and music triumph over capitalism and greed?

The year is 1987 and an aspiring young rocker named Drew (Luke Walsh) works as a busboy in The Bourbon Room, the most famous club on the Sunset Strip. Enter Sherrie (Jodie Steele), an aspiring actress from Kansas, who gets a waitressing job there while waiting to be discovered. Naturally the two youngsters fall for each other, but a botched picnic scuppers their burgeoning romance.

Meanwhile two property developers—Hertz (Vas Constanti) and his outrageously camp son Frank (Andrew Carthy)—plan to demolish The Bourbon Room and introduce "clean living" into the area. Is this the end of rock 'n' rock on the Sunset Strip?

*Rock of Ages* is a silly, tongue-in-cheek show that is clearly not designed to be taken seriously. The romance between Drew and Sherrie is fairytale-like in its sweet simplicity and most of the characters demonstrate a touching belief in the power of rock music to bring people together.

I'd be lying if I said that I didn't enjoy the show at times—some of the tunes are very catchy and there are some strong performances—but its lurching tone often left me nonplussed.

At its best, the show is amusingly self-aware, sending up the excesses of rock music—particularly in the character of Stacey Jaxx (Antony Costa)—and cheerfully breaking the fourth wall. The show is anchored by its narrator Lonny (the excellent Lucas Rush), a weird mixture of Alice Cooper and Kenny Everett, who can always be relied upon to inject some fun into proceedings.

At its worst, the show can be queasily misogynistic. At the risk of sounding like a killjoy, the near-constant objectification of the female performers made me extremely uncomfortable. Equally troubling was the show's depiction of the ostensibly gay Frank, although this became more palatable in the second half.

Despite my issues with the show, I was impressed by the actors' vocal performances. Luke Walsh and Jodie Steele both belt out their songs with aplomb, and Zoe Birkett lends her powerhouse vocals to the character of Justice, the strip club owner.

Although I'm not a huge fan of '80s rock music, I wish the performers had been allowed to sing their songs to completion rather than giving us a couple of verses and choruses.

*Rock of Ages* is a hugely popular show and no doubt this production will be met with great enthusiasm as it travels around the country. I only wish the material was as strong as the talented people involved in it.

**Reviewer:** [James Ballands](#)