



North Carolina Theatre: Director Matt Lenz and Choreographer Michele Lynch Have a Fresh, New Take on High School Musical *Grease*

by [Robert W. McDowell](#)

North Carolina Theatre director Matt Lenz and choreographer Michele Lynch have a fresh, new take on *Grease* that keeps the ducktailed, leather-jacketed, and poodle-skirted denizens of Rydell High Class of 1959 perambulating the stage like, well, “greased lightning.” With clever music, lyrics, and book by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, *Grease* is the ultimate high school musical and, on May 12th, NCT’s first-nighters rewarded the onstage pyrotechnics with a hearty standing ovation.

Lenz and Lynch, who previously staged NCT’s critically acclaimed presentations of *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast* (2005) and *South Pacific* (2006), fill every inch of the magnificent multilevel sets originally designed for Phoenix Productions and Magic Arts & Entertainment’s 2003 national tour of *Grease* by scenic designer James Youmans. Other kudos go to Costume World Theatrical, which provided most of the fabulous Fifties outfits; music director Edward G. Robinson and the hard-rocking NCT orchestra; costume designer Ann Bruskiewitz; hair/wigs/makeup specialist Patti Delsordo; lighting designer John Bartenstein; properties mistress Laurie Johnson; and sound designer Jonathan Parke. Their combined contributions make *Grease* look and sound superb.

Matthew Hydzik is tall, dark, and handsome as Rydell High’s resident bad-boy Danny Zuko; and Hollie Howard is bright, blonde, and more than a bit naïve as good-girl Sandy Dumbrowski, a newcomer to the rumbles and submarine races that characterize some favorite pursuits of the juvenile delinquents who comprise the Burger Palace Boys and their female auxiliaries the Pink Ladies.

Hydzik and Howard give Danny and Sandy the requisite attitude and angst that will make their road to romance especially rocky. Laura Beth Wells is a treat as tough-talking Betty Rizzo, Evan Lubeck is delightfully dim as the car-crazy Kenickie, Michael Busillo is amusing as hapless would-be ladies’ man Sonny LaTierri, and Caroline Kaiser is cute as Jan the compulsive overeater.

Kristoffer Lowe is funny as class nerd Eugene Florczyk, Brian Norris is a pip as class clown and Rydell mooning champ Roger (a.k.a. Rump), and Lisa Kassay is sweetly silly as beauty-school dropout Frenchy. Erin Wilson is hilarious as hot-to-trot Cha-Cha DiGregorio, Terrence McKinnley Clowe is terrific as Teen Angel/Johnnie Casino, and Vinny Genna adds a vivid cameo as amorous WAXX DJ Vince Fontaine.

Cameron Leigh Wade as perky cheerleader Patty Simcox, Leslie McDonel as Marty and Jason Wooten as Doody each have their moments in the spotlight. But it is Lynda Clark who steals the show as the eccentric English teacher Miss Lynch, who terrorizes her students and invades the audience at intermission to give Baby Boomers flashbacks of those classroom terrors of yesteryear.

Director Matt Lenz and choreographer Michele Lynch set a brisk pace, so NCT's third production of *Grease* never flags. Their crisp comic staging and high-octane production numbers make the Raleigh, NC-based theater's latest-and-greatest edition of *Grease* well worth seeing, even if you saw NCT's 1986 and 1999 productions.

North Carolina Theatre presents *Grease* Tuesday-Friday, May 15-18, at 8 p.m.; Saturday, May 19, at 2 and 8 p.m.; and Sunday, May 20, at 2 and 7 p.m. in Raleigh Memorial Auditorium in the Progress Energy Center for the Performing Arts, 1 E. South St., Raleigh, North Carolina. \$25-\$75. *NCT Box Office*: 919/831-6950. *Group Rates (for groups of 10 or more)*: telephone NCT group sales director Leslie Bradford at 919/664-5204, e-mail lbradford@nctheatre.com, or visit http://www.nctheatre.com/group_sales.html [inactive 3/09]. North Carolina Theatre: <http://www.nctheatre.com/>. Internet Broadway Database: <http://www.ibdb.com/show.asp?ID=4056>. Internet Movie Database: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077631/>.

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