

GREASE: THE ARENA SPECTACULAR

SEL & GFO

Adelaide Entertainment Centre
Until 3 June

Review by Simon Slade

After more than 30 years, the musical "Grease" is still as popular as ever and is currently touring the country in an arena spectacular.

Director David Gilmore's "Grease" boasts some very good singers, and the cutesy story is more or less intact.

Smash-hits such as "Summer Nights," "You're the One that I Want" and "Grease is the Word" thrill fans packed around a rotating stage.

The production is painted in broad strokes. Over-sized, cartoon-coloured props are run onto stage - along with the 30-strong chorus at regular intervals. The chorus numbers stand out, and Kelly Abbey's choreography is excellent.

"Australian Idol" finalist Courtney Murphy blazes his sweet, deep voice, and shows that he can act and has a talent for comedy, although he can't keep up with the more complicated dance routines.

The band under Chong Lim was especially convincing, although not aided by the acoustics of the venue or the tonal quality of the vocal amplification.

Nearly every element of the show is good, but there is something missing.

What still detracts from the production as a whole is its very selling point: the scale. Playing the characters big enough to fill the cavernous Entertainment Centre without over-acting is an impossible one.

The funny and talented Magda Szubanski gives it her best shot as the prim Miss Lynch, and Tamsin Carroll provides a creditable Rizzo, aided by this being the "loudest" character. Otherwise talented actors are reduced to creating pantomime people out of cardboard cutouts.

Craig McLachlan resorts to creating a parody of Danny, and Natalie Bassingthwaight offers an almost doll-like Sandy, until her sudden metamorphosis at the end of the show. Luckily McLachlan has the charisma and Bassingthwaight the voice to sail through with the audience lapping it up.

Most of the audience know the show so well that the story is almost redundant, let alone nuances of character. Judging individual performances, therefore, is really as pointless as listing the dizzy array of tricks the vast revolving stage performs.

This is more a celebration than a production, so John Farnham can bring the house down just by his brief appearance as Teen Angel, and Craig McLachlan can get a huge round of applause for showing that his neck muscles work!