

# Hair: the musical – play review

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'Hair' is a play about the choices and struggle of a group of people in the 1960s, called hippies. Hippies believed in peace and love, not war and violence, growing out their hair as a representation. The play was inspired by a need to change the social standard in America. 'Hair' is a rock musical about the revolution of sexuality and social standard. Their mission was to change people's perception of racism, environmental destruction, poverty, sexism and sexual repression, violence at home and the war in Vietnam, depersonalization from new technologies, and corruption in politics.

The actor I chose to critique was the African American chorus boy, who played many different small roles. 'Hair' was the first stage production that gave African Americans equality on the stage, so I was curious to see how he would embrace his role on stage. For being in the Tribe chorus as Claude's friend most of the act, I thought he was believable as a serious, bisexual hippie who was fully committed to taking part in the Tribe protests and drug trips, never once breaking character. With minimal lines he was able to encourage audience to interpret his actions and reactions.

Even though he didn't speak very much, his intentions were communicated through his body language, he portrayed his character in act I with slightly feminized movements, and slightly awkward motions, creating a believable chorus character. When he did speak, he had done his job portraying his character, so his voice matched what my expectations were for his character. In act II, he played a very masculine soldier, surprising me with the diversity of his acting. While the actor's dancing was good, he was great at tricks, executing flawless flips and split jumps in various numbers.

His performance, along with the rest of the chorus, aided the principal actors performance in the musical, by staying true to their chorus roles. Directors determine set, blocking and cast, basically determining if they will be able to "make it, or break it" for any show. Sets influence the theme and meaning of a play, almost as much as the acting. In 'Hair' the set had 10' construction risers that rose in a semi circle around the stage, giving the actors a split center entrance. The edges of set were decorated with multiple tie-die banners, spanning the width of the stage.

Lights were basic, but not over used, guiding the atmosphere in its intended direction. The actors and chorus members were able to use the set to illustrate their intentions effectively because of the different physical levels they were able to reach. Having access to a wide range of blocking possibilities allows creativity to be explored, rather than hindered. I feel the director used the stage well, but there was untapped choreography potential during the dance numbers, essentially crowding the chorus members instead of placing them on rafters.

In terms of blocking, I disagreed with the directors choice and felt the stage was too crowded at certain times when there might have been more impact if there hadn't been so many chorus on stage, for example when Claude was having the discussion with his "multiple parents". Chorus members are not meant to be on stage the majority of the play, or even required to be in all the dance numbers, they are meant to provide specific atmosphere at pivotal moments in the drama. The sound design was minimal; they had actors on

microphones during songs and a live orchestra accompanying, a little bit too loud at times.

Taking all my critiques in mind, I felt the director's choices were effective and valid to the story, giving the show a well-rounded polish. Having been to New York and seeing world-renowned musicals, regular school musicals cannot compare. It is safe to say that the entire play is strong, innovative and revolutionary, thus being in a category by itself. The inspiration behind the show derives from a need to change the way Americans think about their fellow people, and 'Hair' was a strong catalyst in the 1960s.

I was captivated by the uniqueness of the costumes, songs and controversial themes depicted throughout act I. In act II, the actors did their best to take me on a journey most will never experience in their lives. Because of the nature of the play, slight improv and an intended unfinished vibe, I was forced into their world of constant harassment and their passion to change, making me care about the characters in a positive way. The script had basic characters, a strong conflict and controversial climax, but the left the audience with an intended "sour taste", instead of a resolution.

While the script was clever at times, it was also simpler at others, the original play writers wanted to send a clear message to the mass, instead of touching the individual. 'Hair' was a revolutionary musical when it debuted on Broadway: it rejected traditional theatre, and changed the view of American musical attendees forever. Because of its themes and rock music, 'Hair' was able to pave the way for other "out of the ordinary" musicals.

Having never heard of 'Hair' before, I was captivated by the uniqueness of the musical.

While I may not have enjoyed or agreed with everything that I saw, I can respect the hard work, care and dedication that was pouring out of the actors hearts. In terms of a rating, with a traditional Broadway musical being five stars, I would give Prince of Wale's production of 'Hair' a three and a half. I believe there were things to be worked on, choreography to be adjusted and stage spacing to be examined. Having said that, I thought the performance was genuine and each actor gave everything they had to the performance.