

Academy's *Carrie*: A bloody good musical, period.



Photo credit: Samantha Gaus

Carrie: The Musical is based on the Stephen King novel (and subsequent film) *Carrie*, and written for the stage by Lawrence D. Cohen. Directed by Jimmy Calitri, *Carrie* is a unique retelling of the horror story through the conduit of musical theater. Produced by the Academy Players in Providence on an open and inviting stage, *Carrie: The Musical* recalls the events leading up to a tragic prom night, where the title character takes supernatural revenge on her not-so-nice classmates.

Before the play even begins, the atmosphere is set when Sue Snell, played by Dalita Getzoyan, arrives on stage with a terrified look on her face. She humbly makes her way to a room with a single dangling lightbulb and paces back and forth for almost a full 10 minutes before the rest of the cast takes the stage and the house lights go down. By then, audience members are eagerly awaiting the answer to the question of why this teenage girl appears so noticeably horrified. Then, it begins. A voice comes over the intercom and robotically questions Sue about events that took place at her high school one fateful evening. As she recounts, the audience is led through her story by a series of wonderfully executed musical numbers.

The star, of course, is Carrie, a high school outcast who is incessantly tormented by her peers after getting her first period in the girl's locker room. Played by Betsy Rinaldi, Carrie finally gets her chance at normalcy when asked to prom by one of the popular kids. Rinaldi delivers every line with emotion

and has a singing voice attuned to something you would see on the finals of a reality talent show. Coupled with her expressions and exaggerated movements, which are so on point they often left the audience either laughing or slightly teary eyed, her interpretation of Carrie is moving, to say the least. Her crowning moment may be the final scene where she desperately tries to escape the arms of Sue in order to make her way toward — well, wait and see.

Courtney Olenzak, as mean girl Chris Hargenson, gives one of the best performances of the night. Her eye rolls, tone of voice and delivery of dialogue are so convincing, it sparks flashbacks to every high school movie with that entitled bully you just can't help but hate. Her partner in crime, Billy Nolan, played by Marcus Evans, is a wonderful complement to Olenzak. Together, they formed the perfect duo of obnoxious, retribution-deserving teens.

And who can forget Michelle Schmitt's interpretation of Margaret White, the obsessively devout parent of Carrie White. Not only is Schmitt's voice fantastic, but she performs one of the best refrains in a tone so bursting with emotion, chills were running down spines. In perhaps the most eerie melody of the night, the religious zealot mother sings of how menstrual cycles are a curse from God before physically attacking her daughter and locking her in a closet.

Supporting roles do not fall short, either. Both Paula Glen and Jomo Peters act terrifically in their roles as teachers at Carrie's school. Glen, in particular in her support of Carrie, made theatergoers wish they still had that one well-meaning adult who had their back. Of course, high school would have been much more entertaining if they all had fantastic choreography and unbelievable harmonies, which here created a string of praise-worthy moments for the entire cast, who nail it every time.

The lighting, by Alexander Sprague, is effective and essential to the storytelling, bathing the cast in red and white at all the right moments. Carrie's supernatural abilities are accentuated by strobes and projections on the walls, allowing objects to appear as if moving on their own. The cast is sometimes hard to hear when in harmony, with many strong, beautiful voices competing for the spotlight, but this was rare and did not take away from the story. The small live band (directed by Emily Turtle) of keyboards, guitar and percussion was in sync with the characters and added to the emotional impact.

Yet, although this show deserves high praise, some of the play's weaker points lie in its structure. Since *Carrie* is such an iconic film, it is hard not to compare the storyline and interpretation of characters to the original feature, which, in general, is far darker and bloodier than its stage counterpart. At times, the musical feels rushed and off-focus and does not leave much room for the audience to get particularly attached to most of the characters. So, if you find yourself making direct comparisons, don't — this is a completely different creature.

With that said, as the one thing in this world that starts with a period, *Carrie: The Musical* is entertaining, engaging and definitely worth seeing.

The Academy Players of RI present Carrie: The Musical, through Feb 23. 180 Button Hole Dr., Bldg. 2, PVD. For tickets and more information, visit academyplayersri.org