

Strictly Ballroom an enjoyable spectacle

By Alessia Urbani

Mirvish's run of Baz Luhrmann's *Strictly Ballroom*, based on the 1992 classic film of the same name, dances into Toronto's theatrical scene.

On stage at the Princess of Wales Theatre, the show offers an entertaining spectacle, but critically speaking, misses a few steps. The theatrical production very closely mimics the film's exaggerated rom-com plot, but lacks the same satirical essence in its translation to the stage. All that's is a bit of a cheesy quality that doesn't come across as ironic as it is intended.

However, despite my metaphorical lactose-intolerance to cheesiness in entertainment, I was able to handle it; in fact I enjoyed it.

There's a familiarity in *Strictly Ballroom*'s classically romantic plot. Protagonist Scott Hastings (Sam Lips) is the archetypal misunderstood young man who is alienated because he has broken the status quo as he meets dorky and doe-eyed Fran (Gemma Sutton), who becomes his dance partner turned love interest. Despite the predictability of their romance, Lips and Sutton breathe refreshing liveliness into their characters, harnessing their roles with equal passion for one another as they have for dance. Their chemistry, though undeniable, is only fairly secondary to their strong triple-threat talent.

Yet, the standout performances were undoubtedly by secondary characters Rico (Fernando Mira) and Abuela (Eve Polycarpou) as Mira, who silences the audience while performing the Paso Doble and Polycarpou. Those soulful vocals closes the first act.

Defined by its strong choreography and exuberant costumes, watching a rainbow of feathers and sequins dance down the orchestra aisles was undoubtedly fun and engaging. Despite my persistent critical nature that's been bred into me as a theatre student, I followed suit as the audience gave a standing ovation and danced freely in the aisle during curtain call.

Strictly Ballroom is playing through June 25. For more, visit www.mirvish.com