



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: Amateur Players of Sherborne

Name of Production: Bouncers

Venue: Sherborne Studio Theatre

Date: Friday 12th September 2025

Adjudicator: Tash Moore

John Godber holds the accolade of being one of the most performed writers in the English language and *Bouncers* is in part, accredited to this. This popular play was first performed 44 years ago and continues to resonate with audiences as it explores themes such as masculinity and misogyny, gender and classist stereotypes, the extremes of sexual relationships and the social impact of drinking cultures. With a range of featured characters and an appealing comedic tone, there's plenty to appease a wide audience. Many are familiar with the material and the distinctive physical, non-naturalistic playing style required to deliver this distinctive piece of theatre. It's a solid choice for an amateur company as minimal set is required, but still offers plenty of scope for bold aesthetics. For the company, this piece is a gift. Not only do they have ample opportunity to explore and exert their range as an actor, they are invited to fun with the audience as well as the style. Therefore, one can readily appreciate why APS included *Bouncers* in their programming this season.

SET & STAGING

The set, designed by Director Sarah Webster and John Crabtree worked well in the space and was used effectively throughout. The red double doors of the club sat centrally and were nicely decorated with long frosted windows and silver handles. The brilliantly constructed 'Mr Cinders' neon sign was positioned above these doors and was illuminated for scenes exterior to this location.

Two wide treads with strip lighting features to match the sign led up to the doors, and these were occasionally used by the bouncers in positions of repose. Brick details either side of the red doors supported the overall aesthetic of the club exterior, and these included high inset windows. There was a poster on the wall stage left advertising an event and a mirror on the wall to the right was used to suggest a bathroom scene. To open, four blocks were scattered stage left upon which two of the bouncers sat pre-show playing cards whilst the other two characters sauntered through the audience to stand framing the venue's entrance. This was a lovely idea, although was cued a little late as much of the audience were already seated by this juncture. Entrances and exits were namely conducted via the wings and on occasion through the auditorium left doors.

The minimal set delivered everything that was required of this piece. The company of four firmly established their bouncer characters and set up the device in which they served as narrators, as well

as jumping in and out of several roles respectively. The non-naturalistic playing style was established from the offset by the prologue rap, which the audience enjoyed. Similarly, the company had fun with the audience, teasing them at every given opportunity. Perhaps what was overlooked was their ability to intimidate as well as to delight. They are given permission in this play to resent the audience and to reject any positive feedback that is received. Godber says of directing this play; it's acting with choreography. At times the physical portrayals and set pieces could have been bolder and braver, however what the company did deliver was entertaining. The narrative was clearly communicated and the audience were engaged throughout.

The company moved swiftly through scene transitions, for example with a swift exit made by Les following the Steve Wright scene whilst the other three set up the hairdressing salon downstage left, with Les re-entering from upstage right with a handbag over his arm to play Rosie. The staging blocks were used to succinctly establish locations, starting with the hairdresser/barber scene playing out with Eric and Ralph sat on the blocks and Judd stood behind. The use of mime was also well established in this scene by Judd who used a variety of movements to build the setting by enacting activities such as using the sink, mixing foam and sweeping the floor. As the characters switched from one scene to the next, they shifted their postures to suggest that they were moving from playing female, to male characters. These simple choices played into the intended style. Godber wrote them as caricatures so that they could be quickly identified and understood by the audience. Each character should have their own unique movement vocabulary and this is why I felt that Harry Wopat as Les did much for the production in this respect. He had clearly established a different physicality for each of his characters and the audience watched his cues to understand when a transition was in motion.

The energy was buzzing as the group waited for Terry whilst they mimed gearing up for a big night out, with focussed movement used to suggest this. *'The lads'* created their first bar by stacking the blocks with Les and Judd leaning on them to add to the picture effectively crafted here. They vehemently necked their drinks and Eric shared an emphatic delivery of *"Piss call"*, which the audience enjoyed. *'The girls'* used the blocks as a jukebox in their first pub of the night and during this scene they enjoyed targeting a man on the front row of the audience. Thereafter, he remained on the receiving end of several jokes throughout the production and this was accepted with good grace. The next scene marked a complete contrast in mood and pace as the bouncer characters were introduced, starting with a slow exchange of their names. The tedious, monotonous energy of this scene contrasted well with the sudden outburst from the lads on *"Here we go...etc."*

Judd stood on a block to introduce the *'upper-class'* students. The portrayals here were obnoxiously over the top, with numerous *"hoorahs"* delivered out front. As Ralph pulled his fist back to confront one of the students, a snap blackout was used to conclude the scene as well as to provide coverage for a swift reset back to the bouncers outside the club. This saw Ralph now positioned on the blocks with the others sat on the steps as the group relived the memory of the previous scene. Their positions then shifted downstage and a lighting change was also used to effectively suggest the passing of time and to exemplify the group's boredom. This led into Eric's first monologue and it was nice to keep the others onstage for this moment, with Ralph leaning on the wall upstage right and the other two sat on the club steps.

Inside the nightclub, the DJ's booth was formed by stacking the staging blocks. This scene was one of the Act One highlights as the company succinctly communicated a variety of characters and events. Maureen and Elaine enjoyed the scandal of Rosie's boyfriend being seen with another woman and Rosie's hysterics landed well before Elaine comforted her as she sat on the front treads. Suzy's responses lifted the comedy here and this enjoyable scene concluded with the group's zealous out-of-tune rendition of *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*.

One of the blocking highlights was in the scene in which a variety of characters were trying to get into the club. Two bouncers stood as a pair to frame the club doors whilst the other two company members embodied a host of enjoyable characters including Mark and Brian who were presented with heightened accents and hand gestures. Judd took on these characters with a keen sense of intimidation and Ralph and Les had fun with their po-going punks. Circling motions were used as the cast alternated between their bouncer and other roles throughout this scene. It was aesthetically pleasing to watch, the pacing and rhythm worked brilliantly and the simple movements facilitated a clear communication of the various narratives as featured in this scene.

The second half saw the return of the girls in the club with Ralph back in his DJ role. Rosie and Elaine busted out some classic dance moves in unison whilst an intoxicated Maureen was getting somewhat lairy before Les and Judd seamlessly erupted onto the dance floor to remove her from the club. The silly humour of the '*blue movie*' was well received with a decent attempt at playing out the sequence in reverse to conclude. The performances alongside the staging, music and lighting made for an enjoyable scene here. When the girls returned after Eric's second speech, the positioning of the dancing pairs worked well. Baz had his face in Suzy's bosom whilst Elaine spun Kev around with their alternating downstage-facing positions enabling them to address the audience directly. Events descended into chaos as a slow-motion fight was accompanied by the track, *Kung Fu Fighting*. Much fun was had here and it was a shame that it was cut short; this moment could have held longer as the audience relished in the humour of this creative choice.

The final series of short scenes were defined using sharp tonal contrasts; from the lads slow dancing to the bouncers, the hot dog cart, the taxi queue and the final ride home. The staging blocks were positioned two-by-two to create the front and back seats with Kev was sat up front and the other three squeezed in the back. Baz played the urinating out of the window upstage, but more could have made more of the resultant '*blow back*'. During the final sequence, the audience were amused by Ralph's offering of "*a basket meal*" before the group removed their jackets as they relaxed together at the end of their shift. The blocks were positioned on the treads to represent the television where a VHS was being put into a player. The company put their jackets on backwards to perform their version of the *Thriller* routine which brought the performance to an end. It was a shame that the reprise of the rap was not utilised this is a nice bookend (and reinforcement of key messages) to the piece, but the audience were none the wiser.

COSTUME

All four company members appeared in a typical bouncer look, comprised of a black jacket, trousers, smart shoes and a white shirt. All wore bow ties, but these didn't quite match. When they removed their jackets, it was revealed that the shirt styles were mis-matching and that Ralph and Eric were wearing braces. The lack of uniformity worked well as one could readily imagine that a venue such as *Mr Cinders* was hardly going to provide their door staff with the appropriate clothing, and instead relied on the staff sourcing this themselves.

PROPS

Handbags were used to mark the appearance of '*the girls*' and these were well chosen for each character. Rosie's was a small white bag, Maureen's was red and Suzy's was green and black. Ralph's personal props included a cigarette and sunglasses when playing the DJ, and an intoxicated Kev made the most of a space hopper throughout the hot dog scene.

SOUND

An appropriate sound effect was used to convey a phone ringing at the end of the opening rap. The track used as '*the lads*' entered their first bar featured a fantastic balance between the background music and ambient noise of loud drunken conversations, and this in turn sat perfectly against the live

dialogue. Atmospheric music was used for the first scene outside the club, with an upstage PA system employed to deliver muffled music as if it were playing from inside the club. This simple touch proved to be incredibly effective; each time the music shifted from the auditorium to behind the stage, the audience could instantly identify whether the scene was interior or exterior to the club. *Like a Virgin* was the perfect choice of track for the first scene inside *Mr Cinders* given the DJ's speech here, and the cue for *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* during this scene was intuitively timed. The visual cues for the effects used to accompany the undoing and redoing of zips in the toilet scene were neatly met and the dripping SFX used in this scene enhanced the location. A saxophone-led piece was used as the "*sleezy background music*" for the blue movie which added to the fun and silliness of this moment and the effects used for the taxi approaching and the doors opening/closing were well chosen and perfectly cued in line with the onstage visuals.

LIGHTING

The design made good use of the venue's fixed rig, providing ample coverage across the small playing space and the central glitter ball was well used throughout. The opening state used four downstage cans to focus each of the characters and this was used frequently throughout the production whenever the characters returned to these positions. The yellow contrasted nicely with the multi-coloured cans employed upstage and this effective opening sequence concluded with a well-judged fade. The reveal of the pink neon 'Mr Cinders' sign alongside the blue strips around the steps to the club doors was super. Each time the piece returned to the bouncer scenes outside the club, the location could not be missed! During the student scene the disco ball effect was cast across the club doors and this scene also used a snap blackout as Ralph went to hit one of the rowdy students. The single can on Eric was well-meaning but unfortunately cast too much shadow on his face. This state required either angled focus overhead or an uplift. Act Two highlights included the cool appropriately-coloured state used for the blue movie and the dramatic contrast and snap into "*Lucky Eric's third and final speech*" which played into the comedy of this moment nicely. The sole green state was reserved for the club at the end of the night which aptly suggested the time of day and enhanced the mood of the weary characters at the end of a long night.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES

Gary Brooks as Judd: Gary opened the play with an energised rap using lively hand gestures and facial expressions. He effectively contrasted the other three characters who remained stoic and kept their hands clasped. He swiftly transitioned from the hairdresser to the barber, demonstrating good focus and attention to detail in the background work provided throughout these scenes. Plain Elaine was fun, although one certainly wouldn't mess with her! Judd's bravado and defensiveness on the delivery of "*Something*" with regard to what he could bench press was starkly evident and in turn this shared an insight into his dynamic within the bouncer group. Gary made the most of Terry's intoxicated stupor and by kicking-out time he was effectively slurring his words and enjoying the opportunity to intimately dance with a (mimed) partner.

Jordan Wiseman as Ralph: Jordan's dry delivery of "*There's only ugly ones left at two o'clock*" in the barber scene was entertaining and his Suzy was delightfully saucy. In the first bouncer scene, his sage life advice and inclusive views were calmly imparted before his mood switched sharply as he confidently turned to confront Eric. Jordan clearly revelled in the DJ character and did well to alternate between this and the Suzy character in the nightclub scenes. He lifted the comedy without pulling focus as he stood by a sobbing Rosie, disapprovingly wagging a finger at her unfaithful boyfriend. The suave and sleezy portrayal of Nobby was enjoyable and Jordan lifted the comedy of the moment when Suzy successfully managed to dodge Baz's unwanted advances on the dance floor.

Freddie Wopat as Lucky Eric: Eric was calmly introduced to the audience with knowing and bemused looks throughout the prologue rap. Freddie relished in Maureen's wit and lithe energy and developed the character nicely throughout as a somewhat simple and most endearing character. Baz provided a nice contrast and a solid introduction to the group of lads as they readied themselves for Friday night. The low vocal affect for Eric worked well which, coupled with a measured pace, carried a somewhat sinister undertone. Eric demonstrated patience with Les during the bench press exchange and across various scenes built on his complex relationship with Ralph. The first monologue was sincerely delivered with a sense of stillness as the character shared a heartfelt glimpse into what lay behind his tough exterior. The lady in the blue movie provided much hilarity with a suitably silly cod Swedish accent and coquettish gestures. In turn, this played nicely against the extreme contrast of Eric's second speech in which Freddie firmly established an immediate shift in tone and mood. The restraint in which this was delivered emphasised the darkness of the character's sudden violent outburst in this story. This was a performance highlight. Again, Freddie intuitively pushed the tonal contrasts in the piece as he broke the reverie of Les' comment about being in a painting with a well-timed expression of needing "*a slash*".

Harry Wopat as Les: As previously mentioned, Harry did well to demonstrate differentiation between the characters he played. This was across the vocal delivery as well as the physicality, for example using contrasting pitches, rhythms and accents across characters such as Steve Wright and Gervaise. Transitions were executed with succinct accuracy and this really helped the production overall; one could observe a shift in the physicality of this actor and know that the next scene had started. It was clear that Harry had thought each character through and understood the stylistic demands of this piece. Rosie was poised and bitchy but this cool façade faltered throughout the course of the night. Her drunken hiccups and frivolous mood soon turned to rage and eventual distress upon discovering her boyfriend with another before woman. Performance highlights included the portrayal of Birdy who was played as a high-pitched scouse, and the moment when Harry snapped from playing a punter leaving the disco and back into Les. The blocking here was minimal but Harry's performance enabled clear communication of the narrative in what could have been a confusing moment for the audience. He had fun with the space hopper and carried Kev's intoxicated state well with a comedically-slow processing of the time as he struggled to look at his watch in the hot dog scene.