

“School of Rock” has got to be one of the most feel-good musicals of the decade, with its super cute, incredibly talented kids and lovable antihero.

The musical, with 14 new songs by Andrew Lloyd Webber, lyrics by Glenn Slater and book by Julian Fellowes, is a high-energy surge of joy in its national tour now playing at Playhouse Square’s Connor Palace. Leading the way as Dewey Finn for most of Cleveland’s run is the infectiously funny, scruffy Gary Trainor, a wonderful comedic actor who makes you laugh just looking at him with his hilarious facial expressions, goofy movements and ungainly pratfalls.

Cleveland is in great hands with Trainor, who played Dewey in the original West End cast and alternates with the national tour’s primary Dewey, Merritt David Janes. He’ll return to the tour for the last week of Playhouse Square’s run.

True to the Jack Black movie that this musical’s based on, Trainor’s Dewey is a slovenly-yet-good-natured dude with a beer belly. Dewey’s a slacker when it comes to just about everything but rock ‘n’ roll.

He impersonates his roommate Ned to get a substitute teaching job at Horace Green prep school because he’s in desperate need of cash to pay his rent. Dewey’s no scholar, and these serious kids initially try to hold him to the academic standards that their parents are paying for.

The only thing this down-and-out, unemployed goofball takes seriously is rock, and once he realizes his young charges have musical talent, he expects them to do the same. The delightful dozen who learn how to make a truly rockin’ band in Dewey’s fifth-grade class are led by Mystic Inscho with his awesome guitar licks as Zack, unbelievably only 9 years old; high-spirited drummer Cameron Trueblood as Freddy and Camille de la Cruz as killer kid vocalist Tomika.

Sami Bray is also a hoot as Miss-Know-It-All Summer, the band manager who keeps both the kids and Dewey in line, and Leanne Parks has all the right moves with her cool splits and rock star face as Katie on bass. (Read about how the show finds its young musicians at <https://bit.ly/2NMI3DC>.)

This show, which includes several tunes from the original movie, features a seven-piece adult band in the pit. But the kid instrumentalists on stage are the real deal, doing all the music-making as they start forming their group (“You’re in the Band”) and when they audition for and compete in the battle of the bands.

Review

Musical: "School of Rock"

When: Continuing through March 24, 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 1:30 and 7:30 p.m. Saturdays, 1 and 6:30 p.m. Sundays

Where: Connor Palace, 1615 Euclid Ave., Playhouse Square, Cleveland

Onstage: Starring Gary Trainor, Merritt David Janes, Lexie Dorsett Sharp, Madison Micucci, Layne Roate, Sami Bray, Camille De La Cruz, Sammy Dell, Mystic Inscho, Alyssa Emily Marvin, Jacob Moran, Leanne Parks, Julian Brescia, Arianna Pereira, Cameron Trueblood, Dylan Trueblood, Gabriella Uhl

Offstage: Based on the 2003 film; Andrew Lloyd Webber, score; Glenn Slater, lyrics; Julian Fellowes, book; JoAnn Hunter, choreographer; Laurence Connor, director; Anna Louizos, scenic/costume design; Natasha Katz, lighting; Mick Potter, sound; John Rigby, music supervision; Martyn Axe, music director; Larry Smiglewski, production stage manager; Josh Marquette, hair; Talitha Fehr, music coordinator

Cost: \$10-\$110

Info: 216-241-6000 or www.playhousesquare.org

At this elite school, run by uptight principal Rosalie Mullins (Lexie Dorsett Sharp), the kids' creativity and self-expression have been squelched by an emphasis on strictness and high test scores. All that changes when Dewey turns the kids into little rebels.

The score isn't groundbreaking and some of Slater's lyrics are formulaic. Nevertheless, some especially tuneful melodies include "You're in the Band"; "In the End of Time," co-written by Black for the original film; "Stick it to the Man" and "If Only You Would Listen."

In that last song, Fellowes' story attempts to flesh out the lives of individual kids at home with their overbearing parents. This musical achieves that at the surface level, which is more than the movie did.

"School of Rock" has a romance side story that is silly but fun. The show contains some mild language that may not be suitable for young children.

Body found in woods in Springfield Township
