

## ‘Footloose’ Remake Dances to Its Own Tune

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on October 13, 2011 - 4:26pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – If you’re gonna cut loose, “Footloose,” it is best to do what the production team and cast did in cutting this remake of the 1980s kitschy classic – pay deep homage to the source and modify it with a energetic and contemporary spin on the dance floor.

This “Footloose” has a spark of its own, due to the guidance of veteran director Craig Brewer (“Hustle and Flow,” “Black Snake Moan”). He creates a Footloose universe that absorbs the dimensions of the previous film, and steers the young cast to take all of it seriously enough to find their own way through the story. Although suffering from a few soft spots in the middle, “Footloose’ brims with enough frenetic dancing, friendship and real emotion to make a case that this is the better version.

The film begins with the crackling and familiar strains of the song “Footloose,” the 1980s classic by Kenny Loggins, sung in this version by Blake Shelton. The teenage party in the town of Bomont, Georgia, is in full swing, but afterwards some are over-served by the night. An automobile accident kills four of the revelers, including the son of Rev. Shaw Moore (Dennis Quaid). In a strong reaction, the town bans dancing, carousing or any type of teenage gatherings.



New Kid in Town: Kenny Wormaid as Ren in ‘Footloose’  
*Photo credit: K.C. Bailey for Paramount Pictures*

Fast forward to four years later, Ren MacCormack (Kenny Wormaid) is the new kid in town, having come from Boston after his mother has

died. He now lives with his Uncle Wes (Ray McKinnon), who provides him with a place to stay and a yellow VW bug to fix up. His first days as a senior in high school are challenging, but he makes friends with Willard (Miles Teller) and has eyes for Ariel (Julianne Hough), the daughter of Rev. Moore. Ren loves to dance, and is surprised the town is on lock down from such choreography. Can this outside influence convince a whole town to “kick off your Sunday shoes”?

There are two positives here – the story telling approach and the casting. Director Craig Brewer wasn’t looking to compete against the ‘80s film, he was looking to use it as a template for modernizing the story. And as he did with his excellent “Hustle and Flow,” he realizes the beat of the dance through human motivations. In the capable hands of Dennis Quaid, the preacher is a flawed man, racked more by the loss of a son than anger toward the dance. His wild child daughter, the surprising Julianne Hough, steps out of her “Dancing with the Stars” mode and creates a character that doesn’t always do the right thing.

The lead actor, Kenny Wormaid, an obscure actor who is asked to fill the dance shoes of Kevin Bacon from the original, holds up well both against the tide of comparison and in carrying the film. His character background is of a gymnast, which makes sense considering some of his dance moves, and he tests the same dance motion in the factory scene that Bacon had from the original. Providing fine comic relief is Miles Teller, as the best friend Willard, but what makes him more interesting is the dark side he reveals when the gang goes to the city for dancing and fighting.

That is exactly what makes this film all the more palatable. The cookie cutter characters – preacher’s daughter, plucky newcomer, the preacher, wacky best friend, tough villain – are spun through a cycle of initiatives that involve death and emotion. The town is dead because four teenagers died, the preacher’s daughter rebels against the loss of her brother, the newcomer can’t shake his mother’s passing. All are in need of redemption, and footloosing is one of more natural ways to achieve it.



Dancing As a Star: Julianne Hough as Ariel in ‘Footloose’  
Photo credit: K.C. Bailey for Paramount Pictures

Another welcome touch of realism is teenagers acting badly. There is actual liquor, substance abuse and sexuality in this film, and all the natural consequences therein. The script by director Brewer and Dean Pitchford ratchets up the Saturday night mentality, especially in counterpoint to the town laws. They also couldn’t help adding an at-the-race-track mentality, which by practice and psychology are the film’s weakest moments.

But like the first film, there is a wondrous, celebratory climax that is smile inducing and toe tapping. In this remake, the action of being “Footloose” is a way towards the soul’s unburdening, celebrated by the salvation of primal and vital gyrations.

*“Footloose” opens everywhere October 14th. Featuring Kenny Wormaid, Julianne Hough, Dennis Quaid, Andie MacDowell, Ray McKinnon, Miles Teller and Ziah Colon. Screenplay by Dean Pitchford and Craig Brewer. Directed by Craig Brewer. Rated “PG-13.” For a Blu-Ray DVD review of the original “Footloose” (1984) by Matt Fagerholm of HollywoodChicago.com, [click here](#). [16]*



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