

# Audience-pleaser deluxe - from the word Grease

 By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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You have to be a triple threat to land a part in Grease - one of Broadway's longest-running shows and probably the only hit musical from this theatre district ever to be composed completely on guitar. That means, if you can't sing, dance and act, don't bother to audition.

London-based Stori James, re-creator of the musical staging and choreography, had a week to cast for the South African production, set at a high school in the golden days of rock and roll. "We usually have three weeks to audition in London, but I think we got it right," he said. "There's a small pool of dancers in SA, but they're great kids, fresh and energetic, and so excited to be in the business."



## Theatre credits

As a performer, James' theatre credits include Sinatra (London Palladium); Sweet Charity (Sheffield Crucible); Cats (New London Theatre and UK national tour); Grease (Dominion Theatre and UK national tour) and Moby Dick (Piccadilly Theatre). His creative credits include resident director on Cats (UK national tour) and resident choreographer on Dirty Dancing (Aldwych Theatre). "I've been in musicals since I was 19. I never got a buzz out of singing and acting; I just love dancing," said Stori, now in his late-30s.

James performed and understudied the roles of Doody, Roger and Eugene in the 1996 production of Grease at this production's original home, the Dominion Theatre in the West End, and went on tour as dance captain. He returned to help rehearse subsequent shows until he was asked, five years ago, to stage them as associate choreographer. He also runs a musical theatre placement agency.

## Stay true to the 1950s

"I keep an eye on performances to make sure they're not looking tired. I've just finished putting on the London production," James said. His goal is to stay true to the 1950s and to Arlene Philips' original concept. Philips, familiar to local audiences as a judge on BBC1's Strictly Come Dancing, received an OBE for Services to Dance in 2002.

"If I change anything, it's to suit the actor or dancer. They're allowed to bring themselves into the show if they're creative and know the 50s' steps, otherwise I create something for them.

"Grease is about high-school couples and their relationships. They need to radiate an enthusiasm for life. I try and demonstrate the steps to my fullest ability, especially for those who can't see the London show, so that they understand the energy required," he said.

## Choreographic challenges

There are many choreographic challenges - especially in the colourful, lively prom jive for 12 couples, where the guys have to lead their partners so they don't look like they're fighting each other. The Greased Lightnin' sequence includes spins and big straddle jumps made more strenuous by the heavy leather jackets worn by the Greasers. "That's why we make them run it five times in the studio so, once those jackets are on, they won't feel it as much. They know that when I say 'one last time', I don't really mean it," he said.

## Impressive CVs



The experienced cast members have impressive CVs, while this show presents a great opportunity for new professionals. Among the dancers, Jaco van Rensburg (Franky) and Darren Greeff (Trent) performed in *Cats*, and Greeff made the top eight in the local TV series *So You Think You Can Dance*. Louisa Talbot (Barbs) was a top-20 finalist in the series. Duane Alexander (Mitch), former resident director on *Cats*, is dance captain.

“With this cast, I've had more flexibility to change the choreography and bring in some fantastic lifts, because everybody can cope. We're blessed to have Jonathan Roxmouth as Danny - he's got no dance training but he's very quick and has the ability to work it out. Michele La Trobe as Cha Cha is fantastic, while Jaco and Cat Lane (Maggie) make a terrific couple,” said James.

## Most exciting position

“The most important thing for the dancers is musicality. Every single position must be the most exciting position they've ever hit in their entire career as a dancer. Just when the kids think they've got it, I say, ‘no, you're missing the detail: the fingers, the eyes, the focus, the storytelling ... ’”

Presented by Pieter Toerien, Paul Nicholas and David Ian, *Grease* is on at Artscape Opera until 11 April. It runs at Montecasino in Joburg from 17 April to 13 June. Directed by Jason Capewell, backed by resident director Anton Luitingh and musical director Charl-Johan Lingenfelder, it's an uplifting showbiz spectacular that has audiences screaming their appreciation from curtain-up.

Tickets cost from R100 to R350 via Computicket or the Artscape box office on +27 (0)21 421 7695.

Go to [www.greasethemusical.co.za](http://www.greasethemusical.co.za) for more information.

## ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

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