In the Broadway musical 42nd Street, the director ushers Peggy Sawyer on to the stage with the words: “You’re going out a youngster, but you’ve got to come back a star.” Watching the final-year music theatre students at the WA Academy of Performing Arts gives a similar feeling: which one of these slick-haired lads will be the next Hugh Jackman, which leggy dancing girl will make it to Broadway?

42nd Street hangs on its dance numbers; from the tap-dance curtain-raiser to the razzle-dazzle finale, and the student cast sizzled with energy and professionalism. The classic story of a show within a show unfolded at a rapid pace with crisp dialogue, plenty of wisecracks and seamless scene changes.

Naive chorus girl Peggy Sawyer was played by the doe-eyed Meghan O’Shea, light on her toes with a voice both sweet and strong. Her besotted Billy Lawlor was performed by Tobias Madden who sang wonderfully and cut a snappy figure. Ben Hudson had the imposing presence for director Mr Marsh, although his vocal technique was a little shaky. Julia Grenda was crisp and confident as the larger-than-life Anytime Annie.

Credit must go to comic duo Kira Morsley (Maggie Jones) and Drew Weston (Bert Barry), and Naomi Livingston’s Dorothy Brock staked a claim as both the nastiest and the most sympathetic broad on Broadway. Her poise and impressive singing in A Quarter to Nine was a highlight.

The choice of an off-campus theatre was a successful venture in every regard. Set designer Nathan Weyers cleverly used frames, neon signs and staircases to narrow the big Regal Theatre stage to fit the small cast while the student orchestra under Derek Bond generated a fantastic swing.

The only part that felt clumsy were the scene freezes between Dorothy in her upstairs room and the party in the bar below. 42nd Street was a sensation when it opened in the middle of the Great Depression and director Terence O’Connell and the students have done the same in a similar crisis.
Rising stars: WAAPA students sizzle with energy and professionalism in 42nd Street.