

Spotlight: Prom

by [Quinton Skinner](#)
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First staged at CTC in 2004, *Prom* returns with new characters and scenarios. It's a relentlessly energetic and innovative show that depicts teenage life while making a convincing case that our deepest realities fit neatly inside our most insipid rituals. Conceived and directed by Whit McLaughlin, the "prom" in question is staged as a metaphor for a fixed point in the river of time, "the last party of your childhood." Matt Saunders's scenic design turns the theater into a huge school gymnasium, as well as a football field and an ideational space in which the grownups look back wistfully and the adolescents strain to burst out of the gate of adulthood. The action opens with a look back: Faculty members move in stylized dance to quasi-ambient music, while a voiceover recounts the story of their bygone prom. The adult cast includes such standouts as the stern guidance counselor (Marvette Knight), the dishy drama instructor (Laura A. Osnes) and the earnest chemistry teacher (Reed Sigmund). Then we meet the teens, one by one, in a cacophony of canned applause and burning light. (One, we hear, apropos of nothing, is "terrified of sex.") The dance that follows is refereed by Chris Carlson, done up in zebra stripes and miked so that we do not miss a single rasp from his strained vocal chords. The teenage contingent of the cast appears assured while also projecting the vulnerability of their age. David Belt, for instance, playing prom king



Image: Rob Levine

Riley Connors, is all wide-eyed wonder when he levitates following his coronation. But he also gives an appropriately ironic sense of enjoying the ride on a more jaded level, which is kind of how things were back then. Tying matters together is principal Milo Mielke (Gerald Drake), who smiles beatifically from a wheelchair while dispensing nuggets of wisdom of varying comprehensibility. What is surprising is how weird the show is--a silly Bryan Adams take-off, for instance, yields to squalls of funkadelic guitar without explanation, before the action returns to where it left off. By the end, with all the noise and flashing lights behind us, Drake's solo conclusion is as moving as anything you'll see on stage. Better than your own prom, to say the very least.