

Auburn's 'Chorus Line' is brilliant

By Neil Novelli
Contributing Writer

If you're a fan of "A Chorus Line," you won't want to miss the production at Auburn's Merry-Go-Round Playhouse. And if you've never seen "A Chorus Line," this production could turn you into an addict.

review
MUSICAL
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It's classy and exciting.

The show's story line is simple: 31 chorus dancers are competing for only eight jobs, and Zach (Steven Petrillo) — the imperious director — makes them reveal their personalities as part of the audition.

From the first moments, when we see the whole cast dancing in scruffy rehearsal clothes, there's an great sense of ebullience — sheer joy in the ability to dance well.

"I really need this job!" they sing, individually and together, as they work through the intricate steps.

And because most of the Merry-Go-Round cast are professionally trained dancers, they make it all look so easy.

"I can do that!" you want to sing, along with Mike (Michael Serapiglia), who soars into dance as the guy who put on tap shoes at age 4 and never took them off.

Besides, director Brett Smock and his cast develop the diverse characters with extraordinary realism and detail, thus creating strong emotions.

And in the process, they scrub away the yucky sentimentality that can clog the pores of this brisk musical.

There are some shortcomings. Candice Michael as Cassie —

the details

The musical: "A Chorus Line."

Performance time: Two hours, no intermission.

Length of run: Through June 22.

Tickets: \$14-\$20. Call (800) 457-8997 or 255-1785.

Zack's former love, who wants a chorus job — acts woodenly and performs "The Music and the Mirror" with more control than freedom.

And once in a while the actors milk their lines, like Evan Pinto as Bobby, the sardonic Buffalo native who just never fit into his middle-class household.

But when the whole cast, resplendent in gold satin costumes, steps on stage for the spectacular finale, "One (Singular Sensation)," minor imperfections just get blown away.

Those gold costumes, by the way, are on loan from the original Broadway production of "A Chorus Line" in 1975, and the label in one bears the name of Thommie Walsh. Walsh is the Auburn native who played Bobby in that original production and went on to greater show-business success.

Among the especially fine performances:

Zach: Petrillo delivers a diamond-edged portrayal of a no-nonsense theater workaholic.

Sheila: Cindy Thrall beautifully projects both sides of this key role — Sheila's delight in dancing and her bitterness that, at age 30, her career is about done.

Paul: Matthew Merrick incises the grief and the sanity of a man who has always felt himself an out-cast.

Larry: Parker Esse is almost invisible in the role of the dance captain, but his effortless dancing and fine acting really anchor the show.

Val: Ann Zawadski is wonderfully impudent as the girl with a sweet June Allyson smile, a stevedore's vocabulary and an "orchestra and balcony" that she has had enhanced with silicone.

Diana: Janelle DeMarzo's delivery of the "Nothing" monologue sparkles, and so does "What I Did for Love."

Maggie: Straight from playing the raunchy Mrs. Peachum in Syracuse University's "Threepenny Opera," Gaelen Gilliland gives a crystalline performance as a hopeful young dancer.

Debbie G: Cuneo's complex lighting designs are a major part of the evening's success, as is Lenny Leibowitz's light touch as music director.

"AWESOME AND INSPIRING."
Mike Kautz, CFTO NEWS

"I LOVED THE DRAGON!"
Bob Healy, KRIG SATELLITE NEWS

"PURE MAGIC."
Scott Patrick, HOLLYWOOD GIST ONLINE EXCITE

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