

Review: 'A Chorus Line' at the Paramount Theatre

Kicks are all in place in this classic 'Chorus Line'

THEATER REVIEW: "A Chorus Line" at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora ★★★

January 24, 2012|Chris Jones | Theater critic

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With its singularly moving dissection of the fragility of a dancer's life in a brutal business, "A Chorus Line" is a sacred musical for many people in the theater, especially those who, like Chicago-based director and choreographer Mitzi Hamilton, were involved in the development of the original Michael Bennett production in the early 1970s. They do not like anyone to mess with the show. They just want it done as it is supposed to be done.

Hamilton has staged more than 35 productions of "A Chorus Line." If you want the authentic deal, close to the way it was originally staged, she is your woman. If you want some kind of revisionist updating, or progressive new staging, you will need someone else. And thus Hamilton's production at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora is very much "A Chorus Line" as you may well remember it from its several long Chicago engagements — the music, the multifaceted mirrors, the familiar choreography, the 1970s gestalt, the raw kids on the line. The kids have to change, of course. But while Hamilton is watching, not so much the show.

Such are the resources that Paramount has been throwing behind its new self-produced series that Hamilton has been given what she needs to do what she does with a piece she knows inside out and back again. There are 17 musicians under the baton of musical director Shawn Stengel. The mostly Equity cast holed up in Aurora includes several veterans of the most recent Broadway revival and its subsequent tour, including Jessica Lee Goldyn, who dances spectacularly as Cassie; Luis Perez, who plays the director Zach with a nice mix of cruelty and compassion; and Kevin Curtis, who makes for an emotional Richie. And this, of course, is an ideal venue to stage what is inherently a proscenium show: "A Chorus Line" always works best when the human body seems exposed on a huge stage, within a venue big enough to either swallow dreams or let them soar.

On balance, and with some exceptions, this particular "Chorus Line" is better danced and acted than it is sung; not all of those famous Marvin Hamlisch numbers soar as they should at this level. But Pegah Kadkhodaian sings very sweetly as Diana, as does Jay Reynolds Jr., as an empathetic Paul, and Katie Spelman as an unpretentious Maggie. But the spirit of the show shines throughout, the attention to the myriad little details therein is beyond reproach, and the dedication to the intensity of the experience is absolute.

In this fine inaugural season, Paramount is introducing new audiences to such titles as these, and it is offering curious souls the full Broadway-style monty at affordable prices, featuring actors with a lot more experience and depth than you'll find on most tours these days. You do not want to bring to "A Chorus Line" a young person who does not understand what this show is really about — dreams tempered by the agony of so little time and so many ways for them to go wrong, and the way artists must both collaborate and compete and what that does to your head. But Hamilton would never find herself in such a spot.

When: Through Feb. 5

Where: Paramount Theatre, 23 E. Galena Blvd., Aurora

Running time: 2 hours, 15 minutes

Tickets: \$34.90-\$46.90 at 630-896-6666 or paramountaurora.com