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'A Chorus Line' Bristol Amateur Operatic Society Olympus Theatre, July '08
Director – Paul Dyson M.D. – Matthew Tilke Choreographer – Lizzie Westney

A show with lyrics by Edward Kleban, and music composed by Marvin Hamlisch, with nineteen main characters, set on the bare stage of a Broadway theatre during an audition for a musical, it provides a glimpse into the personalities of the performers, the choreographer and the director, as they describe the events that have shaped their lives and their decisions to become dancers. The only set dressing being floor to ceiling mirrors, which were very cleverly lit, the stage was otherwise bare and used to full effect by the performers, all of which gave well defined characters, that we could really believe in. It would be unfair to single anyone out in this production. The cast worked superbly well as a team and brought out the humour, tragedy and pathos of the piece, along with stunning choreography and vocals, giving us a real idea of the joys and heartaches of auditions. A highly commendable and thought provoking production

Sharon Wood
NODA Regional Representative
District 13

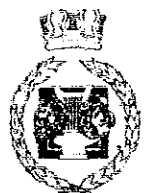
National Operatic and Dramatic Association

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PRODUCTION:

'A CHORUS LINE'

BRISTOL AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY

The original 'Chorus Line' opened off Broadway in 1975 and moved to Broadway two months later, where it went on to be the longest running show in Broadway history at the time, the film adaptation being released in 1985. The story revolves around a casting session for a chorus line in a Broadway show, giving an insight into the highs and lows of hopeful auditionees the world over.

Staging: Set on a bare stage with only a series of full length mirrors, to depict a rehearsal room that would look the same anywhere, the first impression is one of simplicity. However, whenever mirrors are involved, there are huge problems with angles, lighting etc, that need extremely careful handling and choreography, as the audience is actually treated to a complete view of each and every movement. BAOS managed this difficult task with total success. The mirrors posed no problem and were used to their full advantage, Zach the Director was seated high up into the audience, which worked extremely well and the whole scenario was totally believable.

Lighting and Sound: A superb lighting plot, made excellent use of spots, particularly the sweep along the line up at the beginning, the effective sequence of red to white spots as actors wandered about thinking of what to tell Zach, Cassie's solo dance, the conversation between her and Zach in front of the 'line', and the slow fade as Zach walked off after the decision had been made. Subtle and imaginative colours and changes throughout, did much to enhance the production. Sound was level and consistent.

Music: An excellent orchestra led by Matthew Tilke, played the score well, never overpowering the vocals. Musical numbers had obviously been well rehearsed and the difficult timings, counterpoints etc, were all well within the capabilities of the actors.

Choreography: This huge and challenging aspect of the show was exciting and accomplished. The challenge of moving a show in which the actors have to stand in more or less a straight line, must cause quite a few headaches! The opening sequence where everybody was limbering up and the initial eliminations were handled well and with good effect. I loved the photographs at the end of 'I Hope I Get It!' When it came down to the last seventeen auditionees, things really started to get complicated! However, each actor's sections were choreographed to perfection and Cassie's solo was outstanding. Groupings and splits were very effective, I loved the 'One' rehearsal and the tap combination with the superb sequence going on behind Cassie and Zach's conversation, which was outstanding. The finale of 'One' was exactly what we had been waiting for – full of pizzazz, glitz and glamour – pure Broadway! Excellent throughout.

Costumes: A lot of thought had gone into these costumes, although they looked like a huge mish mash of styles and colours, they were exactly right for the show! Cassie's costume being a little more sophisticated, was a clever touch and each costume told us something about the character. Superb!

Individual Performances: There had obviously been a huge amount of work done in the characterizations for this show. With nineteen lead characters, this production demands more than most, but each actor was compelling and convincing in their own right. Concentration was superb and poses etc, that were adopted as they listened to individuals were natural and varied. There were some wonderful moments that any choreographer would have recognized from their own experiences – the chewing of gum, the uncertainty of the new routines, the attitudes, the counting of beats etc, were all there! I would have liked a little more disappointment and resignation from the unsuccessful auditionees at the end, but every character was an individual, and the cast's main strength was, that they all worked so well as a team, which is paramount in this production.

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Individual Performances:

Larry: A well defined character as Zach's choreographer who had to keep some sort of order throughout. A difficult role as you had a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, but good facials and body language gave him substance.

Zach: Although you spent a lot of the time behind the audience, I was sitting one row in front of you and could see you at all times! You never let the character drop and gave an excellent portrayal that was totally convincing. Good authoritative voice, with a lovely timbre, excellent American accent and assured demeanour throughout, you also managed to portray the softer side of Zach, both with Cassie and Paul, giving us some excellent dramatic and poignant moments in the production.

Don: A good all round performance with excellent concentration and facial expressions.

Maggie: Animated and assured, with good projection, working well as an individual and trio, (lovely harmonies in 'At the Ballet')

Mike: A likeable and studied performance with excellent vocals and dancing ability, particularly the tap.

Connie: Maybe small in stature but a big personality, with good stage presence and animated performance.

Greg: A sensitive characterisation that put over the discovery of homosexuality well. Good facial expression and concentration throughout. Excellent dance and vocal ability – loved the leggings!

Cassie: A complex character that was well studied and portrayed with sensitivity and a good understanding. You had the ability to 'dance down', which is difficult when you can do it well and your moving and powerful exchanges with Zach were excellent. 'The Music and The Mirror' must have been a very difficult piece of music to dance to with its complicated tempos, but you danced it enchantingly and it was beautifully executed. A superb performance.

Sheila: Another excellent performance that showed good understanding of the character. Lovely attitude and projection, you also gave us a very poignant moment when the façade fell away and we learnt about her sad childhood and why she loved ballet. Good vocals and stage presence.

Bobby: A good study that brought out the sadness of the unhappy childhood, that he tries to cover up with 'clowning'. I think you were a little nervous to begin with, but you settled down quite quickly and gave us a well drawn character.

Bebe: The very poignant story of a girl, only feeling beautiful as a child when she was dancing, was acted well, ('At The Ballet' was one of the highlights of the show with the trio of Bebe, Sheila and Maggie, all being such different personalities, yet all with a very sad and similar start to their lives). Good vocals and harmonies.

Judy: Number 23! Always a little behind, you gave us a marvellously scatter-brained character, that was sustained throughout. Another problematic childhood emerged, which was handled well. The audience loved this character and your vocals, dance ability and timing were excellent.

Richie: The dancer who wanted to be a kindergarten teacher! 'Gimme The Ball' was a good routine, though you needed a little more volume to get over the others. Good stage presence and characterisation, with capable vocals. The sideways baseball cap gave this character even more poignancy somehow!

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Individual Performances:

Al: A charming double act with 'wife' Kristine, always trying to cover up her failings by finishing off her phrases and sentences. Superb concentration and excellent chemistry between the two characters. Good vocals and dance ability.

Kristine: The other half of the double act with Al, this showed an excellent sensitivity and an ability to sing off key, portraying a character who is tone deaf, (which is never easy, when you're not!) 'Sing' was one of my favourite numbers, so well timed and sung. Good body language and stage presence.

Val: The 'surgically enhanced' auditionee, whose ambition was to be a Rockette. Beautifully portrayed with energy and understanding of the role. 'Dance: Ten; Looks: Three' was excellent and another highlight. Could have been a little more 'raunchy' but good vocals, facials and projection.

Mark: The youngest of the dancers and one of the more difficult to portray, I would imagine, with his memories of adolescence and interest in anatomy! I loved 'Hello Twelve...' with Connie and company and your projection and animation were excellent. The 'priest' was priceless!

Paul: A very accomplished depiction of this complicated character, coming to terms with his homosexuality, and self worth after his early career as a drag act. This was very well drawn, but didn't *quite* wring enough emotion out for me. I should have been in tears and I wasn't! However, that said, it was an excellent performance, a good interchange with Zach and a very believable 'fall', which had the audience gasping!

Diana: A superb performance, with excellent all round ability giving us a believable and charismatic character. 'What I Did For Love' was beautifully sung – a real tear jerker!

Supporting Dancers/Singers: Though lesser roles, the supporting cast is nonetheless vital to the success of the show, especially at the beginning, as they auditions began. There was plenty of energy and enthusiasm from these talented young people. Well Done!

This was an accomplished and compelling production of a difficult and complicated musical. This show gives the opportunity for some in-depth acting, in addition to the usual singing and dancing challenges, and BAOS attacked this aspect of the production with a sensitivity and poignancy that was studied and commendable. A thoroughly enjoyable production from a talented and impressive young cast.

Thank you so much for your invitation and congratulations to all those concerned with this superb production.

Sharon Wood
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