

## arts

# DANCE FEVER

### THEATER REVIEW

#### 'A CHORUS LINE'

Book by James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante; music by Marvin Hamlisch; lyrics by Edward Kleban

Directed and choreographed by Mitzi Hamilton

Through June 20

Theatre by the Sea, 364 Card's Pond Road, Matunuck

BY DAVE CHRISTNER

Dancing may not be what makes your world go around; maybe it's business—watching the steady rise in value of some esoteric monetary derivative that Warren Buffett himself doesn't understand. Or maybe teaching inspires you—seeing students discover the power of their own intellect. Pulling lobster pots or trawling for finfish might be your dream. Could be your passion is in law or medicine, photography, number crunching, or, God forbid, playwrighting. Whatever it is, this passion is what consumes you; it is what you live for.

Theatre by the Sea's season-opening production of "A Chorus Line" is the story of an obsession for dance shared by 15 ragtag hoofers auditioning for a job in an upcoming Broadway show. The show was originally conceived, directed, and choreographed by the late Michael Bennett.

James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante co-authored the book; Marvin Hamlisch did the music and Edward Kleban penned the lyrics of this Pulitzer Prize winner.

Bennett's original intent was to put a face on the performers who toil so arduously in the obscurity of the chorus line, letting a show's name stars draw all the praise and profit from a successful run in the Big Apple or on the road. But behind every pair of beautiful legs and muscular rump, there is a story; and given the state of the arts in most cases it is not a pretty one.

Theatre by the Sea's production beautifully directed and choreographed by Mitzi Hamilton pulsates with energy, passion, and raw emotion—just a few of the ingredients necessary for dream fulfillment in and out of show business. Hamilton makes splendid use of a marvelous cast.

Tom Berklund as Zach is every actor's nightmare of a director: talented, temperamental, demanding, arrogant, spontaneously cruel, and, occasionally even kind. Berklund spends much of the show off-stage, drilling individuals about their private lives over a loud speaker. He is like a vengeful god, looking down on his flock and deciding their fate on a whim. Berklund plays the role flawlessly, easily becoming the most hated man in Matunuck as he merciless-



**Dancing up a storm.** Tyrick Wiltez Jones, in the air, as Richie performs 'Montage, Part 4' with the ensemble in Theatre By The Sea's 'A Chorus Line.' PHOTO BY MARK TUREK

ly abuses the hopefuls mentally and physically. He proves to be quite the accomplished hooper too when demonstrating a new step or joining the "line" for a dance number.

Theatre by the Sea's Producing Artistic Director Amiee Turner takes to the boards in the role of Cassie, a dancer with a past complicated by having been involved in a relationship with Zach. When you hear Cassie's story, you also get Zach's. I think this is Bennett's way of letting us know that directors are people too. Turner shines luminously in her solo "The Music and the Mirror," filling the old barn with her powerful yet melodic voice and dancing up a storm under the glare of a white-hot spot light.

Jennifer Rias as Diana stands out in her montage

"Nothing" and with the company in "What I Did For Love." Emmett Louise Smith as Val provides a real treat with her number, "Dance: 10; Looks: 3," also known in some quarters as the T&A song. Yamil DeJesus does a remarkable job with the demanding role of Paul. Jake Delaney is a great Al; Amanda LaMotte is no less brilliant as his "off-key" wife, Kristine. The list of brilliant performances goes on and on.

In the end, the gut-wrenching stories of the individuals who make the cut and get a part in the show are swallowed up by the chorus line itself where there is no place for individuality; every dancer becomes part of the "line," and the individual lost. Even so, the loss is ironically the individual's gain because,

obscure or not, the individual is doing what he or she wants to do—dance.

If you want to see "A Chorus Line" up close and personal, you won't find a better venue or better production than that at Theatre by the Sea.

*Dave Christner is an award-winning South County playwright and novelist. His plays can be found on the Web at [www.playwrightsplace.com](http://www.playwrightsplace.com).*

**e** Performances are Tues.-Fri, 8 p.m., Thurs., 2 p.m., Sat., 4:30 & 8:30 p.m., & Sun., 5 p.m. Tickets \$39 - \$49. Rush (one hour prior to curtain) \$20. Group discounts available. (401) 782-8587. [www.theatrebythesea.com](http://www.theatrebythesea.com).

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