

# [theatre]

## Taking it off for cash

by Jim Seavor

Theatre-by-the-Sea's *The Full Monty* is fast-paced, laugh-filled and completely Americanized.

What began in 1997 as a rather gentle British film about six out-of-work men who decide on a rather far-out way to raise some cash, has been plopped down in Buffalo, NY. Where once there were smiles there are now laughs. The soft touch has become louder, brasher and the edges sharper. And those laughs, at times, threaten to overwhelm the delicate balance between the fun and games and the play's serious backbone.

That backbone is a familiar one these days. The men's world has collapsed, or threatens to. No work, no money and their very self image is crashing. What to do?

Then one of them has an idea. With an eye to the popularity of the Chippendale Dancers he talks his friends into – for one night – doing their own strip show. Not only that, but they'll out do the

### THE FULL MONTY

Theatre by the Sea  
364 Cards Pond Rd.  
Matunuck, RI  
August 19-29  
www.theatrebythesea.com

Chippendales. They will go all the way.

That's what "full monty" means.

When they're through, there will be nothing between them and the audience except air.

To reach that point, the men have to face their problems. One is not happy with his body, another is keeping his being fired from his wife, and yet another is dealing with an infirm and demanding mother.

That's all there in Matunuck. And, yes, it's a delicate balance. Too much emphasis on one side and you could have a downer. Too much emphasis on the broad comedy and things can become burlesque.

Things begin with a bang – a



Chippendale performance. Next comes a union meeting where the out-of-work men sing about being "Scrap." It's an angry song that nicely balances that revealing beginning.

The balance shifts toward the laughs as the night goes on. Even an attempted suicide is played for laughs. A song in which suggestions are made on how to succeed at one – "Big Ass Rock" – is funny.

And the auditions for strippers are really funny. Not Shakespeare funny, but even he was not above aiming below the belt. The high-

light is Richard Waits as Horse, who turns out to be concerned he might not live up to his name. But his way with "Big Black Man" is a delight. Horse's hips may not be what they used to be, but he can command a stage.

Jean –Pierre Ferragamo creates a three-dimensional character as Dave, who is dealing with low self image and fear his wife as breadwinner is making him less a man.

Jerry, who's so far behind in child support he's facing the possible loss of his son, gets a solid performance from Scott Guthrie while Joel Kipper and Tyler Fish

develop a good relationship as Malcom and Ethan. Their duet on "You Walk With Me" is deeply felt and moving.

And Ellen Karsten as the world-weary and showbiz savvy rehearsal pianist can be a show stopper.

There is much to like in this *The Full Monty* – the first act finale in which the men learn to "dance" by imitating basketball moves stands out. There's the show's pace and energy, the laughter, and those moments when it all comes together.

## Swamp Meadow puts a twist on *Olivia*

by Louise Tetreault

Take the Charles Dickens' classic, *Oliver Twist*, make the hero a girl and add in lots of other well-known British characters and you'll end up with the Swamp Meadow Summer Children's Theatre production of *Olivia*.

In the true spirit of a children's theatre production, this one is being led by first-time director Rosemary Paolucci, a 17-year-old Ponagansett High School student.

"This is my first time directing. I've been a part of Swamp Meadow for a while but I couldn't be in this production because I'm 17," Paolucci says, who explains the age cut off is 16. "I thought it would be fun and interesting to direct."

As the director, Paolucci is

overseeing a cast of 45, ranging in age from 6 to 16 years with varying degrees of stage experience.

"I've had great support and mentors," she says. "This theatre has a history of always trying to keep youth involved."

Paolucci says Swamp Meadows' founder, Amy Hollis, was only 15 years old when she started the theatre, setting the stage for a place for youth to stretch their skills and imaginations. From the board of directors to the stage, youth are involved of all aspects of putting productions together.

*Olivia* seemingly takes a page out of Swamp Meadow's philosophy.

"It's about how someone so little can inspire so many people and change so many people just by being herself," Paolucci says.

### OLIVIA

Swamp Meadow Community Theatre  
Runs Aug. 18 at 12:30 p.m., Aug. 19, 20 and 21 at 7 p.m. at the Captain Isaac Paine Auditorium, 160 Foster Center, Foster.  
Runs Aug. 22, at 2 p.m. at the Foster Fair Grounds, 180 Howard Hill Road in Foster.  
Tickets are \$5 with family pricing at \$30 maximum. Call 397-4740 for tickets and information.

Abigail Dexter, 12, plays the title role of the little orphan with a big heart. Wanting to find her true identity, Olivia escapes from the horrible orphanage that has been her home to find her parents. According to the director, Olivia crosses the path of many well-

known characters including Fagan and the Artful Dodger, Eliza Doolittle, Scrooge, Annie, and Sherlock Holmes.

Through their chance encounters with the spunky girl, each character's life becomes happier.

"Olivia goes through hardship but she doesn't get hard," Paolucci says. "She stays true to herself."

It's a message that Paolucci seemingly has taken to heart as well. Entering her senior year at Ponagansett High School, the young director is considering business as her college major and not theatre.

"I want to keep theatre as a part of my life but I'm looking at a business major," she says.

No matter what her final decision of her major will be, Paolucci says the directing job has given her great experience and skills that

will easily transfer to all areas of her life.

"I really didn't realize how much a director was in charge and how often people turn to the director and rely on them and how much a director relies on the team," she says. "It really is a team effort and I couldn't do it without them."

Her team includes Chris Brostrup-Jensen, Mariah Harrington, Sandy Arnold, Anacapri Mauro and Zach Gibb.

She offers gratitude to Swamp Meadow for giving youth an opportunity to not only perform but lead.

"It means a lot to me," she says. "I'm 17 and to be a head director and in charge – it doesn't seem like something many theaters would do."