

The Arlington Players Presents 'A Chorus Line'

Talented cast of 24 actors reveal their souls through song and dance.

Arlington — Under the direction of Susan Devine, 56, of Fairfax, The Arlington Players is staging the iconic dance-musical “A Chorus Line,” through Oct. 12 at the Thomas Jefferson Community Center off Glebe Road in Arlington.

The complex show features a cast of 24 actors, singers and dancers on a bare stage with only a wall-length mirror during their audition for a musical.

The director Zach, played by formidable real-life director and actor Blakeman Brophy, moves freely through the audience, while running the auditions and putting actors through their paces. As the play progresses, Zach gets them to reveal their souls through song (“What I Did for Love,” and “I Can Do That”) and dance.

Devine wanted to convey the feeling of Zach directing from an empty auditorium — even though he was moving around the audience. She said, “I wanted to make this feel like this was as real an audition as possible.”

The original Broadway production was a mega-hit — running 6,137 times and winning nine Tony Awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1976. With music by Marvin Hamlisch, lyrics by Edward Kleban and book by Nicholas Dante and James Kirkwood Jr., the show has been produced in dozens of international tours around the world.

Besides its intricate and polished choral music and dance numbers, the show portrays the tough life of an artist, said Devine, who stamped her own vision on it. “I think it gives people an opportunity to see what an artist’s life is like,” she said. “Everybody has struggles in their life and deals with rejection.”

Co-producer Amanda Acker, 31, of Alexandria said, “It is deceptively not simple. It needs to come across as a very simple show, but it’s actually difficult and complicated.”

Devine says her biggest challenge was in the casting: “You need 17 people who can sing, dance or act — you need a lot of really strong talent.”

So after 80 twenty-somethings auditioned for two weeks, Devine selected the cast with musical director Paul Nasto and choreographer Stefan Sittig. They narrowed it down to 24 actors, and spent seven weeks in rehearsals.

“We lucked out,” said first-time producer Acker. “We had a lot of talented people who came out.” She added that the cast had to be a triple threat. “Everyone has to be able to sing, dance and act. In community theater, that’s what you strive for, and in this show, it really makes it or breaks it.”

Sittig added his own choreographic vision to the show — using the original choreography and also mixing things up by changing the opening sequence and altering the original choreography at the beginning. Acker also helped with technical aspects of the show.

The actors had to master different styles of dance, tap, and ballet, said Devine. “It hits all the different styles.” And Shaun Moe, who plays the role of Mike, got to show off his tap-dancing abilities.

The scene, “At the Ballet,” sung by the choral-trio of Kristen Magee, Evie Korovesis and Caroline Griswold — was spectacular with its haunting melodies. Lighting Designer Chris Hardy set the right moods for this and many of the poignantly-lit scenes.

Allison Block played the plum role of valium-chugger Cassie, who had a “history” with director Zach. A versatile and seasoned actress with exceptional vocals, Block worked with choreographer Sittig and assistant choreographer Kristina Friedgen on a six-minute solo dance routine. “She’s just able to convey her love of dance, and the tension that goes along with dance,” said Devine. “I thought it was a beautiful piece of theater.”

As the former TAP executive producer for three seasons, Acker also oversaw productions of “Cabaret,” “42nd Street,” and “The Producers.”

According to co-producer Leah Aspell, 32, who moved to Raleigh, NC, during rehearsals: “We wanted to have a show that was true to the original production from the 1970s — so that’s why most of the choreography was almost as exactly as it was on Broadway.” Because of the timing of her move, she had to make “a lot of phone calls and a ton of emails” back and forth to Arlington in tying up loose ends. She said the cast was very close, and bonded with each other — even having sleepovers after rehearsals.

Aspell has been producing shows since 2007, including “Ain’t Misbehavin” with the Elden Street Players in Herndon; “Red, Hot and Cole,” with the McLean Community Players and “The Secret Garden.”

Devine’s other directing credits include “Chicago” at the Little Theater of Alexandria; “The Fantasticks,” at the Vienna Theater Company; and “Flora the Red Menace,” at First Stage in McLean.

Devine says actor Chris Galindo who played the role of Paul with a troubled past, did a “brilliant” job with his monologue... “A five-minute monologue that’s tragic. He held the room every night.”

Nasto built an orchestra of strong musicians, and Bill Van Lear lent his talents as both the rehearsal pianist and show pianist. The work paid off, especially in the finale, when the company changed from their dark slacks, solid-colored T-shirts and leotards, into matching sparkly gold costumes, when they danced to “One” (Singular Sensation) — with synchronized, high kicks and choreographed hand-hat-moves.

