

'A Chorus Line' is a great night of theater

By Alec Kerr

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The Mount Washington Valley Theatre Company's production of "A Chorus Line" opened at the Eastern Slope Inn Playhouse Tuesday and is running daily except Monday through Sept. 4. (JAMIE GEMMITI PHOTO)

CONWAY — Sometimes after watching a show that won a slew of Tony Awards, I just don't see it. What was so great about that show? Perhaps it is just the quality of the production not doing the show justice. That was not an issue with "A Chorus Line," a truly great show, brought across beautifully by the Mount Washington Valley Theatre Company.

"A Chorus Line," which opened at the Eastern Slope Inn Playhouse Tuesday and is running daily except Monday through Sept. 4, literally has a bit everything: fantastic dancing, tuneful songs, heartbreaking monologues, crass laughs, sweet humor, physical comedy and moments of quiet introspection.

The show is deceptively simple in its structure. Zach, a director (Grant Golson), and his assistant (Joseph Tudor) are holding auditions for four men and four women for a chorus line. The show is the audition process for the final 17.

Zach doesn't want them to just perform for him. He wants them to talk about themselves. We get a look into the psyche of each of the auditioners and begin to understand how they got into dancing as

well as their fears and insecurities.

The cast works exceptionally well as an ensemble. When required to dance together they do so with precision timing, except for those cases when someone is suppose to be dancing poorly. After all, this is meant to be an audition. The singing is also strong with complex harmonizing coming across well.

This isn't just ensemble work, though. The format of the show allows for everyone to get their moment, some a bigger chance than others. There really is no weak link in this cast.

Each person in the audience will come away probably liking someone different, which is the nature of the show. In a way each member of the audience is their own director making their picks for who should make the final cut.

Sarah Beling as Cassie probably has the biggest role of all the auditioners. She has a romantic past with the director and after a failed attempt to make it in Hollywood has returned to New York looking for any work she can get. Zach feels the chorus line is beneath her. Their conflict is the closest the show comes to a traditional storyline. Beling does a good job bringing across her desperation as well as her yearning to simply perform. Her solo number "The Music and the Mirror" is rather beautiful.

Catherine Yudain is very good as Shelia, a 30-year-old dancer who hides behind an aggressive, sardonic attitude that masks the hurt that was caused her during her troubled childhood. On "At the Ballet," she is joined by Tara Tagliaferro and Kelsey Thompson in a song about how dancing was her only escape.

The show's most powerful moment goes to Jack Haynie as Paul. He stands alone on the stage and gives a straight monologue about growing up and struggling with his homosexuality and finding himself as a dancer in a drag show. Haynie gives a performance that is exposed, vulnerable and moving.

On the lighter side of the spectrum is Christopher Timson as Bobby, a rich kid who grew up with increasingly weird habits. Timson gives a broad and campy performance that is very funny.

The show's biggest laughs come from Liz Golson as Val who on the bawdy "Dance Ten; Looks Three" explains how she got plastic surgery to make her body match her dance abilities. It is a hilarious number and Liz Golson brings it across exceptionally well.

Brittany Santos leads the cast in "What I Did for Love," a song about the passion everyone auditioning feels about dancing. Santos has a strong and captivating voice.

This is a completely entertaining piece of theater with great singing, dancing and acting throughout. It is hard to imagine someone coming away without liking at least some aspect of the show.