



I-Perry) Sep. 27, 2017

BWW Review: Alabama Talent Fills The Spotlight in A CHORUS LINE at Virginia Samford Theatre



Before there were concept musicals such as Hamilton, RENT and CATS, Michael Bennett (/people/Michael-Bennett/) conceived "A Chorus Line". It broke the mold of traditional musical theater and became a Broadway legend; earning the Pulitzer Prize for drama and numerous Tony Awards. The show is full of back to back Broadway hits. "I Can Do That", "At The Ballet", "One", "Dance Ten, Looks Three" and "The Music And The Mirror." "A Chorus Line" is a show stopping musical about a

group of dancers auditioning for a spot in an upcoming Broadway musical. The director puts them on the spot to share who they are and why they dance. The truths shared are deliberate at times, and others not. Emotions run the gambit from entertaining to being hit with "the feels". These compelling characters clawing for a shot in show business is just as relevant now as it was back in 1975. Granted not everyone wants to audition for a Broadway show, but the dynamic of putting yourself on the line to go for your dream is a feeling we all share. That passion is the heart of A Chorus Line and Virginia Samford Theatre strongly delivers it in 5, 6, 7, 8!

Director Stacy Alley captures the feel of Michael Bennett (/people/Michael-Bennett/)'s original conception. The show benefits from her working as choreographer as well. Her dance skills come into play and is a noticeable in the fluidly of the performance. She compiled a cast young cast of triple threat actors mostly from Tuscaloosa. The tricky part of this musical is casting actors who can give due diligence to the work of the original cast, who were playing parts inspired by events and people they actually knew. The all the elements in the show are taken from real life events. If you ask any actor, they'll verify this. The cast requires a deep connection and ability to share this experience. Most of the cast consistently hits the bull's eye in the show. The ones that shined really dominated the stage with performances that were worthy of note.

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With Gene Kelly (/people/Gene-Kelly/) looks and moves, Jonathan Bryant works the stage like he was born to play (MIKE). Even though he has only been dancing for four years, he moves smoothly and backs it up with projection and a NYC attitude. Proving how life imitates art "I relate to Mike, I started learning from my sister. I saw it in other people and I said Hey I can do that." Grace Arnold (Val) delivers red-hot blonde confidence and a "take

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no prisoners" delivery. This is her second time in role and it's given her a fresh spark in the character. She credits this to "taking the time to become more comfortable and exploring unique ways to input some of my own ways into the role". Her performance shows she's having fun in the role, especially in her solo "Dance Ten, Looks Three". Jared Max Wright (PAUL) conveys the young and bruised inner turmoil in the role. He's vulnerable and incredibly brave. Wright's acting connects with the audience in subtle nuances, delivery and he brings the audience to tears during the iconic monologue.

Megan Kelly (/people/Megan-Kelly/) (JUDY), Daniel Hulizer (BOBBY), and Allie Stewart (CONNIE) deliver memorable comedic performances with seemingly minimal effort. They bring laughs with care not to push it over the edge. William Green (/people/William-Green/) (ZACH) provides controlled intensity needed in the role of the shows director. He plays the layers and emotional range of the role with focus. Melaina Rairamo (CASSIE) hooks the audience with an honest delivery of the movie star back to chorus girl dynamic. She projects her desire to get back on stage, no matter the part. She brings the voice and the moves for the role. Rairamo and Green have a great chemistry together and are believable playing the tension of the two ex-lovers. Michael Charles (Richie) and Carli Hardon (/people/Carli-Hardon/) (Diana) hit the marks with stage presence, song and dance but at times fell victim to delivering rushed dialogue that could of benefited from more emotion and pacing. Daniel Fobes (Al), Blair Ely (Kristine), Desmond Montoya (Mark), Maggie McCown (Sheila) give notable emotion and range in their performances. Callie Walker (MAGGIE) has a noticeably stunning voice that gives a boost in the harmonies.



Music director Michael King (/people/Michael-King/) gives energy to the legendary music by Marvin Hamlisch (/people/Marvin-Hamlisch/), and lyrics by Edward Kleban (/people/Edward-Kleban/). The soundtrack jumps with optimism, fear and hope of people striving for a career on the stage. King and his orchestra deliver just that. Kudos to lighting designer David Page and scenic designer Eddie Charles Moncrief for creative textured lighting and mirrors that morphs around each dancers story.

Collectively the cast does much justice to the story. The show runs straight with no intermission. Its fasted paced with little time to stop and catch a breath. Actor Jonathan Bryant sums up the performance saying, "This show is the epitome of being a dancer. It's what all of us do; each time putting yourself on the line and risking everything". Virginia Samford Theatre's production of A Chorus Line successfully leads the audience to feel the colossal emotion behind a dancer saying those six memorable words, "God, I hope I get it!"

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