

Authenticity, heart key to Metropolis' ambitious 'A Chorus Line'

- [Show photos](#)

Barbara Vitello



Updated 10/4/2018 2:52 PM

"A Chorus Line" -- ★ ★ ★

In 2015, after several artistically uneven and financially uncertain seasons, the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre made some bold choices.

Buoyed by a \$450,000 subsidy from the Arlington Heights village board and the installation of Joe Keefe as the new artistic and executive director, the ailing theater introduced the first of several increasingly ambitious seasons. That ambition has served Metropolis well.

The theater's current production, however, might be one of its most challenging: "A Chorus Line." Conceived, directed and choreographed by Michael Bennett, the 1975 backstage musical about dancers auditioning for a spot in a Broadway chorus doesn't require much in the way of sets or costumes.



Richie (Ivory Leonard IV), right, recalls his days as a high school athlete and aspiring Kindergarten teacher in Metropolis Performing Arts Centre's "A Chorus Line." - Courtesy of Ellen Prather

But "A Chorus Line" demands top-notch dancers including bona fide triple threats: singer-dancer-actors. At this point, not every member of Robin M. Hughes' young, capable ensemble matches that definition. Still the cast -- buoyed by performances from the crackerjack trio of Luke Halpern, Jessica Miret and Casiena Raether -- is solid.

We first encounter the hopefuls midway through a tryout for a new Broadway musical in the fun, frantic "I Hope I Get It." While director/choreographer Zach (Brian Kulaga) and assistant choreographer Larry (Nick Schrier) put the dancers through their paces (Christie Kerr's choreography is from Bennett and Bob Avian's original), we get a sense of how much rides on this audition.

"I need this job. Oh God, I need this show," sings Halpern's Paul, whose plaintive plea suggests more than a stage credit and a paycheck is at stake.

By the end of the number, 17 dancers stand on a white line stretching across a bare stage. Over the next 2½ hours, they lay bare their feelings, sharing funny, defiant and emotional musings on relationships, sexuality and the pursuit of their passion. It's a pursuit that too often ends in rejection and a passion that age or injury will someday force them to surrender.

A trio comprised of newcomer Bebe (Sara Haverly), veteran Sheila (Kara Schoenhofer) and Maggie (Laura Sportiello, a lovely singer) recall unhappy childhoods in the elegiac, sublimely sung "At the Ballet."

In "Nothing," Diana (the terrific Miret) recounts an unfortunate experience in a high school acting class. Doting Al (Dan Hamman, a strong singer whose vocals outshine his dancing) encourages his tone-deaf young wife, Kristine (Jordan Beyeler), in the very merry "Sing."

Ivory Leonard IV's Richie, a former high school jock, channels his younger self in the exuberant "Gimme the Ball." And wannabe Rockette Val (sassy, self-confident Mollyanne Nunn) explains how plastic surgery got her jobs in "Dance 10, Looks 3."

Triple-threat Raether plays Cassie, a former standout and Zach's former lover. She returns to New York after an unsuccessful stint in Hollywood to once again put herself on the line.

Then there's Halpern, whose monologue chronicling childhood abuse, his sexual awakening and coming out to his parents marks the show's emotional apex. Its power comes from Halpern's vulnerability and unflinching authenticity -- qualities that are as essential to "A Chorus Line" performers as dance and vocal prowess.

Mostly, Metropolis' cast members convey those qualities that Hughes elicits in brief, nicely detailed scenes. But for some, their reach -- to paraphrase Robert Browning -- still exceeds their grasp.

Though maybe not for long.

• • •

Location: Metropolis Performing Arts Centre, 111 W. Campbell St., Arlington Heights, (847) 522-2121 or [metropolis arts.com](http://metropolisarts.com)

Showtimes: 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 3 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday; 3 p.m. Sunday; through Nov. 3

Running time: About 2 hours, 25 minutes including intermission

<https://www.dailyherald.com/entlife/20181004/authenticity-heart-key-to-metropolis-ambitious-a-chorus-line>