

"A Chorus Line" comes to Otterbein

Guest artists and students join forces to depict struggle, survival

Before the curtain: long hours spent behind the scenes

By Marsha North

Characters in "A Chorus Line" express the hopes, dreams and spirit of survival of the dancers in Broadway shows.

Ed Vaughan, director and chairperson of the department of theatre and dance, said he hopes to take the audience "on a roller coaster ride of emotions" as they watch the musical and learn details of the characters' lives outside of the audition.

"A Chorus Line," Broadway's longest running show, will be presented May 4-8 at Cowan Hall. It is a joint production of the departments of theatre and music.

The show is set at an audition for a musical and shows the trauma dancers face competing for roles. Once the director has seen each dancer's routine he asks that they come forward individually into the spotlight to tell about themselves.

Vaughn said the musical goes beyond showing the tremendous physical energy needed to be a dancer and portrays "the human being inside the dance discipline."

Two guest artists, Jon and Teri Hiatt Devlin, will lend their expertise to the production. Jon, who is assistant choreographer, portrays Zach, and Teri is cast in the role of Cassie. Teri, a 1970 alumna, is artistic director of the Gallery Players and Jon now teaches part-time in Otterbein's dance program.

Jon's character Zach is choreographer and director of the show. He said, "Zach is not a very nice person: he is out for what he wants and does not care who he steps on to

get it."

Devlin said he has feelings of empathy for the other characters and what they go through because during his career he has been on both sides at auditions.

Teri Hiatt Devlin said of her character Cassie, the oldest cast member, "She has been through it all; she is a great dancer—although not quite a star, and has decided to stick it out and stay in dancing."

Teri said she brings a lot of herself to the character of Cassie. She left the theatre to go into business, but found she was not happy and decided to return. Both Teri and Jon said they identify strongly with the characters because of their professional backgrounds.

As the director of a musical, Vaughan said he works with a lot of creative talents including the choreographers, music director and vocal coach. "My job is to see that it all meshes together," he said.

Vaughn said one reason "Chorus Line" was chosen is to show the upgraded dance program. A bachelor of arts in dance was added last year. However, the cast is made up of a combination of theatre, dance and music majors.

Performances are Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.; Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m.; and a Sunday matinee at 2 p.m. Tickets are free to students with an i.d. at the Cowan box office.



Choreographer Denise David lines up dancers Kelli Glaser, Emily DePaul and Lisa Walton. Photo by Cindy Abrams.

By Beth Payne

Before a single dancer appears on stage Wednesday night to stand in the spotlight and gather applause, many other people have spent long days and nights under the fluorescent lights of work rooms.

Some of the principle players of "A Chorus Line" that will not be seen on stage are choreographer Denise David, technical director Mr. Rob Johnson, costume designer Katie Robbins and music director Mr. Craig Johnson.

Rob Johnson said, "The scene design is deceptively simple, just mirrors and a white line, but it took a lot of time to safely set up and align the 4 by 8 mirrors."

Also, a recently purchased computer will keep track of 120 individual lights in Cowan Hall. This computer has hundreds of light cues stored in its memory. The appropriate light sequence can be achieved by pressing one button.

Another change made for the "Chorus Line" performance is the position of the orchestra. Usually in front of the stage in the pit, the orchestra will instead be underneath the stage with microphones to amplify their sound. Cameras will be placed on the music director, Craig Johnson, and on the cast, with television monitors so they can see each other to give and receive cues.

Also, an off-stage chorus and a new electronic piano are being used.

David said: "It's coming together nicely. It is a good blend of minds and bodies."

Dance classes offered this summer

By Marcie Hochwalt

Dancing, in all its sensuality and style, recently came into the spotlight on the silver screen.

"Dirty Dancing," the movie, took place at a resort in the Catskill Mountains. The year was 1962.

In 1961, Jon Devlin was similarly employed—giving dance lessons at a resort in the Catskills. And again this summer, Devlin will be giving dance lessons—at Otterbein.

Devlin, an adjunct faculty member, will teach three courses: Broadway dancing, Movement Awareness and a Dance Primer.

His reasons for teaching are simple: "Because there's nothing offered and because I'm free." He said it also fits in with his long-range goal of developing a summer dance camp in the area.

Devlin is certainly one to practice what he preaches. He most recently appeared as a guest artist in "A Chorus Line." His character, the director Zach, coaxed and often brow-beat dancers, into revealing their personal histories.

He has also performed throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe in night clubs, dance companies and musicals.

Devlin said he likes the process of performance; he likes the creative work of rehearsals. Yet he said he would rather not worry about audience reaction: "I'd rather do it for myself."

"I probably like to teach more than perform," he said.

He has taught previously at Princeton and at American University in Washington D.C. He has also taught ballet to Sesame Street's Big Bird.

In January, he replaced Mary Sweeney at Otterbein.

Devlin described his two-hour instruction in Broadway Dance as "a full spectrum dance class." He said, "It will contain many elements. . . . The thing about Broadway is you never know what the dancing will be."

Although Broadway dancing is sometimes assumed to be jazz, it also incorporates other styles. Often street dancing, such as break-dancing, is brought onto Broadway. "A lot of dance crosses over," Devlin said.



Jon Devlin rehearsing for "A Chorus Line"

The course in Movement Awareness is aimed at dancers at all levels, as well as athletes. It will include the Chinese slow-motion self-defense health exercise Tai Chi and other exercises for body alignment, stress release, increased agility and increased energy.

"You can work away from a lot of problems," Devlin said, such as neck, shoulder and back problems. "A lot of times, it comes down to usage."

He said harmful movement habits must be worked though slowly to correct them. Although this is not physically painful, it may be painful to a person's patience. Devlin said, "Anything that slows you down, creates self-awareness. . . . It involves everything—it's a whole body/mind thing."

The psychological reasons for why we move as we do are part of what makes such training interesting, said Devlin.

His third class, the dance primer, will be similar to the Broadway dancing class, only more basic. Devlin realizes many people do not believe they have what it takes to be a dancer, and are reluctant to sign up even for a basic class. His attitude is: "'Come on in here—don't worry about it—let's have some fun.'"

Devlin has trained in many dance forms, kinesiology, yoga, tai chi and body therapies, and he is an expert in ball room dance. He created the Jon Devlin Dancercise technique.

Devlin's 12-week summer dance program will begin on Monday, June 13. Trial classes, at \$10 per class, will be given on Saturday. Contact Devlin at the Battelle Fine Arts Center for more details.

Otterbein's 'Chorus Line' a high-stepping musical

By Michael Grossberg
Dispatch Theater Critic

Shivers of delight and recognition coursed through me a decade ago when I saw *A Chorus Line* for the first time on Broadway. Those shivers subsided with repeated viewings of mediocre touring companies and uninspired regional productions.

By 1985, when Michael Bennett's innovative musical was trivialized into a film flop, my shivers had turned to yawns.

But Otterbein College's zestful show, which opened last night, reminded me of my first viewing. This top-notch college production displays the strengths that the film slighted.

THANKS TO fine ensemble work by a superior cast, I shivered again at the glittering theatricality of 30 Broadway "gypsies" lining up onstage for a grueling audition that will expose their souls as well as their talents.

Besides its imaginative concept, stark staging and sassy score, *A Chorus Line* has become Broadway's longest-running show because it plugs so electrically into the defining rites of passage of a young civilization. The audition process becomes a metaphor of growing up and making it — not just onstage, but on any of life's stages.

More than most, this *Chorus Line* reaches out to the adolescent in all of us. In so doing, Otterbein's theater department demon-

REVIEW

strates anew the perennial appeal of this modern classic, which won nine Tony awards and the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for drama.

Otterbein's production boasts two professional guest artists with New York credits: Teri Hiatt Devlin, who recently returned to Columbus to become the Leo Yassenoff Jewish Center's drama director, and Jon Devlin, her husband, an Otterbein dance instructor.

TERI DEVLIN'S voice is voluptuous. She gives Cassie a reserved dignity that shields much of her passion — until she dances, when it all pours out.

Jon Devlin is appropriately gruff and curt as Zak, but he runs the gamut from A to B when called onstage for a wider range of feeling.

This is the archetypal ensemble show, so it seems unfair to single out anyone else from the fine student cast. But, hey, life is unfair, so why not? Especially since the choosing of some performers over others is the tension-inducing premise that gives *A Chorus Line* its drama.

Perhaps most impressive is Timothy Ryan Deak's long monologue about his youthful start in the tawdry side of show business. Alone on the bare stage, Deak commands our attention and, finally, respect.

Emily DePaul is a poignant Diana. When she sang "I felt nothing" at Tuesday's preview, she made the audience feel her regret and determination. Later, DePaul topped herself by leading the cast in a rousing *What I Did for Love*.

Kevin Ford Carty, memorable in Otterbein's *Noises Off*, shows off his comic talents once again as Richie, an overenthusiastic bun-

dle of teen-age nerves. Will somebody please give Carty a nice role in a new TV sitcom once he graduates from college?

Also amusing are Andrea Strom and Chuck Rosen as an insecure wife and her overprotective husband. They have fun sharing the lyrics of *Sing*, a novelty number cut from the film but still mighty effective onstage.

Other standouts: Colby Paul as

the sexy, overripe Sheila; Marc Foster as the unapologetically gay fellow who once broke into neighbors' homes in Buffalo to "rearrange the furniture" and Patrick Loren McRoberts as the athletic Mike, who sings *I Can Do That*.

To be sure, almost everyone in the cast can "do that" — and they do it well, sensitively guided by director Ed Vaughan, music direc-

tor Craig Johnson and choreographer Denise David.

Otterbein College Theatre will present *A Chorus Line* at 8 to night, Friday night and Saturday night and 2 p.m. Sunday in Cowan Hall. Tickets are \$8 and \$9. For more information, call 898-1109.