

## On Stage

**'A Chorus Line'** — UTEP Dinner Theatre, in the UTEP Student Union West building, presents the Michael Bennett musical, winner of the 1976 Tony Award for Best Musical and the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for Drama **Jan. 26-Feb. 11**. Show time is 7 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday; non-dinner matinees are Sunday 2:30 p.m. Feb. 4 and 11; dinner matinee is 1:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 28. Tickets: \$33.50 to \$43.50 Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday discount dinner performances; \$36.50 to \$48.50 (Friday and Saturday dinner performances), and \$19.50 to \$29.50 no-dinner matinee performances (Ticketmaster). Information: 747-6060 or utep.edu/udt.

"A Chorus Line" captures the spirit and tension of a Broadway chorus audition. Exploring the inner lives and poignant ambitions of professional Broadway gypsies, the show features one powerhouse number after another. Memorable musical numbers include "What I Did for Love," "One," "I Can Do That," "At the Ballet," "The Music and the Mirror," and "I Hope I Get It."

**'Los Desarraigados'** — Los Actores Spanish-language theatre company presents the play by Humberto Robles at 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2:30 p.m. Sunday, **Jan. 26-28**, at the Chamizal National Memorial, 800 S San Marcial. Admission; \$10 (\$8 seniors, military, students; \$6 each for groups of 10 or more).

Information: 540-3813 or 474-4275.

The play tells the story of an attractive well-to-do young woman from Mexico City whose unexpected arrival in El Paso at the house of a working-class Mexican American family forces them to confront their own identity and place in American society. Co-presented by International Hispanic Cultural Institute (IHCI).

**'Photograph 51'** — No Strings Theatre Company presents the story of Rosalina Franklin and DNA by Anna Ziegler **Jan. 26-Feb. 11** at Black Box Theatre, 430 N. Main in Las Cruces. Directed by Ceil Herman. Performances are 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., 2:30 p.m. Sunday Feb. 3 and 10; and at 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 8. Tickets: \$15 (\$12 students and seniors over 65; \$10 all seats Thursday. Reservations: (575) 523-1223.

"Photograph 51" is the story of Rosalind Franklin and DNA and neatly coils a scientific detective story around a rumination on how sexism, personality, and morality can impact collaboration and creativity.

**Improv Comedy Show** — Jesters League of America, hosts its first improv show of the year 8 to 10 p.m. Saturday, **Jan. 27**, at Glasbox, 210 Poplar. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. Mature content. Admission: \$6 at the door; \$5 on the league's Facebook page by clicking "attending." Information: (813) 785-6664.

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## 'A Chorus Line' demands acting, dancing, singing

Director Jaime Barba gets to take a trip down memory lane directing "A Chorus Line" at UTEP Dinner Theatre.

He was in the show playing Greg Gardner when the Dinner Theatre first produced it in 1995, so he understood the challenges of producing this particular musical.

"A Chorus Line" is different kind of show," Barba said. "It is a show that truly requires every performer in it be a 'triple threat.' It is essential to the show that each performer is well versed in acting, singing and dancing. There is no chorus. There are no 'lead' characters.

"The 18 'dancers' that are onstage for the entire show have to use all three performing disciplines to tell their stories. It is quite challenging for any performer to take on a role in this show. Dance plays a very important part of the story telling. So, we had to cast a group of kids that could dance. And as anyone who works in the theatre knows, it is hard to try and find a large group of male performers who can dance as well as sing and act. That was a challenge."

How different is "A Chorus Line" from typical musical fare? It was considered innovative when it opened in 1975 on Broadway, winning nine Tony Awards, including Best Musical, and the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for drama.

"A Chorus Line" is very different than you standard 'boy meets girl' musical," Barba said. "It follows the audition process of Broadway dancers trying to get their next 'gig.' Throughout the audition process we get to meet each character and learn a little about them through monologues, song and dance. It was quite groundbreaking for its day and it still holds up for today's audiences."

Barba, however, was glad to take on the challenge.

"Our February slot is usually reserved for a 'smaller' show (in the theater, 'smaller' is relative) and we were asked to try to pick a season of 'name' shows, or shows that have a following," Barba said. "Every season I do get to choose the show that I want to direct, and I put 'A Chorus Line' on my list. Lately we have had a lot of regulars that want to do dance heavy shows (i.e. 'West Side Story,' 'Cabaret'), and I knew we had the talent that could fill the cast and do a great job with the material."

Leading that group is UDT regular Josey Mitchell (Evita in "Evita," Mary Poppins in "Mary Poppins," Reno Sweeney in "Anything Goes") as Cassie. She performs the "Music and the Mirror" song and dance solo in the show, and is the show's choreographer.

"One of the biggest challenges is being in the show at the same time," Mitchell said. "There comes a point where I have to switch off choreographer and have to just be Cassie. The challenge of my role is that it is so much like my own life story that it is

## STAGE TALK

by Carol Viescas

very personal and raw for me. I'm excited to represent who she is for so many dancers like myself."

Other UDT regulars include: Paul (and dance captain) — Derrick Cintron; Ritchie — Rudy Melendez; Sheila — Sarah Pagano; Diana — Lizbeth Pineda; Mike — Jorge Blakely; Mark — Alvaro Callejas; Kristine — Becca Vargas; Greg — Henry Del Toro; Don — John Levick; Bobby — Jeffrey Quintana; Val — Katie Harding; Judy — Tania Hernandez; Connie — Jensen Springer; and Laurie — Kaelin Walker. Zach, the director in the show is portrayed by Edward Gallardo III, who returns to the UDT stage after a long break. Newcomers are Allysa Donnelly as Maggie; Laura Mae Klinger as Bebe and Jean-Andre Moore as Al.

"My biggest joy in this process is watching these performers 'create' their characters and their performances," Barba said. "I have been at the Dinner Theatre for over 25 years (hair and wig designer since 1992, UDT costume designer since 2006), so I see these same performers come in as novice performers and grow into experienced actors. This show is a great vehicle for the musical theater performer to get a 'meaty' character — a character with some substance and with a back story. I love to see one of the cast members bring these characters to life and put their own spin on it."

Barba wants people to understand that because of the depth and backstories required of each character, "A Chorus Line" is unique in musical theater.

"It has the same elements but it is presented in a completely different way. It's a little more edgy. There is a little more substance to the characters and the stories. There are definitely adult themes and situations that most musicals do not even tackle."

Mitchell agreed.

"There are many themes that were brought up by this show in the '70s when it first came out that are now once again in the spotlight: Women's rights, LGBTQ equality and the reality that for all of us our time is limited," Mitchell said.

Barba added that "You are going to hear things that might make some people uncomfortable. But it is all done to show the humanity in people."

*Carol Viescas is a veteran of community theater and teaches journalism at Bel Air High School.*

UTEP Dinner Theatre presents "A Chorus Line" Jan. 26-Feb. 11. Information: 747-6060 or utep.edu/udt.

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