

## Every Little Step

Each year it seems there is a fine documentary about the performing arts and show business. The latest in this line appears with *Every Little Step*, a fascinating look at auditions for that prototype show of auditions “A Chorus Line.” Turns out that the real-life auditions for this show—where some 3,000 actor/hoofters showed up--can be just as compelling as the musical itself.

Directed by the team James D. Stern and Adam Del Deo, who are also Broadway producers, the film follows a varied batch of musical comedy hopefuls as they try out for a part in the 2006 Broadway revival of a “A Chorus Line,” one of history’s most popular and honored musicals (it premiered in 1975). For fans of the show, it is fascinating to see the actual competition for the singular roles of the dancing/singing ensemble, a group that includes, *inter alia*, the short gal (Connie), the silicone-enhanced chick (Val), the shy gay fellow (Gregory), an ex-ballerina (Sheila), a sad jokester (Bobby), and, the lead dancer of the show, Cassie, a performer with star potential who just needs a job in the line. For people new to the musical, it should be as good an introduction to the agonizing yet rewarding audition process as the original show was. At best, it will certainly whet almost anyone’s appetite to see this “singular sensation” (this version recently had a DC run at the National Theater in March 2009).

One key to this revival of “A Chorus Line” is Bob Avian, who launched this new effort after having worked on the original show with its creator, the noted Broadway choreographer Michael Bennett. Along with his colleagues on the new production, Avian gives a rich account of the show and its origins. Even more telling, and most poignant, are excerpts of historic audio material from Bennett himself in sessions with several Broadway “gypsies” (veteran chorus dancers). It was these exchanges that led him to fashion a performance piece out of raw dance audition material. Hearing these musings makes you literally in at the creation of this landmark musical.

The auditions themselves (offering a rare inside look at the process) plus the video/audio material are very well edited and paced, but what heightens the film’s impact is the inherent drama of the auditions themselves: Who will advance to the next level? Who can shake off adversity to advance? Who will be the next Cassie? The filmgoer finds a rooting interest in some or all of these talented, committed performers and wants to see who will come out on top. And this is a competition with both pizzazz and class (leagues beyond the welter of copy-cat voices on TV’s “American Idol”) in a story that takes a little over an hour-and-one-half to tell.

(“*Every Little Step*” is rated “PG-13,” running time 96 mins.)

(June 2009)