

"Performances of the musical "A Chorus Line" continue through Sunday, Nov. 24, at the Birmingham Theatre. For ticket information call the box office at 644-3533.

With its hummable tunes, energetic dancing and broad emotional appeal, "A Chorus Line" at the Birmingham Theatre is a sure-fire bet. While the cast is not particularly memorable, the show — the longest-running musical in Broadway history — is just too good to suffer much effect.

There is no question that every cast member is a highly accomplished



Barbara Michals

ographer's God-like voice at the back of the theater. The play strikes a sympathetic note with anyone who has ever sweated through a job interview or cringed with embarrassment at recalling painful moments of childhood and adolescence.

AFTER THE individuality of the dancers is established, the finale blends them into an ensemble where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. There's an emotional high when all those scruffy, sweaty young dancers are transformed into lovely swans, struttin' their stuff amidst the theatrical splendor of a formal ball.

Nancy Hess plays Cassie, a once-feated dancer now trying to make a comeback to the chorus after some bad career moves. Hess is not a strong actress and, while she is a fine dancer, her solo is not the show-stopping dazzler of past productions.

As Zach, the demanding director-choreographer, Scott Allen projects a satisfactory blend of toughness and empathy. Pamela Khoury, cast as Diana, does a pleasing rendition of the beautiful ballad "What I Did for Love."

John Crutchman is likeable as Mike and his footwork is impressive on "I Can Do That." Trudi Green's Sheila is convincingly bitchy, and Amlee Turner is endearing as the hopelessly off-key Kristine.

Katherine Lynne Condit's Val lacks

the fresh-faced innocence to give "Dance: Ten; Look: Three" its full impact, and Chikae Ishikawa's Connie strains credibility when she totally stumbles through her tap routine.

Real-life director-choreographer James Beaumont has done a nice job adapting the production to the relatively small stage of the Birmingham Theatre. The stage is crowded, but never oppressively so. Kenneth Evans' lighting is oddly intrusive, especially lacking in subtlety during Cassie's solo time.

Performances of "Laura" by Vera Caspary and George Sklar continue Friday-Sunday, Nov. 1-3, and Thursdays-Sundays, Nov. 7-10 and 14-18, at the Farmington Players Barn in Farmington Hills. For ticket information, call 628-5061.

By Barbara Michaels
special writer

"Laura," a 1940s mystery thriller, is a mood piece, developing like the languorous curls of smoke from the detective's cigarette. In the Farmington Players current production, however, the mood is not always effective, and key dialogue seems disappointingly dated.

The detective, Mark McPherson (Ralph Rosati), has become so captivated by murder victim Laura Hunt that he sits alone in her apartment, staring at her haunting portrait.

When Laura (Judith Rosati) turns up very much alive, McPherson must determine whether the intended victim was Laura or the friend who bor-

rowed her apartment, before he can be sure of the
culprit.

Prime suspect is Laura's fiancé, Shelby Carpenter (Joseph Haynes), who tries to hide his involvement with Laura's best friend. Other possibilities are Laura's jealous, elderly mentor, the teenage boy with an unrequited crush on her, and the boy's resentful mother. There's also Laura herself, caught lying to the police.

RALPH ROSATI does a great deal to humanize the cliché character of the hard-bitten detective, but he cannot overcome dialogue like, "What is there about you that drives men crazy?" The classic '40s-style detective is more often presented tongue-in-cheek today; audiences are not used to taking him seriously.

As Laura, Judith Rosati successfully shows the multifaceted personality of her character, but overall she is too wholesome to be entirely convincing as a sophisticated temptress.

Haynes does a masterful job of handling Carpenter's Southern accent. While his character is intended to be hot-headed, Haynes' anger is inexplicably unrelenting.

Dick Coe is highly credible as cynical, erudite Waldo Lydecker, Laura's longtime friend and elderly adviser. At key moments, though, Coe too is

hampered by banal dialogue.

Patrick Harris is fine as Danny, the moody teenager, and Helen DeJulio is satisfactory as his unhappy mother. Anne Burton is delightfully droll as Bessie, Laura's housekeeper.

More extensive use of evocative background music is one way director Ellis Jorgensen might have strengthened the production. Nevertheless, some great old mysteries will just not hold up with audiences used to the fast-paced action of modern thrillers.



Seafood bar

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