

'Stepping Out' steps lively at Birmingham

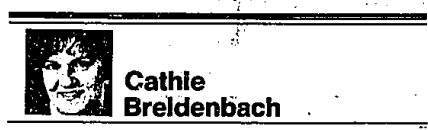
Performances of the Birmingham Theatre production of "Stepping Out" continue through Sunday, Feb. 5. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-3333.

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

"Stepping Out" playing at the Birmingham Theatre unfolds like an amplified, homier version of "A Chorus Line."
The comedy transplants the action from Broadway to a church basement in London where a motley collection of dead oddballs gather for a weekly tap dancing class. The re-

hearsal formal songs "lively" like "A Chorus Line" although these Londoners of sundry ages and assorted waistlines don't aspire to stardom as the hopeful, young hoofers in "A Chorus Line" do. Instead, they dance because it's fun and because it offers a respite from their dreary, or troubled, or frustrating lives.

Week after week, the inept collection of wishful thinkers diligently rehearses a dance they will perform for a charity benefit. The sudden metamorphosis at the end when eight caterpillar-clumsy dancers with umpteen left feet transform themselves into agile hoofers as light on their feet as butterflies may be blatantly unrealistic, but in spirit,



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"Stepping Out" couldn't end any other way.

This upbeat little show brims with the cheerful rhythms of tap dancing music and with the rosy feelings that arise when underdogs show they've got spunk and people make tentative connexions. Written by Richard Harris, the comedy parades its fair share of spunky lines. The wonderful set of a church basement created by David Jenkins breathes the dank, ageless comfort of thick, stone walls and arched doorways.

TOMMY TUNE originally directed "Stepping Out" on Broadway with Marge Champion as associate choreographer Judith Hastell, who directs and choreographs the Birmingham Theatre production, capitalizes on the lanky and humorous individuality of the eight amateur hoofers and their dancing teacher, a perky Doris Day type nicely played by Susan Flynn.

Babs Hooymann bams up her role as the gangling, graceless Dorothy who arrives in motorcycle helmet and changes to an absurd pink tutu to plump around the stage with energetic earnestness. Dorothy's heavy-handed (and heavy-footed) clowning may grate at first, but, like the inept innocent in the children's dance recital, Dorothy wins hearts.

Jess Richards overlays Geoffrey's painstaking reserve, so at moments the lone man in the tap

class appears to be so out of it he could be an escapee from a halfway house for the mentally disabled or a slow-motion pal for Dustin Hoffman's "Rain Man." The women in the group take their pot shots at this token male in their midst, but they haven't the heart to inflict real damage on Geoffrey's vulnerability.

Laurel Franks plays the piano player as a dour, outspoken foil to Susan Flynn's cheerfulness. Leslie Hicks, Betty Ann Grove, Colin Tuckersberry, Barbara Broughton and Vanda Evans round out the well-balanced cast of professionals.

Costumes by Nell Spisak stand on their own as jolly statements of character. Geoffrey wears a sweat-suit more rumpled than an elephant's knees and his clothes project his endearing lack of grace and meek charm. From Sylvia's tartly mismatched layered look to Andy's "Olive Oil" frumpy duds and Vera's sophisticated fiery, the costumes

underscore personality as characters unfold their stories.

A HUSBAND who beats his wife, another husband on the dole, a senile mother, recalcitrant children, an unwanted pregnancy — their litany of woes rivals the afternoon soaps, but they put their troubles behind them as they dance and form a raggle-taggle support group one afternoon a week.

Do they resolve their troubles? The plot hangs together loosely and doesn't trifle about tying loose ends. Who knows? More to the point — who cares? Theirs is a tentative alliance, a tribute to the pleasures of dancing and to a quirky kind of caring.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield teaches college writing classes and works as a freelance writer.

upcoming things to do

WOODBRIDGE TAVERN
Original Dixieland with Mike Karoub's "Little" Dixie Syncopators featured Thursdays 7:30-11:30 p.m. through Jan. 28 at the Woodbridge Tavern in Detroit.

CAT REDFORD
Motor City Theatre Organ Society Inc. presents its new biweekly series at the Redford Theatre in Detroit. Films start at 8 p.m. The program features overtures and intermissions, played by favorite area organists, on the Redford Theatre's vintage 1928 Barton Theatre pipe organ. Organ overtures begin at 7:30 p.m. The program Friday-Saturday, Jan. 6-7, is "1901: A Space Odyssey," a science-fiction film written and directed by Stanley Kubrick and starring Kirk Dullea and Gary Lockwood. Guest organist for the overture and intermission is Jennifer M. Candea.

HOLLY HOTEL
Professional standup comedy is presented in the 1891 Room Comedy Club in the Historic Holly Hotel. Attractions Thursday-Saturday, Jan. 6-7, are Mark Hamilton, Michael Blackman and Tim Butterfield. Thursday show is at 8:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday shows at 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. (two shows each night). Cover charge for all shows is \$7, or \$5 for dining guests. Call 634-1891 for reservations and information.

COMEDY CASTLE
Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle in Berkley will feature: Thom Sharp —

through Saturday, Jan. 7; Larry Amoros — Tuesday-Saturday, Jan. 10-14; Doug Ferrari — Tuesday-Saturday, Jan. 17-21; Frankie Pace — Tuesday-Saturday, Jan. 24-28, and Willie Tyler and Lester — Jan. 31 to Feb. 4.

SATIRIC PLAY
The Attle Theatre presents "Bohphal" (Zulu for arrest), an examination of the lives of a black family enmeshed in the web of apartheid, a satiric play, with performances during Black History Month. Curtain time is 10 a.m. Wednesdays, Jan. 18, 24 and 25. Tickets are \$5.50 for students; price includes complimentary chaperone seats, study guide and talk-back session with the cast and crew. Reservations must be made no later than Friday, Jan. 13. Call 875-8285.

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