



CHICAGO: Christine Dulong is Razzle Dazzle HOT!

A Review by Michael J. Tobin
broadwayworld.com

Seacoast Repertory Theatre ignites the Seacoast stage with a sizzling production of CHICAGO that truly is a "summer must see" for anyone who loves a fast-paced, exciting and professionally performed musical.

CHICAGO, set in Prohibition-era Chicago with music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb and a book by Ebb and Bob Fosse, tells the story of Velma Kelly and Roxie Hart, competing for survival on death row with the help of puppet master lawyer, Billy Flynn. Based on a 1926 play of the same name by reporter Maurine Dallas Watkins, the story is a satire on corruption in the administration of criminal justice and the concept of the "celebrity criminal".

There is no question that Christine Dulong (Velma Kelly) is the glue that holds this super show together. Dulong is a triple threat dynamo who gives a Broadway-like performance that is worth the price of admission. Dulong's acting is strong, her vocals explosive and her dancing stellar.

Jessi Trauth (Roxie Hart) is a master of the dance and a convincing actress, her energy and commitment evident. Unfortunately, Trauth is not a strong vocalist but she can sell a song with conviction.

Michael Karraker (Billy Flynn) gives a great performance, his vocal coloring and physicality appropriate and razzle dazzle fun.

Jamie Bradley (Amos Hart) is subtly perfect. Bradley masters the understated and shines brightly with his heartfelt acting and well-performed song, Mr. Cellophane.

When Ashley Kelley (Matron) is on stage, there is nothing she can do wrong in this production. Without question, Kelley knows how to grab hold of the audience and never let go.

Delta Miles (Mary Sunshine) is deliciously fun-tastic and full of, um, surprises. Miles, with, um, her winning smile and expressive face, is more than just a little bit of good and can sing like a songbird.

The ensemble, too numerous to mention, play their many roles with powerful vocals, appropriate character acting choices and excellent execution of the dance. The sinfully sexy girls know how to sell a musical number- every song and dance step a feast for the eyes. The boys are sweaty, suggestive and fun to watch.

Director and Choreographer, Brian Swasey, has brilliantly blocked a big production in a small space. Swasey's concept is clear and well executed. The choreography is a show in itself, full of Fosse, Fosse, Fosse and quite clever. Swasey paints a beautiful stage picture, allowing for the most simple look or gesture to radiate.

Musical director, Catherine York, delivers a huge sound with attention to detail in diction and harmonies. The band, at times too loud, never misses a note. Excellent work!

The set, designed by Erik D. Diaz, is simple and works well. Diaz created the perfect compliment to Swasey's vision. Lighting designer, Michael Clark Wonson, gives the Rep the best lighting I've seen this season. Wonson is not a "lights up, lights down" designer and knows how to accent every scene, every song, every moment with visual surprises. Costume design by Tommy Labanaris is a feast for the eye with its array of color, texture and suggestion. However, Roxie's act two silver shoes are very distracting with her all black costume. Sound design by Rachel Neubauer was inconsistent, the performers hard to hear at times- especially when the band was playing.

If you want a hot show on a hot night starring the hottest actress on the Seacoast, this CHICAGO is not to be missed.