



EVERY LITTLE STEP: Directed by James D. Stern and Adam Del Deo. Sony Pictures Classics, 2009. 96 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

How many levels of meta-ness can one movie have? *Every Little Step* is a film about the audition and casting process for the 2006 Broadway revival of *A Chorus Line*, which is a musical about the audition process for a musical, based on the lives of performers who had been through this process countless times. It's a film that, though it doesn't recreate the mid-1970s birth of *A Chorus Line*, offers an inside peek at the way the musical came to be — on two levels. And it needs to be said that you needn't be a musical theater geek to find it fascinating. The experience of working and practicing and trying and failing is easy to understand — even if never in your life will face the number of rejections these dancers and singers face in a month. It puts a new

spin on the old saying about show business.

Every Little Step sweeps through the open call auditions, the first round of cuts, without ever stooping to the sort of humiliation comedy that comes from watching the worst failed attempts. In parallel to the present-day casting, the film gives us a narrative of the creation of *A Chorus Line*, told in part by dancers, composers and others involved in creation of the original; in part through old footage and interviews; and in part by the audio recording of the night the musical was born. Against the gold-hued image of a reel-to-reel, original workshop leader and play director Michael Bennett speaks, explaining to a roomful of dancers what he has in mind. It was midnight, January 18, 1974; Donna McKechnie, the original Cassie, now recalls that there was a jug of awful red wine. Bennett asked the dancers to speak about themselves, to tell their life

stories, explain what dancing and being on stage meant to them, and how they came to do it. The tapes are full of voices; as the film progresses, the voices turn into songs. The taped audio plays over lyric sheets. The original cast performs in scenes intercut with images from the present-day auditions, where the original Connie, Baayork Lee, is involved in the odd task of choosing a new young woman to play herself — sort of.

James D. Stern and Adam Del Deo's film is a behind-the-scenes junkie's dream, made with unprecedented access to the Broadway casting process. It's also a striking reminder of the less-visible processes that go into telling every story on stage or screen. What if they chose the other Sheila? What if Jason Tam hadn't reduced at least one man at the casting table to tears with his version of Paul's monologue? Who would it have been instead? And what if different dancers had been present on that 1974 night? How many lives were almost changed with every new show? And how can these dancers keep going after rejection after rejection, waiting for that elusive break? The answer is the story; the story is their lives. For every story that finds a happy ending in the casting process, hundreds of others end in tears and frustration. The life of a Broadway performer sometimes seems a strange one: What if, at the end of your every work day, people rose to their feet and applauded? If anything, the arduous process in *Every Little Step* is a reminder that every night's applause is countered by another day's rejection. What a balancing act to master. **CW**

Every Little Step opens Friday, July 24, at the Bijou.

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Coraline: Henry Selick (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*) adapts Neil Gaiman's creepy, fantastic story into a creepy, fantastic movie about a girl who finds, behind a door in the wall, a fantastic parallel world — complete with her Other Mother, who has buttons for eyes. PG. David Minor Theater.

Every Little Step: I'm not a big musicals person, and I was absolutely invested in *Every Little Step*, which follows the casting process for the 2006 revival of *A Chorus Line* while also revisiting the show's mid-1970s creation. Dancers compete and commiserate, casting staff discuss, dismiss and direct, and lives are changed by the results. It's not a competition for fame; it's a competition for a paycheck that's undeniably entwined with the chance to keep dancing. It's good stuff. 93 min. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

Food, Inc.: Even if you're tired of the glut of information — which seemingly goes ignored by so many — about the problems with our food industry, this new documentary about the flaws in the system, which pulls together all the big guns (Michael Pollan, Joel Salatin) is worth your time. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

G-Force: Talking guinea pigs save the world! Or whatever. Is this just an entire film capitalizing on the animation used to create that creepy-eyed creature in the godawful *Bedtime Stories*? PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Imagine That: Eddie Murphy is a businessman who has no time for his daughter until her imaginary world starts turning out the solutions to his work crisis. Can we use that imaginary world to create some more interesting movie plots? PG. Movies 12.

Mysteries of Film Noir: DIVA screens Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1 pm) and Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (4 pm) as part of their ongoing seminar. DIVA, July 26. \$5 for both screenings.

Orphan: Vera Farmiga and Peter Sarsgaard star as parents devastated by the loss of an unborn child. The kid they take in doesn't exactly make things better. R. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Ugly Truth, The: Any theories about why Katherine Heigl is once again playing a TV show employee? This charmer pairs her with Gerard Butler as a bad-boy TV personality who thinks he knows everything about the difference between men and woman. You got that "charmer" was being used sarcastically, right? R. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Watchmen: Zack Snyder (300)'s adaptation of what the commercials trumpet as the most acclaimed graphic novel, like, EVER, is pretty good — and pretty faithful to Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' book, in which costumed heroes try to solve the murder of one of their own. Among other problems. But Snyder is too busy recreating select moments from the book to bring a vision of his own — beyond highlighting his fascination with violence. R. David Minor Theater (both the theatrical and director's cuts are showing). ★★☆☆☆ (3/12)

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