

ACTORS CABARET DONS A NEW HABIT

Sisters doin' for themselves

In Philadelphia, the city of Brotherly Love, some sisters could use a little prayer. The convent's out of cash — no one's tithing anymore! — and Mother Superior (a resplendent Cindy Kenny) declares the situation dire.

Enter Chelyce Chambers as Deloris, a nightclub chanteuse with a heart of gold. Deloris witnesses some bad doings by her bad boyfriend, and — you guessed it — has to don a nun's habit to keep from getting whacked.

(Wait? Wasn't this a 1992 hit movie starring Whoopi Goldberg? Yup, the same, but now with singing and dancing, because ... why not?!)

Sister Act: The Musical, playing at Actors Cabaret, has a fancy pedigree, with music by Alan Menken (*Little Shop of Horrors*, *Beauty and the Beast*) and an assist on the book from Douglas Carter Beane (maybe best known for another 1990's hit, *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything*. Side note: The world misses Patrick Swayze.)

And this show has plenty of charm.

Director/designer Joe Zingo pumps the production with laughs, from simpleton sight gags to razzmatazz. Costumes are first-rate, and the sets and props — on the tiny stage, so close to the audience we see all the details — are delightfully detailed.

But it's the performances that make this show shine brightest.

As postulant Mary Robert, Ashley Apelzin brings just the right balance of deer-in-the-headlights and spunk.

Chambers is strong as Deloris, with a silky voice and charismatic stage presence. This was our first time seeing Chambers onstage, and we hope to see more of her.



As Mother Superior, Kenny pulls out all the stops. Kenny has some serious pipes, and she flits around like a mother hen, inspiring all the nuns — there's a ton of them — with her sagacious melodies.

As an ensemble, the nuns are a spectacle onto themselves. Special mention to Emily Westlund and Larissa Cohoe for their terrific dual work as back-up singers Michelle and Tina.

As Eddie, the good guy, Chad Lowe (Wait, Chad Lowe? — no, different Chad Lowe. Le sigh.) seems a little tentative, but he warms into the role as the show plays out.

Bill Furtick as the Monsignor — with his hiccupping Irish accenting — pretty much steals every scene he's in.

The show has some bumbling gangsters — about as menacing as the thugs in *Home Alone* — led by Bruce McCarthy as Deloris's yucky boyfriend Curtis. It'd be great if McCarthy dialed the mean factor up a bit, so we had something more to push up against, so we felt from the outset there was more at stake.

But no matter — it's a feel-good, lighthearted affair.

Sister Act: The Musical continues at Actors Cabaret through April 8. Call 541-683-4368 or visit actorscabaret.org for tickets.

DANCE

BY RACHAEL CARNES

THE MOVEMENT AND THE MUSIC

LCC dance concert highlights artistic connections

The Lane Community College Dance Department's annual *Collaborations* concert earlier this month offered three performances by LCC students and faculty as well as Eugene Ballet Academy's company, Eugene Youth Ballet.

The March 2 concert opened with *Happening*, by choreographer Sarah Ebert, set on dancers from Eugene Youth Ballet.

With high energy and precision, Ebert's dancers interweave through connected pathways, looping and jutting through the space, as they carve elliptically to music by John Zorn.

Next, *a reconstruction*, a solo by alumna Hannah Downs — with music written, performed and recorded by Downs — creates pockets of inquiry and introspection, as Downs explores low level shaping and the twisted, angular, but inevitable progression towards vertical.

(be)tween, by alumna Mariah Melson offers sharp, quick changes in focus, with an expressive range of shapes, as she and dancer Kyra Bannister exchange tense, powerful bolts of energy.

Bonnie Simoa's contribution, *Fold*, featuring Arianna LaMora, Colleen Kiyuna and Zoe Winchell, explores the tenuous filaments binding dancers in unison, as movers roll and sweep, expand and contract, in a kind of chrysalis of momentum.

Jana Maszaros' *Whisper*, featuring Maria Antonieta Alvarez and Kelcie Laube, has an intimate fragility, built



DANCERS PERFORM IN SARAH NEMECEK'S *IN DRESSES SEWN BY OUR GRANDMOTHERS* AT LCC

across an armature of terrific strength. One of the most compelling pieces of the evening, the work arrests in its accessibility, exploring relationship through collaboration and contrast, a divination on knowing.

Sarah Nemecek's *in dresses sewn by our grandmothers* takes a slow, meditative approach, with dancers curling, sliding, falling, all on the floor. A wide, illuminated net above them seems to hold the dancers into a low-level space while pulsing original music by Christian Cherry and cumbersome dresses by Mari DeWitt add to the theatricality of wrapping and removal.

Alumna Jackie Thelen's *Finding Strength in Vulnerability*

layers ambient distortions of self-perception with bursts of raw, energetic rhythm.

Simoa's *Arrive, again* delves into weight-sharing and lifts — and, finally, features some men. In rosy, glowing light, ten dancers dart in and out of shifting focal points and mood, intertwined in their deep community.

Finally, Nemecek's *Field of View* offers grounded complexities of balance and weight. Superficially austere, the work takes a read on the vital signs and viscera that connect us all.

Throughout the performance, masterful lighting direction by James McConkey continually bathes the work at hand in eloquent color and form. ■