

# Capital's Swingers

Three new hyperactive plays showcase the best of young Delhi



SOTTO VOCE

KAVITA NAGPAL

THE SHEER NUMBERS were overwhelming. In scene after episode, solo and chorus, group dances and individual numbers, one beheld a veritable storm of talent on stage during the last fortnight. It was difficult to believe that Delhi had sufficient dancers and singers to outfit two major musicals running almost simultaneously. Both *The Chorus Line* (Scene

Dance till you drop: on the sets of *Grease*

Stealers and DanceworX) and *Grease* (Delhi Music Theatre) are based on popular Broadway shows that have also been made into successful films. It is not easy to mount these plays with any degree of artistic satisfaction, for not only do they require a very special kind of talent, but are also expensive to mount. Both productions succeeded in holding audience attention.

Directed by George Pulinkala and choreographed by his son Ivan, *Grease* featured 54 college boys and girls. The drama is set in an American high school and focuses on issues relating to the problems teenagers on the threshold of adulthood encounter at home and in school.

Ankur Sabharwal in the lead role (Danny) and Kristen Jain as the heroine, Sandy, have a tremendous vocal range. Anusha Bose, Ritu Varma, and Kusumita Sana also show promise. The dancing could have been better and the sets were, to put it frankly, eyesores.

*The Chorus Line* unfolds as a two-hour long audition during which the offbeat director Zach, intelligently played by Khalil Joseph, quizzes aspirants on more than just their capacity to sing and dance; he probes their private lives to assess the emotional states and the expressive capacity of the actors. Which, in fact, was exactly what the three directors, Vivek Mansukhani (drama), Ashley Lobo (dance) and Babusha Santana (music), must have had to do while selecting the cast for this production. *The Chorus Line*, which is anchored in true stories based on the lives of chorus line men and women, is poignant theatre. It speaks of the trials, tribulations and trauma of out of work actors everywhere in the world and does so with deep insight and sincere concern. Cassie, played by the talented singer-actress, Roshni Chopra, was once Zach's live-in and a lead player. Out of job for months she is auditing for the chorus line to keep the wolves at bay. Homosexuality, promiscuousness, the fear of accident and permanent disability, the constant fight against the middle age bugle revealing true age, and most importantly the short career span and uncertain future of chorus line artists is

It is heartening to see that this wealth of young talent is not being frittered away on sex comedies and bedroom farces as in the past. The popularity of musicals is a positive gain for English theatre in the Capital. The intensive training these college students have to undergo in song and dance, sometimes as long as three hours everyday for three months, not merely hones natural talent but is an excellent school for self-discipline.

*One Cool Cat* by Ruchika's Little Actor's Club (IHC) warmed the heart with the disarming ease and style with which the pre-teen actors presented their views on the need for animals to be free in their own habitat via the story of Sheru, a lioness from the Gir forest in Gujarat.

## PICK OF THE WEEK

First held captive in a circus and then a zoo, Sheru outwits her captors and is restored to nature. The animal costumes made from ethnic fabric, the uncluttered stage and the improvisational ability of the cast was impressive.

Though the music by Madhulika Saran was delightful, one wishes director Feisal Alkazi had opted for live music rather than lip sync on recorded songs. Each time a song

A festival of three plays by well-known Bengali playwright Debasis Majumdar is presented by Impressario India at the Shri Ram Centre August 20-22. Abhiyan opens the Natya Mela with *Tamrapatra*, a Hindi version of *Amitakshar*. Jayant Das directs *Swapna Santati* on August 21 and Debasis directs his own play *Rangamati* on August 22 with actors from his Calcutta group Sudrak.

The shows are preceded (5.30-6.30) by hour-long talks on the