

Review: Lakewood's 'Sweet Charity' sticks to ingredients that work in Lake Oswego

"Sweet Charity" owns a great recipe for success: Take a generous helping of movement by Bob Fosse, add some clever writing by Neil Simon, stir in jazzy music by Cy Coleman with tasty lyrics by Dorothy Fields, and, presto, you've got an enduring crowd-pleaser, an entrée that appears to have gone down in history.

Ever since it opened on Broadway in 1966, "Sweet Charity" has been revived with regularity here and abroad. At the Lakewood Theatre in Lake Oswego, the show proves how successful it can be in a theater if you've got the right ingredients; an able chorus, strong direction and, maybe even more importantly, first-rate, attention-to-detail choreography. Oh, and don't forget, a woman of star quality to play Charity, the dance-hall hostess who gives generously despite her unluckiness in love.

Amy Beth Frankel, a petite, waif-like actor who appears to have dance in her DNA, exudes that stellar radiance. It's also a plus that she co-choreographs the show with Gina Johnson Morris. Together,



Amy Beth Frankel as Charity Hope Valentine and Joe Theissen as Oscar in *Sweet Charity*.

er, they've reproduced the Fosse dances primarily with their own choreography, tailoring them to fit the Lakewood stage and the chorus. One forgets that this show revolves around dance (Fosse directed and choreographed the 1969 film version with Shirley MacClaine). Morris also blows our socks off as the lead dancer in the "Rich Man's Frug," a wonderfully staged number with performers in black and white, holding cigarettes aloft, and with noses in the air, performing bits of popular '60s dances, including the Swim and the Jerk, never losing their cool. It's a highlight of the show (there are several of them), and Frankel and Morris have made it clean and tight. Later,



"Big Spender" as danced by the ensemble in Lakewood Theatre Company's musical production of *Sweet Charity*.

when Charity gets the gift of a top hat and cane from the Italian movie star Vittorio Vidal (Joe Theissen), the Fosse signature is complete.

Theissen plays all the men in Charity's life, and he nearly steals the show from Frankel a few times. He's the no-

goodnik Charlie for a few minutes in the first act, swaggering and slouching, later the handsome moustachioed Vittorio who shows an interest in Charity briefly and finally, he's Oscar, the mild-mannered accountant. Oscar's scared to death of elevators. When he gets stuck in one with Charity, Theissen gets to show off his comedic skills. In the throes of panic, he can't form words, he can't stand up straight, as he slithers to the floor, suddenly losing his skeletal structure. Isaac Lamb, in his Portland directorial debut, obviously loves this scene, and has Theissen play it for what it's worth.

Another delectable performance comes from Megan Misslin, as Charity's dance-hall pal Nickie, intoning "Big Spender" with the rest of the deadpan gals

at the Fandango Ballroom, and later brightening up hopefully in "There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This." Other memorable selections are "Rhythm of Life," a spoof on '60s religious groups, "I'm a Brass Band" and Charity's effusive solo "If My Friends Could See Me Now." Fans of Fosse's will enjoy "Sweet Charity": It contains some of his best work.

-- Holly Johnson
Special to The Oregonian



The "Rich Man's Frug" as danced by the ensemble in Lakewood Theatre Company's musical production of *Sweet Charity*.

Sweet Charity

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, plus various times Sundays, through Oct. 17

Where: Lakewood Center for the Arts, 368 S. State Street, Lake Oswego

Tickets: \$20-\$30, 503-635-3901 or buy online

Web site: www.lakewood-center.org

Recommended