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Whirl With Merle

WOMEN RULE WITH CHIX 6 by Merle Exit

Queens Theatre in the Park (QTIP) has gotten a change with the new director. It seems that they are shooting for shows that are pre-Broadway, amongst other things, including their expanded café.

The latest show, performing through October 30, is *Chix 6* with a spotlight on Lourds Lane. *Chix 6* tells the story of Katie, a comic book artist trapped in an unhealthy relationship with Jay, a narcissistic musician who will do whatever it takes to get ahead. When Jay's emotional games become too much to bear, Katie's creations, a quintet of strong, sassy, superheroines, come to life, leaping off the page to teach the vulnerable artist how to be strong and make changes in her life. I understand that the plot is based upon Lourds' own life.

The cast, for the most part, are dynamic and the score is upbeat and totally original. Talk about multi-tasking, Lourds composed the music, lyrics and book and well as portraying one of her characters, Rise, as well as playing the electric violin.

A classical music prodigy, Lane began her training on violin and piano at the age of three; by six, she had played Carnegie Hall and was traveling the world with her youth orchestra. After graduating with honors from Harvard, she formed her own band, *LOURDS*, and as the band's frontwoman, played the electric violin, mandolin and electric guitar. Lourds is also the creator of the annual Medusa Festival, which has been showcasing the best emerging female-fronted bands in the country for the past six years.

Let's get to the show itself beginning with the cast. With backgrounds of Broadway, the leading superheroines are right on key in singing, choreography and acting. Carrie Manolakos portrays Katie and Brian Gallagher, her boyfriend Jay Champ. The other main characters are: "Blaze" (Celina Carvajal) whose hair looks like fire; "Seven" (Nicolette Hart) who is donned

in red-framed glasses and tells of people's true thoughts (At the performance that I attended, her understudy, Kelly, was superb); "Mama-Mazing" (Danielle Lee Greaves), wearing a leather and buckle outfit, lends to the audience participation in her flirting; "Lola Touche" (Molly Tynes) is a seductive acrobatic who never seems to skip a musical note while doing her "Cirque" type routines.

Going Broadway, I felt that they needed to make a few changes, though. Gallagher, for instance. The actor may have been able to sing, but the acting wasn't up to par with the rest of the leads. There are a few sequences of the character of Lightning, who dances. Both her and her partner are fair in their performance, but not up to Broadway material. I did hear that Lightning was not the original one cast. I wouldn't have a problem leaving in Manolakos who has a fabulous voice and quite believable.

Double kudos for the directing, lighting, sets and choreography and I loved that the show plays to the audience in participation. Years ago, you would never see a Broadway show where any member of the cast acknowledge that there was even an audience. Now, it's "the thing" and adds much enjoyment to this over 2 hour musical.

That band of Lourds is something else! We even get to hear a few solo-ing from the lead guitarist. All in all, I suggest you take in this musical while the prices are low and there's free parking.

Performances are Tuesday-Saturday evenings at 8pm, Wednesday & Saturday matinees at 2pm and Sunday matinees at 3pm. Tickets are \$42 for weekday performances and \$49 for weekend performances. You can call the box office at 718-760-0064.

Here is what's coming up at QTIP. S'Wonderful. Five musicals take audiences on an all-singing, all-dancing ride to the places, times and styles that made the Gershwins the most success-

ful songwriting team in musical history. Featuring more than 40 classic hits including "I Got Rhythm," "Someone To Watch Over Me," "They Can't Take That Away From Me," and "Rhapsody in Blue." November 3-13.

Melissa Manchester. The Grammy Award-winning singer of such hits as "Through the Eyes of Love," "Whenever I Call You Friend" and "Don't Cry Out Loud" comes to Queens Theatre for two special performances. Saturday, November 19, 2011.

Paula Poundstone. The Emmy Award-winning comedian comes to Queens Theatre for two side-splitting performances featuring her trademark brand of witty and spontaneous comedy on Saturday, December 3.

Celebrate the season with the heartwarming classic, *It's A Wonderful Life*, re-imagined as a live 1940's radio broadcast. Five actors bring George Bailey, Mary, the angel Clarence and the townspeople of Bedford Falls to life, playing dozens of characters and performing all the sound effects, just as they did during the golden age of radio. Don't miss this fresh new take on the beloved film! December 14-18.

Over to QPAC, Queens Performance Arts Center, located at Queensborough Community College. Two shows in particular coming up. *Blood Sweat & Tears*, Saturday, November 19th, 8 p.m. Yes, it's the ones who sang "You've Made Me So Very Happy", "And When I Die", and "Spinning Wheel".

No longer on Off-Broadway, *Forbidden Broadway* is taking a tour and will be performing on Sunday, November 20th at 3 p.m. If you haven't seen one of these shows, it's a ROFLOL as they spoof Broadway shows such as *South Pacific*, *Gypsy*, *Grease*, *Annie*, *Phantom* and *Wicked*. If you have seen the shows on Broadway you can't help but guffaw, and if you haven't you will definitely catch the "in joke" of it. Call the box office at 718-631-6311 or go online to www.visitqpac.org.