

Spotlight on Learning

A Chorus Line



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Approximate running time: 2:00 minutes. This show has no intermission.

Student Talk-Back: There will be a Student Talk-Back directly after the performance.

SPOTLIGHT ON
LEARNING
SEPTEMBER
2009

A Pioneer Theatre
Company Classroom
Companion

Directed by
Patti D'Beck

A Chorus Line

Sept. 25 thru Oct. 10, 2009

Conceived and Originally Directed and Choreographed by Michael Bennett. Book by James Kirkwood & Nicholas Dante, Music by Marvin Hamlisch, Lyrics by Edward Kleban. Co-Choreographed by Bob Avian. Original Broadway production produced by the New York Shakespeare Festival, Joseph Papp, Producer, in association with Plum Productions, Inc.

"Dancers kill themselves in a show. They're always the low man on the totem pole. They work like dogs, they get less money than anybody else, and they don't get any real credit. I want to do a show where the dancers are the stars."

-- Michael Bennett

AN ENSEMBLE CREATION

Over thirty years after its initial appearance, after countless awards and many different audiences, it is easy to forget that the way which *A Chorus Line* came into being was not only revolutionary at the time, but that it continues to have a significant effect on the way musicals are conceived and staged.

In 1975, the year before *A Chorus Line* swept the board at the Tony Awards, the award for the best musical went to *The Wiz*, and the award for best book went to James Lee Barrett, Peter Udell and Philip Rose for *Shenandoah*. *A Chorus Line* represents a significant step forward not only in subject matter, but also in creative technique.

Prior to *A Chorus Line*, musicals were written by a composer/lyricist and a book writer, rehearsed for a period of five weeks or so and then polished during an out of town run before returning to New York for a premiere. Workshops were then not used for musicals, and the idea of placing dancers on salary before the book and lyrics were complete was unheard of. While the director of *A Chorus Line*, Michael Bennett, is widely acknowledged as the chief motivator and creative engine behind the project, which went through a series of stages and involvements before becoming a fully scripted musical, *A Chorus Line* is very much a child of its time. The initial

concept for the piece came out of a disillusionment with the processes of conventional musical theatre. As Donna McKechnie says in Ken Mandelbaum's book; "A Chorus Line was born out of the frustration of many dancers, myself included. I had gone to California, and when that didn't work out, I was thinking of quitting show business yet again."

In the mid seventies, the tension between the need for creative self expression and the structure of commercial theatre resulted in an extraordinary meeting on the night of January 18, 1974, in which a group of dancers met to express their feelings and exchange experiences. "We decided," remembers Michon Peacock in "What They Did For Love", "we would hold a talk session to find out where dancers have come from and gone to, and to create something either a book, a magazine article, a play, something. We were all gypsies and we had a mutual interest in making gypsies more functional and more appreciated in the profession."

But the very idea of a collective approach to a series of individual problems came out of an era in which many of the old values and ways of production were being questioned. Since the founding of La MaMa (1962) and opening of The Public Theatre (1967), new initiatives in the making of theatre were very much in the air. As Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright comment in *Changing Stages*; "Like the Group Theatre of the 1930s, many of the companies worked communally- writing plays as collectives and acting in ensembles. The ensemble was intended to be a paradigm of a perfect society, free of the authority of the playwright and the supremacy of text. It was a return to the communitarian spirit of the Federal Theatre Project and the Provincetown Players- and, indeed, of the Founding Fathers."

Companies like the Living Theatre, the Open Theatre, the Bread and Puppet Theatre, the Manhattan Project, and the Performance Group (later mutating into the Wooster Group) looked longingly to an American Eden uncorrupted by the competitive and hierarchical materialism of their parents, and to an aesthetic untainted by the commercial imperatives of Broadway or the boundaries of conventional play-making. Their binding belief was in iconoclasm."

So, *A Chorus Line* began in a desire to do something different for and with dancers. The results of the interviews were tape recorded, and those recordings served as the basis for the eventual script. Eventually, all the others signed over the rights to the recordings to Michael Bennett who then approached Joe Papp of the Public Theatre with the idea of doing a series of workshops. This proved to be the critical step in the making of *A Chorus Line*, as Mandelbaum explains; "In addition to giving Bennett freedom from the pressures of Broadway, the "workshop" system gave him the total control he had been unable to exercise on earlier productions. While Joseph Papp and the Shakespeare Festival were co-producers with Bennett's Plum Productions, Papp wisely did not attempt to exercise much authority during the workshop period, trusting Bennett to develop the material and only dropping in occasionally to sample the work. Bennett was conceiving the show himself, co-writing it, hiring all the talent involved, and supervising all the creative elements."

A Chorus Line was responsible for a revolution in technique that still has significant repercussions.

—Mike Dorrell, Dramaturg

"The overwhelming success of the show is especially admirable because, in a history decorated with unlikely shows, *A Chorus Line* was in many ways Broadway's most unlikely. It is an anti-musical, or, perhaps more accurately, Broadway's first counter-intuitive musical. It has no scenery beyond some mirrors, no costumes but leotards except for a few spangles for the finale, no setting other than a non-descript theater, no intermission, and no star. Its very ethos was contrary to every convention the American musical had built up over a century. As far back as *Sally* in 1920, musicals were about girls getting out of the chorus line to become stars; here, Cassie, Donna McKechnie's character, is a star manqué who is desperate to get back into the chorus line."

— Broadway: the American Musical

"At the first performance, Michael said his worry was that it was so inside that nobody would get it except dancers. And I said, well, everybody's gonna get it because everybody's tried to get a job, compete for a job, or be interviewed for a job – that's what's under it all and that's universal. And the fact that it's dancers instead of plumbers just makes it more theatrical."

— Tommy Tune

Director and Cast for *A CHORUS LINE*

PATTI D'BECK (Director/Choreographer) is very happy to return to PTC for her thirteenth production. She has appeared on Broadway in 13 shows including *A Chorus Line*, *Evita* and *My One and Only*.

JESSICA LEIGH BROWN* (Maggie) performed in *Turn of the Century* at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago where she understudied Rachel York and performed opposite Jeff Daniels. Her Broadway/ National Tour roles include "Ursula" in *Sweet Charity* starring Molly Ringwald, "Emma Fairfax" opposite Tommy Tune in *Doctor Dolittle*, *Nine* with Antonio Banderas and Chita Rivera, Stephan Sondheim's *Follies*, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Sunset Boulevard* with Petula Clark, and the "Rockettes".

HANNAH CHIN* (Connie) has just graduated from NYU. Her favorite credits include: *The Wild Party* (Sally), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Mary Magdalene), *All Shook Up*, *Hello Again* (The Whore), *Into the Woods* (Lucinda), and *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (Ruth).

KAITLYN DAVIDSON* (Val) debuts with PTC. She was last seen as Rapunzel in Pittsburgh CLO's production of *Into the Woods*. Other roles at PCLO include Velma in *West Side Story*, Gloria Upson in *Mame*, Estelle in *The Full Monty*, and Victoria/Silibub in *Cats*. Kaitlyn originated the role of Lady Jane in *The Prince and the Pauper*, performing at the Kansas City Starlight Theatre, The Fifth Avenue, and The Ordway.

JEFFRY DENMAN* (Zach) was in the original Broadway casts of *White Christmas* (Astaire Award nominee), *The Producers*, *Dream*, the original revival cast of *How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* and in the final cast of *Cats*. Off-Broadway performances include *Yank* (upcoming Feb 2010); *Children of A Lesser God* (Keen Company). He is the author of the book "A Year with The Producers" – a journal of his time in Mel Brooks' hit musical.

ERIN DENMAN* (Sheila, u/s Cassie) made her Pioneer debut as Velma Kelly in *Chicago*. Her Broadway and tour credits include Diane in *42nd Street* (Revival), *Stairway to Paradise* (Encores!). National Tour credits include *The Producers*.

MIGUEL ANGEL FALCON* (Paul) is in his sixth production of *A Chorus Line*, having previously appeared on tour, Rochester's Geva Theatre, and Arkansas Repertory Theatre. His TV and film credits include *All My Children* and *Fighting*.

KIMBERLY DAWN NEUMANN* (Cassie) was recently seen on Broadway in *A Chorus Line* where she frequently played Cassie opposite Mario Lopez. Her Broadway roles include *Annie Get Your Gun* (Sylvia Potter-Porter, Winnie Tate); *Urban Cowboy* (Barbie McQueen); and *Ragtime*. Her National Tours include *Kiss Me, Kate* (Lois, Bianca); *Annie* (Lily St. Regis); *Ragtime* (Chicago); and *A Chorus Line* (Val).

DEONE ZANOTTO* (Diana) made her Broadway debut in the most recent revival of *A Chorus Line*. Other New York credits include *Zorba* and *Bajour!* (York Theatre Co., Anyanka). Deone resided in London and performed in the West End production of *We Will Rock You* and in *South Pacific* for the BBC London. Deone is an Aria nominee for the Original Cast Recording of "Dirty Dancing."

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Maggie



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Sheila



JEFFRY
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MIGUEL ANGEL
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KIMBERLY
DAWN
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DEONE
ZANOTTO
Diana/
Dance Captain



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