

DRAMATURGICAL PRODUCTION BOOK FOR THE 2007

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY-SAN MARCOS

PRODUCTION OF A CHORUS LINE

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by

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CHAPTER I

DRAMATURGY

Overview of Dramaturgy and the Functions of a Dramaturg

It is difficult to pinpoint, particularly in the U.S., a single agreed upon definition for dramaturgy, to include a set role for the dramaturg. Moreover, dramaturgs frequently find themselves having to continually educate others on their training and abilities, as a surprising number of theatre practitioners still have only a vague notion of what a dramaturg can offer. To provide some clarity on the topic, an overview of dramaturgy and the general functions of a dramaturg in the U.S. is in order.

Many of the duties performed by dramaturgs have existed well before the profession ever gained its title. While dramaturgical antecedents have been evident throughout the history of theatre, most scholars recognize Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729 - 1781), one of Germany's finest eighteenth-century playwrights, as the first dramaturg. G.E. Lessing was already a well-known playwright when he was asked to serve as a resident critic and literary advisor for the Hamburg National Theatre, which opened in 1767. Scholars view Lessing

as the first dramaturg, as his roles included in-house critic, overseer of the repertory, literary-artistic advisor, and public educator. Lessing was also the author of the journal Hamburg Dramaturgy, a series of critiques on plays and practitioners that is now considered one of the most significant literary criticisms of the period. Since Lessing's time, dramaturgs have become heavily entrenched in theatre institutions in Germany as well as a number of other European countries.

Although dramaturgy is more heavily rooted in Europe than the U.S., a great deal of progress has been made in the last century to institutionalize the role of the dramaturg in the American theatre. More universities are adding the study of dramaturgy to their curriculum, which has helped to further establish the profession (Hay 71). Nevertheless, it is still difficult to provide a definitive job description for a dramaturg, as responsibilities can vary greatly depending on the director, type of production, and/or theatre institution. However, there are generally three categories of dramaturgy: production, new play, and institutional dramaturgy.

A production dramaturg has a sizeable number of duties that differ vastly from one production to another. Directors will typically tailor the dramaturg's role based on his or her needs for the production. Duties and responsibilities can be divided into three phases: preproduction, production, and postproduction.

For the production dramaturg, work typically begins during the preproduction phase, which occurs months before rehearsals begin. During this phase, the dramaturg must focus on maintaining the integrity of the text. The dramaturg may be called to read and evaluate numerous editions of a particular play and provide translation services if necessary. Initial duties may include script adaptation or collaboration on a working text. The dramaturg must conduct a structural analysis using various models and tools such as breaking down the scenes into units and beats. The director may request that the dramaturg provide image research and sensory objects for the production team and cast to help them better understand the play and/or to support the director's overall production concept. The dramaturg must be ready to supply synthesized research on all topics related to the play including, but not limited to, the social, historical, and cultural context of the show; production history; and critical and scholarly commentary.

During the production phase, the dramaturg normally attends selected rehearsals. Involvement in the rehearsal process allows the dramaturg the opportunity to inform the director of incidents such as inaccurate historical or cultural portrayals and improper pronunciations by cast members. Depending on the wishes of the director, the dramaturg may be called to provide constructive criticism during the rehearsal process--a delicate task in which the

dramaturg must ensure he or she does not take ownership of the production itself. Prior to the show's opening, the dramaturg is frequently responsible for publicity, program notes, and creating an inspiring lobby display to support the production. In addition, the dramaturg may be tasked to provide educational outreach through the creation of websites, study guides, and lesson plans.

Depending on the nature of the production, the dramaturg may provide public presentations as a form of outreach to certain segments of the population or to the community at large. Once the show is open, the dramaturg sometimes leads preshow or postshow discussions. After the production is closed, the production dramaturg often has the responsibility of gathering and analyzing reviews of the production.

The new play dramaturg, sometimes referred to as a literary manager, is mainly responsible for obtaining and evaluating new scripts to determine their production potential for a particular theatre institution or group. During the course of reading and evaluating scripts, the new play dramaturg often develops a working relationship with playwrights by providing them constructive criticism and aiding in the maturation of working texts. The new play dramaturg also serves as a liaison between the author and director during script workshops and rehearsals while focusing on maintaining the integrity of the author's work.

The institutional dramaturg is ordinarily a permanent employee at a professional theatre institution. The duties and responsibilities of the institutional dramaturg often encompass that of a production and new play dramaturg. In addition, the institutional dramaturg typically assists with formulating the mission statement of the institution, handling general publicity matters, and serving on the season planning committee. Unlike the production dramaturg, who serves at the pleasure of the director, the institutional dramaturg is ultimately responsible to the producer--the institution itself. As such, the institutional dramaturg must serve as a liaison between the director and the producer-institution.

Because the role of the dramaturg is so extensive, it is not practical to list every conceivable function. Even among the three general categories, there are no set boundaries regarding duties and responsibilities. It is highly likely for dramaturgs to find themselves fulfilling duties from more than one category. It is equally important to understand that because every dramaturgical assignment is unique, the dramaturg must clarify expectations with the director and institution at the onset.

Whatever the category of dramaturgical assignment or duties performed, flexibility as well as the skill to work well with others is crucial. A dramaturg must always be cognizant that some of the functions and duties he or she will be

performing have previously been carried out by other members of the production team or institution. The dramaturg will occasionally encounter directors that do not know how to utilize a dramaturg or theatre practitioners who have different notions of dramaturgy or reject the profession in its entirety. Sensitivity and emotional intelligence are key ingredients in successfully negotiating territorial battles and other delicate interpersonal situations that may arise.

Although great strides have been made, the position of the dramaturg is still evolving in the U.S. Nevertheless, the benefits of utilizing dramaturgs leave no doubt that the acceptance and understanding of their roles will continue to grow, and the profession itself will become more commonplace in the American theatre.

Dramaturgical Role for “A Chorus Line”

On 2 July 2007, my graduate advisor, Dr. Debra Charlton, offered me the opportunity to work as an institutional and production dramaturg for the November 2007 production of A Chorus Line (ACL). She advised that the guest director for the production would be Dr. Robert Ball of the University of the Incarnate Word Theatre Arts Department in San Antonio, with Dr. John Fleming, chair of the Texas State Theatre and Dance Department, serving as the

institution's producer. I immediately accepted the opportunity and began my assignment the first week of August.

My first step was to compile an initial production protocol, which consisted of two notebooks combining both synthesized and raw research material. In the first notebook, I assembled data on the following topics: biography on ACL's creator, Michael Bennett; the creation of ACL; lighting and set inspiration; a breakdown of musical numbers; biographical information on ACL's producer, Joseph Papp; and reviews of the original Broadway production. The second notebook contained the following categories: background on the 2006 ACL Broadway revival, reviews of other productions, imagery collection, the royalty controversy, plans for a film documentary, a student study guide, and a historical overview of Broadway musicals. My goal was to be thoroughly prepared to meet Dr. Ball and immediately provide him with any data needed.

I sent an email to Dr. Ball on 3 August to introduce myself and request a meeting to learn about his directorial vision and ensure my research was compatible with his needs. After weeks without a response, I obtained permission from Dr. Fleming to contact him at his home number. A meeting was subsequently established for 1 September 2007.

At our first meeting, Dr. Ball immediately asked what ACL made me feel. I informed him that the words sacrifice and risk-taking came to mind along with

the pain and joy of pursuing a passion despite difficult odds. Dr. Ball advised my feelings were in line with his thematic concept. Dr. Ball stated he was going to direct a present day version of ACL versus staging it in the original 1970s period. One reason for his decision was to avoid the 1970s costumes. At Dr. Ball's request, I provided commentary concerning updating ACL. Specifically, I told him that the director of the 2006 ACL Broadway revival chose to keep the musical in the 1970s due to the number of '70s references and his belief that the show was strictly reflective of the period's sexuality and morality. I also provided him a brief summary of ACL's origin and other relevant aspects that I gathered from my research. The only stumbling block at the meeting was Dr. Ball's objection to my initial ideas for a lobby display. At one point during the meeting, he expressed strong feelings against using a display but then later advised he ultimately did not care what was done for the display so long as it did not have Broadway production pictures--he preferred using his own rehearsal pictures. At the conclusion of the meeting, Dr. Ball provided seven initial dramaturgical tasks. I departed the meeting feeling very enthusiastic, as we had a great rapport, and it appeared he wanted to utilize my dramaturgical services to the fullest extent.

The initial two tasks revolved around analyzing the script for 1970s elements. The first task was to change seventeen characters' birthdates to

correspond with present day. Dr. Ball asked me to subtract several years off each date, as the cast was extremely young in age and appearance. While this task was relatively simple, care had to be taken, as ages and birthdates were occasionally referred to in different parts of the text. In one instance, I discovered an error in the original text concerning the Chinese Year of the Chicken and the age of the character Connie Wong--they do not correspond even though the character of Connie asserts she was born in this particular Chinese year. For the update, a birth year of 1981 would be the Year of the Chicken, Chinese year 4679, and would make Connie twenty-five versus thirty-two as stated in the text. This presented a problem since Connie is reluctant to admit her age, suggesting she is probably approaching or is already in her thirties. A decision needed to be made: references to the Year of the Chicken would need to be removed; Connie's stated age would need to be modified; or an inconsistency, which would probably go undetected by audience members, would have to be accepted. The second and more significant task was to examine the spoken text for all 1970s elements and propose three alternative solutions for each finding. Dr. Ball cited an example in the original text where the character Kristine states she never wanted to be Ann Miller; instead, she wanted to be Doris Day. Dr. Ball stated he did not understand the meaning behind the comparison of these two women. He advised he wanted me to thoroughly research all the cultural

references to ensure my suggested alternatives preserved the integrity of the underlying meaning in the text. This task was one of the most meticulous and time consuming, as I had to reread the script numerous times to ensure I uncovered all 1970s elements. In addition, providing suitable alternatives was sometimes difficult. For example, there are a number of references in ACL naming established entertainment stars from the big movie musicals of the 1940s and '50s. However, present day entertainment culture has changed drastically, as we no longer have the big movie musicals with established stars known primarily for their dancing or singing talents. Ultimately, in the spoken text, I identified thirty-one references for Dr. Ball to review along with suggested alternatives.

The third and fourth task pertained to how ACL was created. Dr. Ball asked that I provide him with raw material from my research on the evolution of ACL. For the fourth task, Dr. Ball requested I provide his cast with a research paper on ACL's creation. I subsequently provided the paper to the stage manager for distribution on 19 September. This research paper, with some modifications, is contained in Chapter III, "The Story Behind the Musical."

The fifth task was to prepare a research report for the cast on the realities of a dancing career in New York City, with particular focus on financial sacrifices, time and training invested, and longevity. On 24 September, I

provided a handout to the cast entitled “The World of the Broadway Gypsy,” which included the definition of a Broadway gypsy, working conditions for dancers, job outlook, earnings on Broadway, cost of living in New York City, training expenses, professional expenses, and injury statistics (see Appendix A). I included a great deal of source data from Actors’ Equity Association and the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

My sixth task was to serve as a coordinator with Lori Smith, the publicity manager at the Texas State Theatre and Dance Department concerning submissions, deadlines, and flexibility for the production’s written program.

My seventh task was related to the production phase of ACL. Dr. Ball asked me to attend select rehearsals and serve as “an intelligent audience member.” Dr. Ball stated he wanted an extra set of eyes to ensure he was making an emotional connection with the audience and conveying appropriate feelings throughout the performance.

On 14 September, we meet again to discuss my document concerning 1970s references in the script. For a number of the references, Dr. Ball had already eliminated applicable sections of the text. Some of my suggestions were incorporated, while others Dr. Ball did not agree with or found other suitable substitutions. I also provided him with additional suggestions for the lobby display such as presenting information about the Broadway tradition of the

Gypsy Robe and displaying information about the world of the play--the real life obstacles faced by dancers in ACL. Dr. Ball again was not receptive to these suggestions. He insisted I find a way to make the audience feel versus think. He gave some examples such as hanging ballet slippers from the ceiling or shining large spotlights in front of the theatre building. He also made suggestions for having some type of preshow performance. Dr. Ball tasked me to come up with five "out of the box" ideas in lieu of a conventional lobby display.

As an institutional dramaturg, I ultimately represent Texas State and answer to my producer, Dr. Fleming. As such, I arranged a meeting with him on 20 September. After discussing the issue of the lobby display, Dr. Fleming had no staunch objections to some type of preshow lobby performance; however, he advised that because potential donors and special guests would be attending the performances, a conventional lobby display was required despite Dr. Ball's objections. I also asked Dr. Fleming if there was anything I needed to do about changes being made to the script. Dr. Fleming advised he had already discussed the matter with Dr. Ball, and he was handling all issues of this nature as the department chair.

When the production phase of ACL began, I attended the weekly production meetings. Although I was not a significant contributor to the meetings, I was able to coordinate publicity matters with Smith, arrange for the

photographer to take needed pictures for the lobby display, and finalize details for the production's program notes with Dr. Ball.

To free up time for Dr. Ball, I created the press release for the show and prepared the program notes. I advised Dr. Ball that I thought the program notes should actually be director's notes and asked him to make any changes and additions to my rough draft to help provide a more personal touch.

As of early October, the matter of the lobby display had not been resolved. I met with Dr. Ball again the second week of October and learned that he did not accept any of my unconventional ideas for a preshow performance in the lobby. Instead, he came up with his own preshow idea for me to implement utilizing his cast and a large number of actors from the student body. It was not until a later conversation with Dr. Charlton that I learned anything considered "preshow performance" was outside the scope of my dramaturgical duties, and that while I could offer assistance, I would not be primarily responsible. However, this became a moot point, as Dr. Ball later abandoned his idea.

At this same October meeting, I informed Dr. Ball that Dr. Fleming required a conventional lobby display, but that this requirement did not preclude the addition of his suggested preperformance element. While he was more agreeable to a conventional lobby display than in the past, he was not pleased with certain aspects. Although not expressly stated, I inferred from our

numerous conversations that his primary concern was that a conventional lobby display would invite unfavorable comparisons between Bennett's much-lauded Broadway production and his production at Texas State. This is certainly a valid concern for any director. While developing the lobby display, I remained extremely vigilant about this sensitivity. I ensured that every photograph, document, and object selected enhanced the audience's experience, supported Dr. Ball's vision, and in no way undermined our own production. Further details about the final lobby display created are contained in Chapter VIII, "Texas State's Production."

Regrettably, the conflict over the lobby display combined with a couple other minor issues, which are addressed in Chapter IX, negatively affected our director-dramaturg relationship. This is sometimes the reality dramaturgs face, particularly an institutional dramaturg who, while trying to please both the director and the producer, must ultimately serve the needs and requirements of the institution. Though the communication breakdown was disappointing, it did not significantly impact my workload. It is not uncommon for dramaturgs to find themselves more and more underutilized when productions get closer to opening date. In this case, Dr. Ball had been rehearsing the show since the first week of September.

My role as an institutional dramaturg illustrates the real push and pull between representing the institution at one end and striving to meet the needs of a guest director at the other. On a positive note, the multitude and variety of tasks undertaken for ACL clearly demonstrate how a dramaturg can provide both utilitarian and unique services to benefit the director, cast, production team, and audience.

CHAPTER II

MICHAEL BENNETT'S BIOGRAPHY

Michael Bennett loved dance and knew that one day he was going to use it to tell stories. Intending to pursue this goal at an early age, Bennett left high school just shy of graduation to join a musical touring production. Shortly thereafter, in the early 1960s, he emerged as a chorus dancer in several forgettable Broadway shows. However, he would not stay in the background for long. His extremely ambitious nature coupled with his passion for theatre and dance propelled him into an intense career as a choreographer, director, and producer that spanned two decades. While Bennett's methodologies were often controversial, he became one of the most influential artistic forces of his time, leaving a permanent imprint on the world of musical theatre.

Bennett was born Michael Bennett DiFiglia on 8 April 1943 in Buffalo, New York. His mother was a secretary and his father a machinist. With parents that encouraged his talent, Bennett began dancing at the age of three and by the age of twelve was well versed in ballet, tap, modern, and folk dancing. Bennett

was not like other boys . . . he did not have a collection of sports paraphernalia or trophies in his room. Instead, Bennett decorated his walls with pictures of choreographers such as Jerome Robbins and Gower Champion (Royston 11).

Shortly before graduation, Bennett dropped out of Buffalo's Hutchinson Central Technical High School for Boys to join Jerome Robbins' touring company of West Side Story. Bennett saw Robbins as a role model. Citing West Side Story as an example, Bennett particularly admired how Robbins integrated dancing into his musicals. Bennett was impressed that people such as Robbins had traversed boundaries between Broadway and ballet (Berkvist D5).

After the West Side Story tour, Bennett sought a career in New York City, performing in the choruses of Subways are for Sleeping (1961), Here's Love (1963), and Bajour (1964). Bennett's chorus time proved invaluable, as it provided him the needed foundation to sharpen his skills as an up-and-coming choreographer.

Bennett began developing his skills as a choreographer in the '60s, dabbling first in stock circuits before turning to bigger projects. He served as assistant choreographer on the Broadway musical No Where to Go But Up, which opened at the Winter Garden in 1962. He informally honed his choreographic skills as a dancer on NBC's rock and roll series Hullabaloo. This series was where, in 1965, he first met dancer Donna McKechnie whom he later

became extremely enamored with both personally and professionally. He also choreographed musical numbers for many television music and variety shows such as The Ed Sullivan Show, The Kraft Music Hall, The Hollywood Palace, and The Dean Martin Show. From 1967 to 1968, he assisted with the choreography of Broadway's How Now, Dow Jones and off-Broadway's Your Own Thing and By Jupiter; however, he did not receive formal credit for the shows (Gerard B4).

Bennett began his Broadway career as a sole choreographer in 1966 with A Joyful Noise, followed a year later with Henry Sweet Henry. Both musicals were box office failures; however, Bennett was commended by critics and received Tony nominations for both shows.

In 1968 Bennett had his first commercial success as a choreographer with Neil Simon's Promises, Promises, which ran from 1968 to 1971. Although he received his third Tony nomination, the show itself did not afford him the opportunity to display his broad range of choreographic skills, as the show was not heavily laden with dance numbers.

Bennett would suffer another theatrical disappointment before picking up steam on Broadway. In 1969 he choreographed the musical Coco, starring Katherine Hepburn in the lead role as designer Coco Chanel. Although it ran for more than 300 performances, critics panned the show. For the fourth time, Bennett was nominated but failed to capture a Tony Award.

Bennett never let the prospect of failure slow him down. In fact, when Coco opened, he was already working with director Hal Prince on George Furth and Stephen Sondheim's Company. Company opened in 1970 and earned Bennett his fifth Tony nomination for choreography. Inspired by Robbins' concept of individualizing chorus members in West Side Story, Bennett converted Company's chorus into principal actors who also sang and danced as an ensemble.

By the early 1970s, Bennett's star was on the rise, and he began to branch out into directing. Bennett served as choreographer and co-director with Prince on James Goldman and Sondheim's 1971 musical Follies. Follies depicted a reunion of the Weismann Follies girls who gather at their once-majestic theatre, which is about to be leveled into a parking lot. Bennett won his first Tony Awards as co-director and choreographer for the musical. Although the show ran for a year and a half, it was a financial failure. However, Follies, was later seen as a notable precursor to ACL, as it offered audiences a backstage glimpse of dancers' lives.

The early 1970s was also a time for Bennett to delve into other aspects of theatre. He directed two nonmusical plays: George Furth's Twigs in 1971 and Neil Simon's God's Favorite, which was based on the biblical story of Job, in 1974. In between Twigs and God's Favorite, Bennett had been recruited to "fix"

the musical Seesaw, which ultimately opened in 1973. As the new director, Bennett changed almost every aspect of the show including rewriting the book; making changes to the choreography, costumes, lighting, and set design; and recasting many roles.¹ The show was far from flawless; however, it received mostly decent reviews. Seesaw earned Bennett his second Tony for choreography.

In 1975, when Bennett brought ACL to Broadway as the creator, co-producer, choreographer, and director, he struck gold. The show's raw honesty resonated with audiences and critics alike, as the dancers' collective struggle easily translated into every person's aspiration to win in life. While this multiple award-winning musical solidified Bennett's fame and brought him wealth, the enormous publicity and subsequent book accounts brought to light his darker side. Some involved with ACL revered him, a number experienced feelings of ambivalence, while others perceived him as manipulative and ruthless. James Kirkwood, one of the show librettists, later complained, "Michael would do anything--anything!--to get a show on. The cruelty was extensive . . ." (Kelly 136).

Bennett's drive to achieve came at a high price to his personal life.

Following ACL Bennett disclosed some of his private sorrow:

¹ Bennett claimed credit for rewriting Seesaw; however, accounts differ on who actually rewrote the book (Mandelbaum 85-86).

I was the American dream. But I was not a very successful human being in my own eyes when I began work {on ACL}. I'm someone who works twenty-four hours a day, and I've had relations screwed up because work came first, because of wanting to win the Tony Award, wanting to be the No. 1 director and choreographer. It was a sickness (qtd. in "Michael Bennett" sec. Sidelights).

Through the years, Bennett also developed a penchant for substance abuse. His only marriage, which was to McKechnie in 1976, quickly dissolved. Bennett had a number of other romantic relationships, many of which were with men.

However, Bennett's homosexuality was less publicized.

In 1978, with the profits from ACL, Bennett purchased a building at 890 Broadway and had it converted into an office and rehearsal studios. Bennett viewed his converted dance studios as a gift to the community and a place where he would have everything needed to create his upcoming musicals (Gerard B4). He later sold the property in 1986 to several of the dance companies that had been utilizing the facilities.

Bennett made use of his new facilities to produce his next musical Ballroom, which opened on Broadway in 1978. Although the show received three Tony nominations and one win for choreography for Bob Avian and Bennett, it was a disappointment for audiences and critics alike. Ballroom's

failure to register with theatergoers may have shaken Bennett, but he was undeterred.

Bennett's next venture, Dreamgirls (1981), would restore his glory on Broadway. Unlike ACL, Bennett did not conceive of the musical, nor was he the original director. Bennett was leery about the show's prospects, but was attracted to the fact it was a backstage piece, which for him made the song and dance numbers less contrived. Bennett proclaimed, "I love backstage musicals. I love Gypsy. I like musicals about how musicals are made. I realized they're happier when I'm doing backstage musicals, and the truth is, I am, too . . ." (qtd. in Mandelbaum 211). The musical received thirteen Tony nominations and won six, including one for Bennett's choreography. The musical was successful, but it garnered better reviews after it was trimmed down and revived on Broadway in 1987. Nevertheless, it did not come close to reaching the same level of fame as ACL.

Like the decade prior, Bennett's reputation continued in the '80s as a theatre wunderkind and prominent Broadway show doctor. It was not unusual for Bennett to be called to resuscitate, improve upon, or simply put final touches on shows. For instance, in the early 1980s he assisted James Lapin's production of Sondheim's Sunday in the Park with George (1983) and Tommy Tune's production of the Gershwin musical My One and Only (1982).

In 1984 Bennett began workshops for his musical Scandal. However, just prior to completion, he cancelled the production, claiming it had become evident the show was not working. Bennett later advised that his celebrity partially compromised the workshop setting, and that he was simply never able to recreate the same stimulating environment he had with ACL (Gerald B4).

In late 1985, Bennett began work on the British production of the musical Chess; however, he withdrew from the project in 1986 due to health reasons. Bennett retreated to his home in Tucson, Arizona without publicly disclosing the nature of his illness; only those closest to him knew he had AIDS. That same year he was nominated to the Theater Hall of Fame for his lifetime achievement on Broadway. On 2 July 1987, Bennett died at the age of 44 in his Tucson home, succumbing to AIDS-related lymphoma.

Though his life was cut short, Bennett will always be remembered as one of Broadway's rare finds--that unique director-choreographer combination. ACL producer Joseph Papp summed up Bennett the best when he stated, "He was a supreme being. He understood the stage like no one else" (Gerard A1). However, no matter the fame and lofty titles bestowed, Bennett never forgot his humble beginnings as a dancer. Many sensed he was always a dancer first--it was not only the core of his being but also the underlying source of his artistic brilliance.

CHAPTER III

THE STORY BEHIND THE MUSICAL

Michael Bennett always had a special empathy for dancers. He once proclaimed, “Dancers kill themselves in a show . . . They work like dogs, they get less money than anybody else, and they don’t get any real credit” (Royston 2). Bennett, who began his career in the chorus, had longed to do a show where dancers were the stars. In July 1975, Bennett finally realized his dream when ACL made its Broadway debut at the Shubert Theatre. In addition to serving as director and choreographer, Bennett claimed credit as the sole conceiver. Stories soon abounded about how Bennett ingeniously cultivated his idea for the show by tape recording the real-life stories of gypsy dancers. However, an in-depth look at the conception and development of ACL reveals not only a fascinating account of its creation, but also confirms that Bennett was not alone in laying the groundwork for this musical.

In 1973 dancers Tony Stevens and Michon Peacock were frustrated, as the Broadway musical they were a part of, Rachel Lily Rosenbloom (And Don’t You Ever Forget It!), flopped on Broadway. Stevens, the show’s choreographer, and

Peacock, a chorus member and Stevens's assistant, had sat helplessly on the sidelines while an inexperienced director mangled their work. Stevens stated, "It became clear that most of us--the dancers in the show, the chorus people--knew more about how to put a show together than many of the producers . . ." (Flinn 6). According to Peacock, the dancers faced verbal abuse and degradation: "We are seen as individuals who don't know anything, who can't express ourselves, who are not capable of contributing anything other than five, six, seven, eight, go" (Flinn 8). Out of their sense of disillusionment, Peacock and Stevens came up with the idea of forming a dancers' repertory company where they could write, produce, direct, and choreograph their own shows. However, both realized they had neither the influence nor financial means to get their vision off the ground. It soon became evident to Stevens and Peacock that they would need to call in a power player (Flinn 6-8).

Peacock contacted Bennett who, by this time, was an established name on Broadway. Bennett was immediately fascinated with the idea. According to Peacock, the three of them decided to hold a meeting with dancers to learn about their experiences. From that, advised Peacock, they would "create something either a book, a magazine article, a play, something" (Flinn 8). Peacock secured use of a studio on the Lower East Side, and both she and Stevens began placing

calls to dancers. While a number of dancers declined, many agreed to participate, eager at the prospect of working with Bennett (Flinn 8-9, 11).

The first session took place at midnight on a Saturday in January 1974. The dancers consisted of three different groups: Bennett's inner circle, Bob Fosse's circle, and a group of select dancers that performed yearly in the Milliken Breakfast Show.² Stevens started the meeting by leading a dance session. Bennett arrived late with his friend and favorite dancer, Donna McKechnie. Following Bennett's arrival, the dancing soon concluded, and each dancer was asked to answer a one hundred question survey addressing, among other things, information about his or her childhood and experiences as a dancer. Dancers were to supply the answers verbally while sitting in a circle (Flinn 12-16). Knowing the dancers were nervous, Bennett opened the session by revealing his uncertainty about his sexual identity and other private information. Bennett's admissions set the tone for the dancers to be open and honest (Lee 33). Even though rivalries existed among some of the dancers, as the evening progressed, they were eventually comfortable enough to reveal their intimate fears, experiences, and disappointments. Carole Bishop and McKechnie spoke of troubled childhoods and how ballet influenced their lives (Lee 35; Flinn 29-32).

² The Milliken Breakfast Show was an elaborate musical show produced annually for a textile convention.

Priscilla Lopez told of how two teachers humiliated her at the High School of the Performing Arts (Lee 35). One after another, often through tears, dancers revealed their painful experiences. McKechnie said the session was quite beneficial, as “Everybody realized how similar their lives were; growing up is growing up” (Lee 35). By Sunday at noon, an audio recording had captured each of the dancers’ histories leading up to their arrival in New York (Finn 35). Of the twenty-two dancers that attended the session, eight ended up originating roles in ACL (Lee 28).³

The second session was scheduled for early February. Due to the travel demands within the gypsy community, several dancers from the original session had to drop out. However, word of the project had spread, and there were dancers eager and willing to take their place (Flinn 37). Again, the session began with dancing. However, for many that attended the first session, they were let down by the second, as much of the magic and spontaneity had been lost. Knowing what to expect, dancers arrived with a rehearsed presentation of their experiences (Lee 77-78; Flinn 39). Nevertheless, Nick Dante, who later became one of the librettists for ACL, provided one of the most poignant stories about

³ Individuals who attended the first workshop and originated roles in ACL are as follows: Trish Garland (Judy), Sammy Williams (Paul), Thommie Walsh (Bobby), Wayne Cilento (Mike), Carole Bishop (Sheila), Priscilla Lopez (Diane), Renee Baughman (Kristine), and Donna McKechnie (Cassie). After a review of multiple sources, it became clear that there are different accounts of how many dancers participated in the first session. Numbers ranged from fifteen to twenty-four.

being sexual molested as a child, coming to terms with his homosexuality, and working as a teenager for the drag show, *The Jewel Box Revue* (Lee 79).⁴ Bennett concluded the session with his final question, "What do you do when you can't dance anymore?" (Flinn 39). This question led to a great deal of soul searching and a return to the fundamental question of why they chose to become dancers in the first place (Flinn 39-40).

Following the second session, Bennett met with Stevens, Peacock, and Dante to discuss a potential project from the tapes. Peacock reported she was shocked when Bennett suggested the material be turned into a book. However, a firm decision was not reached, as Bennett's prior commitments temporarily diverted his attention. Still, they agreed to carry on in two directions: Dante, on Bennett's behalf, would continue to interview dancers; Peacock and Stevens would continue to pursue their original desire to form a company of dancers. However, due to a number of difficulties, Stevens and Peacock's dream to establish a dance company never came to fruition (Flinn 40-41).

Sometime later, Bennett had a follow-up meeting with Stevens, Peacock, and Dante. Bennett asked for the tapes and advised he believed he could get Joseph Papp, founder of The Public Theatre, interested in sponsoring a

⁴ There are occasional fact discrepancies between Flinn's and Lee's books. According to Flinn, Dante's story was provided in the first session. Dante's story later became the basis for the character of Paul (Flinn 33).

workshop. Realizing they did not have the power or resources to produce anything substantial from the recordings, they capitulated. With feelings of ambivalence, each signed a contract for a dollar giving Bennett legal control of the tapes. Peacock opined that Bennett must have planned all along to develop a musical (Flinn 42-43).

With Dante on board as the librettist, Bennett secured support from Papp. At the time, utilizing a workshop approach in New York City to develop and test a large-scale musical was extremely unconventional, as out-of-town tryouts were still the norm. Bennett's decision to take his project to Papp versus a commercial producer proved to be a saving moment for the production. Although Papp's support wavered towards the end, Bennett knew Papp would allocate him more time and artistic freedom than any commercial producer would have provided (Lee 199-201; Flinn 44-45).⁵ Papp agreed to sponsor a workshop paying each participant \$100 for a six-day workweek (Lee 106). Fortunately for Bennett, Broadway was suffering the effects of the city's economic downturn. According to Bennett, "There wasn't other work. If there'd been work, they wouldn't have been at the Shakespeare Festival {The Public Theatre} for \$100 a week" (Mandelbaum 119).

⁵ Towards the end of the second workshop, Papp decided he could not allocate any more funds to Bennett. However, LuEsther Mertz, chair of the New York Shakespeare Festival's Board of Directors, made a sizable contribution to keep the rehearsals going.

Bennett's biggest hurdle was that he was practically empty handed; outside of the thirty hours of tape, he lacked a book, music, and lyrics. Bennett's first step was to complete the hiring of his artistic staff. Bob Avian came on board as the assistant choreographer. Avian was a natural choice, as he had worked with Bennett in nearly all of his shows. Bennett obtained Marvin Hamlisch for the music and Edward Kleban for the lyrics. Although the duo had never worked together before, Hamlisch added the needed credibility to the endeavor as an Oscar-winning composer, and Kleban had the requisite Broadway musical experience. In addition, Bennett hired Robin Wagner as scenic designer, Tharon Musser for lighting, and Theoni V. Aldredge for costumes.

Bennett did not believe the dancers who had participated in the earlier taped sessions were automatically entitled to a part in his show. All were required to audition, which did not sit well with many of the dancers who had poured out their life stories for him (Lee 92-93). Bennett scrutinized each of the hopefuls, searching for a significant personality trait that the writers could build upon. For example, Renee Baughman, one of the original session participants, did not sing well. However, Bennett was impressed with her charm, vulnerability, and dancing. He decided to create a part for her (Kristine), with plans for a song about her poor singing skills (Flinn 51-52). As was likely to

happen, Bennett did not select everyone who participated in the taped sessions. Mitzi Hamilton attended the second session and spoke of how she had her breasts and buttocks surgically enhanced because her appearance was preventing her from getting hired (Lee 80). Hamilton served as an inspiration for the character Val, but Bennett selected Pam Blair for the role. Peacock, who admitted she did poorly at the audition, was also not selected. Stevens initially declined to participate in the workshop; however, after discovering choreographer jobs were difficult to come by, he accepted the role of Larry (Flinn 56).⁶

Bennett asked each of the dancers to sign a one-page contract allowing him to use their stories in exchange for a dollar. All dancers signed the release; however, many later regretted their decision (Flinn 48). Lopez, who originated the role of Diana Morales, stated, "I knew it was wrong, but I thought, if I don't sign this, I'm not going to be a part of it" (Robertson 1).

The first six-week workshop began in August 1974. The workshop was very loose, as a framework for the story had not yet been established. In fact, the first idea had a Pirandello feel. The concept was that the dancer characters would be mysteriously called to a theatre that had a disembodied voice asking

⁶ Bennett later released Stevens at his request when he was offered the opportunity to work as Bob Fosse's assistant on Chicago (Flinn 85).

questions. However, the idea was soon abandoned when Avian insisted the show be structured around a musical audition (Flinn 57). Another idea that Bennett never quite realized was a mechanized finale in the expressionistic vein of Fritz Lang's Metropolis. Under his original concept, the dancers would wear matching costumes and dance in sync in a cold, robotic manner with plastered smiles. Bennett believed the audience would be mortified that all the dancers had sacrificed their individuality and personality for the small privilege of becoming an anonymous background dancer. Bennett believed his initial finale concept would be powerful enough to put a permanent end to chorus lines (Mandelbaum 170-171; Flinn 117).

Character delineation and development was another area that was quite shaky during the first workshop. Some dancers were assigned characters that sang or had dialogue based on their own life story. However, others had characters that were drawn from another dancer's story or an amalgamation of stories. When needed, a small bit of fiction was also added. Wayne Cilento (Mike), Baayork Lee (Connie), Bishop (Sheila) and Lopez (Diana) were for the most part playing themselves. The other dancers had to work harder at developing their characters--some even had to contend with character rewrites (Lee 108). For instance, McKechnie was originally the character Maggie but was later reassigned to a new character named Cassie. Kay Cole was then hired to

play Maggie--the character inspired by McKechnie's childhood material. One of the most frustrated cast members was Robert LuPone who was originally hired to play Al, but voluntarily switched to the role of Zach when the original actor departed. The character of Zach was actually Bennett's alter ego, which caused a great deal of tension between the two men (Flinn 77-82; Lee 188, 211). LuPone began to develop the character of Zach by exploring the consequences of Zach's actions. LuPone opined that this forced Bennett to see things about himself he did not want to face (Lee 190). On one occasion, when Bennett encouraged the dancers to experiment with their characters, LuPone elected to play Zach as a homosexual. Bennett became enraged, and Avian had to restrain him from assaulting LuPone (Flinn 82).

Although many cast members initially enjoyed the experience of the first workshop, it soon gave way to bruised egos and aggravations, as songs, lines, and dances were continually being modified or cut completely--some dancers' parts were shrinking while others were growing. After the first workshop, Bennett still faced an uphill battle, as the first run-through lasted four hours (Gussow 22).

The second workshop began in January 1975 with the addition of a second librettist, James Kirkwood, to assist Dante. However, the show was still being assembled in a laborious manner. Most of the monologues were extremely long,

leaving one dancer to recall, "It is the longest, saddest thing I've ever seen in my life" (Flinn 77). Soon everyone began to realize there would not be enough time for each to have a "big moment." Cuts were coming fast, as Bennett and his staff decided to follow the storyline of certain characters over others to garner interest and sympathy from the audience (Lee 194-195).

With the show still short on laughs, a cure was sought via a "show doctor," and luckily for Bennett, he had connections to Broadway's chief surgeon, Neil Simon. Although not all jokes were used, Simon provided Bennett with approximately twenty-five lines for the production. In turn, Bennett fed them to the dancers as if they were a product of his own invention. Simon enjoyed contributing to the show even though he was not paid. Simon reported that the only thing Bennett gave him in return was an odd gift--a pair of satin pillowcases. Sometime later, Simon asked Bennett to help him with one of his plays and was stunned when Bennett charged him for his input (George xv-xvi).

With the off-Broadway opening approaching, the contractual status for the dancers had to change. Each signed contracts for a \$150 per week under a "favored nations" status, meaning everyone would be paid the same. However, the dancers were angered when they discovered Bennett arranged for McKechnie to get more. Bennett justified his decision with the claim that

McKechnie was a more established performer who had made significant contributions to the show (Lee 223-224).

By the time of previews at Papp's Newman Theater in April 1975, Bennett was still tweaking the show. For example, to create tension among the dancers, Bennett continued the practice of announcing a different list of eight chosen characters a night. Bennett and Avian kept searching for the perfect grouping. However, Bennett soon discovered the audience had a strong reaction to whether or not Cassie got a role. Marsha Mason, the then wife of Neil Simon, insisted that Cassie not be rejected at the end. Mason stated, "It might be more truthful, but you can't just kill off people's hope" (Lee 239). Bennett soon solidified the chosen eight, which included Cassie. Little by little, Bennett put the finishing touches on the show. With glowing reviews and 101 off-Broadway performances, it was now time to look toward Broadway.

With Broadway on the horizon, Bennett assessed the dancers' contributions from a financial standpoint. Although he was under no obligation, Bennett negotiated a precedent-setting contract for thirty-seven individuals to receive a small portion of the writers' royalties.⁷ The portion amounted to one-half of one percent of the gross weekly box office income, as well as a prorated

⁷ The group of thirty-seven also included dancers who provided story material but did not participate in the production. For example, Mitzi Hamilton, who provided material for Val but was not selected for the show, was assigned to Group A.

share of subsidiary rights (Mandelbaum 297). Bennett assigned the thirty-seven into three tiers depending on their contribution: Group A, B, or C (Flinn 142).⁸ Peacock stated she was thrilled that Bennett allowed dancers to participate in the show's financial success. Although she was not selected for the production, Peacock herself was assigned to the highest tier, Group A, because of her coordination efforts in the original session (Flinn 143). Although they did not get equal payouts because of the tier system, within five years members in the three-tier group split \$750,000 (Mandelbaum 298). It is important to note that there still is controversy and resentment over royalties among some of the dancers, to include bitterness over signing Bennett's contract for their stories (Robertson 1; Lee 225-226; Flinn 143).⁹

ACL made Broadway history after previewing in July of 1975. Further details about this award-winning musical will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

An investigation into ACL's creation and subsequent journey to Broadway reveals not only an innovative origin, but also the fact this was not a singular endeavor on the part of Bennett. Bishop, who originated the role of

⁸ Unlike those in Group A and B, those in Group C only received profit shares while participating in the show. When someone from Group C left, the number of shares dropped allowing the remaining A and B shareholders to receive more money.

⁹ Initially, none of the dancers was to receive royalties from the 2006 revival (Robertson 1). However, through extensive negotiations, an agreement was finally reached that will cede a currently undisclosed financial amount to the dancers who had holdings in the original (Boroff).

Sheila, summarized many of the dancers' views when she stated, "There never would have been ACL without Michael, but there never would have been ACL without us either" (Robertson 1). Regardless if one concurs with Bishop's position, it is undeniable that the heart of the show comes from the verisimilitude supplied by the dancers. It is the subsequent translation of these raw truths on stage that not only endow the show with beauty and pathos but also provide a universal connection for the audience.

CHAPTER IV

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Prior to ACL, Michael Bennett had directed, choreographed, and/or worked on approximately eleven Broadway productions; however, for him, ACL was truly “the first Michael Bennett show” (Gussow 22). Before the musical even opened off-Broadway, there were inklings it might be destined for a successful run. However, no one, including Bennett, would have believed that this musical, with its sparse set, meager spectacle, and simple idea, would still be going strong today.

When ACL’s off-Broadway preview opened in April 1975 at the Estelle R. Newman Theater, word soon leaked out that Joseph Papp had something special going on at The Public. Theatergoers were queuing up at the box office on Lafayette Street hoping to arrive before another sold-out night (Kerr 104). Many just wanted to find out if Bennett’s new musical was worthy of all the commotion. According to critics, audiences did not leave disappointed.

With rave reviews, ACL quickly moved uptown to have its first Broadway preview on 25 July 1975 at the Shubert Theatre, with a formal press opening scheduled for October. Though some negative criticisms surfaced, ACL immediately became the toast of Broadway, winning numerous awards and accolades including numerous Antoinette Perry (Tony) Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. A detailed account of significant ACL awards is listed in Table 1 at the end of this chapter.

Bennett hastily expanded the show's audience base by opening an international company in April 1976, followed months later by the establishment of the London Company. International tours of ACL have included Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and extensive locations throughout Europe. In May 1976, Bennett opened the U.S. National Company, and four years later, in September 1980, he opened the Bus & Truck Company ("History" sec. Facts).

On 29 September 1983, ACL, at performance 3,389, surpassed Grease, becoming the longest running show in the history of Broadway. Bennett, relishing the significance of his accomplishment, decided to celebrate. For him, there was no better way to commemorate this milestone than to invite every performer from ACL past and present, whether on Broadway or touring company, to participate in a special performance known as "the gala." Bennett

invited 457 performers and received 332 acceptances. The price tag of the gala was approximately a half million, which surpassed the cost to produce ACL off-Broadway. Bennett designed the show to have one cast replace another throughout the performance. He also arranged for multiple actors to appear on stage together playing the same character and sharing lines and songs. For instance, Sammy Williams began Paul's poignant monologue alone but was later joined by ten other actors playing the same role. For Cassie's role, Donna McKechnie began dancing "The Music and the Mirror" but was later accompanied by six other Cassies for the famous number. Adding to the exhilarating evening, celebrities such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Stephen Sondheim, Francis Ford Coppola, Meryl Streep, and Helen Hayes were in attendance. According to critic Frank Rich from the New York Times, the evening seemed as if the cast and audience were united in the momentary feeling that ACL was one of the most extraordinary experiences ever, and that Bennett was an artist without limitations. Rich noted that the audience was so moved by the celebration that many were openly crying (Mandelbaum 228-233).

With ACL's undisputed success, Hollywood soon came knocking. Universal Studios purchased the rights to the musical, and Bennett accepted a lucrative contract to direct the film version along with a few other movies. However, Bennett soon found the Hollywood experience distasteful and

relinquished his rights to the movie version of ACL. Universal Studios later abandoned the project, selling rights to Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin. After several passes from various directors and screenwriters, English director Richard Attenborough was placed at the helm despite his relative inexperience with musicals. Michael Douglas was recruited for the part of Zach while the rest of the cast were virtual unknowns by Hollywood movie standards. As often happens, the movie, which was released in 1985, departed from the original script. The Cassie-Zach relationship was propelled into a central romantic storyline. Instead of Diana, Cassie sang “What I Did for Love,” depriving the dancers of a critical emotional moment needed to drive the story towards the climax. Attenborough also replaced the musical number “Hello Twelve . . .” with a substandard disco-style number. Needless to say, the movie flopped (Mandelbaum 323-330).

After Bennett’s passing in 1987, ACL celebrated its five thousandth performance in his honor. The celebration, which took place in August 1987, was low-key compared to the gala. Anyone who had ever performed in ACL in amateur or stock productions was invited to enter a contest entitled “Chance to Dance.” Winners were awarded the opportunity to appear on Broadway for the celebrated evening to perform with the cast during “What I Did for Love” and the finale (Mandelbaum 268).

It took fifteen years before ACL ran out of steam on Broadway. Papp announced ACL's closure, which took place on 28 April 1990, after 6,137 performances and gross revenues of more than \$280 million worldwide (Robertson 1).¹⁰ Nevertheless, with the musical's legacy firmly intact, productions continued at both the regional and amateur levels. These productions are discussed further in Chapter V, "Critical Commentary."

It would take slightly over fifteen years for ACL to resurface again on Broadway. In January 2005, John Breglio, an entertainment lawyer and executor of Bennett's estate, announced plans for a revival.¹¹ Breglio had been fielding offers for years for the rights to revive ACL; however, he ultimately decided to produce it himself (Cox 45). According to Breglio, the timing was right, as a new generation had yet to discover the musical. Breglio also contrasted the economically unstable environment of 1975 Broadway with the Broadway of today, which he believed was more welcoming, particularly to legendary productions (Royston 44). A number of surviving members from the original production returned for the revival including Bob Avian as director and Robin Wagner as scenic designer. For Avian, this marked the first time returning to the show since the original run. Avian retired in 2000, and was not initially keen on

¹⁰ Reports of gross revenues vary depending on the source.

¹¹ Breglio's connection to Bennett dates back to 1973 when Bennett became one of his first clients (Royston 43).

accepting the project. However, that all changed at the first audition when he saw the adrenalin-charged dancers entering the room (Gold 36). Avian noted that the dancers as a whole displayed a much higher dancing, acting, and singing standard compared to the mid-1970s (Gold 36). Baayork Lee, who has carved a career out of restaging ACL around the world, is the show's choreographer. Marvin Hamlisch assists on an as-needed basis. The new lighting designer, Natasha Katz, found Tharon Musser's inspired lighting for the original ACL to be a product of genius. Rather than create something from scratch, Katz chose to design a modern version of Musser's iconic light plot (Lampert 25-26).

Breglio and his production team found that Bennett's original staging and direction were inseparable from the show itself, so they decided that, with few exceptions, the revival would remain faithful to the original production to include its mid-'70s setting (Cox 47). Hamlisch, who had witnessed attempts at updating a touring production of ACL to a 1980s setting, echoed the opinion of the production team when he stated that the changes were inferior to the original with all its 1970s trappings (Jones 1). For Hamlisch, the show continues to be current from a thematic standpoint, as it deals with issues that are still relevant today: "people struggling to find work, someone in charge having to choose who's special or who's not special" (Jones 1). Hamlisch advised that the new performers would make the show their own, as none had been asked to

duplicate original performances (Jones 1). Avian tweaked the choreography and made slight costume adjustments to better fit the dancers' bodies and reflect the sexuality of the present day (Gold 38). He is also took advantage of new technology in music, design, and lighting.

With ACL looking pretty much the way it did over fifteen years ago, would the revival thrive like the original? After an out-of-town tryout at San Francisco's Curran Theatre and a Broadway preview in September 2006, ACL had its formal opening at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre on 5 October. Professional reviews have been mixed; however, audiences have generally embraced the show, rendering it financially viable. One reason for the positive reception may be that ACL, despite its dated setting, provides a topical format that is extremely relatable in today's world of confessional reality shows and American Idol-style talent searches. The revival was nominated for two Tony Awards in 2007, one for Best Revival of a Musical and the other for actress Charlotte d'Amboise who portrays Cassie. In addition, in December 2007, the new cast recording was nominated for a Grammy under the category of Best Musical Show Album.

Many insiders have heard rumors that Breglio is producing a documentary, Every Little Step: The Journey of a Phenomenon, from the 2006 revival auditions. Breglio has an abundance of footage--some 1,700 dancers--that

may provide a compelling behind-the-scenes account to complement the staged version. The documentary is tentatively scheduled for a May 2008 release (Cox "Documentary").

ACL no longer holds the record for longest running Broadway show; it has since been surpassed by The Phantom of the Opera, Cats, and Les Misérables (Knapp sec. theater). Nevertheless, the musical remains a pop culture phenomenon. As such, it is virtually guaranteed to remain a viable production choice for both professional and amateur theatres for generations to come.

Table 1. ACL Awards. This table provides a history of significant awards bestowed upon ACL and its participants from 1975 to 1984 (“History” sec. Facts).

| Award | Date |
|---|-----------|
| New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Musical | 1974-1975 |
| Theatre World Award for members of the creative staff and original cast | 1975-1976 |
| Obie Award <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priscilla Lopez (Diana) • Sammy Williams (Paul) | 1975-1976 |
| Pulitzer Prize for Drama | 1976 |
| Tony Award (won 9 nominated for 12) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Musical • Best Musical Book <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Nicholas Dante and James Kirkwood • Best Musical Score <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Marvin Hamlisch and Edward Kleban • Best Actress, Musical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Donna McKechnie (Cassie) • Best Featured Actor, Musical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Sammy Williams (Paul) • Best Featured Actress, Musical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Carole Bishop (Sheila) • Best Choreography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Michael Bennett and Bob Avian • Best Lighting Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Tharon Musser • Best Director, Musical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Michael Bennett | 1976 |
| Drama Desk Award <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Book • Best Score • Best Director • Best Choreographer • Best Actress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Tie between Donna McKechnie and Carole Bishop | 1976 |
| Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production • Direction • Lighting Design • Book for Musical • Choreography | 1976 |
| London’s Evening Standard Award for Best Musical | 1976 |
| Columbia Record’s Gold Record Award | 1978 |
| Special Tony Award for longest running show in Broadway’s history | 1984 |

CHAPTER V

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

Prior to ACL's off-Broadway opening, a considerable buzz was already circulating about the development of an innovative new musical from Michael Bennett. When New York Times critic Clive Barnes reviewed ACL's off-Broadway preview at the Newman Theater in May 1975, he reported the reception was remarkable and that "tremendous" and "terrific" were possibly all too conservative words to describe Bennett's show. Barnes went on to state, "What makes ACL so devastatingly effective is its honesty of subject matter--so that even its faults can work for it." Barnes gave high marks for Edward Kleban's lyrics and the overall look and blocking of the show. Barnes also found the cast superb. Although Barnes noted that Bennett's show was overwrought with sentimentality, he dismissed it as simply a part of show business that theatergoers have come to accept (32).

The majority of critics echoed Barnes's sentiments and enthusiastically embraced ACL's arrival on the Great White Way; however, reviewers did identify flaws in the production. Walter Kerr of the New York Times found the

stark stage design and lighting powerful; however, he complained that some of the dancers' stories were rather ordinary and unimaginative (5). A number of reviewers criticized Marvin Hamlisch's musical score as maudlin and lacking in originality (Cox 45). Hamlisch advised that his concept was to make the musical numbers seem like a spontaneous recitative stream-of-consciousness. Hamlisch acknowledged the score received terrible reviews with the often-heard complaint, "there's nothing to hum" (Lippa 23). Though Barnes noted that the music was occasionally catchy and ultimately satisfactory, he also opined ACL was not Hamlisch's best work (32).

Harris Green of the New York Times noted that while the dancing was delightful, he found the Cassie-director relationship contrived and the overall interview format of the show constricting. Similar to other critics, he disliked ACL's overuse of sentimentality. However, he commended actor Sammy Williams, who played Paul, for a smart approach to his character. According to Green, Williams had the most overemotional monologue but saved the role by playing it in an understated manner (D1).

When rumors surfaced that an ACL revival would hit Broadway in 2006, debates ensued, as industry insiders learned that it would be virtually identical to the 1975 original, including the mid-1970s setting. Some were skeptical while others were cautiously optimistic (Rooney 77). Would the material be embraced

from a period perspective or would it be perceived as simply outdated and alienating from an audience standpoint? Reviews have been mixed. Assessing the out-of-town opening at San Francisco's Curran Theatre, Dennis Harvey of Variety found that the revival had an enjoyable cast that was able to deliver much of the musical's strength. However, Harvey noted the only thing missing was the excitement of discovery since it was basically the same show from 1975 (18). David Rooney reviewed the revival on Broadway and advised, "This lovingly mounted replica gives ample evidence of what makes the show such a landmark." While applauding ACL's return, Rooney echoed many critics when he stated, "It's the sense of duplication--albeit masterfully executed--that keeps the revival from soaring"(77). Ben Brantley of the New York Times observed that while the dancing felt reborn, much of the show seemed recycled and without heart. Brantley also noted that most of the cast had not come into their own as individual characters (E1).

Similar to its original reception on Broadway, ACL has largely been successful at the regional theatre level. One notable production was in 2001 at the Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn, New Jersey. Former cast member Baayork Lee directed the production, which replicated Bennett's original. While her show received enthusiastic reviews, one minor criticism came from Wayne Hoffman of Billboard who cited some uneven pacing on the part of the musical director (19).

In 2005, The American Musical Theatre of San Jose produced ACL with Kay Cole, the original Maggie on Broadway, as the show's director and choreographer. The production received some glowing reviews along with minor criticisms such as an ill-timed intermission after "Dance: Ten; Looks: Three" that broke the show's momentum (Pratt sec. Stage); a small portion of newly inserted choreography that fell flat, particularly during Cassie's solo; and an impaired sound system that interfered with vocal delivery (Connema 1).

For non-professional ACL productions, reviews have ranged anywhere from stellar to disappointing, which is a partial reflection of the challenge involved in finding a large number of performers who can act, dance, and sing. For example, John Hopkins University received poor reviews in their student newspaper for their 2004 ACL production. The reviewer cited a frequent problem with amateur productions of ACL: poor dance skills that interfere with the belief that these individuals are of Broadway caliber. The reviewer also noted that insufficient diversity among the actors caused casting decisions that were "mildly distracting" such as a Caucasian actor playing the part of Connie Wong (Rice 1).

John Garcia, who critiques professional and amateur theatre in the Dallas area, reviewed Denton Community Theatre's 2005 production of ACL. He complained the show was uneven due to problems with choreography, direction,

and lighting. The director chose to develop her own choreography instead of using Bennett's. Garcia stated the choreography was sluggish and disjointed, failing to make emotional connections in and between scenes. There was also a lack of coherence between direction and choreography, as there was a great deal of blocking that lacked purpose and character motivation. According to Garcia, the lighting was also a miss, as there were too many shadows on the dancers' faces, and the overall design failed to create visually intimate, emotional scenes. Another minor flaw cited was an actor claiming to be a member of a race to which he clearly did not belong (Garcia sec. Dallas).

A 2006 production at Old Town Temecula Community Theatre in Southern California fared much better. A critic noted that the director succeeded in maintaining the spirit of the original without slavishly duplicating Bennett's iconic staging. The director also updated the production to present day, which the critic claimed did not distract from the storyline in any considerable way. However, there were no further details, other than costumes, concerning how and to what extent the updates were implemented (Moran).

Despite imperfections pointed out by the critics and the unique challenge in finding triple threat performers, particularly at the amateur level, ACL has generally remained a reliable hit in the world of musical theatre. No matter where it is produced, it continues to honor and give voice to the hoards of

anonymous background dancers of both yesteryear and today. However, its timeless appeal comes mainly from the public's continued connection with ACL's characters on a more empathetic level--a level that understands the joys, humiliations, risks, and sacrifices involved in pursuing a dream.

CHAPTER VI

ANATOMY OF A CHORUS LINE

A Fully Integrated Backstage Concept Musical

American musical theatre has come a long way since The Black Crook (1866), a disjointed yet elaborately staged melodrama generally agreed to be the first American musical. Beginning in 1920s, American musical theatre slowly improved in quality and complexity. Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern's 1927 musical Show Boat exemplified this improvement, as the show maintained the book's integrity and served as a forerunner of the more meaningful musicals that began in the 1940s. However, this subchapter does not attempt to address the comprehensive history of American musicals; rather, the objective is to provide a synoptic account that contextualizes ACL's contributions and attributes within this highly popular genre.

ACL is a backstage musical, meaning it features the joys and sorrows of performers' lives and contains a show within a show. As such, it continued the perennially popular backstage tradition of musicals such as Kiss Me, Kate (1948), Me and Juliet (1953), Funny Girl (1964), Applause (1970), and Follies (1971).

Prior to ACL, Applause was the only musical to focus, at least in some measure, on the Broadway gypsy (Mandelbaum 152).

In ACL the song and dance elements are inseparable from the libretto; however, this was not always the case in American musical theatre. In the 1920s and '30s, the idea of using musical theater to tell a story was still a novel concept. Prior to the 1940s collaboration of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, the typical American musical consisted of a weak plot that functioned as an excuse for the musical extravaganza. The spoken dialogue was seen as filler between charming song and dance numbers that lacked dramatic purpose. Rodgers and Hammerstein pursued the type of musical theatre that Kern helped initiate with Show Boat. Their musicals were more refined and often contained a deeper message with robust themes and a stronger integration of artistic elements. Their musical Oklahoma! (1943) integrated dance, musical score, and libretto more so than any musical of its time. The dancers emerged as characters within the story and every song flowed from the dramatic action. The show's choreographer, Agnes de Mille, established a prototype for dance in musicals and made not only the dancer a vital part of the show but also cemented the role of choreographer as an essential team member (Mandelbaum 10). However, because her role was subservient to the director, she never had the same degree of power as future director-choreographers (Mandelbaum 12).

It remained for the director-choreographer Jerome Robbins to expand on de Mille's role. In the 1957 musical West Side Story, Robbins used his dances to develop plot and characterization, rendering the book one of the shortest compared to other musicals (Mandelbaum 13). The scenes were generally choreographed versus directed, and from an artistic standpoint, it was the most integrated musical yet.

Bennett greatly admired Robbins, and early in his career, he began developing the practice of integrating elements of musical theater together. In Promises, Promises, Bennett's approach was to only choreograph dance scenes that grew naturally from the script and characters' motivations (Flinn 106). Promises, Promises demonstrated that even a more conventionally structured Broadway musical could seamlessly incorporate dance and contemporary music without a jarring effect (Lee 83).

Bennett soon ventured into concept musicals. Put simply, a concept musical is a musical that has all its elements embody an idea. Concept goes beyond theme into some image or statement of what the show means or intends to illustrate (Kislan 182). Examples of concept musicals include Cabaret (1966), Chicago (1975), and Pacific Overtures (1976). Bennett's first involvement with a concept musical was Company, where he converted the standard chorus into principals who sang and danced. This musical, which was about marriages, had

all of its elements to include dance, song, libretto, direction, and overall staging truly integrated and at the service of a prevailing metaphor: New York City as the embodiment of modern relationships where self-involved individuals fail to connect with one another (Mandelbaum 56). This musical, which utilized nonlinear storytelling, did not rest on plot; rather, the characters and scenes were connected by the underlying idea (Mandelbaum 56-58). Follies, which Bennett choreographed and co-directed, was another musical that did not rely on plot; instead, it was unified by the idea of using former Follies showgirls as a metaphor for shattered dreams.

With ACL, Bennett further elaborated on ideas he had developed in Company and Follies. According to musical theatre scholar Ken Mandelbaum, ACL “can be considered a concept musical like Company in that it lacks a linear plot, substitutes characters and confession for a conventional book, and is organized and held together by the concept of an audition” (190). The backstage story of the audition works on a conceptual metaphorical level—everyone in life has to risk humiliation and rejection by standing on the line for something desired. Mandelbaum stated that previous concept musicals were not as successful because the characters were too grim; however, ACL added a dose of humanity to this type of musical, as audiences genuinely care for the characters on stage (190). While Bennett was undoubtedly continuing Robbins’s work, he

would go a step further with ACL by developing, directing, and choreographing a thoroughly unified backstage musical about chorus dancers.

Plot and Structure

The above subchapter provides some insight into why ACL has received a permanent place in the musical canon. However, a more detailed review of the show's plot and structure is in order. According to author Richard Kislán, "A plot is a sequence of actions designed to bring out the drama in character, idea, or situation . . . Plot implies a specific chart of events . . ." (179). The structure refers to its distinctive organization of all the elements within a musical according to the requirements of its concept or theme (Kislán 189). A review of ACL's plot and structural elements is requisite for anyone desiring to fully understand its legacy and/or be involved in a production.

Many mistakenly believe that ACL does not possess a plot. It has a plot, although it is not a particularly complicated one. The musical is set in 1975 at an audition in a Broadway theater. The opening sequence lets the audience know they have arrived mid-audition point with twenty-four dancers competing for spots in the chorus line of an upcoming musical. After the dance portion of the audition, the director Zach immediately dismisses seven dancers, which whittles the audition pool down to seventeen. He is looking for four boys and four girls but wants to learn more about them before making his final decision. During his

interrogations, the seventeen dancers disclose both humorous and heartbreaking stories through dialogue, song, dance, interior monologues, and a recitative stream of consciousness method. As the show progresses, the audience learns that Zach has had a romantic relationship with Cassie, the dancer who wants to return to the chorus after an unsuccessful attempt at stardom. The song “What I Did for Love” brings the show to its thematic climax. After the song, the dancers return to the white line for the last time, and Zach makes his eight selections. The eliminated dancers depart knowing they must find a way to cope with the rejection of the audition and overall brutality of their profession on Broadway. The finale is the last musical number “One,” which is the curtain call and show-within-a-show. It is a future fantasy where all principal characters, to include the nine rejected dancers, unite to participate in a number belonging to the fictitious Broadway musical for which they auditioned.

ACL is structured around an audition and the collective stories from its seventeen dancers that revolve around a number of themes. In their book On The Line, authors and original cast members Baayork Lee and Thommie Walsh state that ACL’s theme is about dancers auditioning not only for a Broadway show, but also for their lives (87). Other universal themes can be found, such as the need for love and acceptance; the trials of growing up and discovering self;

being a team player, having a work ethic, and paying dues; and finding the courage to define one's own success.

ACL is structured as a musical without an intermission. Bennett's goal was to maintain the momentum of the show and the illusion for the audience that a real audition is taking place (Lee 203). However, the original cast informally divided the show into two acts, with the first ending right before Paul's confession to Zach about working at the Jewel Box Revue (Lee 203). Despite Bennett's decision, many directors, based on run time, have divided the production into two acts with an intermission in between.

With the first musical number "I Hope I Get It," it becomes evident that the show is structured to allow the audience to hear the dancers' private thoughts. Some spoken lines and songs or parts of songs are external and directed to Zach and/or the other dancers, while some are internal, which serves as a private mechanism to express the dancers' inner needs, desires, insecurities, and fears. This convention was established by having the dancers look away from Zach when anything became too personal for a public confession, rendering the admission a private one (Flinn 58). As needed, the dancers also pantomime external moments while lights switch to another dancer to hear his or her internal thoughts. By shifting back and forth between the internal and external, audiences are encouraged to accept the convention and become more intimately

acquainted with the dancers' lives (Flinn 58). After the opening dance scene, ACL strays from a realistic portrayal of an audition when Zach explains he needs to extract information about their private lives . . . information that extends well beyond anything that would happen at a real audition. However, dramatic license needed to be taken at this juncture to further plot progression and themes.

By design, the focus of ACL is intentionally on certain dancers over others. By the second workshop, the creative team realized that no matter how much they wanted to individualize and bring out the characters of all the dancers, they could not have seventeen lead characters. This revelation and subsequent trimming of roles gradually became known as the "Big Six." The Big Six consists of Zach, Cassie, Sheila, Val, Paul, and Diana who all have the majority of lines and songs (Lee 194-196). Zach's assistant Larry and the other twelve dancers are only allotted a brief amount of time to make an impression on the audience.

Through the spoken text and thirteen musical numbers, ACL is structured to span the life of a "collective dancer." After the introduction of all seventeen dancers, stories generally progress chronologically from early childhood to adolescence and then finally to adulthood. In the second musical number, "I Can Do That," Mike claims he was four when he first went to his sister's dance class. Bobby then speaks about his antics as a youth. This is soon followed by the

fourth musical number with Sheila, BeBe, and Maggie singing “At the Ballet,” which speaks to their dysfunctional childhoods. The creative team knew they needed to avoid a mind-numbing song-monologue-song structure that could easily ruin the show, so they began to expand upon the idea of “At the Ballet” (Lee 168). The new musical number created was a choral piece informally known as the “Montage.” The Montage is the sixth musical number “Hello Twelve, Hello Thirteen, Hello Love,” which consists of a collage of the lives of the seventeen dancers that fused their adolescent experiences with an overlapping style of words, stories, lyrics, and dance steps. Diana’s song “Nothing” is inserted in the middle of the number. The Montage not only serves as a bridge from childhood to adulthood, it also solved the problem of how to feature the dancers that had small roles (Flinn 99). Following the Montage, the remaining portion of ACL, with the exception of Paul’s story, mainly covers the characters’ lives as professional dancers.

Staging and Artistic Elements

Musical theatre is a highly collaborative endeavor. As discussed in the first subchapter, nowhere was this more evident than with ACL. In addition, many consider Bennett’s original staging synonymous with the musical itself. Thus, a brief look at some of the show’s staging and artistic elements is warranted.

With regards to set design, Robin Wagner decided to focus on three features in the world of a dancer: a dance studio surrounded by mirrors, a black box resembling but not duplicating a stage environment, and some type of backdrop (Mandelbaum 134). The three selected features became black velour, mirrors, and a deco sunburst for the finale. Bennett used the mirrors symbolically in ACL so the audience could see themselves reflected on stage (Mandelbaum 190). Wagner decided to use periaktoi, which are three-sided theatrical devices that display a different background when turned. The fourth scenic element was the white line, which served not only a utilitarian purpose, but also as the metaphor for the musical.

Instead of a realistic lighting design, Tharon Musser created something more surreal. Bennett wanted a light plot that would help the audience differentiate between the dancers' internal and external thoughts. Tharon Musser used deep lavender internal thought lights to help the audience distinguish between the two modes (Mandelbaum 135). For the floor, Musser used a Mondrian-inspired lighting pattern that appeared as squares of stained-glass color; wherever the dancer stood, the square became his or her individual light (Mandelbaum 135).¹² Another staging element Bennett used with the

¹²Mondrian was an avant-garde Dutch painter famous for his non-representational paintings known as "compositions," which were rectangular formations of white, blue, yellow, red or black colors separated by black lines.

assistance of lighting was jump cutting, which was a cinematic staging technique utilized to bring a scene, character, or action into instant focus. In ACL he utilized the jump cut to shift the audience's attention abruptly from one figure to another (Mandelbaum 168).

When one thinks of ACL's artistic elements, Bennett's renowned choreography comes immediately to mind. Most productions of ACL incorporate, if not all of Bennett's original choreography, at least a significant portion of it. For ACL, Bennett utilized a wide range of dance styles from vaudeville to the Rockettes; however, he made them more expressive (Mandelbaum 167). Yet, Bennett never placed primary importance on individual dance steps; rather, his emphasis was on the comprehensive staging of the musical sequences to ensure accurate reflection of pertinent themes (Mandelbaum 166). It is interesting to note that ACL contains a relatively small amount of dancing despite the fact it is a backstage musical about a chorus audition.

ACL's musical score has generally been the least admired artistic element. The score was so deeply imbedded in the musical that it became eclipsed by the show's staging and thematic content. Hamlish received a great deal of criticism from critics who may have been unaware that he created the score solely to serve the production and purposely chose to compose different styles of music to

represent the characters' collective journey through different ages and stages of life. The score's most overlooked feature is the almost nonstop underscoring. For its two-hour run, the sixteen-piece orchestra plays over ninety minutes. The music is only programmed to stop three times during the production, with Paul's revelation taking up most of the non-music portion (Mandelbaum 161-162).

For its time, ACL was an innovative musical that offered a traditional backstage format combined with a methodology that became quite prominent in the '70s: unification through concept. In addition, the musical's plot along with its structural, artistic, and staging elements united to form one of the most fluid and seamless musical presentations on Broadway. While much credit is due Bennett and his artistic team, they are also indebted to the pioneering efforts of choreographers, directors, and composers of yesteryear that strove to progressively enhance the state of American musical theatre.

CHAPTER VII

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Bob Avian, the revival's director, maintains that ACL should remain a period piece because it reflects the unique perspective and morality of its time. Avian had previously witnessed an update by a Broadway touring company in the 1980s, but for him, "It started to become dishonest" (Cox 45). He recounted that the touring company first changed the costumes and then started removing outdated references such as Jill St. John and Robert Goulet. According to him, their changes resulted in a domino effect, and elements within the show began to lack coherence (Gold 38; Cox 45). In contrast to Avian's view, some directors believe that with slight adjustments, the musical can transcend the original period setting. However, it is not the author's intent to take a position in this chapter. Rather, the purpose is to examine the relevant social and historical conditions and explore how they manifest in the musical.

After undergoing the social upheaval of the 1960s, a new transition period for the country materialized circa 1970. While many of the "revolutionary" ideas from the 1960s continued to gain momentum such as sexual freedom, civil rights,

and the feminist movement, the free-spiritedness of the prior decade along with the notion of peace and love soon dissipated. In its place, an atmosphere of disillusionment surfaced. Michael Bennett would later claim he wanted to counteract this atmosphere of rampant skepticism and suspicion with his production of ACL (Royston 31).

What caused this spirit of disillusionment in the 1970s? The sources are numerous, but only a few key reasons will be discussed. Firstly, the Vietnam War still raged, as well as the antiwar protest movement on the homeland. In May 1970, the Ohio National Guard opened fire on unarmed demonstrating students, wounding nine people and killing four. Over a week later, two other students were shot and killed at a protest at Mississippi's Jackson State. Though a majority of Americans viewed the war protests as unpatriotic, the killings genuinely shocked the nation. Moreover, while a gradual withdrawal of troops began occurring in the early '70s, significant casualties were still taking place. An ending to the Vietnam War would eventually come in 1975; however, it was one of utter failure for the U.S. Secondly, one of the most infamous political scandals of the twentieth century took place in the early '70s--Watergate. In 1973, the nation watched in disbelief as a plot was uncovered linking President Richard Nixon to the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate complex. Nixon's involvement in the conspiracy

and subsequent cover-up soon became apparent. Facing impeachment, Nixon resigned from office in 1974. Bennett told a New York Times reporter that he was inspired by the Watergate hearings, and that ACL was “a reaction to the falsehood and apathy that seemed to grip the country during that period. I was sick of it. I wanted to do something on stage that would show people being honest with one another” (Berkvist D5). Bennett also told Mary Cronin of Time that the Watergate hearings created a longing in him to see truth on stage (“Michael Bennett”). Thirdly, in 1974 the country was experiencing a severe recession, which had initially begun in 1970. Economists coined the term stagflation to describe this 1974 period of slow economic growth coupled with high inflation and unemployment.

Broadway theatre was not immune to this sluggish economic period. While many in the industry had been fretting for decades that Broadway was dying a slow death, the statistics in 1974 seemed to reinforce their fears. To illustrate, in the 1926-27 season, there were 264 new shows compared to fifty-four shows in both the 1972-73 and 1973-74 seasons. Performers were alarmed because just seven seasons prior there had been eighty-four shows on Broadway (Lee 25). By 1974 Broadway performers had hit hard times, which was a key factor that helped Bennett secure dancers for his \$100 a week workshops for ACL (Royston 41). The book of the musical also reflects this economic downturn. In

the number "I Hope I Get It," the dancers do not sing that they merely want this job; instead, they sing that they need this job. Prior to the song "What I Did for Love," the dancers discuss the perils of their profession and the glum prospects on Broadway. For example, BeBe complains that she does not want anyone to tell her Broadway is dying because she just arrived, and Connie comments, "They're not doing big musicals like they used to" (Kirkwood 131). In comparison with present day statistics, The Broadway League reported that the 2006-2007 Broadway season had sixty-eight total shows that included thirty-five new openings, which is close to the average number of new show openings for the past ten years ("The League").

When ACL arrived on Broadway in 1975, the area was not the exhilarating, glittery tourist attraction of today. While Times Square had generally been known for its vices, its reputation became significantly degraded by the early '60s. In 1975, the Times Square area, to include 42nd Street, was bursting with debauchery; it was a crime-ridden location full of prostitution, pornography, drug dealing, and seedy businesses. ACL depicts this cesspool aspect of New York City when Paul tells Zach about his father taking him to the movies on 42nd Street and being molested there by strangers. Zach reacts with surprise that he was taken to this location as a child. This response would no

longer be applicable in today's environment following the completion of the Times Square cleanup effort in the 1990s.

The 1970s was also a time of startling changes regarding sexuality and morality. According to author James T. Patterson in his book Restless Giant, the 1970s destroyed the entire structure of sexual morality. It was a period when the sexual revolution of the '60s surged into the mainstream of the pre-AIDS '70s. This new decade emphasized personal choice and freedom. Out-of-wedlock pregnancies increased along with divorce rates. Sexual themes in television, movies, books, and advertising became rampant. In addition, following the Stonewall Riots of 1969, the gay liberation movement burst onto the scene.¹³ Gay and lesbian activists became increasingly organized and vocal, particularly in larger cities such as San Francisco. However, it is important to note that despite the strides made in gay liberation, a significant majority of 1970s Americans still considered homosexuality an abomination. Popular reactions to these sweeping social changes differed sharply between generations: younger people tended to accept the changes, while older Americans believed they threatened family life. Many older Americans mobilized behind conservative spokespeople, with

¹³ The Stonewall Riots began in June 1969 when the police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village. The patrons fought back, launching not only a four-day riot, but also a gay power movement across the nation.

complaints that standards of behavior among young baby boomers had been slipping since the rebellious '60s (Patterson 45-48, 51, 181).

Avian and others affiliated with the revival have insisted ACL is imbued with a sexuality and morality belonging solely to its era. The show has overt sexual references such as the musical numbers "Sing!" with the line, "I'm terrific at a . . . dance. Guys are comin in their . . . pants" (Kirkwood 53) and "Dance: Ten; Looks: Three" with Val singing how her surgically enhanced breasts and buttocks helped with her sex life. In addition, the outspoken dancer Sheila portrays a sexually aggressive female with the line to Zach, "Can I sit on your lap?" (Kirkwood 41). The text also has two of the dancers, Don and Paul, tell stories of working in sex industries as minors, which is more reminiscent of the "morally loose" '70s versus the environment of today, which is more protective of its youth. Yet, while this musical is rooted in the '70s, it is important to note that Avian is most likely referring to the fact the dancers were born between 1943 and 1955, with the majority graduating high school sometime in the '60s. During the musical, they discuss memories of their adolescence, which was a time when sexual promiscuity and homosexuality were much more taboo. This is echoed in the angst-ridden musical number "Hello Twelve . . ." with the dancers singing about their sexuality and other anxieties associated with their adolescent years. Paul claims his whole life was a secret. Greg realizes he is a homosexual, which

depresses him because he thought being gay meant being “a bum” for the rest of his life. He even states, “Gee, I’ll never get to wear nice clothes . . . ” (Kirkwood 76). Mark complains of girls having “lockjaw of the legs” (Kirkwood 77) and locking himself in the bathroom with the 1956 “sordid” book Peyton Place. Judy recounts how she practiced kissing on another girl and is mortified when there is an awkward silence after asking the other female dancers if they ever did the same. Later in the show, Paul recounts to Zach how, at the age of fourteen, he proclaimed he was “a faggot” and questioned if he had a future (Kirkwood 100). Paul further relays that in 1962 he confessed to his Catholic high school principal that he was a homosexual and that afterwards the principal sent him to a psychologist who urged him to quit school. Paul tells Zach that he later realized he was under the false impression he had to be “butch” to be a man. Thus, the liberating environment of the ‘70s afforded the dancer characters the opportunity to openly discuss aspects of their lives that were considered extremely risqué or unacceptable in their youth. Concerning homosexuality, some may argue it has not been fully accepted in today’s society either. However, there is certainly a greater amount of tolerance, acceptance, and support systems available now compared to the 1950s and ‘60s when the dancers were growing up.

The popularity of drugs was another characteristic associated with the 1970s. In their website booklet entitled “Speaking Out Against Drug

Legalization,” the Drug Enforcement Agency reported that overall drug use in the U.S. is down by more than a third since the late 1970s, with a reduction in all three categories of casual, chronic, and addictive use. According to author Denny Martin Flinn in his book What They Did for Love, most of the 1975 cast of ACL used drugs on a casual basis; however, one unnamed member was severely hooked on hard drugs (203). In addition to marijuana, the drugs of choice, if anything, tended to be Quaaludes and Valium (Lee 210). This trend is reflected in the musical when Paul gets hurt and Cassie asks if anyone has any Darvon or Valium. Sheila replies she is in possession of one of the drugs and has already taken three today. Flinn reported that by the end of the decade, all three ACL companies were affected by heavy cocaine usage (203). Nancy Lane, who originally played the character Bebe, stated, “All this dope stuff was happening under my nose and I didn’t know any of it was going on . . . And to find out years later that just about everybody was taking something {to give them stamina} to do the show!” (Lee 210).

There are a number of other 1970s aspects reflected in ACL. For instance, many of the dancers were initially reluctant to participate in Zach’s interrogation. Diana claims she is too nervous to answer Zach’s probing questions, and Mike urges him to start his questioning at the other end of the line. Even the outspoken Sheila has to be prodded into revealing information about her

childhood. One must remember this was a time before individuals were readily sharing private aspects of their lives on reality shows, the Internet, and other public forums. The lyrics and spoken text are also infused with names of entertainment stars and performers from the 1940s to the 1970s. In addition, ACL is peppered with vernacular, trends, television shows, and other cultural relics from its decade. Chapters I and VIII further address these aspects.

While there are differing opinions over the merits of maintaining ACL's original setting, all directors, regardless of their choice, must be aware of the social and historical implications contained within this musical. This analysis has shown that in various ways, ACL is reflective of not only the overall milieu of the U.S. and Broadway in the 1970s but also a generation that was primarily raised in a more morally restrictive period.

CHAPTER VIII

TEXAS STATE'S PRODUCTION

Production Concept

Soon after ACL's first appearance on Broadway, a plethora of productions began appearing both nationally and internationally. Many have soared while a number have ranged anywhere from satisfactory to lackluster, particularly at the amateur level. ACL "purists" have insisted on cloning the original because they believe Michael Bennett's iconic staging is indistinguishable from the musical itself. Furthermore, the very nature of the show leaves little room for sweeping changes or diverse directorial interpretations. However, many directors have eschewed the carbon copy concept. For Texas State's production, Dr. Ball chose a combined approach that allowed him to implement his creative vision while maintaining portions of Bennett's staging and the overall integrity of the musical.

Dr. Ball's overriding theme for his production of ACL was the need for love and acceptance. Dr. Ball saw ACL as addressing the hopes, insecurities, and defensive masks of the dancers as well as the character Zach. He found it crucial for the audience to make emotional, empathetic connections with the characters,

as he believed it would keep them engaged in the lives represented on stage. He wanted the audience to reach the realization that everyone, regardless of occupation, needs the same thing--to be accepted and loved. Dr. Ball sought to communicate that the sense of unworthiness led the characters to develop masks to shield themselves from rejection. For him, the unveiling of the characters was a progression: characters first react by trying to be who others think they should be; however, through the interrogation process, layers of their facades are stripped away leaving the real individuals exposed. Towards the end of the musical, the dancers reveal the vulnerability and commitment needed to achieve what they love. According to Dr. Ball, this makes them worthy to have what they love. After Diana and the other dancers sing their anthem, "What I Did for Love," his desire was for the audience to view all of them as winners, not just the final eight selected. For Zach's criticisms of Cassie, Dr. Ball wanted to reveal Zach's underlying frustration with her for not matching his professional success along with his expectations in their romantic relationship. Pertaining to the finale, Dr. Ball emphasized that while it offered an impressive theatrical spectacle, it was an extremely small segment of the show in terms of time. For him, it served as a curtain call for the performance, and he did not want excessive resources devoted to it in relation to other areas of the show (Ball).

One of the first changes Dr. Ball wanted was to bring the musical into present day, which meant deleting or changing certain lines in the book and deleting references in musical numbers.¹⁴ Some '70s references were taken care of inadvertently, as Dr. Ball cut various portions of the musical due to concerns over the skill level of certain actors and to streamline the action. However, some antiquated references within the musical number "Hello Twelve . . ." needed to be removed such as Robert Goulet, Steve McQueen, Troy Donahue, Ted Mack Amateur Hour, Peyton Place, use of the term "broad," and so forth. In addition, Dr. Ball cut the musical number "And . . ." in its entirety. The song expresses the dancers' anxieties about not wanting to openly reveal themselves during the audition process. Dr. Ball acted in part on research provided by the author, as he decided the song was no longer reflective of today's culture, which is accustomed to individuals readily baring their soul on reality shows and other confessional mediums. Dr. Ball also made needed deletions and changes in the spoken dialogue. For example, when the dancer Judy Turner introduces herself, she jokingly states that her real name is Lana Turner. Dr. Ball changed the line to Tina Turner based on a recommendation from the author. Along the same line, he removed or utilized substitutes for entertainment stars of long ago such as Ann Miller, Doris Day, June Allyson, Cyd Charisse, Anna May Wong, Gwen

¹⁴ Dr. Ball coordinated all copyright matters with Dr. John Fleming, who secured the needed production rights and permissions.

Verdon, and Jill St. John. Many other lines had to be eliminated or updated to include antiquated references to a television set, The Ed Sullivan Show, a door-to-door salesman selling dance lessons, contracting polio, wearing dungarees; St. Joseph's Hospital; and so forth.¹⁵ There were also minor areas that were outdated but left intact such as The Jewel Box Revue, which ceased performing in 1975; The High School of Performing Arts, which was merged into LaGuardia High School in 1984; and the nightclub union AGVA, which no longer covers performers in strip club venues. In addition, Dr. Ball left in references to Sheila talking about her astrological sign, dancers' complaints about the gloomy job outlook on Broadway that prevailed in 1974, mention of the dangers of 42nd Street, Cassie calling Zach "pussy cat," and open drug usage of Darvon and Valium.¹⁶ While it can be argued that these references were reflective of the overall culture and environment in New York City and the country in the mid-1970s, Dr. Ball believed they would still be applicable in today's world and would continue to serve the production well.

Dr. Ball wanted to instill humor into his production and avoid excess sentimentality, which can often be a pitfall for ACL productions. For example, in

¹⁵ Polio was eradicated in the U.S. in 1979, and St. Joseph's Hospital in New York City closed circa 2005.

¹⁶ Due to an extensive cleanup effort, by the mid-1990s, a tourist-friendly Times Square was resurrected along with a safer, more wholesome 42nd Street. In Dr. Ball's updated version, the character of Paul reflects on 42nd Street when he was a child in the late 1980s. At that time, the seedy grindhouses were shut down, but the cleanup effort was far from complete.

Diana's song "Nothing," it ends sadly with her proclamation she felt nothing when her acting teacher who belittled her during high school passed away. Many productions have Diana sing the final part in a somber manner. However, Dr. Ball allowed his actress to make the line humorous, which produced laughs from the audience. Another extremely emotional moment is during Paul's dialogue with Zach when he speaks about his teenage years as an isolated homosexual who yearns for his father's love and acceptance. When Paul tells the story about joining a drag show and later learning that his father loved him, he cries and Zach comforts him. Dr. Ball avoids an overly sentimental scene by having Paul hug Zach a bit too hard and having Zach react uncomfortably. In addition, he has Larry accidentally witness the embrace and react in a perplexed manner. Through his staging, Dr. Ball achieved a comedic moment, which provided the audience with a much-needed boost after Paul's heart-wrenching monologue.

Dr. Ball strived to create an extremely energized production with more interaction among the characters during the musical numbers. For instance, Diana's song "Nothing" is frequently performed alone. In the book of the musical, the stage direction is for the dancers to depart the stage during her song. Instead of following the direction, Dr. Ball had the dancers surround Diana downstage and pretend they were fellow students acting out scenarios in the

song such as becoming a table, sports car, and ice-cream cone. The blocking of this musical number was dynamic and added extra vitality to the production.

Dr. Ball had to make casting adjustments during the course of the production, which offered additional creative opportunities. Instead of a male, he cast a female with strong dance skills in the role of Larry, Zach's assistant. Although it is initially concealed from the audience, Zach and his assistant were engaged in a romantic relationship, which is implied by a brief kiss. This added twist in no way disrupted the storyline. Instead, it provided a small measure of tension since Zach still had feelings for Cassie. Due to a cast injury late in the rehearsal process, the character of Bobby had to be eliminated, leaving sixteen principal dancers. Since Bobby was one of the eight chosen dancers, Dr. Ball had Al selected in his place. This offered a very interesting, new dimension to the scene, as a silent conflict arose between Al and his wife Kristine when he was selected and she was not.

Dr. Ball also made slight adjustments to accommodate his staging needs for the production. Because the actors were very young, he lowered the ages of most of the characters by several years. He also changed the last name of the character Connie Wong to McKenzie since the actor was clearly Caucasian. He chose to add the characters Jill and Leslie to make the stage appear fuller during

the initial dance audition.¹⁷ The added characters were dismissed at the beginning of the show along with the seven other “extra dancers.” Although ACL is designed to run uninterrupted, Dr. Ball inserted an intermission when he discovered the show was running longer than expected. His intermission came when Zach’s assistant takes the dancers away to learn dance steps while Cassie stays on stage at Zach’s request.

Dr. Ball’s production was well received by audience members. The decision to update the musical did not seem to detract from the storyline or the audience’s experience. While some may correctly argue that updated productions like Dr. Ball’s create incongruous moments on stage, those moments are often overlooked or go unnoticed, as audiences tend to be captivated by the show’s universality and timeless themes. The musical is not designed to stimulate critical thinking; rather, it is meant to engage the emotions. In addition, the updates may have made the show more accessible, especially for younger spectators. While the production was not flawless, the audience appeared to be absorbed in the performance, especially during Act I. The crowd seemed particularly fond of the characters Mike, Kristine, Paul, Sheila, and Val. Towards the end of Act II, the audience started to become restless and distracted.

¹⁷ Dr. Ball did not utilize the extra dancer character named Tricia, which is called for in the original. He used a male dancer named “Jim.” Thus, Dr. Ball had nine extra dancers compared to seven in the original production.

However, when the finale began and Paul peaked out from the curtain with his gold outfit and hat, the crowd became exuberant. It was evident the audience comprehended Dr. Ball's message: all the dancers were winners.

Dr. Ball's goal for his production of ACL was to maintain the spirit and intent of the original, while modernizing and finding places to put his own stamp on the production. Without a doubt, he succeeded in striking this balance.

Lobby Display

For the lobby display, Texas State Theatre and Dance Department provided a large professional six-panel folding display board and a glass display case. While creating the overall display, I remained focused on Dr. Ball's desire to create a sense of anticipation for the audience. I strived to provide an interesting and meaningful presentation that would please both the director and institution. Moreover, while I knew I needed to acknowledge the musical's legacy in some capacity, I made sure that nothing featured took away from or in any way competed with elements from our own production.

For the display board, I decided to have each of the six panels reflect individual themes ranging from the show's history to the challenges faced by Broadway dancers of today. As requested by Dr. Ball, I did not include any production pictures of ACL. I did include two pictures from the 1983 gala performance that celebrated ACL surpassing Grease and earning the title of

longest-running musical. This performance was an anomaly, as Michael Bennett brought back all actors who had ever played a part of ACL to perform together for one night. In addition, multiple actors played the same character at the same time. While the topic of this particular panel appeared to be the gala and did in fact offer interesting trivia for ACL enthusiasts, the theme was actually the verisimilitude of the dancers' stories. The two gala photographs used were close-ups of two characters: multiple actors playing Val and multiple actors playing Paul. One of the actors in the Val photograph was the individual upon whom the character was based. For both photograph narratives, I included information on the fact the actors were portraying the stories of two actual Broadway dancers. I also included hints about each of the dancers' stories to arouse the audience's curiosity. For further details concerning the organization and content of the entire display board, refer to Table 2 at the end of this chapter.

Unfortunately, the display board only offered two choices of colors: red on one side and blue on the other. To bring in ACL colors, I used a black table skirt and gold sequined material for the tablecloth, which was the same material used on the finale costumes.

For the glass display case, I wanted to pay homage to dancers everywhere. I placed the display case objects on gold stretch fabric, similar to costume fabric used for the show. In the center of the case, I prepared a document on dancer

facts and statistics entitled, "Career Information from the U.S. Department of Labor's 2006-07 Occupational Outlook Handbook on Dancers." Surrounding the document were three rows of nine dancers' shoes that included toe, tap, and ballet slippers. Anchored at the corners of the display case were four pictures of male and female dancers at various ages. Each of the shoes and dancer pictures had thirteen corresponding quotes beneath them pertaining to dancing. For example, for the tap shoes I used the Japanese proverb, "We're fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well dance." For the two toe shoes, I used the following anonymous quotes: "There are never mistakes, just unexpected solos," and, "The ballet toe shoe is one of the few instruments of torture to survive intact into our time." For one of the pictures in which a male dancer has his arms outstretched and his body arched back, I used the biblical quote, "To everything there is a season . . . a time to dance . . .," from Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8.

To enhance the audience's experience, I took painstaking measures to select just the right photographs and objects as well as develop relevant documents supporting the show's themes. I received numerous compliments from Texas State students and personnel from the Theatre and Dance Department. From what I observed, the display case seemed to be the most popular. Numerous people advised that they found the combination of the shoes and quotes inspirational and touching. In summary, I believe the overall

display brought the audience into the world of the play, which, in turn, created excitement and anticipation to see the production.

Table 2. Display Board Content and Layout. This table provides information on the overall presentation of the lobby display board for ACL.

| Panel and Item Number | Theme | Visual Element | Narrative |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Panel 1 Item 1 | <u>ACL</u> 's origin and legacy | Photograph: Headshot of Michael Bennett | " <u>A Chorus Line</u> solidified Michael Bennett's fame as a choreographer and director. However, Bennett's career was cut short when he died of an AIDS-related illness in 1987 at the age of 44." |
| Panel 1 Item 2 | <u>ACL</u> 's origin and legacy | Photograph: Rehearsal with Michael Bennett and the original cast | "Bennett tape recorded groups of dancers in New York City while they revealed intimate details of their lives: 'It had been years since they had thought about their childhood and how they had become dancers . . . everybody was listening and nobody was criticizing or judging. The next morning when I walked out of that studio, I was happy . . . I knew I had some kind of a show here'" (qtd. in "Michael Bennett"). |
| Panel 1 Item 3 | <u>ACL</u> 's origin and legacy | Photograph: 1975 <u>Newsweek</u> cover of Donna McKechnie as Cassie with the title "Broadway's New Kick" | "Bennett hired an artistic staff to help him condense thirty hours of tape into <u>A Chorus Line</u> . The musical became an instant hit, garnering numerous awards and nationwide press coverage." |

Table 2 continued.

| | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| Panel 2 Item 4 | <u>ACL's</u> universal theme | Document: Sketch of 17 dancers standing on a line with the following narrative: "When <u>A Chorus Line</u> was still in the development phase, the one design feature that was present from day one was the line on the floor in which the dancers stood. Robin Wagner, the original Broadway set designer, considered it the one essential scenic element--an element that represented more than just the title of the musical." | "Trish Garland, who originated the role of Judy, summarized her perspective, 'Even though we're different in appearance, shapes, and sizes, we all need and want the same things. Everybody can put themselves on the line. Everybody in life has to audition, no matter what it's for'" (Lee 20). |
| Panel 2 Item 5 | <u>ACL's</u> universal theme | Photograph: 1975 rehearsal with dancers gathered near the white line | "Above photo is a rehearsal of <u>A Chorus Line</u> in 1975, months before opening. Photo below is our rehearsal, one week before opening." |
| Panel 2 Item 6 | <u>ACL's</u> universal theme | Photograph: Texas State rehearsal with seventeen dancers standing on the white line | See narrative for Panel 2, Item 5. |
| Panel 3 Item 7 | Real stories, real people | Photograph: Shubert Theatre--venue for the gala | "When <u>A Chorus Line</u> broke the record for longest running Broadway show in 1983, Bennett decided to bring performers back--past and present--for 'the gala' and have multiple performers play the same character at the same time." |

Table 2 continued.

| | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--|--|
| Panel 3 Item 8 | Real stories, real people | Photograph: "Multiple Vals" at the gala with Mitzi Hamilton in the center | "Val's character was inspired, in part, by Mitzi Hamilton who participated in the taped sessions but was not selected during the original casting. Hamilton confessed she had not been getting jobs because of her looks . . . until she decided to take matters into her own hands." |
| Panel 3 Item 9 | Real stories, real people | Photograph: "Multiple Pauls" at the gala | "Nick Dante (<u>A Chorus Line</u> book writer) provided inspiration for the character of Paul when he revealed his coming of age experiences during a taped group session with Bennett. Dante's story had one of the most powerful impacts on the dancers present." |
| Panel 4 Item 10 | The Gypsy Robe | Document: Image of Gypsy Robes with narrative pertaining to the tradition--see Abstract B for narrative portion | N/A |
| Panel 4 Item 11 | The Gypsy Robe | Photograph: Gypsy Robe that was donated to the Smithsonian in 2001 | "Each recipient adds decorative mementos representing his or her musical. When there is no more space, the Robe is retired and a new one started. Retired Robes are either stored by Actors' Equity or put on display in such places as the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American History and the New York Public Library." |

Table 2 continued.

| | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Panel 4 Item 12 | The Gypsy Robe | Photograph: Lorin Latarro during her 2006 <u>ACL</u> Gypsy Robe ceremony | "Lorin Latarro was chosen as the recipient of the Gypsy Robe for the 2006 Broadway revival of <u>A Chorus Line</u> . Latarro plays Vicki and understudies several roles in the show." |
| Panel 5 Item 13 | Evolution of the triple threat | Photograph: A chorus line from an unnamed theatrical production circa 1930 | "In the past, dancers only had to study ballet, tap, and jazz. Auditions typically required conventional dance combinations compatible with the traditional musical theatre style of the day." |
| Panel 5 Item 14 | Evolution of the triple threat | Photograph: Unidentified dancer at a New York City audition circa 2007 | "The musical theatre of today has a wide range of choreographic styles that demand comprehensive dance techniques, as well as singing and acting-- performers are expected to be a triple threat." |
| Panel 5 Item 15 | Evolution of the triple threat | Photograph: Broadway billboards at night in New York City | "According to an article in <u>Back Stage</u> magazine, 'getting a job in a Broadway show or tour can mean having to be anything from a championship Irish step dancer, a world-class ballerina, or a super tapper, to just the right size to fit into an elaborate Disney costume'" (Sagolla 28). |
| Panel 6 Item 16 | World of the Broadway gypsy | Document: Report on earnings and cost of living in New York City--information acquired from Appendix A | N/A |
| Panel 6 Item 17 | World of the Broadway gypsy | Photograph: Hot dog and soda | "In his book, <u>Acting is a Job</u> , Jason Pugatch states that despite the high cost of living, Broadway performers can survive in New York City with a 'turkey dog diet,' roommates, and frugal living." |

Table 2 continued.

| | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Panel 6 Item 18 | World of the Broadway gypsy | Photograph: Young man working at a pizza restaurant | "The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that because of unpredictable earnings, most Broadway bound performers have to supplement their incomes with secondary jobs in low- paying fields." |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|

Other Production Elements

As part of my dramaturgical duties, I prepared a press release, which is located at Appendix C. I also prepared program notes, which were subsequently edited by Dr Ball. The program notes are located inside Appendix D, "Program for ACL." Production photos are at Appendix E.

CHAPTER IX

SELF-EVALUATION

Serving as a dramaturg for ACL has been a gratifying experience as well as an outstanding learning opportunity. However, the experience was not without frustration and disappointment. Preparing this self-evaluation has been helpful in that, with the passage of time, it has forced me to reexamine my dramaturgical role in a more objective manner and gain a fresh perspective.

Because I viewed ACL as a relatively simple musical, I was initially ambivalent when Dr. Charlton offered me the opportunity to be the show's dramaturg. However, Dr. Charlton assured me this thesis assignment would have plenty of avenues to explore. Now having completed this project, I certainly agree.

At the outset, I was concerned about Dr. Ball's desire to work with a dramaturg, as he postponed our initial meeting for several weeks. However, my uneasiness subsided when he provided me with a sizable amount of dramaturgical assignments at our first meeting on 1 September (detailed in Chapter I). Because rehearsals were about to begin and many of the assignments

involved textual analysis and synthesized research for the cast, Dr. Ball needed most of the tasks completed immediately. Prior to our first meeting, I had accomplished extensive background research on ACL to include preparation of a production protocol. This preparation proved invaluable in meeting Dr. Ball's short deadlines. Dr. Ball was not only complimentary over my work products in general, but also the speed at which I was able to produce them.

While I strongly believe my dramaturgical training adequately prepared me for the challenges of this project, there were definitely lessons learned and corrective actions I would take for future assignments. As mentioned in Chapter I, at our first meeting, Dr. Ball expressed disapproval over having a conventional lobby display. In retrospect, I realize my first mistake was bringing up the issue of the display before I had a fully developed concept. Prior to the first meeting, I was obviously unaware of Dr. Ball's vision and thematic focus for the production. I brought up the topic of the lobby display to solicit his input; however, I never anticipated such a strong reaction against its use. Nonetheless, as a guest director it is understandable that he is accustomed to different production practices. In hindsight, I wish I had listened to his concept first and then, at a later meeting, provided a mock-up display consisting of all pictures, documents, and objects selected so I could explain how the proposed display would enhance the audience's experience and support his vision. Though I

suspect he still would have rejected the lobby presentation, I believe it would have been a more persuasive and professional course of action.

I also should have been more cognizant of my space during rehearsal observations. On one occasion at a rehearsal in mid-October, I purposely sat alone, several rows behind where I believed the stage manager and director were sitting. However, sometime after the run-through began, I noticed Dr. Ball had moved several rows behind me. I have always been a copious note taker; however, most of my notes that evening were not criticisms. It was simply my way of staying engaged in every aspect of the production to ensure I would be prepared to discuss anything, no matter how minor. I can see now how this could have been very irritating from a director's perspective with the assumption that I was finding nothing but flaws in his production. I should have relocated to the back row.

Last of all, there was a communication breakdown that occurred between Dr. Ball and me. The primary cause of the breakdown was ongoing issues related to the lobby presentation. Unfortunately, I was in a position in which the requirement of the institution to have a conventional lobby display board conflicted with the desire of the guest director. Dr. Ball only wanted to have a preshow performance or some other type of unconventional display. Because Dr. Fleming permitted us to utilize both styles of presentation, I provided Dr.

Ball with a number of diverse themes and ideas; however, I was ultimately unable to find a creative solution to his liking. An additional problem arose at a mid-October meeting when Dr. Ball asked me to incorporate his preshow performance idea involving a large group of actors, including cast members, periodically entering the lobby to see if they made an audition cut posted on a large board with over two hundred names.¹⁸ According to Dr. Ball, those that were eliminated would take off their dance shoes and throw them in a trashcan. After he presented his general concept, I tried to obtain additional details so I could begin making logistical arrangements as well as acquiring manpower and costume resources.¹⁹ However, he believed we could safely postpone a detailed discussion of his preshow idea until much later in the production phase. He also stated that he would be responsible for coordinating the portion of the performance involving his cast. Because I knew it would be more and more difficult to find students outside of the cast willing and able to adjust their schedules at the last minute to participate as “rejected dancers” in eight preshow performances spread over six days, I was very persistent about needing to solidify a plan. Despite the fact that I reiterated I wanted to support his concept,

¹⁸ When I provided creative ideas for a preshow to Dr. Ball, I had assumed utilization of the cast was off-limits since they would be occupied prior to the performance with vocal and stretching warm-ups, makeup, and last-minute meetings with the stage manager.

¹⁹ As mentioned in Chapter I, both Dr. Ball and I were operating under the incorrect assumption that a preshow presentation would be my responsibility as the dramaturg.

it became evident that my request for additional details offended Dr. Ball. On one hand, I believe my stance was justified. Since I had been given responsibility for the lobby presentation, I believed it was inappropriate to place the timing, planning, and execution of it outside my control. However, I admit I have a tendency to be overly rigid about the need to organize and prepare in advance. Exacerbating the situation, Dr. Ball had arranged for this discussion to take place immediately prior to his first run-through rehearsal, which included a number of invited guests from the theatre department. A case could certainly be made that I should have been more sensitive to the demands and pressures he was facing as a director. While I firmly believe a detailed discussion of the preshow could no longer be put off as Dr. Ball suggested, I should have taken the initiative to propose another meeting time that would have been less stressful and more conducive to our discussion.

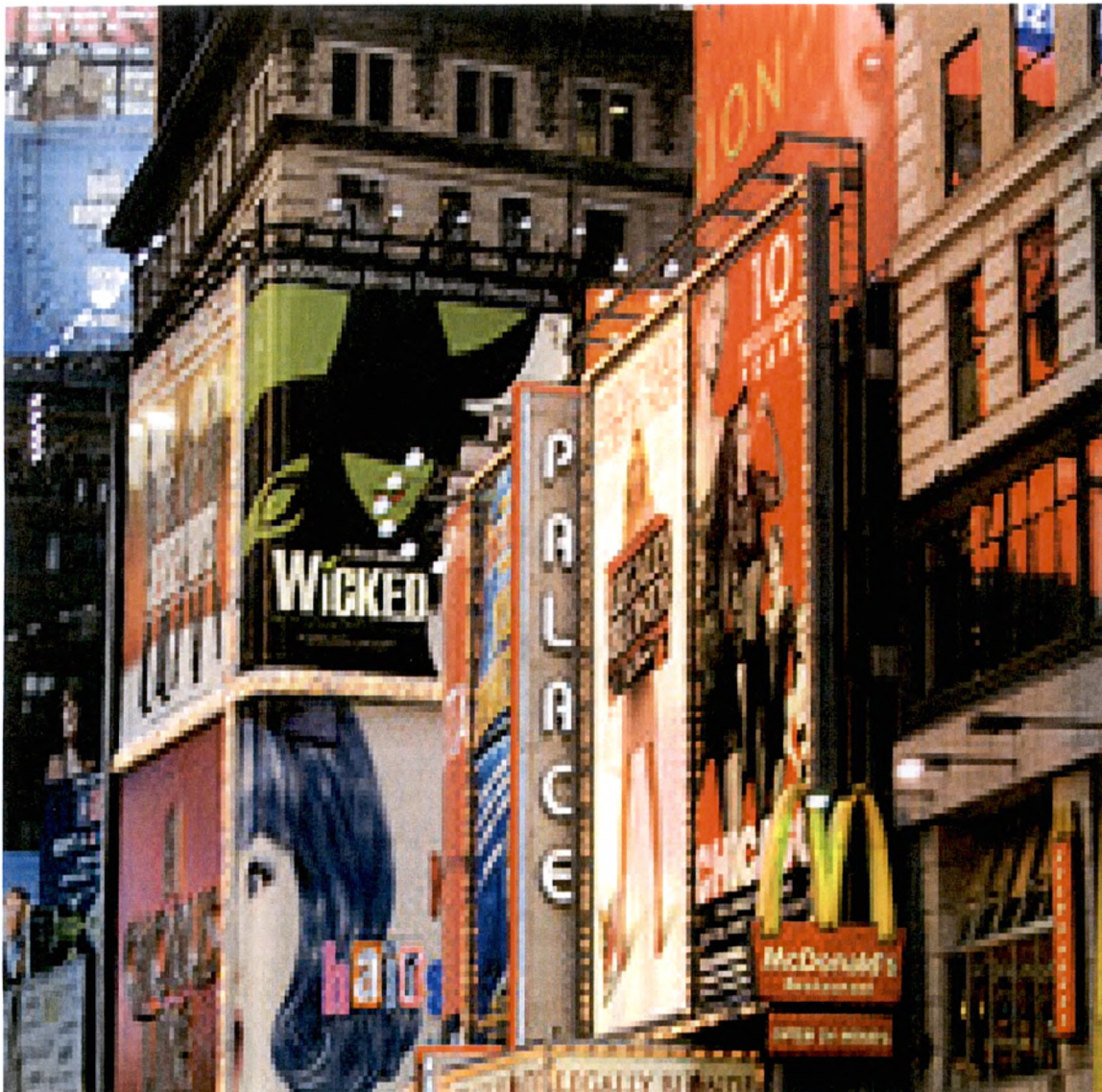
Two other minor issues may have also contributed to problems in our working relationship. I believe Dr. Ball's decision to update the production was a sensitive subject, as he did not seem to be aware of the extent of 1970s elements in the script and was somewhat defensive when we discussed my research about '70s textual references and suitable alternatives for his updated production. In addition, at Dr. Ball's invitation, I attended the first run-through rehearsal in October and provided him with requested dramaturgical rehearsal notes.

However, I kept my notes very limited since the rehearsal run-through was simply too rough to provide a more substantial assessment. Specifically, I noted two flawed areas in the rehearsal: weaknesses in the first audition dance scene and two characters whose names clearly did not match the actor's gender in one case and ethnicity of the actor in the other. Pertaining to the second criticism, a female was playing "Larry" and a Caucasian was playing a Chinese character with the last name "Wong." I believe my notes were appropriate, as both flaws had been sources of criticism in other productions of ACL, and it was early enough in the rehearsal process for name modifications to be made if desired. Shortly after receiving my notes, Dr. Ball advised my work in the production was completed.

Fortunately, with few exceptions, the late breakdown in my relationship with Dr. Ball did not affect my dramaturgical tasks, as most had already been accomplished or could be accomplished without his assistance. Despite this setback, I took great pride in accomplishing this project. As discussed in Chapters I and VIII, I was able to effectively utilize my creativity and dramaturgical training to contribute in many significant ways to this production. Most of all, I am thankful for this opportunity since it has allowed me to increase my knowledge and skills in the dramaturgical field.

APPENDIX A

THE WORLD OF THE BROADWAY GYPSY



(Cariberry)

Family and friends have already warned you this is a tough profession. That is not the objective of this handout. Rather, its purpose is to provide a glimpse into the world of the play--a world these gypsy dancers must contend with to pursue their dreams on Broadway.

THE BROADWAY GYPSY

The term refers to a performer who makes a living dancing in Broadway shows and touring productions, one after another. There was a time when dancers only had to study ballet, tap, and jazz. However, the musical theatre of today, with its wide range of choreographic styles, demands comprehensive dance technique, as well as singing and acting skills. Performers are expected to be "a triple threat," which can overwhelm anyone pursuing a career on Broadway. Anthony Van Laast, the Broadway choreographer for Mamma Mia, stated, "I see so many good dancers who can't sing and it breaks my heart, because no matter how brilliantly they move, I just can't cast them" (Sagolla 28).

WORKING CONDITIONS

The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, provides an Occupational Outlook Handbook for actor and dancers. Listed below are some highlights on working conditions from the report:

- Many dancers stop performing by their late thirties because of the strenuous nature of the profession to include physical demands on the body.
- Performers work very long and late hours. They often rehearse or train during the day and work on evenings and weekends.
- Actors endure constant stress and pressure due to intense competition for roles, lengthy periods of unemployment, and frequent rejection in auditions.
- Because of the erratic nature of the profession, actors face income that is unpredictable and fierce competition for even the lowest-paying jobs.
- Because earnings are uncertain, many have to supplement their incomes by holding jobs in other low-paying fields.
- Only the most gifted find regular employment.

Years ago, Actors' Equity Association (AEA) held a workshop addressing the stress and anxiety levels of actors. The workshop tackled psychological and social problems that resulted from frequent unemployment, family pressures, and other difficulties inherent in the profession. The need for AEA to hold this

workshop further validates the adverse working conditions performers face (Moore 11).

JOB OUTLOOK

The unemployment rate for actors is generally agreed to be about 85% (Moore 129). The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook states that employment for dancers and actors is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2014. However, for actors and dancers the number of applicants will continue to greatly surpass the number of job openings.

According to the Actors' Equity Association 2005-2006 Theatrical Season Report, the eastern region workweek growth, which includes Broadway, has remained flat since the 2002-2003 season. Throughout all regions of AEA, the number of principal workweeks grew by 1.8%, and stage manager workweeks grew by 6.1%; however, chorus workweeks leveled off from past season growth. AEA does not know if this is developing trend or just an anomaly for the season (DiPaola 6-7). Below is an AEA membership breakout for major cities:

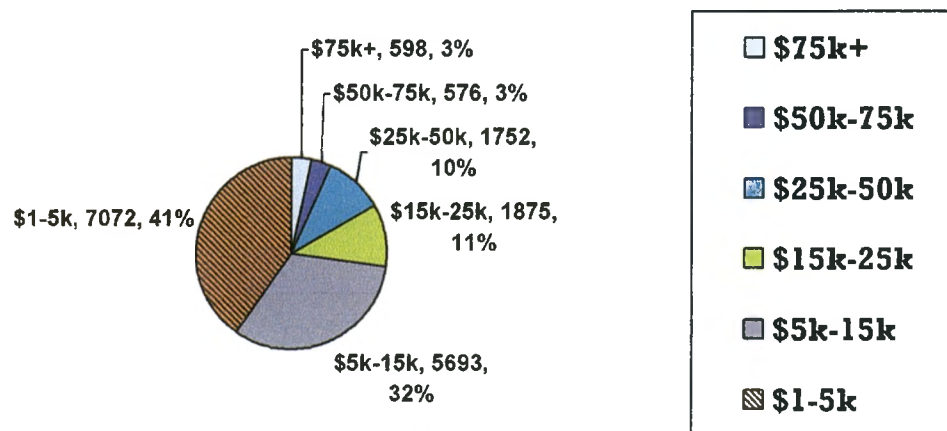
- **New York 15,842**
- Los Angeles 7,505
- Chicago 1,380
- San Francisco 905
- Washington DC/Baltimore 783
- Philadelphia 774
- Boston 724
- Orlando 463
- Minneapolis/St. Paul 431
- Seattle 395

There is currently a total of 39,969 AEA members in good standing (DiPaola 17-18). AEA membership continues to grow, as it went from about 14,000 in 1970 to more than 27,000 in 1980 to its present total today (Moore 21).

EARNINGS

According to AEA's 2005-2006 Theatrical Season Report, equity members worked an average of 17.2 weeks during the 2005-2006 season with median earnings of \$7,040. Below is a chart reflecting annual earnings by working members in six different dollar ranges. Note that 73% of the working members earned no more than \$15,000 (DiPaola 3; 16).

Members with Earnings by Dollar Ranges, 2005-2006



According to AEA contractual terms, the minimum weekly salary for actors in Broadway productions as of 25 June 2007 was \$1,509 ("Equity" 94). As of October 2006, actors in off-Broadway theaters received minimums ranging from \$506 to \$890 a week depending on the seating capacity of the theater ("Off-Broadway" 68). Actors must work a certain number of days/weeks per year or earn a set minimum amount of pay to qualify for additional coverage such as union health, hospitalization, welfare, and pension fund ("Occupational").

Note: As a salary comparison, \$62,820 is the average starting salary across all professions for a person with a graduate degree (Pugatch 181).

COST OF LIVING IN NEW YORK

Compared to the rest of the country, New York City's cost of living is 64.5% higher than the U.S. average. Below is a cost of living index for New York City based on a U.S. average of 100. Anything below 100 indicates the city is cheaper than the U.S. average and anything above it means it is more expensive ("New York"):

| Cost of Living | New York, NY | United States |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|
| <u>Overall</u> | 165 | 100 |
| <u>Food</u> | 142 | 100 |
| <u>Health</u> | 182 | 100 |
| <u>Housing</u> | 203 | 100 |
| <u>Utilities</u> | 165 | 100 |
| <u>Transportation</u> | 120 | 100 |
| <u>Miscellaneous</u> | 136 | 100 |

According to a recent article in the New York Times, between 2002 and 2005, median rents in the city increased 20%, with vacancy rates slipping to a five-year low of 1%. Even outside of Manhattan, the more moderate rent apartments are becoming a rare find. In addition, to make matters worse, the New York Rent Guidelines Board recently approved a 7.25% rent increase for two-year leases (Finnegan 125). Although estimates vary, you can currently expect to pay around \$2,400 for a studio apartment in Manhattan.

In his book, Acting is a Job, Jason Pugatch estimates that with roommates, a “turkey dog diet,” and frugal living, actors may manage an annual cost of living in New York City of \$18,500 (177).

TRAINING AND EXPENSE

With the high demands for versatility, training can never stop. For those who pursue formal dramatic training either through an acting conservatory or a university program, it is not unusual for debt to range anywhere from \$50K–100K following graduation. Here is a quick glance at some of the better-known programs (basic tuition only):

- American Repertory Theatre/Two-year MFA/Tuition: \$28,800/\$22,200 (2nd year)
- The Julliard School/Four-year BFA program/Tuition: \$27,150
- American Conservatory Theater/Three-year MFA program/Tuition: \$15,366
- Yale School of Drama/Three-year MFA program/Tuition: \$25,735

While the advantages of a college education are obvious, it alone will not suffice in the marketplace. A Labor Department survey conducted several years ago reported that for a period of 9 to 12 months each year, most professional performers were spending up to 14 hours a week studying or training. They

were also spending more than several thousand dollars a year to finance these sessions (Moore 120). In Dick Moore's book, Opportunities in Acting Careers, he advises that acting classes typically cost a minimum of several hundred dollars per course, with individual instruction even higher. Typically, singers, dancers, and actors spend more than \$100 a week on classes (Moore 126). The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook provides the following additional training information on dancers:

- Most dancers begin formal training at an early age. Ballet training for women usually begins at 5 to 8 years of age with an independent ballet school or a private teacher. Focused training typically starts between the ages of 10 and 12. Men often begin their formal ballet training between the ages of 10 and 15.
- Many dancers have their first professional audition by age 17 or 18.
- To keep in shape and/or prepare for performances, dancers normally spend 8 hours a day in class and rehearsal.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPENSES

There are a number of other professional expenses in addition to training--too many to be listed in this handout. However, one crucial requirement is for headshots/promotional material. Jason Pugatch provided an estimated breakdown of costs for the first six months of promotional material in his book Acting is a Job (177):

- Headshot Originals: \$850
- Reproductions: \$350
- Postcards: \$200
- Mailings: \$80
- Total: \$1,480

INJURIES

From the outside, Broadway gypsies make their performances look effortless. However, acting, dancing, and singing demands of today are incredibly taxing on the body. Little information was available about specific injuries to Broadway performers until a team of professionals from the University of Houston Medical School conducted a survey of Broadway actors and dancers in cooperation with AEA. The survey revealed that 55% of dancers and actors sustained at least one injury in Broadway productions and touring companies. A breakdown of the most frequent sites of injuries for dancers is below:

- Back: 22%
- Neck: 12%
- Lower extremities: 55%
 - Knee: 29%
 - Ankle: 25%
 - Foot: 20%
 - Hip: 12%
 - Calf: 6%

While, some injuries were more serious, the majority were sprains and strains. Approximately 37% of injuries resulted in at least one missed performance. Female dancers were more likely to sustain injuries than males (possibly because of high-heeled shoes). Other factors attributing to injury included greater body mass, raked stages, physical demands of a role, and cold ambient temperatures onstage and backstage (Evans 77-80).

CONCLUSION

This handout reflects the real world sacrifices and hardships facing these gypsy dancers who, despite all the obstacles, chose to persevere just for the chance to dance in a Broadway chorus. Neil Simon, who contributed some comedic lines for A Chorus Line, summed it up best when he told an audience of performers:

It's hard to be an actor. I know of no greater act of courage than to walk out on an empty stage, seeing the silhouette of four ominous figures sitting in the darkened theater, with your mouth drying and your fingers trembling, trying to keep the pages in your hand from rattling and trying to focus your eyes on the lines so you don't automatically skip the two most important speeches in the scene, and all the while trying to give a performance worthy of an opening night with only four pages of a play, the rest of which you know nothing about. And then to finally get through it, only to hear from the voice in the darkened theater, "Thank you . . ." It has got to be the most painful, frustrating, and fearful experience in the world. Because with it comes a 90 percent chance of rejection. And to do it time after time, year after year, even after you've proven yourself in show after show, requires more than courage and fearlessness. It requires such dedication to your craft and to the work you've chosen for your life, that I'm sure if Equity posted a sign backstage that said, "Any actor auditioning for this show who gets turned down will automatically be shot," you'd still only get about a 12 percent turnaway (Moore 2).

APPENDIX B

THE GYPSY ROBE

Who are the Gypsies?

Gypsies are chorus members who continually perform in one show after another. Actors' Equity website posts a more in-depth definition: "The martyrs. The troopers. The workhorses who don't always get the recognition or the dressing rooms with the stars on them. The diverse range of performers who are celebrated in A Chorus Line, whose anthem can be 'What I Did For Love.'"

What is the Gypsy Robe Tradition?

The tradition, which began in 1950, involves a ceremonial passing of a Robe to a designated gypsy in a Broadway musical. There is an official protocol addressing how the Robe is to be presented, worn, and paraded on stage.

Four Rules of the Gypsy Robe--What Every Gypsy Needs to Know

1. The Gypsy Robe goes only to Broadway musicals with a chorus.
2. The Robe goes to the chorus member who has performed in the most Broadway shows.
3. It must be delivered to the chosen chorus member a half hour before the curtain rises on opening night.
4. The chorus member must put on the Robe and circle the stage three times, while cast members reach out and touch it for good luck ("Gypsy Robes").

APPENDIX C

PRESS RELEASE

**Texas State University
Department of Theatre and Dance
Production Press Release Form**

| | |
|---|--|
| Title: | A Chorus Line |
| Production Company: | Texas State University-San Marcos Department of Theatre and Dance |
| Description (6-8 word description): | Award-winning Broadway musical conceived by Michael Bennett |
| Dates: | November 13 th - 18 th at 7:30pm Matinee performances on Saturday, November 17 th and Sunday, November 18 th at 2:00pm |
| Theatre Space: | Mainstage University Theatre Texas State Theatre Center |
| Address: | 601 University Dr., San Marcos, Texas |
| Ticket Prices: | \$10 general admission and \$7 for students with a valid Texas State ID For reservations, call the Texas State Box Office as (512) 245-2204. For additional information contact (512) 245-2147. |
| <p>For Release:</p> <p>Seventeen dancers reveal their dreams and disappointments as they vie for eight spots in a Broadway chorus line. One by one, the dancers disclose personal stories ranging from humorous to heartbreaking. <u>A Chorus Line</u>, which was inspired by real life stories of Broadway dancers, made its Broadway debut in July 1975. The musical ran for fifteen years and won numerous awards including the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and nine Tony Awards. As a testament to the show's enduring popularity, <u>A Chorus Line</u> was revived on Broadway in 2006.</p> | |
| <p>Additional Information:</p> <p>For this production, Texas State welcomes from San Antonio guest director Dr. Robert Ball of the University of the Incarnate Word Theatre Arts Department. Dr. Ball has acted on professional theatre stages in New York, Chicago, and on national and international tours. He is also the co-author of <u>The Essential Theatre</u> and the co-editor of <u>Plays for the Theatre</u> with his long-time friend and mentor Dr. Oscar G. Brockett.</p> | |

APPENDIX D

PROGRAM FOR A CHORUS LINE

THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE PRESENTS

A CHORUS LINE

conceived by michael bennett
book by james kirkwood & nicholas dante
music by marvin hamlisch, lyrics by edward kelban
directed by robert ball

| | |
|-----------|--------|
| NOV 13-18 | 7:30PM |
| NOV 17&18 | 2:00PM |

ADULTS \$10, STUDENTS \$7
MAIN STAGE - THEATRE CENTER
BOX OFFICE: 512-245-2204

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
SAN MARCOS

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY-SAN MARCOS IS A MEMBER OF THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Texas State Department of Theatre and Dance

Welcome to our 2007-2008 Season of productions. We are presenting what we believe will be an exciting array of classical and contemporary shows. We are a robust department with approximately 325 theatre majors, 20 graduate students, and 125 dance majors. We are proud of the accomplishments of our faculty and students.

The Theatre and Dance faculty continues to earn both national and international acclaim. In recent years, faculty have had their designs displayed at the Prague Quadrennial, the most prestigious competition for university designers, and they have won an international playwriting competition in Belgium. Within the U.S., faculty members have recently worked at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Utah Shakespearean Festival, Illinois Shakespeare Festival, Texas Shakespeare Festival, Austin Shakespeare Festival, Zachary Scott Theatre, Austin Lyric Opera, Alliance Theatre, Asolo Theatre, Berkeley Rep, Cleveland Play House, and the Colony Theatre in Los Angeles. In addition, Dance faculty have choreographed or performed in Athens, Paris, Costa Rica, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and New York.

Faculty have also been active in scholarly endeavors, as their articles have graced the cover of *American Theatre*, their books have been nominated for awards, and they have been asked to be featured speakers at national conferences. Likewise, graduate students have increasingly presented their research at both national and international conferences.

Our undergraduate students have also been extremely successful. Each year multiple students have earned honors at the state and regional levels of the American College Theatre Festival and American College Dance Festival. For each of the past seven years our department has been recognized at the Kennedy Center. Individual students have been National finalists in the areas of scene design, lighting design, costume design, and acting. In 2005, a Texas State student won the costume design competition. In addition, since 2003, the department has offered a summer study abroad in collaboration with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon, England.

We have a track record of success, and we hope you will join us for what we expect to be another exciting season of theatre and dance performances. Thank you for your interest and support.



The rising STAR of Texas™

Texas State University-San Marcos Department of Theatre and Dance

Presents

A Chorus Line

Conceived by Michael Bennett

Book by James Kirkwood & Nicholas Dante

Music by Marvin Hamlisch

Lyrics by Edward Kleban

Directed by Robert Ball

Scene Design
Ashley P. Frith

Costume Design
Abbey Moore

Lighting Design
Jan-Allen Bowley

Choreographer
Melissa Moncus

Musical Director
Gordon Jones

Dramaturg
Karen Wilson

Stage Manager
David Gibson

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Program Notes

Over thirty years have passed since A Chorus Line made its debut on the Broadway stage. The original production, which closed in April 1990, ran for 6,137 performances and received many notable awards including a Pulitzer Prize for Drama and nine Tony Awards. Michael Bennett, the powerhouse director-choreographer, was the driving force behind A Chorus Line. The momentum for the show started when two disgruntled Broadway performers approached Bennett about developing a project exclusively for dancers. As a result of the meeting, Bennett held sessions with New York City dancers to learn about their personal and professional lives. Bennett tape-recorded their stories, which he later used as raw material for A Chorus Line. His concept for the show was simple. Dancers, in an attempt to fulfill their dreams, audition for a spot in the chorus of a Broadway show. In the end, some dancers prevail while others are rejected. However, the show's primary impact on its audience comes not from the final decision, but from our experience of their collective journey – a journey that conveys what it means to face incredible obstacles, risk rejection, and do something purely for the love of it.

The cast, designers, and various crews have worked hard on this production of A Chorus Line, but it has been a labor of love. Those wishing a professional career in theatre, dance, or music face challenges as great as those that existed more than thirty years ago. They still put themselves on the "line" and take formidable risks to do so. They do so in the name of love and this production of A Chorus Line honors them and that same indefatigable spirit in each of us.

Robert J. Ball, Director

**Texas State Department of Theatre and Dance
would like to thank the following:**

Hofmann's Supply
Solana Bolton
Bill Mester and Stage Tech, Inc.
Doug Skinner and the School of Music
Dean Richard Cheatham

The Cast

| | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Mark..... | John Boulanger |
| Bebe..... | Nicole Bennett |
| Larry..... | Jenny Anne Canfield |
| Jim..... | John Cheuvront |
| Roy..... | Travis Cornett |
| Don..... | Brady Faucett |
| Frank..... | Frank Garcia |
| Diana..... | Noellia Hernandez |
| Maggie..... | English Hinojosa |
| Tom..... | Caleb Hugdens |
| Vicki..... | Whitney Hoy |
| Val..... | Jenny Joslin |
| Jill..... | Jillian Krametbauer |
| Kristine..... | Macey Mayfield |
| Leslie .. | Leslie Monge |
| Richie... .. | Jimmy Moore |
| Judy | Alicia Nelson |
| Zach..... | Wesley Riddle |
| Al..... | Joseph Ruel |
| Mike..... | Bobby Sands |
| Butch..... | Eleazar Santos |
| Lois..... | Debbie Swann |
| Cassie | Christine Tucker |
| Sherla..... | Catlin Uhlig |
| Greg..... | Anthony Vargas |
| Connie..... | Celeste Villarreal |
| Bobby. . . | Tyler Wallach |
| Paul..... | Richie Wilcox |

Time: The Present

Place: The action takes place in a New York City theatre being used for the final audition of a Broadway chorus line as well as in the minds of the dancers

**The play will be performed with one 15 minute intermission.
Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, and electronic watches.
Please no flash photography or recording devices.**

A Chorus Line contains adult language which may not be appropriate for children. Portions of the choreography for this production are based on the original choreography by Michael Bennett.

Musical Numbers

ACT I

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| I Hope I Get It | Company |
| I Can Do That | Mike |
| At the Ballet | Sheila, Bebe, Maggie |
| Sing..... | Kristine, Al & Company |
| Montage – Part 1 (“Hello Twelve”)..... | Mark, Connie & Company |
| Montage – Part 2 (“Nothing”)..... | Diana & Company |
| Montage – Part 3 (“Mother”)..... | Don, Judy, Company |
| Montage – Part 4..... | Greg, Richie & Company |
| Dance 10; Looks 3. | Val |

Intermission

ACT II

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| The Music and the Mirror. | Cassie |
| One..... | Company |
| The Tap Dance..... | Company |
| What I Did For Love | Diana & Company |
| Bows..... | Company |

Band

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Musical Director/Keyboard II..... | Gordon Jones |
| Keyboard I..... | Blaine Hollub |
| Bass..... | Matt Moreno |
| Drums..... | Atkins Fleming |
| Reeds I | Janelle Martin |
| Reeds II | Ty Reagan |
| Reeds III..... | Ricky Hall |
| Trumpet I..... | McChelle Zientek |
| Trumpet II..... | Tim Hurlburt |
| Trombone I..... | Max Garza |
| Trombone II..... | Scott Harrison |

About the Company

Robert Ball (Director) is an Associate Professor of Theatre Arts at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas. Robert, who holds a B.F.A degree in Acting, an M.F.A degree in Directing and a PhD in Theatre History and Criticism, is a two-time recipient of an award for “Outstanding Teaching” of undergraduate students at Vanderbilt University. He has acted on professional theatre stages in New York, Chicago, and on national and international tours as well as having directed numerous plays and musicals for both professional and university theatres. Robert is also the co-author of The Essential Theatre and the co-editor of Plays for the Theatre, both in their ninth editions, with his long-time friend and mentor Dr. Oscar G. Brockett

Nicole Bennett (Bebe) is a freshman Musical Theatre candidate from Seguin, Texas. At Seguin High School, Nicole was seen in High School Musical, Charlotte’s Web, Godspell and My Fair Lady with the Seguin Art Center.

John Boulanger (Mark) is a first-year Masters student studying playwriting. John received his B.F.A. in Directing from Texas State University where he also was seen on the Mainstage in Learned Ladies and Marisol. He has also appeared in the Zachary Scott Theatre production of The Buddy Holly Story as Ritchie Valens. John has had several of his plays produced by various theatre companies, and has been selected to attend the Stratford Study Abroad Program for the upcoming summer.

Jan-Allen Bowley (Lighting Designer) is a senior B.F.A. Design & Technology major from San Antonio, Texas. After transferring from U.T. San Antonio, Jan served as the Intelligent Lights Coordinator for The Rocky Horror Show, as well as the Master Electrician for Much Ado About Nothing.

Jenny Anne Canfield (Larrie) is a junior B.F.A. Musical Theatre major from Bedford, Texas. She has been seen in The Rover and The Rocky Horror Show on the Mainstage, as well as W.A.S.P. for the At-Random Theatre Company. Jenny Anne is also the Vice President of Alpha Psi Omega.

John Chevront (Jim) is a B.F.A. Acting senior from San Antonio, Texas. John has been seen on the Mainstage in Much Ado About Nothing and The Night of the Iguana.

Travis Cornett (Roy) is a freshman Acting candidate from Corpus Christi, Texas. He has been seen in various musicals including Oklahoma! and Godspell for the Harbor Playhouse in Corpus Christi.

Brady Faucett (Don) is a B.F.A. Acting senior from Belton, Texas. Brady has been seen in Move Over Mrs. Markham, The Rocky Horror Show, The Next Amendment, and Candlestein all on the Mainstage. Brady is a member of Alpha Psi Omega, and participated in the Stratford Study Abroad program.

Ashley Frith (Scenic Designer) is a B.F.A. Design & Technology senior from Houston, Texas. Ashley has painted for the Mainstage on Much Ado About Nothing, The Rocky Horror Show, The Night of the Iguana, and was the Scenic Designer for Move Over Mrs. Markham.

Frank Garcia (Frank) is a Sophomore at Texas State University from El Paso, Texas. Frank has appeared with the Emerald Players in several productions including Seussical, The Royal Gambit, Into the Woods, and Love's Labour's Lost.

David Gibson (Stage Manager) is in the B.F.A. Technology and Design program. Prior to Texas State University, he attended Richland College in Dallas, Texas. Last spring, David was Assistant Stage Manager for Much Ado About Nothing. At Richland, he designed lights for One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and several dance shows. He has also stage managed Seussical, the Musical. In 2004, he received an ACTF award for his sound design of Time of Your Life. He also was awarded an International Thespian Honor Award in May of 2004. He worked as a professional stage hand at the Eisemann Center in Richardson. David knows that his future lies in Technical Theatre and plans to become a professional stage manager and lighting designer.

Noellia Hernandez (Diana) is a B.F.A. Performance & Production junior from Round Rock, Texas. Noellia has worked for several different theatre companies on numerous shows including Jesus Christ Superstar, Romeo & Juliet, Dollywood, and An Arabian Midsummer Night's Dream. She is the choreographer for Mother of Invention Productions.

English Hinojosa (Maggie) is a B.F.A. Acting major from La Porte, Texas. English has been seen on the Mainstage in The Rocky Horror Show, as well as the At-Random production of Welcome to the Sandbox. English is involved with the Mitte Honors Program and is a member of Alpha Psi Omega.

Whitney Hoy (Vicki) is a junior B.F.A. Acting major. This Weatherford native last appeared on the Texas State Mainstage as Hero in Much Ado About Nothing. She also was seen in The Children's Hour, and Absurd Person Singular for the At-Random Theatre Company. Whitney is also a member of Alpha Psi Omega.

Caleb J. Hudgens (Tom) is a sophomore from Haskell, Texas majoring in both English and Mass Communications with a minor in Theatre. Caleb participated in the Texas State entry to the Austin-based 365 Days, 365 Plays Festival, and was recently seen in The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas for the New Braunfels Theatre Company.

Gordon Jones (Musical Director) is a music educator, composer, and world music practitioner. In 2001, he moved to Texas from his native UK, where he had taught in universities for 25 years. He now teaches in both Music and Dance departments at Texas State, and has served as musical director for many Theatre Department productions. Gordon freely admits to being a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. He has composed, directed, choreographed, performed, written and occasionally bluffed his way through a mountain of projects, ranging from large-scale music-theatre works to a book on Balinese music.

Jenny Joslin (Val) is a B.F.A. Acting junior from Longview, Texas. On the Mainstage Jenny was seen in last season's Much Ado About Nothing as well as Absurd Person Singular for the At-Random Theatre Company.

Jillian Krametbauer (Jill) is a senior B.F.A. Acting major from Houston. Jillian has been seen in the children's theatre production of Candlestein, and in the 2005 Black & Latino Playwrights Conference. Her portrayal of the Nun in Much Ado About Nothing won her the award for Best Actress in a Minor Role at the 2007 Ramsey Awards. She has also been nominated for an Irene Ryan Award for her role as Gwendolen in The Importance of Being Earnest.

Macey Mayfield (Kristine) is a junior B.F.A. Acting major from Mansfield, Texas. Recently, Macey was seen in My Favorite Year for Zilker Theatre Productions. At Texas State, Macey has appeared in The Rocky Horror Show, The Next Amendment, and The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek.

Melissa Moncus (Choreographer) graduated from Southwest Texas State in 1986 with a B.F.A. in Theatre where she played leads in Amanda, Hair, and several children's shows. After graduation, she started a professional career in Florida where a favorite role was Anita in West Side Story. Later she moved back to Texas and opened a ballet academy in Kerrville. Melissa has choreographed several productions for Texas State including Chicago, A Little Night Music, The Next Amendment, and The Rocky Horror Show. She is currently working on a Master's degree in education at Texas State University.

Leslie Monge (Leslie) is a junior transfer student from Blinn College. She has been seen in The Night of the Iguana as Frau and in Sweeney Todd as the Beggar Woman.

Abbey Moore (Costume Designer) is a senior B.F.A. Design/ Tech major from College Station, Texas. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies from Newcomb College at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. While working towards her B.A. at Tulane, Abbey worked as a stitcher and costume shop assistant in the theatre department, making costumes for A Comedy of Errors, Trojan Women, Queen Christina, and Working: A Musical, among many others. During the summers of 2001 and 2002, she worked as a stitcher and costume shop assistant on My Fair Lady, Annie, The Will Rogers Follies, Annie Get Your Gun, Victor/Victoria, and Phantom, at the Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre. While at Texas State, Abbey has been the Assistant Stage Manager for The Night of the Iguana, a stitcher and dresser for The Rocky Horror Show, and costume design assistant on Much Ado About Nothing.

Jimmy Moore (Richie) is a B.F.A. Performance & Production senior from San Antonio, Texas. He has been seen on the Mainstage as Riff-Raff in The Rocky Horror Show, and as Sydney in The Next Amendment. This is Jimmy's farewell performance, as he will graduate in December.

Alicia Yvonne Nelson (Judy) is a junior B.F.A. Musical Theatre major from Houston, Texas. Alicia was seen in The Next Amendment on the Mainstage, and Picasso at the Lapin Agile for the At-Random Theatre Company. Alicia is a member of Alpha Psi Omega and a Friends of Fine Arts scholarship recipient.

Wesley Powell Riddle (Zach) is a junior Theatre major. He has been seen in The Rocky Horror Show and The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek.

Joseph Ruel (Al) is a sophomore Musical Theatre candidate from Pharr, Texas. He has been seen in Much Ado About Nothing and The Rocky Horror Show at Texas State University. His most recent stage appearance was in the Riverside Theatre in Vero Beach where he played Joseph in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.

Bobby Dale Sands (Mike, Dance Captain) is a Theatre major from Snyder, Texas. Bobby was seen in MCC's productions of You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown and Ramayana, and was most recently seen in The Rocky Horror Show at Texas State University.

Eleazar L. Santos (Butch) is a Freshman Music-Vocal Performance major from San Antonio, Texas. In high school, Eleazar played in Take It Easy, Annie, As Bees in Honey Drown, and Harvey and Five Kinds of Silence. This is Eleazar's Texas State debut.

Debbie Swann (Lois) is a Master's Directing student from McAllen, Texas. She received her Bachelor's in Theatre and English from Kansas State University. She appeared in Grease, Pippin, Macbeth, and The Vagina Monologues at KSU. Debbie will be directing the upcoming Texas State production of The Memory of Water.

Christine Tucker (Cassie) is a freshman Musical Theatre candidate from Sugar Land, Texas. Christine has worked on Soldadera, A Piece of My Heart, and Pirates of Penzance for the Ranger Theatre Company.

Catlin Uhlig (Sheila) is a junior from Sugar Land, Texas. This B.F.A. Acting major has been seen in The Children's Hour for the At-Random Theatre Company as well as The Mariner, The Music Man, and The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe for the AHS Playhouse. Most recently, Catlin participated in the Austin-based Artspark Festival in The Bohemian Project.

Anthony Vargas (Greg) is a freshman Musical Theatre candidate from McAllen, Texas. In high school, Anthony played in Oklahoma!, The Music Man, and Once Upon a Mattress. This is Anthony's Texas State debut.

Celeste Villareal (Connie) is a freshman Respiratory Care major from Houston, Texas. Celeste recently appeared in Joseph & the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat as well as Necessary Targets for the Emily Ann Theatre.

Tyler Bentley Wallach (Bobby) is a sophomore Musical Theatre candidate from Houston, Texas. At Texas State University, Tyler has been seen in the Mainstage productions of The Rocky Horror Show and Move Over Mrs. Markham. Tyler is a member of Alpha Psi Omega and has been nominated for an Irene Ryan Award and a Tommy Tune Award for Best Actor.

Richie Wilcox (Paul) is a Master's Directing student from New Waterford, Nova Scotia. Richie received his Bachelor's degree in Theatre Studies from the University of King's College. He has appeared in numerous productions for various theatres, which include Lonesome West, Oliver, Annie, and Triumph of Joe T. Richie was recently awarded the 2007 Mayor's Award for Emerging Theatre Artist in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Guest Director Program

To recognize our colleagues across campus who have helped enrich the academic life of Texas State students, we have instituted a guest director program. Each "guest director" receives a backstage tour, cast photo, and complimentary tickets. Thus far, our guest directors for the 2007-2008 season have been:

The Importance of Being Earnest:

Dr. Pam Wuestenberg, Director of University Seminar

A Chorus Line:

Ms. Carolyn McCall, Director of the Center for Student and Professional Services

Production Staff

Assistant Stage Managers.....Rebecca Brummett & Erin Dodd
Text, Voice & Dialect Advisor.....Melissa Grogan
Band Manager.....Rebecca Brummett

Costumes

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Costume Faculty Supervisor..... | Sheila Hargett |
| Cutter/Draper..... | Homa Khosh-Khui |
| Costume Shop Manager..... | Lindsay D. Jones |
| Costume Design Assistant..... | Tiffany Harris |
| Graduate Student Assistant..... | Lela Holt |
| Costume Shop Assistants..... | Glenda Barnes, Staci Bell, Rachel Brown, Stacy Davis, Diana Dearman, Erin Dodd, Caitlin Hales, Fumiyu Hamada, Tiffany Harris, April Martin, Amanda Mendoza, Abbey Moore, Claudia Pinon, Samantha Saucedo |
| Wardrobe Supervisor..... | Tiffany Harris |
| Wardrobe Running Crew..... | TH 3344 Class |

Lighting

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Lighting Faculty Supervisor..... | Darren McCroom |
| Master Electrician..... | Carley Brock |
| Lighting Assistants..... | Jan-Allen Bowley, David Gibson, Carley Brock, Robert Peterson |
| Light Board Operator..... | Miriah Borden |
| Lighting Crew..... | TH 2338 Class |

Props

Properties Master.....Kelsey Boute
Properties Running Crew.....TH 2111 Class

Scenery

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Set Design Faculty Supervisor..... | Michelle Ney |
| Technical Director..... | Shane K. Smith |
| Scene Shop Supervisor | Dwight Markus |
| Assistant Technical Director..... | Joshua Austin |
| Scene Shop Assistants..... | Karen Arredondo, Joshua Austin, |

Kelsey Boutte, Mark Fowler, Ashley Frith,
Kyle Moore, Bobb Nelson, Vanessa Velasquez,
Jade White

Scenic Artists.....Vanessa Velasquez, Karen Arredondo,
Ashley Frith

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Construction Crew..... | TH 1358 Class |
| Scenery Running Crew..... | TH 2111 Class |

Sound

Sound Engineer.....Robert Peterson
Sound Board Operator / Mixer.....TH 2111 Class

Front of House

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Poster Design/Program Cover..... | Will Roman & Steven Skadal |
| Publicity..... | Lori Smith |
| Publicity Assistant..... | Stephen Wood |
| Box Office Manager..... | John Boyd |
| House Manager..... | John Iverson |

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Friend (\$50-99)

Lunelle Anderson
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 Phillip J. Hudson
 Jeffrey Hunter

2007–2008 Mainstage Season**The Importance of Being Earnest** by Oscar Wilde

Directed by Richard Soddors

October 2–6 at 7 30 pm, October 7 at 2 00 pm

A Chorus Line

A musical by Michael Bennett, Music by Marvin Hamlisch

Directed by Robert Ball

November 13–18 at 7 30 pm, November 17, 18 at 2 00 pm

The Piano Lesson by August Wilson

Directed by Christine Menzies

February 19–23 at 7 30 pm, February 24 at 2 00 pm

The Caucasian Chalk Circle by Bertolt Brecht

Directed by Michael Costello

April 8–12 at 7 30 pm, April 13 at 2 00 pm

Backyard Story by Charles Pascoe

Directed by Charles Pascoe

April 22–26 at 7 30 pm, April 27 at 2 00 pm

2007-2008 PSH Foundation Studio Theatre Season**Texas State Black and Latino Playwrights Conference**

Sept 14 at 7 30 pm, Sept 15 at 2 00 pm & 7 30 pm, Sept 16 at 2 00 pm

Fuddy Meers by David Lindsay-Abaie

Directed by Eleisa Jordan

October 18–20 at 7 30 pm, October 21 at 2 00 pm

Suburbia by Eric Bogosian

Directed by Mandi Tapia

October 25–27 at 7 30 pm, October 28 at 2 00 pm

Low in the Dark by Mauna Carr

Directed by Richie Wilcox

January 31–February 1 at 7 30 pm, February 2 at 2 00 pm

The Memory of Water by Shelagh Stephenson

Directed by Debbie Swann

February 7–9 at 7 30 pm, February 10 at 2 00 pm

For more information call the Box Office at 512-245-2204

Due to illness the character of “Mike” which was to be played by

Bobby Sands,

will be played by Tyler Wallach.

The character “Bobby” no longer appears in this production of

A Chorus Line.

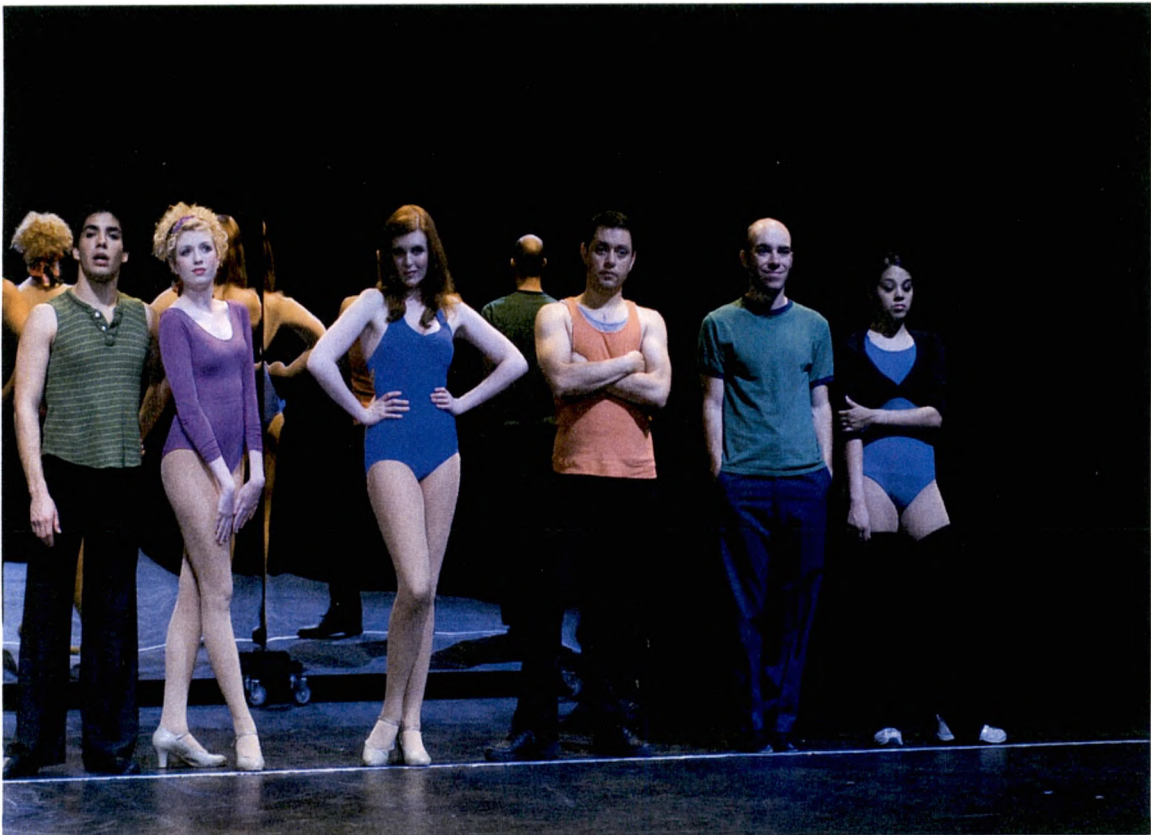
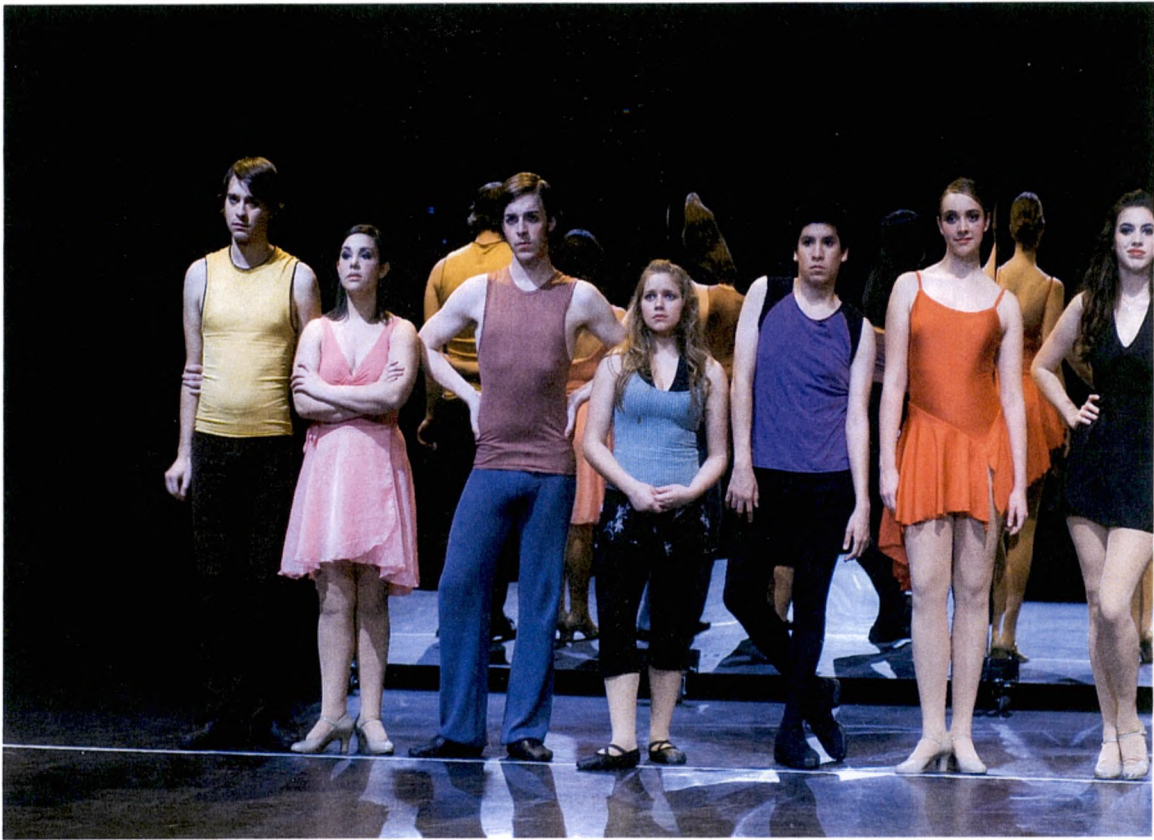
We wish Bobby Sands a quick and complete recovery.

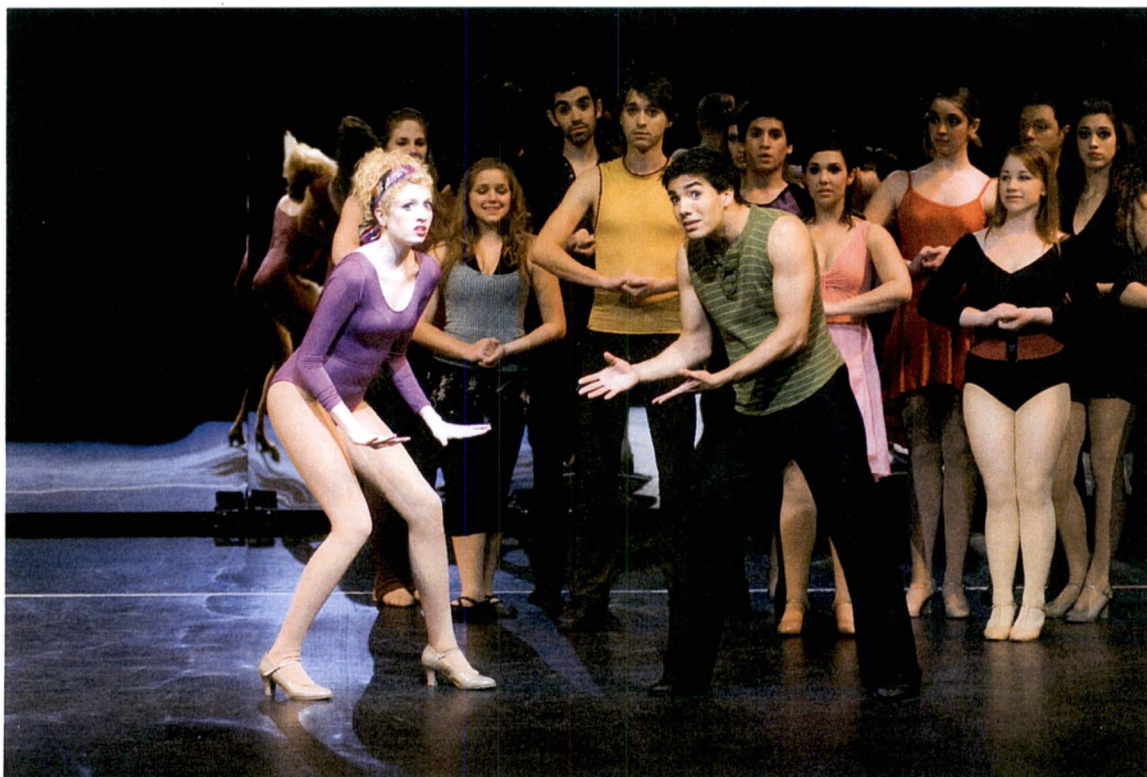
APPENDIX E

PRODUCTION PHOTOS













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