



The Guide to Musical Theatre

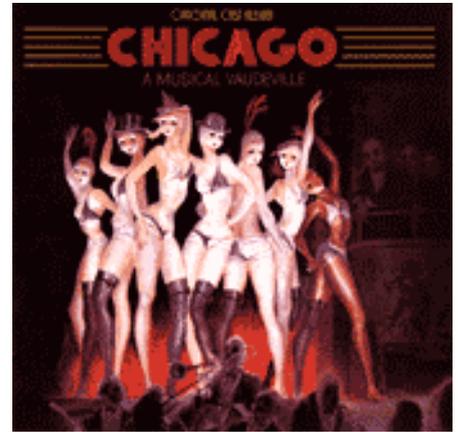
CHICAGO

Book by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse: Music by John Kander: Lyrics by Fred Ebb

Based on the play Chicago by Maurine Dallas Watkins

Produced in London, 1979 and revised in 1997

46th Street Theatre 3 June 1975 (898 perfs)



SYNOPSIS:

In razzle-dazzle, roaring twenties Chicago, Roxie Hart, married chorine, murders a faithless lover. Roxie and a sister murderess, Velma Kelly, are both headline hunters seeking to capitalise on pre-trial publicity for the sake of acquittal and stage careers. The story is told through a succession of vaudeville acts: Roxie's pre-trial prison career, the trial itself in which she is defended by the slickest lawyer in town, and her acquittal and return to obscurity

Chicago is a story of murder, greed, corruption, violence, exploitation, adultery, and treachery-all those things we hold near and dear to our heart. It is jurisprudence-as-showbusiness and trial-by-publicity. It is a tale of the sensational murderess Velma Kelly, the reigning queen of the Cook County jail, and Roxie Hart, the newest of the merry murderesses, who, of course, haven't really committed any crime (their men had it coming).

Velma won't give Roxie the time of day, so she turns to the jailhouse matron for advice. For a small bribe, the matron tips Roxie to Billy Flynn, the legal Mr. Fix-it, who knows everything about women, juries, and how to weave sympathy into the press conferences he holds for his clients. As her mouthpiece (using her as a ventriloquist's dummy), Billy pulls the strings that make Roxie the new queen of the self-defence killers.

Since no woman has been hanged in Cook County in 47 years, it seems only a short time until she can parlay all the publicity into vaudeville stardom. Roxie has bumped Velma off the front pages, stolen her lawyer, even her court date. Now, Velma tries to persuade Roxie to do a sister act.

Remembering her treatment earlier, Roxie returns the cold shoulder. Roxie is a star, a single, until Go-to-Hell Kitty, the most sensuous murderess yet, comes on the scene. Roxie, realising she could quickly lose all she has gained, faints and announces that she is going to have a baby. Refusing to go along with the courthouse charade, an innocent girl is found guilty and hanged-breaking the 47 year tradition. Velma and Roxie both panic and plead with Billy to get their cases over with in a hurry.

They are found innocent, of course, but at the moment of Roxie's triumph another woman shoots up the courthouse and steals all the headlines. Roxie and Velma shrug as if to say That's show biz and decide to salvage as much publicity as they can by doing the sister act-and all that jazz!

STORY

Act I

Velma Kelly is a vaudevillian who welcomes the audience to tonight's show ("All That Jazz"). Interplayed with the opening number, the scene cuts to February 14, 1928 in the bedroom of chorus girl Roxie Hart, where she murders Fred Casely as he attempts to break off an affair with her.

Roxie convinces her husband Amos that the victim was a burglar, and Amos agrees to take the blame. Roxie expresses her appreciation of her husband's willingness to do anything for her ("Funny Honey"). However, when the police mention the deceased's name, Amos belatedly realizes that Roxie has lied to him. Roxie, feeling betrayed, confesses and is arrested. She is sent to the women's block in the Cook County Jail, where several women accused of killing their lovers are held ("Cell Block Tango"); among the inmates is Velma Kelly, revealing herself to have been involved in the death of her husband and sister, though she denies committing the act. The block is presided over by Matron "Mama" Morton, whose system of taking bribes ("When You're Good to Mama") perfectly suits her clientele. She has helped Velma become the media's top murderer-of-the-week and is acting as a booking agent for Velma's big return to vaudeville.

Velma is not happy to see Roxie, who is stealing not only her limelight but also her lawyer, Billy Flynn. Roxie convinces Amos to pay for Billy Flynn to be her lawyer ("A Tap Dance"), though Amos lacks the funds. Eagerly awaited by his all-woman clientele, Billy sings his anthem, complete with a chorus of fan dancers ("All I Care About"). Billy takes Roxie's case before realizing Amos doesn't have the money; to make up the difference, he turns the case into a media circus and rearranges her story for consumption by sympathetic tabloid columnist Mary Sunshine ("A Little Bit of Good"), hoping to sell proceeds in an auction. Roxie's press conference turns into a ventriloquist act, with Billy dictating a new version of the truth ("We Both Reached for the Gun") to the reporters while Roxie mouths the words.

Roxie becomes the most popular celebrity in Chicago, as she boastfully proclaims while planning for her future career in vaudeville ("Roxie"). As Roxie's fame grows, Velma's notoriety subsides, and in an act of desperation she tries to talk Roxie into recreating the sister act ("I Can't Do It Alone"). Roxie turns her down, only to find her own headlines replaced by the latest sordid crime of passion ("Chicago After Midnight"). Separately, Roxie and Velma realize there is no one they can count on but themselves ("My Own Best Friend"), and Roxie decides that being pregnant in prison would put her back on the front page.

Act II

Velma returns to introduce the opening act, resentful of Roxie's manipulation of the system ("I Know a Girl") and ability to seduce a doctor into saying Roxie is pregnant; as Roxie emerges, she sings gleefully of the future of her unborn (non-existent) child ("Me and My Baby"). Amos proudly claims paternity, but still, nobody notices him, and Billy exposes holes in Roxie's story by noting that she and Amos had not had sex in four months, meaning if she were pregnant, the child was not Amos's, in hopes that Amos will divorce her and look like a villain, which Amos almost does ("Mr. Cellophane"). Velma tries to show Billy all the tricks she has planned for her trial ("When Velma Takes the Stand"), which Roxie treats sceptically. Roxie, upset with being treated like a "common criminal" and considering herself a celebrity, has a heated argument with Billy and fires him; Billy warns her that her kind of celebrity is fleeting and that she would be just as famous hanging from a noose. At that moment, Roxie witnesses one of her fellow inmates, a Hungarian woman who insisted her innocence but could not speak English and whose public lawyer refused to defend her, as she is hanged ("Hungarian Rope Trick").

The trial date arrives, and the now freshly terrified Roxie runs back to Billy, who calms Roxie by suggesting she will be fine so long as she makes a show of the trial ("Razzle Dazzle"). Billy uses Amos as a pawn, turning around and insisting that Amos is the father of Roxie's child. Roxie steals all of Velma's schtick, down to the rhinestone garter, to the dismay of Mama and Velma ("Class"). As promised, Billy gets Roxie acquitted, but just as the verdict is announced, some even more sensational crime pulls the press away, and Roxie's fleeting celebrity life is over. Billy leaves, done with the case, admitting that he only did it for the money. Amos tries to get Roxie to come home and forget the ordeal, but she is more concerned with the end of her brief run of fame and admits she is not pregnant, leaving Amos in the dust.

The final scene cuts to a Chicago vaudeville theatre, where Roxie and Velma (acquitted off-stage) are performing a new act in which they bittersweetly sing about modern life ("Nowadays"). The former Mary Sunshine, revealed during the trial to actually be a man in drag, takes his natural male form as a pushy vaudeville promoter, shaping Roxie and Velma's dance ("Hot Honey Rag") to make it as sexy as possible. The show ends with a brief finale ("Finale").

Musical Numbers:

1. Overture – Orchestra
2. All That Jazz – Velma Kelly and Company
3. Funny Honey – Roxie Hart, Amos Hart and Sergeant Fogarty
4. Cell Block Tango – Velma and the Murdresses
5. When You're Good to Mama – Matron Mama Morton
6. All I Care About – Billy Flynn and the Girls
7. A Little Bit of Good – Mary Sunshine
8. We Both Reached for the Gun – Billy, Roxie, Mary and the Reporters
9. Roxie – Roxie and the Boys
10. I Can't Do It Alone – Velma
11. Chicago After Midnight – Orchestra
12. My Own Best Friend – Roxie and Velma Act 2
13. Entr'acte – Orchestra
14. I Know a Girl – Velma
15. Me and My Baby – Roxie and Company
16. Mr. Cellophane – Amos
17. When Velma Takes the Stand – Velma and the Boys
18. Razzle Dazzle – Billy and Company
19. Class – Velma and Mama Morton
20. Nowadays/Hot Honey Rag – Velma and Roxie
21. Finale – Company

“The unfailing brightness and sheer good fun of *Chicago* do nothing to disguise the satire at its core. This exuberant American musical... Its music and lyrics are at all times splendidly apt”... *Plays and Players*

CAST: 19 parts, 5 principals, (M9 F 10) 14 members of strong dance chorus who sing and double parts.

- Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly, featured dancers, act and sing.
- Billy, dashing, mature actor, sings.
- Matron, character woman with strong singing voice, dances.
- Amos Hart, character man, sings.

Smaller Roles

Liz, Annie, June, Hunyak, Mona

Four girls in the chorus are exceptional support dancers with good voices.

Choreography:

Jazz, tap, male striptease (to shorts), production numbers.

SETTING

One basic set to suggest various venues: Chicago, a bedroom, the jail, a Courtroom, etc.

SCENES AND SETS: 2 acts, a unit set. Billy's office fly-in, set pieces, jail bar units, courtroom, furniture on winch wagon units. Elevators, one large drum up center on platform level, and four small pivot drum elevators at the four corners of the center drum. Winch-driven wagon brings on the partial set units. "Chicago" logo scrim.

ORCHESTRATION

Reed 1 (soprano sax, alto sax, clarinet, piccolo), Reed 2 (soprano sax, tenor sax, piccolo, clarinet, bass clarinet), Reed 3 (soprano sax, tenor sax, clarinet, baritone sax, bass clarinet), Trumpets 1 & 2, Trombone 1, Trombone 2, Tuba/Bass, Banjo, Violin, Percussion, Keyboard 1, Keyboard 2, piano/conductor's score.

LIGHTING and SPECIAL EFFECTS

Tight, dramatic, colorful lighting throughout. Backstage follow spot. Neon signs: -Chicago-the late 20's" and "Roxie" in a rainbow (optional).

PERIOD and COSTUMES:

Chicago, Illinois, late 1920's. Extensive costuming to dress the bare unit set. Sequin dresses, satin teddies, striped net jail robes, black bikinis, black trench coats, black tights, vest and bowler, high button shoes, fleshcolored tights, G-strings, policeman's uniform, pinstripe suits (red, blue, and green), goldpatterned suit, brocade vests, wigs, lace dresses, female white tuxedo jackets, top hats and canes, wide-brimmed hats, body stockings, floral robes, work and casual clothes, clown pants, shirt, coat, and red clown shoes, celluloid collars for men, maternity dress, hanky and furs, female reporting dresses and suit, assorted leotards and flashy dresses, judge's robe.

DISCOGRAPHY:

- 1975 Original Broadway Cast Recording - Arista 07822-18952-2
- 1981 Original Australian Cast
- 1996 Broadway Revival
- 1998 London Cast
- 1997 Austrian (German language) Cast – Live Cast Album (with Anna Montanaro)
- 1999 Dutch Cast – Live Cast Album, 2 discs (with Pia Douwes)
- 2014 German Cast - Live Cast Album, Stuttgart, 1 disc with Nigel Casey, Lana Gordon, Carien Keizer