

SUBSCRIBER ENRICHMENT PACKET

A CHORUS LINE

book by James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante
music by Marvin Hamlisch, lyrics by Edward Kleban
originally co-choreographed by Bob Avian
original Broadway production produced by the
New York Shakespeare Festival,
Joseph Papp, Producer, in association with
Plum Productions, Inc.
directed by Eric Hill
choreography by Gerry McIntyre
musical direction by Steven Freeman

A CHORUS LINE: Celebrating Passion Against the Odds

There are few things theatre goers love more than bemoaning the ill “health” of the American theatre. Every year, the diagnosis is confidently proclaimed; “Broadway is dying!” While we tend to brush it off as mere dramatics, in 1975, this ominous prophecy seemed to be coming true. Broadway was not only plagued by financial hardship but seemed to be stuck in an artistic rut. Few at the time could have predicted that a musical without stars or flashy sets and about relative nobodies, Broadway’s chorus dancers, would revitalize and revolutionize Broadway and the American theatre.

The mastermind behind *A Chorus Line* was director and choreographer Michael Bennett who reportedly conceived of the project while sitting in his living room among a small circle of friends; dancers suffering endless auditions, nearly constant rejection, and relative anonymity. Bennett was inspired by the personal stories and struggles of these nameless and faceless workhorses of Broadway and began to recognize their potential as intriguing subject matter.

Soon after, Bennett invited dancers to participate in taped workshop “share” sessions, paying them one-hundred dollars a week for their participation. Bennett’s central vision for the project was captured on film during one of the first sessions. He explained to his fellow dancers in a tone that clearly captured his passion and excitement, “I really want to talk about us. I’m talking about an idea that I have for a show. It’s really about examining a group of people in society, and that’s us, Broadway’s actors. I’m also thinking, we’re pretty interesting, and I think that maybe there’s a show there. It should be called *A Chorus Line*.” Further, it was Bennett and his collaborators’ intention to not only give voice to the dancers they interviewed but to create a piece in which the characters would represent and acknowledge the contributions and sacrifices of the thousands of chorus dancers or “gypsies” who sacrificed their own ambitions and careers to support the star of the show, all for the love

JULY 02–JULY 21
AT THE COLONIAL THEATRE

conceived and originally directed and
choreographed by Michael Bennett
directed by Eric Hill
choreography by Gerry McIntyre
musical direction by Steven Freeman

9
TONY
AWARDS



DID YOU KNOW?

- The original production ran for 6,137 performances, becoming the longest-running production in Broadway history until it was surpassed by *Cats* in 1997. It remains the fifth longest-running Broadway show ever.

- Prior to the first performance the original company collectively had appeared in 72 Broadway shows, 17 national companies and 9 bus and truck tours in which they gave a total of 37,095 performances. Collectively they had 612 years of dance training with 748 teachers. They spent approximately \$894 a month on dance lessons. While performing they sustained 30 back, 26 knee and 36 ankle injuries.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The character of Paul was largely based on the life experiences of Nicholas Dante, one of the book writers of *A Chorus Line*.
- A Chorus Line* was one of the first musicals to address homosexuality in an open and accepting manner.
- In the workshop stages of the production, the performers who made the “line” changed with each performance. Reportedly, cast members were often hurt when they were not among the “chosen.” Now the names are pre-set.
- A Chorus Line* was the first show on Broadway to use computers in the control booth, as well as the first to provide a ASL-interpreted performance.

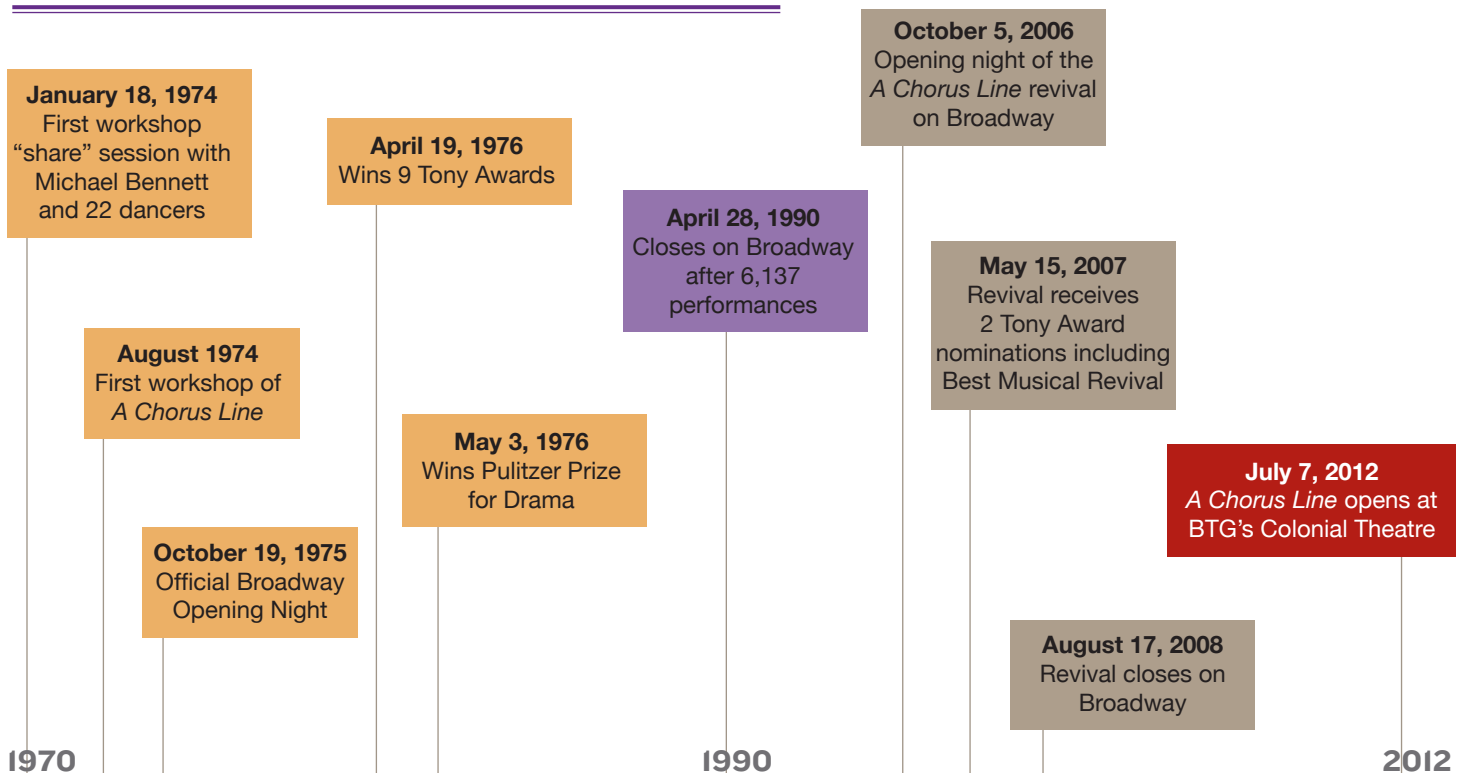
of their craft.

After buying the rights to the dancers’ stories and convincing Joseph Papp, of the Public Theater, to finance a workshop and develop a stage musical, Bennett’s vision became a reality. The resulting production quickly transferred to Broadway’s Shubert Theatre and, according to Shubert Organization chairman Gerald Schoenfeld, not only “totally changed the musical theater,” but catalyzed the improvement of the area. Audiences and critics flocked to this unlikely hit, which broke nearly every convention of the American musical genre both technically and stylistically. Martin Gottfried of the *New York Post* praised *A Chorus Line*, calling it “a dazzling show; driving, compassionate and finally thrilling. It is a major event in the development of the American Musical Theater.” The accolades continued as the unlikely musical received twelve Tony award nominations in 1976,

winning nine, including Best Musical. The creator of the production, Michael Bennett, took home dual Tonys for Best Choreography and Best Direction of a Musical. The ultimate honor came later that year when *A Chorus Line* took home the distinguished Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Unlike other shows that characterized 1970’s Broadway, *A Chorus Line*’s success could not be attributed to big-name stars, extravagant set pieces, or driving plot. Rather, the show’s appeal lay in its artistic innovation and its ability to provoke strong audience identification. Although Bennett sought to create a show about dancers, *A Chorus Line* is universally appealing. Donna McKechnie, who originated the role of Cassie, explained the extraordinary audience connection best when she said, “It’s about dreams. Everybody has dreams. We’re all in the chorus.” Indeed, *A Chorus Line* gives voice and encouragement to everyone who chooses to pursue their dreams and put themselves “on the line.”

A Chorus (Time) Line



Creative Team Comment on *A Chorus Line*

“ [A Chorus Line was] the first show my mother took me to see. That’s why I’m in show business, because of this show.

It changed my life”

-Gerry McIntyre, Choreographer



“ What we have to do is fulfill our own *emotional obligations* to the story which is, what we did for love.

That is the heart of the show”

-Eric Hill, Director

CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF *A Chorus Line*?

Join BTG in celebrating the legacy of one of America’s most groundbreaking musicals with a triple-threat of theatrical offerings throughout the month of July!

A Class Act

This small musical with a big heart is a tribute to the life and work of Edward Kleban, the lyricist of *A Chorus Line*. Nominated for 5 Tony Awards including Best Musical and 3 Drama Desk Awards, *A Class Act* explores the joy and struggle that go into making music soar.



At The Unicorn Theatre, Stockbridge

music and lyrics by Edward Kleban
book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price
originally directed on Broadway by Lonny Price
A Class Act was originally produced by Manhattan Theatre Club and previously developed by Musical Theatre Works.

directed by Robert Moss

Previews July 11–13;

Opens July 14 at 8pm; Runs through August 04

Tickets • Previews: \$35 All other performances: \$45

Donna McKechnie: My Musical Comedy Life



Tony Award-winning star of *A Chorus Line*, Donna McKechnie, brings her critically acclaimed cabaret show to Pittsfield’s Colonial Theatre. Don’t miss this opportunity to celebrate the best of musical theatre with one of Broadway’s foremost dancing and singing stars. One night only!

A Benefit Concert to Honor Larry Vaber At The Colonial Theatre

111 South St. Pittsfield, MA

July 28, 2012 at 8pm

Tickets: VIP: \$100 A: \$45 B: \$25

DID YOU KNOW?

•The profits of *A Chorus Line* funded The Public Theatre’s other work for 15 years.

•Donna McKechnie, who originated the role of Cassie, also provided inspiration for the characters of Cassie and Maggie.