



## Program Notes

When one thinks of the musical *Chicago*, a few associations instantly come to mind—the iconic opening vamp of “All That Jazz,” a wah-wah trumpet, a seductively subtle thrust of the hip. For many people, what comes to mind is simply a couple of finger snaps.

But behind all of these instantly recognizable images and sounds is a surprising history—in fact, the story of Roxie, Velma, Amos, Billy, and the Merry Murderesses of the Cook County Jail has been part of America’s collective cultural consciousness for nearly a *century*.

The story begins with—what else—murder. Or, rather, *alleged* murder. The unrelated murder trials of Beulah Annan and cabaret singer Belva Gaertner riveted the world of 1924 Chicago with their sensational, lurid details. This was in no small part thanks to intrepid journalist Maurine Dallas Watkins, who covered the trials breathlessly as a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*. The immense popularity of her columns and the circus-like atmosphere surrounding the trials prompted Watkins to write a satirical play inspired by these true events. Beulah and Belva became Roxie and Velma, and the rest is history.

After Watkins’s play *Chicago* had a healthy run on Broadway in 1926, it went on to become a silent film in 1927 and then a film vehicle for Ginger Rogers titled *Roxie Hart* in 1942. After John Kander, Fred Ebb, and Bob Fosse got their hands on the material and worked their unique brand of musical theatre magic, it became *Chicago: A Musical Vaudeville* in 1975. A modest success but critically underrated and misunderstood, the production was shut out at the Tony Awards, steamrolled by the far less cynical *A Chorus Line*. The show didn’t become a bonafide hit until 20 years later, when New York City Center’s Encores Series, in one of its first seasons, presented *Chicago* in concert to overwhelming acclaim, prompting Fran and Barry Weissler to move the production to Broadway in 1996. The Broadway revival triumphed at the box office and at the Tony Awards, making it clear that Chicago had finally become an essential part of the musical theatre canon. The revival has remained open ever since and is now the second longest-running Broadway production of all time. The sensational reception of the Broadway revival portended that numerous tours and international productions were not far behind. Even Hollywood came knocking—and before long, the 2002 motion picture adaptation of *Chicago* was sweeping the Oscars.

### PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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# *amp* | Program Material

This brings us to the present moment: *Chicago*, with its brilliant score and its ever-relevant story, has conquered Broadway, Hollywood, and the international stage. Now, composer John Kander has given us still *another* exciting chapter to add to this impressive history, providing the inspiration to revisit the score in a new medium—the symphony orchestra. Orchestrator Bill Elliott’s reimagined and deconstructed soundscape is full of surprises, providing a fresh perspective for approaching the music while still bolstering everything you know and love about the “Cell Block Tango,” “Mr. Cellophane,” “Nowadays,” and the rest of the dynamic score. Whether it is your first exposure or you are a long-time fan, this *Chicago* experience will have a special Razzle Dazzle for you quite unlike any other.

To make the alignment of talents even more serendipitous, this project has been spearheaded by none other than Rob Fisher, the same legendary conductor responsible for making the Encores production (and the Broadway revival it generated) possible in the first place. But you just can’t do it alone. Mr. Fisher, Mr. Kander, Mr. Elliott, and librettist Tom Thompson, have poured their passion for *Chicago* into creating this unique concert experience together.

“In fifty years or so, it’s gonna change you know,” Roxie and Velma sing with a bittersweet laugh. And yet, 95 years after the trials of Beulah Annan and Belva Gaertner, some things have not changed at all— toxic celebrity worship is still *en vogue*, the justice system is still eminently corruptible, and, of course, people still have a boundless capacity to con and be conned. In other words, it is no surprise that this electrifying tale of murder, greed, corruption, violence, exploitation, adultery and treachery is still very much near and dear to our hearts.

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