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Chicago Closes Out the 2004-2005 Season

By John Lieder and Joann Yant

"Ladies and gentlemen, you are about to see a story of murder, greed, corruption, violence, exploitation, adultery, and treachery – all those things we all hold near and dear to our hearts." So begins the next Players production, *Chicago – A Vaudeville Musical*. A bit of a departure from Players' standard fare, the production satirizes the judicial system and gives a nostalgic look back to the vaudeville era.

Directed by Alan Wilson, this production features Players veterans Kathy Taylor as Roxie Hart and Stuart Cartwright as Billy Flynn with newcomer Nancy Lamb as Velma Kelly. Supporting this trio are Evelyn Young as Matron Mama Morton, John Lieder as Amos Hart, J. R. Wright as Mary Sunshine and Bruce Parrish as Master of Ceremonies.

Choreographer Jessica Flowers (another Players newcomer!) and her talented troupe of dancers have been working hard to polish the many dance numbers. Flowers' choreography is in the style of Bob Fosse, but she injects her own creative flair into the design.

The multi-level set, designed and built by Cartwright, provides several areas for segregating the scenes, but also functions well as a unit set for the production numbers. The design keeps scene changes to a minimum.

Becky Marcotte (Guenevere in this season's *Camelot*), has provided vocal musical direction. Her husband, Dan, will lead the orchestra. Cathy Sutliff is Costume Designer.

The show contains some strong language, which Wilson has toned down to a degree, non-graphic violence, sexual humor and a costume design that is, well,

sexy. The 2002 movie version was rated "PG-13 for sexual content and dialogue, violence and thematic elements" (Internet Movie database). Similarly, this production may not be suitable for Junior High students and younger.

Opening on May 6, 2005, *Chicago* runs May 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22. As is Players' custom, performance times are 7:30 pm on Wednesday and Thursday, 8:00 pm on Friday and Saturday and 2:30 pm for Sunday matinees.

Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$13 for seniors or students with IDs and \$6 for children under 6. Tickets can be purchased by stopping by the box office or calling 309-663-2121. Box office hours are 1-5 pm starting May 2 and one hour prior to curtain.



Welcome to the first issue of the Community Players' newsletter! Our intent is to use this newsletter to keep the Players' membership posted on what's happening at Players. We'll provide you with directors' insights into coming productions, announcements of auditions, news from the Board of Directors, volunteer opportunities, some news from other theatre venues and other topics of interest.

We plan to publish an issue prior to each Players' production. We hope this will entice you to attend (if you don't already have season tickets!). This timing also works well to provide you with the information you need to prepare for auditions for the following show.

The editorial board includes Joann Yant (Membership Chairman), Jim Kalmbach and John Lieder. Take a gander at this issue and let us know what you think! Send email to lieder78@yahoo.com or drop a note to Newsletter, Community Players, 201 Robinhood Lane, Bloomington, IL 61701. Oh, and keep us posted if you're changing your address. Enjoy!

www.communityplayers.org

New York, New York!

Bob McLaughlin and Sally Parry recently spent several long weekends in New York. They offer this report on some of the theater they saw:

In January we had two-and-a-half days, not very long really, but plenty of time to see five plays, spend a lot of money, and exhaust ourselves. Most highly recommended is **The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee**, a new musical about, well, a spelling bee. Adults play the adolescent finalists, and some surprised audience members are called on to join the actors on stage and show the world how well they can spell. (Unfortunately, Sally and I were passed over.) As the contest proceeds, the characters learn about themselves and grow. The score is outstanding, and everything about the show is lose-control-of-your-bladder funny. We saw this Off-Broadway, but it has since transferred to Broadway's Circle in the Square Theater.

Also still running is **Little Women**, at the Virginia Theater, a musical adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's classic novel. This is one of the few times we've seen a musical whose second act was stronger than its first. In the second act, the scenes, songs, and actors hit all the emotional moments effectively, and Sutton Foster as Jo, calms down into a very fine performance. (In act 1 she tried way too hard to impress upon us that she's a tomboy.) The score is fine to listen to, but little of it stays in your mind after you hit 52nd Street. Our response was generally neutral: not much about the show was awful, but not much was terrific either.

The other plays we saw have since closed: **Souvenir**, a play about a real woman who, in the 1930s, was well known for singing badly—very funny and touching, with a wonderful performance by Judy Kaye; **Pacific Overtures**, a revival of Stephen Sondheim's 1976 musical about the opening of Japan—always great to see, but this production suffered in comparison with the original; **After the Ball**, the U.S. premiere of Noel Coward's musical adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windemere's Fan*—a very pretty score, very well sung and performed. We saw this last at the Irish Repertory Theater, a tiny spot on 23rd Street, and who came in and sat RIGHT NEXT TO US? Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward!

They say hi.

In March we got to make another quick trip during ISU's spring break. Most highly recommended is **Dessa Rose**, a new musical by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty (Ragtime) about a black woman who leads a slave rebellion and the white woman who helps her escape. Although the reviews were negative, we thought it had beautiful songs and amazing performances by LaChanze and Rachel York in the leading roles. Also beautifully done is **The Light in the Piazza**, Adam Guettel's (Richard Rodgers's grandson) new musical about an American woman and her mildly brain-damaged daughter on vacation in Venice. Elegant and leisurely, it becomes very powerful in the second act. Less highbrow is **Dirty Rotten Scoundrels**, based on the Steve Martin movie. It's very funny and very vulgar, sometimes at the same time. The best thing about it is Norbert Leo Butz's breakout performance in the Martin role. We also saw the New York City Opera production of **Candide** with John Cullum and Judy Kaye, now ended. As is often the case with this play, the people who can sing the score aren't always the best actors and the actors who capture the tongue-in-cheek acting can't always handle the singing. Still, a good, fun production.

The climax of this trip was **Wall-to-Wall Sondheim**, a twelve-hour concert in honor of Stephen Sondheim's 75th birthday. There were too many wonderful things to go into here, but it was among the neatest theatrical experiences of our lives.

We're planning on going back in June for the Tony Awards. More news then.



Wizard of Oz Auditions

Community Players will present 11 performances of L. Frank Baum's beloved classic "The Wizard of Oz" (based on the MGM film version) opening July 8th and closing July 24th.

Actors who wish to audition should come to the theater on May 16, 17, or 18 from 7:00 to 9:00 with a prepared song. An accompanist will be provided. Please be prepared to read from the script as well as sing.

Adults who are 18 and up are needed to play major roles (Glinda, the Scarecrow, the Wizard etc.) Young people who are 8 and up are encouraged to audition for the roles of the Munchkins and the residents of the Land of Oz.