

# A CHORUS LINE



**LEARNING  
PACK**





Photography by Marc Brenner

## HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document is designed to be a springboard to creative responses to the key issues and ideas raised in the musical *A Chorus Line*. Using the history and development of musical theatre as a form, the pack explores the historical context of the show, and then breaks the show into three key disciplines: acting, singing and dance. Each of these disciplines have ideas for creative activities that are designed to help and guide key curriculum focuses for KS 3–5 and Higher Education courses (such as foundation degrees in Musical Theatre or Drama).

Most of the exercises have three levels of working: beginner, intermediate and advanced. This is not necessarily designed to adhere strictly to KS 3–4 as beginner, 4–5 as intermediate and 5–HE as advanced, rather they are designed to challenge and inspire so any of them can be used to teach any level.

So much of *A Chorus Line* is about knowing the individuals who might fade into the background against a shiny star lead performer, but their contribution to the piece is vital and without them the show wouldn't exist. Because of this, this Learning Pack contains not only interviews with key creatives and cast members, but also with a whole range of people who are involved in putting a show of this scale together professionally. You will also find shorter FACT BOXES which contain small amounts of information to help clarify key concepts and people.

## SYNOPSIS

A group of Broadway performers are auditioning to be in the chorus of a new show. As they learn and perform the intense routines choreographed by the production's director, Zach, they are systematically 'cut' from the process and the remaining hopefuls get nearer to that all important job.

When only 17 dancers remain, Zach says he wants to get to know more about them and asks them to tell him their stories. Reluctantly they do. Their stories range from their first experience with dance to how Ballet is an escape from the tragedy of their home lives, from not being able to sing, to not getting into drama school.

On a break from the auditions, Cassie (an older dancer who has had some success as a solo artist), reveals that she and Zach had been in a relationship once, but she really wants to get this job as being in the chorus is what she does. In one exposing sequence Paul (a young dancer) tells Zach about the hardships he has experienced growing up and his sexuality.

During one of the routines Paul falls and damages his knee. He is taken off to hospital and the dancers are forced to reflect on how quickly their careers could end. Zach makes his final cut, and only the final eight dancers remain. Four boys and four girls that will never be recognised as individuals but give their life to Broadway.

## CHARACTERS

### ZACH

The imperious director running the audition.

### LARRY

Zach's assistant.

### DON KERR

A married man who once worked in a strip club.

### MAGGIE WINSLOW

A sweet woman who grew up in a broken home.

### MIKE COSTA

An aggressive dancer who learned to tap at an early age.

### CONNIE WONG

A petite Chinese American who seems ageless.

### GREG GARDNER

A sassy Jewish gay man who divulges his first experience with a woman.

### CASSIE FERGUSON

A once successful solo dancer down on her luck and a former love of Zach's.

### SHEILA BRYANT

A sassy, sexy, ageing dancer who tells of her unhappy childhood.

### BOBBY MILLS

Sheila's best friend who jokes about his conservative upbringing in Buffalo.

### BEBE BENZENHEIMER

A young dancer who only feels beautiful when she dances.

### JUDY TURNER

A tall, gawky, and quirky dancer.

### RICHIE WALTERS

An enthusiastic black man who once planned to be a kindergarten teacher.

### AL DELUCA

An Italian American who takes care of his wife.

### KRISTINE URICH DELUCA

Al's scatter-brained wife who can't sing.

### VAL CLARK

A foul-mouthed but excellent dancer who couldn't get performing jobs because of her looks until she had plastic surgery.

### MARK ANTHONY

The youngest dancer, who recounts the time he told his priest he thought he had gonorrhoea.

### PAUL SAN MARCO

A gay Puerto Rican who dropped out of high school and survived a troubled childhood.

### DIANA MORALES

Paul's friend, another Puerto Rican who was underestimated by her teachers.





# MUSICAL THEATRE HISTORY 1900-1975

Photography by Marc Brenner

At the turn of the 20th century there was one major form of theatrical entertainment that was making money and internationally successful: the British operetta! Derived from comic opera (and by association opera) operetta was a highly amusing, risqué and satirical form most well-known and associated with Gilbert and Sullivan. So successful were their operettas that one of their most famous, *The Mikado*, actually premiered on Broadway (after running for one night in England to secure the financial rights first). Their shows continued to be a mainstay in theatres next to Broadway's other popular entertainment, vaudeville. Much like the British music hall, vaudeville was a bit like *Britain's Got Talent* with singers, bands, novelty acts having their turn on the stage to perform for a rowdy paying audience. And it is within vaudeville that something extraordinary was happening which would change New York's cultural landscape forever.

**FACT BOX • TIN PAN ALLEY** The name given to a collection of New York city music publishers and songwriters who dominated American popular music form the late 1800s to the early 1900s.

Florenz Ziegfeld Jr had been to Paris and seen the famous Folies Bergère and wanted to bring that kind of show back to the USA, but he wanted it to glorify the American girl rather than the European one. He quickly went about creating an entirely repeatable show (rather than a vaudeville which might be different every night) in which glamour, extravagance and music was the order of the day. Ziegfeld found stars for his shows like Fanny Brice and Josephine Baker, and he was the first person to give a leading role to a black performer in a predominantly white show (Bert Williams). The Follies were spectacular, lavish and expensive, and people loved them.

**FACT BOX • JOSEPHINE BAKER (1906-1975)** American entertainer, French resistance fighter (WWII) and civil rights activist. She was the first black woman to star in a major motion picture.

Because Ziegfeld's Follies were so popular, he had in many ways made Manhattan the place to be for anyone who wanted a glamorous job. New ideas in art, literature and philosophy were rife, but it was the 'new music' coming out of Manhattan's Lower West Side that was particularly appealing. Anyone who was anyone and wanted work as a composer or performer came running to Manhattan. American composers drawn by this new music, ragtime, wanted to learn more about it, how to write it, and why it was just so darn popular! Ragtime music then developed into jazz and bands were writing it, playing it in shows and clubs. Audiences loved it and wanted it in all their entertainment. To keep up with popular demand the music publishing district, Tin Pan Alley, became THE place to be for a young composer. It was the beating heart of the music publishing industry where the new famous songs came from, and each building was filled with people writing music on pianos. In fact, it was the very place that a young George Gershwin went to immerse himself in this music. It was in Tin Pan Alley where the cultural black communities of Manhattan lived, is where the

Harlem renaissance started. The Harlem renaissance was a burgeoning of artistic creativity from the black community, predominantly happening in Harlem. It was where the likes of Josephine Baker, Ma Rainey, Langston Hughes, Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington crossed paths with the likes of The Gershwins, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter and Irvin Berlin. An explosion of creation where ideas were shared, assimilated and celebrated.

**FACT BOX • PAUL ROBESON (1898-1976)** American bass-baritone stage, concert and film actor who became famous for his cultural accomplishments (he was the original singer for Ol' Man River in both the stage and film version of *Show Boat!*) and his political activism.

Ziegfeld had spawned a string of imitators (there was a lot of money to be made from Follie style shows!) and by incorporating this new jazz style of music, large troupes of performers and the casual sprinkling of a flimsy plot, the 'American Musical Comedy' was born.

**FACT BOX • APPLAUSE!** Applauding in theatre to show appreciation is part of theatre life, however in the first production of *Show Boat!* The curtain fell on the final act, and there were no bows as audiences expected the cast to just stay on stage. This is why there was no applause, and why Zeigfeld thought his show had bombed! It was actually that audiences didn't realise they were meant to clap at that point!

It was here that Ziegfeld was approached by Jerome Kern and Lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II who had written the songs for a new show based on Edna Ferber's novel *Show Boat*. After hearing the songs for act 1 Ziegfeld, ever the risk taker, decided that he wanted to produce it. Broadway audiences expected pretty girls and a happy ending with their musical comedies, but this show was the opposite of that. Hammerstein, who had written the book and the lyrics, did not want flimsy plots, he wanted to find something more real, more like a play and he wanted the songs to be part of that. Ziegfeld got cold feet during rehearsals and attributed this to the dialogue sections between the songs (the play). What he wanted was to cut out these 'boring bits', but Kern and Hammerstein insisted they keep that dialogue, and therefore keep in the political and social relevance of the original stories. And so, on December 27th 1927 *Show Boat* opened at the Ziegfeld theatre on Broadway. As the curtain closed the audience remained in silence as they got up and walked out. Ziegfeld thought everything was lost, however the reviews were incredibly enthusiastic, the show sold out for over a year and the 'Book Musical' was born.

**FACT BOX • BOOK MUSICAL** A musical play where songs and dances are fully integrated with serious dramatic goals that is able to evoke genuine emotions other than laughter.







Photography by Marc Brenner



Broadway was booming, and then in 1929 everything changed. The Wall Street crash brought this multi-million-dollar business to an abrupt close. Actors left to seek their glory in Hollywood (which was relying on Musical Comedy for most of its big pictures). The money to make shows did dry up, however because such large sums of money weren't at stake, theatre composers and writers had greater creative freedom and weren't being forced to write another popular comedy, a review, or another Follie. This newfound freedom allowed the Gershwins to write *Of Thee I Sing* (a musical lampooning American politics) which won the 1932 Pulitzer prize, and George's masterwork *Porgy and Bess*, the first all-black opera.

**FACT BOX • PULITZER PRIZE** An award for achievements in newspaper/magazine/online journalism, literature and musical composition within the United States. The only people eligible for the award are those born in the USA. To Date 10 musicals have won the award, *Of Thee I Sing* (1932), *South Pacific* (1950), *Fiorello!* (1960), *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1960), *A Chorus Line* (1976), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1985), *RENT* (1996), *Next to Normal* (2010), *Hamilton* (2016) and *A Strange Loop* (2020). Although it did not win an award, *Oklahoma!* was awarded a special Pulitzer in 1944.

In the early 1940's Oscar Hammerstein II was 47 years old. He was a has-been whose work just wasn't that interesting anymore. He was trying to write a musical based on Bizet's opera *Carmen*, for an all-black cast, but it wasn't going very well. He had, however, found Lynn Riggs play *Green Grow the Lilacs* which he wanted to make into a book musical, but his writing partner Jerome Kern had no interest in doing it. Lorenz Hart (who at this time was a very ill man, but a very successful composer of book musical comedies) pointed Hammerstein in the direction of his long-time collaborator Richard Rogers. Hammerstein told Rogers that he really wanted to push the idea that the libretto and the lyrics were all about storytelling, that they revealed character and were written concurrently with the music. The usual way of making musical comedy was music first (to write the hits!) then script later. Rogers was extremely interested in this proposition, and they entered into an experimental process to create their new show. In production they brought in admired choreographer Agnes De Mille. In one section Rogers and Hammerstein were trying to work out how to communicate Laurey (the female lead's) predicament of wanting to be with Curley (our male lead) but knowing Jud (the antagonist) wants her too and her terror of that. Rogers composed a long section of music which they decided should be a dance section. It was from this that De Mille revolutionised the relevance of dance as storytelling in musical theatre. The 'dream ballet' sequence was the first of its kind, and the dance she created showed Laurey's fears and insecurities in a nightmare sequence with no verbal communication. Dance had only ever been like window dressing before on Broadway, big tap numbers, jaunty dance crazes writ large on the stage, but De Mille changed that forever by making dance an integral part of the narrative. The show they created was *Oklahoma!*. It was a smash hit, and the first in Rogers and Hammerstein's extraordinary collaboration. Songs with meaning, shows that discussed things

like patriotism, fascism, racism and colonialism. These were serious stories for serious Broadway audiences. Without *Oklahoma!* We wouldn't have shows like *The Pajama Game*, *Guys and Dolls*, *My Fair Lady* or *Brigadoon*. The simple act of integrating music, drama and song had created what we know as "The Musical".

**FACT BOX • AGNES DE MILLE (1905-1993)** American dancer and choreographer. Famous for creating the first ballet to contain only dancers of Black American origin and integrating narrative dance into Broadway musicals. She was the daughter of William C. deMille and niece of Cecile B. deMille, both Hollywood Film directors.

Rogers & Hammerstein's legacy to the Broadway musical remains: what had started as an experimental process became the only way to write musicals for decades, and to a certain extent is how most musicals are judged as 'good or bad' to this very day.

**FACT BOX • HAL PRINCE (1928-2019)** Director and producer of some of the greatest and most successful musical theatre shows of all time. Most notably, *West Side Story*, *Cabaret*, *Sweeney Todd* and *The Phantom of the Opera*.

The first great extension of the integrated musical was conceived by the choreographer Jerome Robbins. He had been working on a contemporary version of *Romeo and Juliet* between Irish Catholic and Jewish immigrants into New York in the 1950's. This was eventually changed by book writer Arthur Laurents to be white blue-collar workers and Puerto Rican immigrants. What Robbins explored in this was an extension of De Mille's work in *Oklahoma!* that dance played a much larger and important part of the story telling. In the extended dance sequences of his and Bernstein's *West Side Story* he created something that nobody had ever seen before, strange angels, violence, threat and everything served the purpose of telling the story. Robbins also acted as director AND choreographer (the first instance of this happening in a Broadway show), and he insisted on casting what we now know as a triple threat in all the roles, highly unusual at the time (The first time that an actor sang and danced the complete role of Laurey in *Oklahoma!*, including the dream ballet, was Josefina Gabrielle in the 1998 National Theatre version!). These dances were immortalised in Robbins' movie version for which he won an academy award for Best Director.

**FACT BOX • JEROME ROBBINS (1918-1998)** American choreographer, director, dancer and producer who worked in classical ballet, stage, film and television. Notable works include *West Side Story*, *The King and I* and *Fiddler on the Roof*.

It wasn't until the 1960s that experimentation became de rigueur again on Broadway and 1964 was a really important year. Rock and roll and Beatle mania had swept the world and the band had been at number 1 in the charts for 3





months. Martin Luther King won the Nobel Peace prize. Malcom X left Islam and stated he was going to form a black nationalist party, and as a result, three racial equality workers were abducted and murdered by the Ku Klux Klan, President Johnson signed the civil rights act that ended segregation in the United States. The USA was a stormy, volatile place, but Broadway was not reflecting the concerns of the nation. It felt old and unvital. Picking up on this and wanting to change that, Hal Prince (a Producer/Director) was working with some new writers, Joe Kander and Fred Ebb, on a piece that reflected this angry world back at them through the stories of the writer Christopher Isherwood on his experience on the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazi party. Prince looked at America and saw the backlash against ending segregation and the rise of white supremacy, he also noticed that wherever humans are, terrible things can happen. The crazy, decaying, falling world of dubious morals and people struggling to just get by in a world of extreme adversity was called *Cabaret*. It was not an instant smash hit. It was political, weird, formally experimental and felt unsafe.

**FACT BOX • TRIPLE THREAT** A term most closely associated with musical theatre which denotes a performer who is highly skilled in acting, singing and dance.

The youth of America started protesting their involvement in the Vietnam war, wanting to preach a new philosophy of love and acceptance. Gerome Ragni and James Rado were two actors who wanted to make a theatre piece about protest, so they went to pitch their idea to Joseph Papp at his newly founded Public Theatre where they just wanted to write a show about "love not war". Papp had little experience in producing musical theatre, and Ragni and Rado had never written one, but they started to create a show in which rock and roll was the driving force. That show was *Hair* and it was the first time Rock and been heard on Broadway. It divided opinion at the Public, but was very popular so it transferred to The Cheetah, a club off-Broadway, then three months later it transferred to Broadway. It was the show that adults went to to understand their children, and it was the show that children took their parents to to understand their point of view. It caught the zeitgeist and ran for four years.

**FACT BOX • THE PUBLIC THEATRE** Originally founded in 1954 as a Shakespeare Workshop by Joseph Papp, The Public Theatre is a place that develops and shows work by up-and-coming new writers. It has a long connection with the development and production of new musicals, notably: *Hair*, *A Chorus Line*, *Bring in Da Noise Bring in Da Funk*, *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, *Caroline or Change*, *Fun Home* and *Hamilton*.

This renewed the vigour of experimentation, but keeping Broadway relevant was never truer than in the first smash hit of the 1970s. Stephen Sondheim (who had written a few nice shows for Broadway, but was better known as a lyricist) was working with his long-term friend and collaborator Hal Prince on a show that seemed more like an anti-musical than one that followed the form. *Company* was a collection of non-linear scenes that explored contemporary ideas of marriage in upper-middle class New Yorkers. Its passive lead, Bobby, just watching, never having that complete Cinderella ending that Broadway so loved. The songs did not grow out of the narrative like Sondheim had been trained to do by Hammerstein (his mentor) but rather they commented on the situations and characters. The show literally held up a mirror to the patrons of a very white Broadway audience. The show was ambiguous and cynical. It showed New York as a place of alienation, where people are just going through the motions of life. It was a smash hit, winning the Tony award for best musical in 1971 and became what we now call a 'concept musical'.

**FACT BOX • STEPHEN SONDEHEIM (1930-present)** American composer and lyricist most closely associated with creating highly unusual, emotionally charged, intellectually stimulating but popular works. He is expected to have a new work produced in 2022/23 at the age of 92.





# SHOW CONTEXT, HISTORY AND WHAT IT IS ABOUT

In the early 1970s, two Broadway dancers, Michon Peacock and Tony Stevens, came up with the idea to create a troupe of Broadway dancers. They approached their friends and choreographer Michael Bennett with their idea who had, coincidentally, been thinking about creating a full-length show about dancers. Bennett's idea was simple, Bennett would invite a group of his dancer friends into the room and then they would talk about their experiences, and Bennett would work from that point to develop a show. It had the working title of "The Dancers Project".

**FACT BOX • MICHAEL BENNETT (1943-1987)** Director and choreographer and dancer. He was the original choreographer for *Company* and *Follies*, which led him to become the director and co-choreographer for *A Chorus Line* and *Dreamgirls*. He won seven Tony awards for his work and was nominated for an additional 11. He died of AIDS related complications in 1987.

In January 1974 the group arrived, and Bennett began interviewing and recording each dancer, asking them to state their name, where they were born and why they started dancing. They talked for 12 hours. As the interviews concluded their stories grew and encompassed everything from childhood trauma, insecurities, sexuality and more. However, twelve hours was not enough and they scheduled a second day of interviews. Bennett then pitched his idea to Joseph Papp at the Public Theatre, who then allotted him many weeks of development 'workshop' time. At this point in musical theatre the idea of a 'workshop' to devise and develop a show was unheard of, a production was commissioned based on it being fully written, not just an idea for something that hadn't been worked out. This was the first 'workshop' of a musical in history.

**FACT BOX • JAMES KIRKWOOD (1924-1989)** American Playwright and novelist. Most famous for co-writing the book of the musical *A Chorus Line*. He died of AIDS related complications in 1989.

The first workshop was on August 4, 1974. There was no real script to start with and each role was created organically, individually crafted to suit the talents and personality of the person playing it. Several dancers played versions of themselves and others played characters created from combining several stories. The cast members also contributed their own stories. From these character developments and personalities, Marvin Hamlisch and Edward Kleban created songs and music. This is an example of what we call Verbatim Theatre.

**FACT BOX • NICHOLAS DANTE (1941-1991)** American dancer and writer most famous for co-writing the book of *A Chorus Line*. He died of AIDS related complications in 1991.

*A Chorus Line* opened Off Broadway at The Public Theatre on April 15, 1975. Advance word had created such a demand for tickets that the entire run sold out immediately. Producer Joseph Papp moved the production to Broadway and on July 25, 1975, it opened at the Shubert Theatre, where it ran for 6,137 performances until April 28, 1990. The production was nominated for 12 Tony Awards, winning nine: Best Musical, Best Musical Book, Best Score, Best Director, and Best Choreography, Best Actress (Donna McKechnie - Cassie), Best Featured Actor (Sammy Williams - Paul), Best Featured Actress (Kelly Bishop - Sheila) and Best Lighting Design. The show won the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play of the season. In 1976, many of the original cast went on to perform in the Los Angeles production. When it closed, *A Chorus Line* was the longest running show in Broadway history until its record was surpassed by *Cats* in 1997. On September 29, 1983, Bennett and 332 *A Chorus Line* veterans gathered to celebrate the musical becoming the longest-running show in Broadway history.

**FACT BOX • MARVIN HAMLISCH (1944-2012)** American Composer and conductor. One of only two composers to have won the 'PEGOT' for his work on the film *The Sting*, *Barbara Streisand: The Concert* and *A Chorus Line*. The only other person to earn these awards was Richard Rogers.

**FACT BOX • EDWARD KLEBAN (1939-1987)** American composer and lyricist most famous for the lyrics on *A Chorus Line*. The Kleban Foundation that he set up gives a \$100,000 award to the most promising librettist and lyricist in American Musical Theatre every year.

**FACT BOX • VERBATIM THEATRE** A form of documented theatre in which plays are constructed from the words spoken by people interviewed about a particular topic or event. High profile shows include *The Laramie Project* (about the murder of gay student Matthew Shepherd), *The Permanent Way* (about the privatisation of the UK's railway network) and *London Road* (the documentation of a group of British citizens as they struggle to come to terms with finding out they lived next door to a murderer).

**FACT BOX • PEGOT** Acronym denoting the achievement of all major American awards: Pulitzer, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony.



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# ACTING

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## CREATIVE INTERVIEW ALECKY BLYTHE

Alecky Blythe is a British playwright specialising in extremely detailed Verbatim Theatre. In 2011 she wrote the verbatim musical *London Road*.

### How does verbatim theatre work?

Verbatim theatre is theatre created from real-life conversations. There are different levels of it, and I would put myself at the most extreme, purest end: nothing in any of my work has been fictionalised or made up in terms of what is said. On the other hand, someone like David Hare, who has also used verbatim techniques, works at the looser end of the spectrum to me. Sometimes context or action is changed in my plays, but the actual words are the words said by those real-life people. I then edit those conversations and during the show the actors speak those real words. Traditionally in verbatim theatre, and in *London Road* and all my shows, the actors wear ear phones during the performance and copy the exact words of those interviewees [the 'recorded delivery' technique]. The idea of the earphones is to stop them from falling into their own speech patterns – they copy every 'um' 'ah' and stutter, every non-sequiter.

### Why do you think you're on the 'purest' end of the verbatim spectrum?

For me the advantage is the authenticity, which is first and foremost – I would find it difficult to write with that kind of truth and honesty. To me pure verbatim theatre is brilliant, joyful, and illuminating. There are frustrations with it – I find myself thinking 'oh, gosh, if only they'd said that', when things don't link into the narrative. I'm at the mercy of what they say.

### Do you see your verbatim method as a kind of reporting, like an alternative news gathering tool?

Yes, in a way it is. Although I would always say that I'm a dramatist before a journalist; it would be wrong and breaking all sorts of journalistic rules if people were to take too many factual things from my plays. I do manipulate the material and there's always the challenge of getting the balance between being faithful to these interviewees and thinking in dramatic terms. For that reason I always say when I'm interviewing people that I work in quite a journalistic way but it's not, first, journalism.

### Do your plays have a social goal?

I suppose they do. They're political with a small 'p' – I'm interested in the human experience more than why something happened, for instance the reason for the London Riots. I'm interested in ordinary people in extraordinary situations, because that's when we really reveal our true colours.

## CREATIVE INTERVIEW KAY MAGSON

### Did you train to be a casting director? how did you become one?

No training as such, I was theatre secretary at the old Leeds Playhouse and learned on the job

### Can you tell us what a casting director is and does?

A casting director works with the director and creative team to bring together shortlists of actors to then audition and offer jobs to.

### When did you first get involved with this production?

As soon as the show was announced Nikolai, Ellen, David and I started talking about what we were looking for and we took it from there.

### Can you tell us a little bit about your initial process working on the show?

The director provides me with a breakdown for the show, I then take this breakdown to 310 agents who submit their clients who they think are suitable for the roles, I then shortlist and work on a list of my own alongside Nikolai's and pull everything together into the audition room.

### Can you tell us a little about your working relationship with Nikolai and the other creatives?

I have worked with Nikolai for more years than either of us care to remember! It's a great relationship because we instinctively know the actors we like and we work in the same way, trusting our instincts and taking chances on bright young talent. I worked with Ellen on *West Side Story* and with David Shrubsole many years ago on *Martin Guerre*.

### What are the challenges you've faced casting this show?

This one was a tricky show to put together. There are so many multi skilled actors needed to satisfy all the creative team. It was also a hard one to put together because when we started casting, we were working under very strict covid regulations, with actors doing full two hour dance calls in masks and with extreme social distancing in the audition rooms.

### What is the most unusual experience you've had in an interview/meeting/audition?

Too many to mention, the fact that you really don't know what any one individual is going to bring into the room is why I love my job.



WHAT I DO  
**JENNIFER LANE BAKER**

**Role:** assistant director

**What I do on the production:** I assist Nikolai (the director) across all aspects of the production – doing research before we get started, attending meetings, supporting him during rehearsals, rehearsing covers, looking after the show once it opens... the list can be varied and endless!

**How long was the training for this job?**

Never-ending... I officially trained on a two year long postgraduate course but I learn so much more on every single job that I do.

**How long have you been in show business?**

Professionally – a year and a half. For fun – since I was four.

**Current Favourite Musical:** *Parade*







# DRAMA ACTIVITIES

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## 1 • GUESS THE LEADER

### Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced

One person leaves the room while the rest of the group stand in a circle and choose a secret leader.

The leader will start a repetitive motion that the others must follow and the leader will slowly change the motion while the others follow without missing a beat.

The person from outside will come back in and try to figure out who the leader is.

They will only get three chances to guess the leader.

## 2 • ENSEMBLE WARM UP

### Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced

Ask the group to move around the room, balancing the space.

The leader calls the following instructions that the rest of the group try to complete in unison.

- Stop and Go
- Clap – everyone claps
- Jump – everyone jumps
- Sky – everyone reached for the sky
- Floor – everyone touches the floor

The leader then hands the instructions over to the group. Anyone can call an instruction for the group to do, however no two people can speak at the same time. If two people call an instruction at the same time the whole group must lie flat on the floor and then return to standing.

## 3 • CREATING VERBATIM THEATRE

### Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced

In pairs label yourselves A and B. Ask the group to split into pairs and decide on A and B labels.

As will become the interviewer and ask Bs three questions; Why do you like performing? How old were you when you first performed? What is your favorite memory related to performing? (These questions could be changed to suit the subject matter you wish to explore).

Once As have finished answering it is Bs turn to be the interviewer.

The answers should be written down, this is your own verbatim monologue.

Ask As to stay where they are. When the leader calls “Swap”, Bs change partners.

When Bs are facing a new partner, As ask one of the three questions. B’s then respond with a slightly more detailed version of their original answer.

When the leader calls “Change” Bs ask As one of the three questions and again they answer with a slightly embellished answer.

The leader then calls “Swap” and the process is repeated with the answers becoming more and more exaggerated with every change.

Write down the newly developed answers into a monologue, see how these differentiate from the original monologues.

Ask the group to feedback on the most memorable answers.

## 4 • WHO AM I ANYWAY

### Intermediate/Advanced

As a group put all the stories that you created in the previous exercise into a hat, and then draw them out randomly so that everyone has someone else’s story.

Use this as short monologue. What information can you draw out of it? What kind of a character do you think of when read it? Try to imagine how it would feel to be this person. Spend some time saying the words out loud. Maybe record yourself saying them and play it back and listen to see what you feel about it.

As a group come back together and share the piece with the group. Try and convince the group that the story is yours. If it’s appropriate, the group can try and guess who each story belonged to.

## 5 • PAUL’S MONOLOGUE

### Advanced

Read Paul’s monologue from the show. How much do you know about it? How might you approach performing this role?



Write down any words, places, names you don't know. Research them and find out more information. Try researching what 1975 was like in Manhattan. What was it like for a dancer?

The main thrust of this monologue is about Paul coming to terms with his sexuality and how he is treated by the establishment and his family. Research other stories from the 1970s and what it was like to live as an 'out' member of the LGBTQIA+ community (At that time just the LGBT community).

Can you relate to this kind of exclusion and treatment? What parts of the monologue seem similar to today's the treatment of the LGBTQIA+ community, what things seem different? How might this affect the way you perform it?

What is it that you want to communicate to an audience with this monologue? What is the story? Why does Paul cry, is it important that he does?

Really think about these issues, maybe try playing the opposite of what is written, how does that feel? How does that change the focus of the monologue? Keep exploring this.







# DANCE

Photography by Marc Brenner

## CREATIVE INTERVIEW REBECCA GIOCAPAZZI

### What was your role on the London revival?

I was the audition dance assistant, dance captain, understudy Bebe, Sheila, Kristine, Connie and swing on the 2012 London revival of *A Chorus Line*.

### Can you tell us a little about what that role entailed?

I had been introduced by a mutual friend to Baayork Lee (the original Connie, and Michael Bennett's assistant) the year before the show was put on in London. I met her and listened to her vision for the show and I felt I was able to connect with that. She then asked me to become her assistant when auditions started in the UK, so my role was a little like Larry in the show! The difference for me was that although I was working with her, I also had to audition to be in the production. After I was cast in the show, my job as dance captain was to make sure the choreography was correct and kept at performance standard. Because I was also an understudy, I had to learn four tracks in case somebody was off (illness, holiday, injury). In this production there was an 'on-stage' swing and an 'off-stage' swing. The on-stage swings are in the production to perform the opening number every night, and then they are the people who get 'cut' from the group when Zach keeps the finalists to help tell that part of the story. These swings usually understudy the larger roles. There are no leads in *A Chorus Line*, because we are all chorus, but roles like Cassie need special attention because she dances 'Music and the Mirror' and nobody else does. So for example, if the actor playing Cassie is off, the on-stage swing goes on as Cassie, then the off-stage swing comes on and replaces the on-stage swing! In the show we used to refer to being in the show as 'on the line' as in I might have to do a dance call with a swing going on for someone because they were 'on the line' that night.

### Michael Bennett's original choreography was used in this production, what was it like to learn and perform?

Yes we did perform his original choreography, but strictly speaking it was a revival, not an exact copy of the original. This is because Baayork has adapted some of the choreography over time. The difference is almost imperceptible, but it's definitely been changed to help the dancers out and not injure themselves too much. None of Michael's choreography was ever written down, so it's Baayork who travels the world advising and teaching it when it's needed. For example, she taught me the choreography for the whole show, and her assistant from the USA came over and helped with that, and with assisting in the auditions. In rehearsals, once the choreography was laid down, the US assistant and I then rehearsed it.

She is extremely generous when people do this show, so new choreographies do and have existed of it, and she's always happy for that to happen. With Michael's choreography, the opening is extremely technically demanding; turns, jumps, pirouettes, jazz, ballet - it's meant to be hard. But later in the show, it's not so much that it's technically challenging but it's about how exact it is.

### What do you think the choreographic challenges are in *A Chorus Line*?

The opening number. That opening number has to be rehearsed properly because it is so tricky. You have to just learn it inside out so that you never forget it. It's in your body so that you know it even on your death bed! But the biggest challenge is that the choreography has to be performed exactly the same by every dancer. Every line, angle, head move has to be performed at exactly the same time height and shape every time. The audience is only meant to see a single line of precision dancers, not individuals. I think that's the genius of the piece, that we see these amazing dancers, but then we get to know these people as individuals and what they do for the love of dancing. We know their struggles. For example, Connie and Richie are excellent dancers and friends, but also rivals. Why? Well, they come from a world where if you were in an ethnic minority you weren't allowed to join a queue to audition to be a Broadway dancer. Historically a lot of minorities tried for years to join this line, not disheartened by the blatant racism. Then one day two WERE allowed to join the line, and eventually more and more. So why are Connie and Richie rivals? Well, they are both in the final and in that world in the 1970s there was only room for one non-white person in that show, so they know that only one of them is going to get the job, regardless of whether they were equals in the room. It's why Michael's production was revolutionary, it was the first time on stage that more than one ethnicity was represented in a musical. This might not sound too much like a choreographic challenge, however finding people that good who can open up emotionally like that is extremely hard. It's interesting that the show was really called a play; It's not about the choreography, they're just the steps, they're not for narrative at all, it's just to see technique, the show is about sacrifice, questioning your choices, you cannot hide in this show, there is no fancy set, lighting or costumes, it's raw. It's about people.

### *A Chorus Line* is as much about rejection as it is about getting the job, we all deal with rejection in this industry a lot, how do you deal with it?

Well, I get up and crack on, but that comes from experience. You learn to let things go. Your dedication and discipline to your craft makes you more resilient. You have to get up and go to that ballet class, nobody is making you do it, but it's the drive, the passion, the sacrifice you make to do that thing that brings you joy. Dance is really harsh. You are constantly looking at yourself in the mirror, and you are your own worst critic, and when you are forced to face that eight hours a day and at the weekend you do become more resilient. There are a few things I would say, one is that if you have made the final or semi-final you know that you are good enough to be in that show, another is that it's the producer's show, so they have every right to say yes and no to whoever they want. But most of the time you never get told why. I have seen audition forms before and the reasons some people get rejected can be as simple as being too tall. I wonder if all those people who ever auditioned, who found it was as simple as that, would stop being so self-critical about their skill. In the end, you do need rejection to grow. If you never know what it is, how are you ever going to deal with it when it happens to you!





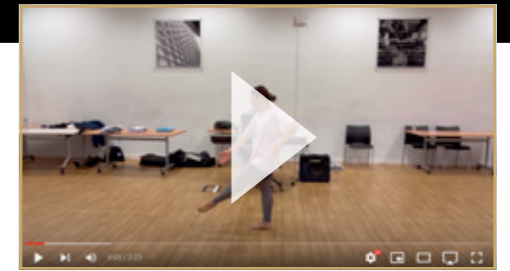


# DANCE ACTIVITIES

Photography by Marc Brenner

## 1 • LEARN SOME CHOREOGRAPHY!

Demi Essex, a CYCC Musical theatre dance practitioner has created a dance to the opening sequence of *A Chorus Line*. Click on the image to the right to watch.



## 2 • MAKING YOUR OWN CHOREOGRAPHY

### Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced

Form a large circle with your group.

Pick one person to start, that person should come up with one gesture/movement, it should be repeatable. The level of it is entirely dependent on their own ability.

Once they have shared their movement/gesture, the rest of the group copies it.

The person to the left of the first person then performs a gesture of their own creation (but different from the first one) the group then copies that movement, and then immediately after links it to the first gesture (which they also perform).

This then repeats for as many people you have in your group until everyone has had a turn. For example, if you have a group of 12 you will have a sequence of 12 gestures that the entire group is able to link together.

Once the group is confident that they know this sequence, the group leader should work with the group to try and find how the gestures link together properly, maybe even merging gestures together more succinctly. This part of the process helps to understand how many counts/beats there are in a particular section. Perform this to some upbeat music and see what happens!

### Intermediate/Advanced

Using the sequence, get the group to explore it with different types of music. How does the feel of it change?

What happens if you perform the sequence fast to slow music, slow to fast music?

How can you extend the sequence and explore a full piece of music?

### Advanced

Using the sequence, each member of the group is given a mood (maybe the group leader has them written and the students pull them out of a hat).

They then work individually to extend and morph it to create a 1 minute (minimum) acapella dance that explores the mood quality they have.

Then find an appropriate piece of music see how the individual score fits into that.

After sharing all these solos with the group, each student pairs up with someone else, and then they spend time using their individual score and seeing how they could relate to each other, expressing both of the moods. Students should be exploring using their dances in improvisation with each other.

## 3 • COMMUNICATING CHOREOGRAPHIC IDEAS

Imagine that you are a choreographer and you want to communicate to your dancers what you feel about how the dance works in your production of *A Chorus Line*.

Search for images and ideas that really appeal to you.

With a partner try and explain your ideas to them (and where they come from). Think about what the dance is expressing and how that is expressed to the audience.

Then use the previous activity in groups to explore making gestures and movements that respond directly to the images, and a sequence.

How successful is this sequence based on what you felt when you were presenting images? Try now describing in words to the group how you want the choreography to develop to better fit how you saw/felt it.

Work the sequence into something that you would like to see/feel. Has the change made any difference? Observe other group's work. How does it make you feel, how would you describe it?

**FACT BOX - TRACK:** What a single actor does though the course of the complete show is called a track. For example, in *A Chorus Line* Zach's track is everywhere he is, everything he does and every prop he needs. Alternatively, Mike's track would be very different as he spends more time dancing, and has his own unique solos that nobody else does - that would be Mike's track. It is usual for a Swing to learn multiple tracks so they can slot into multiple roles if they need to. In some rare circumstances, swings can perform multiple tracks simultaneously!!!





# MUSIC ACTIVITIES

Photography by Marc Brenner

## 1 • CREATING MUSIC

This exercise requires music software like **Logic** or **Garage Band** so that you can cut and edit sound recordings. It is based in part on Adam Cork and Alecky Blythe's techniques for creating their version of verbatim theatre.

1. Using a recording device, one person interviews their partner about any subject they chose. Questions could be feeling towards current affairs, what their favorite dinosaur is, or the route Zach does. The interviewer should also ask their name, age and something about their lives that they wish to share.
2. Import this into the music software.
3. Find one sentence, isolate it, copy it and paste it many times (or play it on a loop). As you listen to the sentence you will become aware of how the voice rises and falls and your ear starts to hear it more like music, than as spoken sound.
4. Try to speak along with the sentence and find the natural rise and fall in the music of the sound.
5. The more you listen to the sentence, the more you will find that you can turn the speech pitch into sung pitch. Keep singing this vocal line.
6. Record this sung version of the sentence, or someone can sing it for you, and import it into your music software.
7. You can just work with one sentence; however, you may wish to do the same for the whole interview so you have a longer piece of music.
8. Once you have imported as much of the sung sentence you have, use your music software to add harmonies, beats and other sound effects into the mix. Try mixing it in different styles like ballad, house, RnB, Jazz, Grunge, etc. Try thinking about how the sentence was said, and what style of music might best express that. Try taking the vocal line out and singing it live.

## 2 • WORDS WITHOUT SONG

One of the most useful things you can do when approaching singing musical theatre songs is to remove the music. Try taking a song you are working on at the moment and write out the lyrics in front of you. The exercise is simple (but in fact quite difficult to do!). You are going to perform the lyrics as a monologue, HOWEVER, you must resist the temptation to say the words in the rhythm of the music! This in itself can be a really big challenge, so try and stick to the following rules.

1. Use one breath for one sentence (so you can only breathe once at the start of the sentence and not in the middle of it)
2. You must make a slight pause at a comma (not a breath, just a pause)
3. You can choose to decide if you breathe at hyphens, colons and semi-colons

These simple rules will help guide you to a more natural rhythm, rather than using the one the composer has written.

When you go through this, how does this feel to say? Are you really battling against the composed rhythm? Why do you think that is?

For higher level students, start thinking about the natural speech rhythm you have found and if that plays into or against the sung rhythm. Why do you think that is? Does it help you access something in how you might perform the song? Now look at the sung pitches of the words, does it tell you anything about the way it should be performed, i.e. – how are high and low notes used? Is it very high or very low when they sing about strong emotions? Do the same with dynamics, is it loud for big emotions and soft for secrets? How would you interpret it?





Photography by Marc Brenner

## WHAT I DO ANNE BAXTER

**Role:** Deputy Stage Manager (DSM)

**What I do on the production:** During rehearsals my role involves creating "The Book". This contains the script and score. In it I will then write down all the cast's corresponding moves, entrances and exits; In addition I also note when any set pieces are being moved, and where furniture etc. needs to be set and any other technical aspects. I'm also responsible for sending out rehearsal notes liaising with all the theatre's departments informing them of what is required. When we move into the theatre all the technical cues are added into the book - every lighting change, sound effect, flying set piece and cued entrances. It is then my job to call the show. In which I verbally, and using cue lights, marry together all the technical elements with what is happening on-stage.

### How long was the training for this job?

I did a one year post graduate diploma in Stage Management but every show teaches you something new and different - so I'm constantly learning!

### How long have you been in show business?

Years.

**Current Favourite Musical:** Far too many to decide between!!

**FACT BOX • REHEARSAL NOTES** During daily rehearsals the DSM will make notes about anything that arises in that rehearsal and send them to all the heads of departments (Props, Costume, Design, Lighting, Sound, etc) for example, if a director decides that they need new props, have had lighting ideas, or a choreographer needs to send a note to the designer about making items of design safer to use.

**FACT BOX • CALLING A SHOW** The process of giving verbal cues to the lighting, sound, fly operators and stage crew during the performance. This is usually done by the Deputy Stage Manager on the book. Being on the book involves following the cues which are written into the script and giving a verbal 'GO' cue to all technical departments

## WHAT I DO ZOE LEONARD

**Role:** Assistant Stage Manager

**What I do on the production:** I help facilitate rehearsals with the rest of the Stage Management Team. This can be anything from moving bits of rehearsal furniture or set around the rehearsal room, through to finding/making/buying props and furniture which will be used in the production. I work closely with the director, designer and actors to make sure everything matches the design and functions properly. During the show I work backstage and make sure everyone and everything is in the right place, at the right time, with the right prop or piece of furniture in their hand.

### How long was the training for this job?

I went to Guildford School of Acting and did a three year degree in Theatre Production, specialising in Stage Management.

### How long have you been in show business?

I graduated four years ago and have been working since I graduated.

**Current favourite musical:** *Sister Act*.

## WHAT I DO EMMA COLLINS

**Role:** ASM / Book cover

**What I do on the production:** Run backstage during the show with the Stage Management team and cue the book if needed

### How long was the training for this job?

Three years

### How long have you been in show business?

Five years

**Current Favorite Musical:** *Hamilton*



## WHAT I DO ANGEL ROSSELL DE PABLOS

**Role:** Sound Number 1

**What I do on the production:** I make sure the balance between the music and the singers is adequate and everyone can enjoy the music and hear the lyrics (to learn it and hopefully sing along!).

### **How long was the training for this job?**

It's been two years preparing for this (with a pandemic in the middle, that's true) but I'm still learning!

### **How long have you been in show business?**

All my life. I started as a promising rock star and shortly realised it wasn't going to happen (shocking!), so I wanted to stay in the music business by becoming a sound technician and help more talented people to give their best.

**Current favourite musical:** *Chess*. Not a fan of the plot, but the music is brilliant!

## WHAT I DO SEAN MCCABE

**Role:** Sound No 2

**What I do on the production:** I fit and maintain the radio mics on the actors during the show. If any mics go down during the show, I am responsible for changing them to a spare or fixing them as quickly as possible to avoid a show stop. I allocate the radio mic frequencies to avoid any clashes and intermodulation. I also look after the orchestra pit microphones and on this show, I will be Mix Cover which means I will mix shows if the No 1 is ill and X amount of shows a week (tbc).

### **How long was the training for this job?**

I've been doing this for three to five years, most of it was on the job training taught by both Sound Designers, Production Sound Engineers and Sound No 1s.

### **How long have you been in show business?**

I started as a casual seven years ago.

**Current Favorite Musical:** *Hamilton*

## CREATIVE INTERVIEW HOWARD HUDSON

### **Did you train to be a lighting designer? For how Long and where?**

I didn't study lighting as such – I did a Fine Art degree at Chelsea College of Art and Design after a Foundation Course there. I was lighting small shows throughout my time there and then just kept on going.

### **Can you tell us what a lighting designer is and does?**

If you imagine the theatre to start with as having all its lights turned off – a completely black space. My job is to collaborate with the rest of the creative team and, sympathetically with the piece, decide what the audience see, how they see it and when they see it. So in turning each light on and off, I control the brightness, the colour of the lights, whether a light has a sharp edge or a soft edge or the speed in which they turn on and off to create the overall lighting design for the show. The positions of the lights is one of the most crucial things, so a large part of my job is deciding which lights go where in the space to make sure the angle of light, and type of lighting fixture are going to give us the right toolbox of options.

### **When did you first get involved with this production?**

I was brought on board I believe in February of 2021.

### **Can you tell us a little bit about your initial process working on the show?**

It starts with a very general discussion with the director and designer. What is their take on the piece? Are there any initial visual references we might be going for? What does such an iconic piece have to say today in 2021? Then a little further down the line when the designer has made what's called a white card model, showing an initial idea for the set design, I start to contribute and chip in potential broader ideas and make a start on thinking about how I might light the set and the overall space we have to work with. Next is the final model, which gives more of an idea about the finishes of certain materials – maybe some ideas have changed since the white card. I can then start to draw my Lighting Plan, which is my sort of Bible I use to tell the crew where all the lights are going to go, what the channel numbers are for each light and what colour we want to gel them. This for me is a very important part of the process as it will go through many revisions and updates as ideas get refined or improved. The lights get rigged, and we then start to light the piece in the technical rehearsals.

### **Can you tell us a little about your working relationship with Nikolai and the other creatives?**

As above. This has been a great process as I've come on board maybe a little earlier than I usually would, so I've been able to contribute to the design process from quite an early stage.

### **What are the challenges you've faced designing the show?**

With the set being so beautifully sparse, and celebrating the Curve stage and the broadness of this, the lighting design is going to have to be quite a large element of the look of the piece. The lights themselves and Curve's lighting bars are going to play a large part in the design, so there has been perhaps a bit more pressure to make sure what we do works aesthetically for the show. So despite us having so much space to play with, actually fitting everything in has been a challenge – because there are so many lights!

### **What is the most unusual experience you've had in an interview/meeting/audition?**

Hanging out with Nikolai in one of our early meetings on an empty Curve stage and being completely distracted by his brilliant dog Oscar was definitely a highlight!





## WHAT I DO FIONA MOORE

**Role:** Press and Digital Manager

**What I do on the production:** I work across a number of areas of our marketing campaign for the show, including writing and sharing the latest announcements with media, organising press opportunities, co-ordinating digital content like videos, blogs, podcasts and behind-the-scenes insights, managing social media, proofing and promoting educational wraparound activity, as well as sourcing all the content for our show programme.

### **How long was the training for this job?**

I haven't actually ever specifically trained for this role! I studied French and Spanish at university and, when I came to graduate, took a sideways communications step into Public Relations. I worked for a number of years in a digital PR agency, looking after a wide range of accounts in industries such as housebuilding, hospitality, logistics, education, pet care, finance, construction, 3D technologies, retail – a really varied mix! This experience gave me a solid grounding in how media operates across different sectors, and how a creative and thoughtful approach can achieve real results.

I'd always been passionate about theatre so when I secured the Press and Digital Manager job at Curve, even though I'd never worked in theatre, I was able to translate my skills and jump head-first into the role. There's been a lot to learn along the way but that's something I really love about it – you're always learning something new, whether that's increasing your knowledge of theatre and the arts or just keeping up with the evolution of the media and emerging digital avenues to reach new audiences.

### **How long have you been in show business?**

I started this role in May 2017, so just under five years.

**Current Favourite Musical:** *A Chorus Line*, of course.



Photography by Marc Brenner







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