

*Chicago**Broadway to Hollywood*

Twenty years from now, they'll die to see it [*Chicago*]*—*but . . . *Chicago* will be a wild card already played. It won't even be in the discard pile. It's over.

—ETHAN MORDDEN

WHEN ETHAN MORDDEN MADE HIS DOUR PREDICTION FOR *Chicago*, it was 1983 and the Broadway musical as he had known it seemed a thing of the past. He could not have imagined that, twenty-five years later, *Chicago* would be playing to sold-out houses on Broadway. Maurine Dallas Watkins's 1926 play *Chicago*, the source material for the musical, is a prescient satire depicting how the press, in collusion with the American criminal justice, turns criminals into celebrities. Although set in the twenties, her story is as relevant today as it was seventy-five years ago. As of this writing, the 1996 Broadway revival of the musical *Chicago* is still going strong and has become the longest running revival in Broadway history. This production inspired the 2003 Miramax film version of the musical, which garnered three Golden Globes and six Academy Awards, including best film. The soundtrack of the film went platinum in 2004 and triple platinum in 2005.

Gwen Verdon provided the impetus for the musical *Chicago*. She had wanted to play Roxie Hart, one of two main parts in the play, ever since seeing the 1942 Warner Brothers film *Roxie Hart*, which starred Ginger Rogers

and which is loosely based on Watkins's comedy. In this film, Rogers performs the Black Bottom for the press and gets them to join in. It is no wonder that Verdon and Bob Fosse, her husband since 1960, saw musical potential in this story. Verdon's tough-dame exterior and inner vulnerability seemed ideal for the role of Roxie. In the late 1960s, she and Fosse tried to obtain the musical rights, but Watkins refused to grant them because she felt uneasy about her journalistic connection to the subject. When her play opened in New York, she even concealed the fact that she had been a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* in order to defend herself against accusations of having been involved in the very process that the play mocks. After Watkins died in 1969, her estate agreed to sell the rights to Fosse, Verdon, and the producer Robert Fryer. By then, Fosse and Verdon had separated, but they both remained committed to the project. News of the musical appeared in the *New York Times* as early as 1972, but it was another three years before *Chicago* opened on Broadway.¹

Ironically, what has now become one of Kander and Ebb's biggest successes was one of their most unpleasant experiences and a project that almost collapsed. A major setback occurred when Fosse suffered a heart attack, which precipitated a suspension of rehearsals. In the hope of keeping the cast intact while Fosse recovered from his now infamous bypass surgery, the producers scrambled to find temporary jobs for the out-of-work actors and dancers. With Fosse out of commission, they also made inquiries into the availability of other directors, including Hal Prince and Jerome Robbins. Rehearsals resumed as soon as Fosse emerged from the hospital.

Watkins based her play on two real murder cases that she covered while working as a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*. Belva Gaertner, a cabaret singer, shot and killed her lover, Walter Law. Although the murder weapon was shown to be hers, she claimed to have been drunk at the time of the murder and therefore unable to recall anything about the incident. Shortly after Gaertner's arrest, Beulah Annan allegedly murdered her lover, Harry Kalstedt, and then swore to her husband that he had tried to sexually assault her. Two days after Annan's arrival at the Cook County jail, Watkins wrote an article that forever linked the two purported murderesses, noting their shared interests: "A man, a woman, liquor and a gun." Watkins titillated her readership with her juicy reportage of these cases and her dry sense of humor. She knew a good quote when she heard one, such as Gaertner's "Gin and guns—either one is bad enough, but together they get you in a dickens of a mess."² Nor did it escape Watkins's attention that Annan's cover story underwent several alterations during the lead-up to her trial, and that during

the proceedings she claimed to be pregnant. In the end, the women were acquitted within ten days of each other.

Shortly after Gaertner and Annan were released from prison, Watkins abandoned her job at the *Tribune* for an editorial assignment in New York and to attend the playwriting program at Yale Drama School. She wrote *Chicago* in 1926, two years after the conclusion of the Gaertner and Beulah cases, and the play ran on Broadway for 172 performances.

In the prologue of Watkins's play, Roxie Hart shoots Fred Casely, an auto salesman and her latest lover. After the gunshot and a brief blackout signifying the passage of three and a half hours, her husband, Amos, confesses to the crime, claiming that he was protecting his wife. The assistant state attorney, Harrison, punches holes in Amos's story and informs him of Roxie's infidelity. Jake Callahan, a news reporter, is on hand to shape events into spectacular news copy. Jake predicts that Roxie's crime will turn her into an overnight sensation: "lay off men and booze till when you come to trial yuh look like Miss America . . . Why, you'll be famous!" He also convinces the opportunistic lawyer Billy Flynn to represent her.

When act 1 begins, Roxie is already enjoying her public notoriety. She and Mrs. Morton, the matron of Cook County Jail, collect paper clippings recounting the murder. Velma Kelly is also in jail, awaiting trial for killing her philandering husband. Billy Flynn, who has accepted both cases, concocts a self-defense strategy for Roxie: "you both grabbed for the gun." As the curtain rises on act 2, Roxie, who is being upstaged by the arrival of "Go-to-Hell Kitty" (Kitty Baxter), who is also accused of killing her husband, gets the reporters' attention by announcing that she is pregnant. Roxie's trial occupies most of the third act. Her testimony, from the tilt of her head to the tone of her speeches, is literally staged by Billy Flynn. Toward the climax of the trial, Flynn dramatically confronts his client: "Roxie Hart, the State charges you with the murder of Fred Casely . . . guilty or not guilty." Roxie cries out that she killed him, yes, but only to defend her "husband's innocent unborn child." The jury returns a not-guilty verdict. When gunshots are heard from outside the court building, Jake and the rest of the press dash off, leaving Roxie alone with Billy. "You're all washed up," he tells her, but Roxie insists that she is going to become a famous vaudeville star. The press reemerges with the new female killer. "Gee, ain't God good to the papers!" cries Jake. "Come on, sister, you gotta play ball: this is Chicago!" he adds as flashes go off and the curtain falls.

Watkins enlists sarcasm as her main weapon in the battle against the col-

lusion between the press and the criminal justice system. The play teaches that in America being a bad celebrity is just as advantageous as being a good one. Once Roxie learns this lesson and how to “play ball,” the original title of the play, her acquittal and stardom are practically guaranteed.³ Of course, she receives plenty of assistance in her rise to fame both from Billy Flynn, who takes her case on only to secure his own fame, and from Jake Callahan, who exploits Roxie’s crime in order to catapult his own newspaper career, usurping true justice in the name of readership. Watkins’s character descriptions are as wry as her dialogue, and they telegraph her cynical viewpoint about the subject matter. Roxie is “the prettiest woman ever charged with murder in Chicago”; in profile, “there’s a hint of a Raphael angel—with a touch of Medusa.” Her description of the publicity-savvy Billy Flynn is a parody of the Romantic hero mixed with commentary on the ethnicity suggested by his features: “a rich voice . . . with a minor undertone that’s Gaelic . . . a little man, like Napoleon, and he carries himself with the Corporal’s air. A magnificent iron-gray mane, with a forelock he tugs at to convey the impression of thought, or tosses back now and then to reveal the Caesarian brow. The eyes are deep-set and keen; the nose starts out to be Semitic, but ends with an Irish tilt; the mouth is broad without being generous, and the jaw is pugilistic.”⁴

When Fosse started work on *Chicago*, he enlisted Fred Ebb to coauthor the script. Perhaps taking his cue from Roxie’s final lines in Watkins’s play—“I am not washed up! I’m goin’ in vaudeville—I’m famous”—Ebb decided to tell the story as a vaudeville show, even though when he had tried to do the same thing with *70, Girls, 70*, the audience had difficulty following the plot (see Chapter 6).⁵ *70, Girls, 70* proved to be a valuable training ground for *Chicago* and illuminated some of the pitfalls of telling a story as a vaudeville. In *70, Girls, 70* the vaudeville structure was a fun gimmick, but it had no metaphorical purpose. In *Chicago* the vaudeville is a metaphor for the American justice system in which the best performance wins over the press and the jury. This time Ebb structured the entire musical as a vaudeville bill, presenting the story through a series of vaudeville songs and vignettes, each of which evokes a well-known vaudeville act, such as ventriloquism or the “dumb show,” or a particular performer, such as Sophie Tucker (“When You’re Good to Mama”). The result was a much more organic and seamless work than anything Kander and Ebb had written before or have written since.

The vaudeville concept was perfectly wedded to the theme of *Chicago*.

After all, vaudeville producers willfully featured notorious, even criminal, figures and freak acts, such as Lillina Graham and Ethel Conrad, who were nicknamed the “Shooting Stars” for killing W. E. D. Stokes.⁶ By superimposing a vaudeville framework onto Watkins’s comedy, Ebb implicitly linked showbiz to the tawdry, parasitic practices of the press and the corruption of the American justice system. The musical literally conflates courtroom performance and stage performance. Further, the vaudeville format suited Fosse’s background and aesthetic leanings. He had grown up in Chicago during the twenties and was a product of vaudeville and burlesque.

Ebb played up the vaudeville concept as much as possible. For example, he wanted to project vaudeville legends (captions) before each scene to summarize the action. One of Ebb’s outlines gives the legends for act 1. Eventually, the legends were replaced with spoken announcements made by the conductor, Stanley Lebowsky, who can be heard on the original cast recording.

Vaudeville Legends for Act 1

Scene 1 “VELMA O’ROURKE SINGS THE OPENING NUMBER WITH A BRIEF APPEARANCE BY MISS ROXIE HART”

Scene 2 “MR. AND MRS. AMOS HART PERFORM A LOVE DUET”

Scene 3 “THE COOK COUNTY SEXTETTE, CELL BLOCK FOUR SING A LAMENT”

Scene 4 “A PIECE OF THE ACTION”

Scene 5 “VELMA O’ROURKE SINGS OF THE IMPROBABILITIES OF LOVE”

Scene 6 “ALL I REALLY NEED”

Scene 7 “MISS ROXIE HART SINGS OF A GLORIOUS FUTURE”

Scene 8 “THE AMAZING BALLANTINE AND HIS [C]OERCE BALLOON BUSTING”

Scene 9 “MISS VELMA O’ROURKE DOES A SELLING JOB”

Scene 10 “MISS ROXIE HART, SONGS, DANCES AND SAD SAYINGS”

Ebb started work on the script in 1973. He elevated the character of Velma to leading-role status. Like Belva Gaertner, the person on whom she is based, Velma is a nightclub entertainer. As soon as Roxie arrives at the jailhouse, she and Velma become rivals and vie for the attention of the press and their mutual lawyer. Jealous but not self-defeating, Velma invites Roxie to form a duo act with her. Roxie tauntingly rejects Velma’s proposition because she thinks that she can make it on her own, but, after her trial, Roxie comes to the realization that she has a better crack at vaudeville with Velma than alone. Ebb replaced the role of Jake with a theatrical agent of his own invention,

Henry Glassman, who is known aptly as “the worm.” Glassman represents Velma, but because he is having a hard time booking her act, he urges her to team up with Roxie.

The name Bob Fosse remains closely associated with the musical *Chicago*, and the Broadway revival bears his signature finger snaps and hallmark cynicism. But *Chicago* is also quintessential Kander and Ebb in that it uses performance to draw attention to the relationship between theater and everyday life. Lionel Abel calls this type of theater (theater about theater) “meta-theater.”⁷ Richard Hornby has identified five major types of metatheater that writers such as Kander and Ebb employ to draw attention to the artifice and overt theatricality of their work: 1) the play within the play, 2) performed ceremony, 3) role-playing within the role, 4) literary and real-life references, and 5) self-reference.⁸ *Chicago* employs all five: Roxie and Velma’s stage act at the end of the musical (play within the play); Hunyak’s hanging and Roxie’s trial (performed ceremony); Roxie’s imitation of a ventriloquist dummy during “We Both Reached for the Gun” (role-playing within a role); references to entertainers such as Sophie Tucker (literary and real-life references); musical calling attention to itself as a musical entertainment (self-reference). The references to past performers have been called “performative reiterations.”⁹ Performative reiterations force “the spectator to reevaluate his or her relationship with the dramatic fiction and to theatre as a whole.”¹⁰ *Chicago*’s self-referentiality occurs in the form of asides and direct addresses to the audience in songs such as “Roxie,” “I Know a Girl,” and “Mister Cellophane”; the conductor’s announcements; and Roxie and Velma’s ingratiating speech to the audience at the end of their stage act. The orchestra for *Chicago* sits not in a pit but on the stage, in the original production high atop a cylindrical platform that also served as part of the scenery. This idea, brilliantly realized by the scenic designer Tony Walton, helped to draw the audience’s attention to the fact that they were in a theater. (Mendes borrowed this idea for his version of *Cabaret*.)

Nearly all of the songs and scenes in *Chicago* are allusions to real vaudeville entertainment and performers (table 3.1). For example, “When You’re Good to Momma” is the type of number that Sophie Tucker sang, and “We Both Reached for the Gun” is a parody of the vaudeville ventriloquist routine. Velma’s appearance at the beginning of both acts recalls Texas Guinan, a woman and owner of a speakeasy who famously greeted her clientele with the epithet “suckers.”¹¹ At the beginning of act 2, Velma looks at the audience just back from intermission and says “Hello suckers, welcome back.”

Table 3.1. Vaudeville musical references in *Chicago*

Songs	Vaudeville Associations
“All That Jazz”	Texas Guinan (1884–1933) (during prohibition owned the famous speakeasy called the 300 Club)
“Funny Honey”	Helen Morgan (1900–1941) (“Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man,” “Bill,” and “Don’t Ever Leave Me”)
“When You’re Good to Mama”	Sophie Tucker (1884–1966) (“You’ve Got to See Mama Every Night”)
“All I Care About Is Love”	Ted Lewis (“I’m Crazy ’Bout My Baby, And My Baby’s Crazy ’Bout Me”)
“A Little Bit of Good”	Julian Eltinge (1883–1941) and Bert Savoy (female impersonators)
“We Both Reached for the Gun”	Ventriloquist acts
“Me and My Baby”	Eddie Cantor (1892–1964) (“Yes Sir, That’s My Baby” and “My Baby Just Cares for Me”)
“Mister Cellophane”	Bert Williams (1876–1922) (“Nobody”)

The black performer Bert Williams, the most revered comic of the vaudeville era, has been described as “a pathetic stage figure, hesitant in its delivery of lines, executing a song like ‘Nobody’ to the ‘plaintive sound’ of a slide trombone, which he made ‘apparently desperate efforts to catch up with.’”¹² Williams’s rendition of “Nobody” is the model for Amos’s self-deprecating performance of “Mister Cellophane.” A number of scenes in *Chicago* feature a traditional vaudeville routine or sketch: tap dance (act 1, scene 6), ventriloquist act (act 1, scene 8), card game trick (act 2, scene 3), rope trick (act 2, scene 4), and courtroom scene (act 2, scene 6).¹³ These references help to reinforce the staginess of the proceedings, even for those members of the audience who know little or nothing about vaudeville. One need not be familiar with vaudeville to appreciate *Chicago*, as the current revival, which mutes the 1920s aura, proves.¹⁴

These referential songs draw attention to the artifice of the vaudeville structure.¹⁵ For example, “Funny Honey” evokes the melancholy figure of Helen Morgan, whose tragic stage persona spilled over into her real life. Morgan, the famed chanteuse known for singing on top of an upright piano, was an alcoholic and died of liver disease. In Fosse’s staging of “Funny Honey,” Roxie, perched atop a piano with a drink in her hand, sings about Amos as he is being questioned by the district attorney. With each passing verse, Roxie knocks back another drink. The tone of the song takes a sour turn when Amos

rats on Roxie, who, now completely inebriated, loses her composure and lashes out at him. Roxie's Helen Morgan stylization lulls the audience into the sentiments of the song (that she feels affection for "that funny, sunny, honey hubby of mine"), but she negates this effect with her outburst ("that scummy, crummy, dummy hubby of mine").

By the end of 1973, Kander and Ebb had completed a draft of the score, which included a song for Henry Glassman called "Ten Percent," a country-swing version of "We Both Reached for the Gun," "It," and "Looping the Loop" (table 3.2).¹⁶ When *Chicago* went into rehearsals in the fall of 1974, the score contained only a few changes, such as a new version of "We Both Reached for the Gun." One of the changes to the score was the result of the audition of the actor Michael O'Haughey, who sang the "Bell Song" from *Lakme*. Fosse was so impressed with O'Haughey's abilities as a falsettist and female impersonator that he cast him in the role of Mary Sunshine. Kander and Ebb replaced Sunshine's earlier song, the cloying "Rose Colored Glasses," with the even more ingratiating and operatic "A Little Bit of Good." Billy Flynn de-wigs Mary Sunshine at the climax of his closing arguments at Roxie's trial, thus demonstrating that everything that happens in court is a performance.¹⁷ The Playbill listed the actor as M. O'Haughey in order to conceal his true sexual identity.

The tryout period in Philadelphia was tense for Kander and Ebb. Fosse was still recovering from his heart attack and the prolonged hospital stay. His mood had darkened, and he suspected that the producers and writers were scheming behind his back. He took out his paranoia on the cast and on Ebb. When Ebb would go off to work on a lyric, he would return to rehearsals only to find entirely new scenes improvised without his approval.¹⁸ Kander remembers going back to his hotel room, flopping on the bed, and thinking, "I could die right here." He once physically had to drag Ebb out of the rehearsal hall, lest his partner and the infant terrible director come to blows. Fosse's 1979 movie *All That Jazz* is a fictional account of his own experience working on *Chicago*. The single composer-lyricist character in the movie is allegedly a composite of Kander and Ebb, although on the surface he is much more Ebb than Kander. In any case, the depiction offended Ebb.¹⁹ Many people, including Kander and Ebb, found Fosse's postoperative frame of mind to be darker than it had been before, and it started to adversely affect the tone of the musical. Jerry Orbach observed that "There was no room in Bobby's concept of the show for real sentiment. He wanted something with an undertone of corruption." Fosse's original staging of "Razzle Dazzle" was "orgiastic": he

Table 3.2. Preliminary and final score of *Chicago*

Original Score		Final Version of Score	
Song	Character(s)	Song	Character(s)
Act One		Act One	
“All That Jazz”*	Velma and boys	“All That Jazz”	Velma and boys
“Funny Honey”	Roxie	“Funny Honey”	Roxie
		“When You’re Good to Momma”	Matron Morton
“Cell Block Tango”*	The girls	“Cell Block Tango”	The girls
“Ten Percent”*	Henry and Velma		
“No”*	Male quartet		
“All I Really Need”	Billy and chorus	“All I Really Need”	Billy and girls
“Rose Colored Glasses”*	Mary Sunshine	“A Little Bit of Good”	Mary Sunshine
“We Both Reached for the Gun”* (first versions)	Roxie, Billy, Mary, and chorus	“We Both Reached for the Gun” (third version)	Roxie, Billy, Mary and chorus
“Roxie”*	Roxie and boys	“Roxie”	Roxie and boys
“Pansy Eyes”*	Male quartet		
“I Can’t Do It Alone”*	Velma	“I Can’t Do It Alone”	Velma
“My Own Best Friend”*	Roxie and chorus	“My Own Best Friend”	Roxie and Velma (with chorus)
Act Two		Act Two	
“I Know a Girl”*	Velma	“I Know a Girl”	Velma
“Me and My Baby”	Roxie and boys	“Me and My Baby”	Roxie and boys
“Mister Cello- phane”*	Amos	“Mister Cello- phane”	Amos
“When Velma Takes the Stand”	Orchestra and quartet	“When Velma Takes the Stand”	Orchestra and quartet
“Razzle Dazzle”*	Billy, Roxie, Mary Sunshine, judge, jurors, and chorus	“Razzle Dazzle”	Billy and com- pany
“Class”	Velma and Matron	“Class”	Velma and Matron
“It”*	Roxie and Velma	“Nowadays”	Roxie and Velma
“Loopin’ the Loop”*	Roxie and Velma	“Hot Honey Rag”	Roxie and Velma

*Included on Kander and Ebb’s demo recording.

had the chorus members copulating on the spiral staircases leading up to the orchestra platform above the cylindrical set.²⁰ The producers hated it, but Fosse agreed to restage the scene only when Orbach convinced him that he was missing the Brechtian subtlety intrinsic in the number.

The reviews in Philadelphia were devastating, sending the creative team back to the drawing board. They made many changes, but the hardest choice they had to make was to cut the character of Harry Glassman and his song “Ten Percent,” which had been well received during performances. Since Glassman and Mama Morton were both parasitic characters, Fosse and the writers realized that one of them should be cut. After much deliberation, they decided to keep Matron Morton because she was a more integral part of the story.²¹ It was at this point that Kander and Ebb composed the song “When You’re Good to Mama,” which offset the loss of “Ten Percent.” Before *Chicago* reached Broadway, several other good numbers were cut in the service of the overall flow of the musical. In Philadelphia, *Chicago* featured a barbershop quartet, which sang “No, No, No”—a waltz in close harmony—while Roxie pleaded with Amos to put up \$5,000 for her legal defense. The quartet returned later and sang “Pansy Eyes” as Roxie posed for a series of photographs arranged by Billy: one while embracing a group of nuns, another while accepting a bouquet from a boy on crutches, and another while accepting a puppy from a lonely lady.²²

In Philadelphia, Roxie and Velma’s double act, which constitutes the finale of *Chicago*, was not coming off as Fosse had hoped. They sang a well-matched pair of songs, “Loopin’ the Loop”—which featured Gwen Verdon on saxophone and Chita Rivera on drums—and “It.”²³ Despite the excellent music and lyrics of these numbers, the scene seemed too much like an amateur act, so Fosse asked for something more “glamorous in pretty gowns and kinda like the toast of the town.” Kander and Ebb went back to their hotel and wrote “Nowadays.” Ebb proudly recalled, “He loved us and loved the song, and everyone loved the song. . . . That’s when we became heroes.” A short dance section occurs in the middle of “Nowadays,” sometimes called “R.S.V.P.” The band conductor whistles a debonair melody, and Roxie and Velma sing “wa-wa” vocals, a holdover from “It.” “Nowadays” segues into an upbeat dance routine entitled “Hot Honey Rag.” Peter Howard, the rehearsal pianist and dance arranger for *Chicago*, composed “Hot Honey Rag” over the harmonic foundation of “Funny Honey.”²⁴ Kander, Ebb, and Fosse salvaged “Loopin’ the Loop” by using it for the overture to *Chicago*.²⁵

Chicago opened at the 46th Street Theater on June 1, 1975, with Gwen

Verdon as Roxie, Chita Rivera as Velma Kelly, and Jerry Orbach as Billy Flynn. Barney Martin, best known as Morty Seinfeld, Jerry's father on *Seinfeld*, gave a strong performance as Amos, Roxie's hum-drum husband. The reviews were generally favorable, although many critics had trouble with the show's bleakness and cynicism. The most insightful statement about the musical appeared in a review by Stephen Farber: "Bob Fosse's love-hate letter to Broadway razzle dazzle—a valentine engraved in acid." Farber interprets Fosse's invective against the American tendency to treat criminals like celebrities as tantamount to accusing entertainers of being like killers: "The show blasts the ruthlessness, egomania and duplicity of performers, the coldbloodedness and opportunism of the promoters who merchandize and exploit them, as well as the fickleness and brutality of the vampire-like fans who feed on celebrities. . . . the intensity of the musical seemed to enjoy the form over content."²⁶ Walter Kerr failed to appreciate the vaudeville concept and felt that, unlike *Cabaret*, *Chicago* lacked the evil force to justify its gloomy point of view: "Al Capone wasn't Hitler and Cicero wasn't Munich." Clive Barnes dismissed the premise out of hand: "A comedy melodrama of a girl who shoots her lover and is then acquitted through the chicaneries of the Chicago criminal system—you can only wonder who ever thought it was suitable for a musical."²⁷ However, Barnes had a change of heart when Liza Minnelli later substituted for Verdon, describing this version as "Bob Fosse's Brechtian outpost of glamour, squalor and sublime discontent."²⁸ *Chicago* could not compete with *A Chorus Line*, which was playing two blocks away. It is ironic that the 1996 Broadway revival of *Chicago* is still running. In the fall of 2006, *Chorus Line* returned to Broadway for the first time. It will have to stay nearly as long as the original production to overtake *Chicago's* record.

Kander and Ebb's Score

Kander and Ebb's score for *Chicago* has a singular sense of purpose, and the songs seem to be cut from the same cloth. The jazzy style of the score provides a metaphor for the corruption on display as well as creates a sense of time and place. A few musical features in particular suggest the 1920s: "blue" notes, minor mode inflections, melodies centering on the 6th scale degree, and syncopated rhythms. The bluesiest song in the score, "Funny Honey," reserves the evocative lowered 3rd of the blues scale for the cadence on "that funny honey of mine" right before the bridge. The first phrase, a rising chromatic line embedded into a repeated melodic fragment, drives toward the

(a) BILLY:

I don't care a - bout ex - pen - sive — things, — cash - mere — coats, —
dia - mond — rings —

(b) BILLY:

Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, — we both, oh yes, we both oh yes, — we bothreached for
the gun, the gun, the gun, — the gun, oh yes, we both reachedfor — the gun, for the gun.

(c)

(d) VELMA:

Can you im - a - gine? I mean, can you i - ma - gine?

Example 3.1. The 6th scale degree as melodic focal point in songs from *Chicago*: (a) “All I Care About Is Love”; (b) “We Both Reached for the Gun” (chorus); (c) “I Can’t Do It Alone” (vamp); (d) “I Know a Girl” (verse); (e) “Me and My Baby”; (f) “Class”

(e) ROXIE:



Me and my ba - - - by, my ba - by and me.

(f) VELMA:



What-e-ver hap-pened to fair deal-ing and pure eth-ic and nice man-ners?

lowered 7th scale degree, which pushes the music in a subdominant direction. A minor subdominant in the next measure sets up the “blues” cadence. The bridge, which starts, “He ain’t no sheik,” is in the relative minor.²⁹ The 6th scale degree is the melodic focal point of no fewer than six songs in *Chicago* (see example 3.1a–f) plus three new songs that Kander and Ebb composed for the film. Most of the excerpts in example 3.1 also incorporate syncopated rhythm. For instance, “We Both Reached for the Gun” (example 3.1b) is a variation of a common figure in rags around 1925.³⁰ The secondary rag, as it is called, superimposes a group of three notes of equal duration over a steady beat in duple meter, the result being a constantly shifting accent pattern:

> > > > >

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

An example of secondary rag is found in the B section of Scott Joplin’s *Pine Apple Rag*.³¹ In “We Both Reached for the Gun,” the pattern is displaced and truncated, starting on the third reiteration of “oh yes.” The first beat of each triple eighth-note grouping is subdivided into sixteenth notes, the second of which is tied over the beat. The melody simply alternates between two pitches, which, coupled with the syncopated rhythmic, gives the impression that the ventriloquist dummy (Roxie) is mouthing to a broken record.

Over half of the seventeen songs in *Chicago*—as well as most of the cut-out songs and the numbers written for the film—either are in a minor key or incorporate pitches from the blues scale or minor scale.

Broadway Score

Overture (“Loopin’ the Loop”)

shift from major to minor in the A phrase (mm. 5–8); bridge starts in relative minor

“All That Jazz”

lowered 3rd on final cadence of refrain

“Funny Honey”	lowered 3rd on final cadence of refrain; bridge in relative minor
“Cell Block Tango”	introduction in minor key; oscillation between major and minor harmonies
“When You’re Good to Mama”	refrain begins in major but cadences in the parallel minor
“All I Care About”	bridge begins in minor subdominant
“Roxie”	lowered 3rd (blue note) on final cadence of the refrain
“I Can’t Do It Alone”	minor inflection during the bridge
“Mister Cellophane”	shift to minor key mediant in verse; lowered 3rd on “never know I’m there”; final cadence on minor tonic
“Class”	shift to parallel minor in refrain; lowered 6th scale degree and minor iv on “ass”
“R.S.V.P.” (dance break in “Nowadays”)	lowered 3rd and 7th scale degrees (blue notes)
“Honey Rag”	minor inflected chord (based on harmonic progression of “Funny Honey”)

Cutout Songs

“Ten Percent”	verse in minor key
“No, No, No”	bridge in minor key; minor inflection on “live”
Verse to “Roxie”	verse in minor key

Songs Written for the Film

“It’s a Criminal Thing”	in minor key
“In Other Words . . . Chicago”	minor bridge

“When You’re Good to Mama” and “Cell Block Tango” are full-fledged minor songs. Both have the tendency, however, to slip into the major mode. Occurring back to back early in act 1, they introduce the audience and Roxie to the prison world in which most of the story takes place. “Cell Block Tango” begins with a sultry introduction in the minor key, but the song starts in the parallel major key (example 3.2). The opening line moves along an axis stretching from the “blue” A-flat down to A-natural. The cross-relationship between

He had it com-plain' He had it com-plain' He on-ly had 'him - self to blame. _

if you'd have been there, If you'd have seen it, I'll bet-cha

you would have done the same.

Example 3.2. "Cell Block Tango"

A-flat and A-natural creates a high degree of tonal ambiguity, but the chorus cadences definitely in F minor. The refrain starts out like a real blues number—four measures on the tonic chord followed by two measures in the subdominant—although it does not fully complete the twelve-bar-blues pattern. Kander and Ebb might have had W. C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" (1914) in mind, which Bessie Smith recorded in 1925. Like Handy's song, the refrain of "Cell Block Tango" incorporates the habanera rhythm ("Spanish Tinge") discussed in reference to Scott Joplin's "Solace" in Chapter 1.

The introduction to “When You’re Good to Mama,” an orchestral fanfare in A major, accompanies Mama Morton’s first entrance. The verse starts in the parallel minor and ends on a half cadence. A burlesque bump-and-grind vamp follows, but the first phrase of the song—a two-measure theme occurring three times in a descending sequence—starts out in the parallel major key (example 3.3). The melody quickly shifts back to the minor key, and, on the aphoristic ending of the line “Mama’s good to you,” the voice traces the bottom six notes of the F-sharp minor scale, skipping over B.

The unusual emphasis on the minor mode in *Chicago* is not just connected to the influence of the blues. It also carries implicit ethnic associations (Latino, African-American, and Jewish), which lie just beneath the surface of the story. Even before the twenties, Tin Pan Alley composers regularly wrote songs in the minor key. Jack Gottlieb has shown that this tendency derived from Jewish and Yiddish musical traditions. The identification of minor melodies with Jewish music was so strong that Cole Porter, the only non-Jewish Golden Era composer to conquer Broadway, confessed to Richard Rodgers that he consciously tried to write “Jewish music,” by which Rodgers and Porter understood to mean languid minor melodies. Porter must have meant it, for he composed some of the greatest minor ballads in the musical theater repertory—for example, “So in Love” from *Kiss Me, Kate*, and “I Love Paris” from *Can-Can*. Broadway composers occasionally used minor keys to denote ethnicity, race, and otherness (for example, “Can’t Help Lovin’ That Man” from *Show Boat* and “Wintergreen for President” from *Of Thee I Sing*). In *Cabaret* (especially the film version) and *Chicago*, Kander and Ebb adopted the old practice.

It should be noted that Ebb’s early drafts portray racial tension among the inmates, especially between Roxie and Velma. Roxie’s lines are laced with racial epitaphs, a trait also found in Watkins’s play, albeit to a lesser degree. Because Ebb had Chita Rivera in mind for Velma, he used her Latin-American ethnicity as the main target for Roxie’s bigoted slurs (even though Velma’s last name is Irish). For example, while feasting on the dinner sent to her by a secret admirer, Roxie goes out of her way to provoke Velma: “I’d offer ya some, but it ain’t one of it [*sic*] enchiladas. . . . Don’t you know anybody could send you dinner from the Palmer House? Some nice . . . bull fighter or somethin’?” Later, in the presence of Mary Sunshine, Roxie continues to antagonize Velma: “I find people of . . . Spanish origin very . . . jealous, don’t you? It must be that hot climate. And all them bananas.” These lines were

Got a lit-tle mot - to,

Al-ways sees me through ————— When you're good to ma - ma,

Ma-ma's good to you. ———

The image shows a musical score for the song "When You're Good to Mama" in G major (one sharp). It consists of three systems. Each system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand. The lyrics are: "Got a lit-tle mot - to," "Al-ways sees me through ————— When you're good to ma - ma," and "Ma-ma's good to you. ———".

Example 3.3. "When You're Good to Mama"

eliminated during tryouts in Philadelphia, perhaps because they would have squelched any sympathy that the audience might have for Roxie.

The song "Ten Percent," although cut from the show after Philadelphia, provides a good case study of how Kander and Ebb subtly slipped traces of ethnic stereotypes into the score, as Watkins did with her character descriptions. It also sheds additional light on the composition of "When You're Good to Mama." Harry Glassman, the character who sings "Ten Percent," can be read as Jewish, if only because of his name and theatrical profession. In addi-

Did you

know that the worm is here. Well may-be it's a fi-gure of speech. But it

ain't nice. The worm is here and nei-ther is "Get off me you leech."

Example 3.4. "Ten Percent"

tion, musical details of "Ten Percent" mark him as a Jew. As Glassman first enters the stage, the orchestra plays an ethnically tinged vamp in the minor mode, with strong offbeat accents (example 3.4). Kander probably modeled the vamp for "When You're Good to Mama" on this vamp. It is closely related to the opening measures of the "Money Song" from the film version of *Cabaret*, sounding like a cross between Eastern European Klezmer music and burlesque. Henry's opening melody outlines an inverted G minor triad, with an emphasis on the minor sixth interval between D and B-flat. A figure reminiscent of a cantorial trope on "The worm is here" centers on the interval of a diminished third formed between the upper neighbor E-flat and C-sharp.

Such a melodic gesture has its roots in popular Yiddish song. The C-sharp in this example is borrowed from one of two prominent melodic types of Jewish folk music that contain an augmented second. This version contains a raised 4th scale degree, which forms the augmented second with the lowered 3rd of the minor scale.³² An abrupt modulation to the major key and a broadening of the tempo occur during a grandiose melody on “I’m a theatrical agent,” at which point Glassman performs an Italianate recitative. The refrain that follows is in the relative major and is evocative of the Charleston.

There is a historical precedent for the minor verse–major refrain structure of “Ten Percent.” This harmonic relationship between verse and refrain was common in early popular Jewish-American music and reflects the process of acculturation of Jewish musicians: as Jack Gottlieb notes, “For while this [minor] verse portrayed the Jew in traditional garb, the chorus in major showed him off in American Cloth.”³³ The syncopated rhythms (a symbol of the American vernacular and modernity, and the cause, as Watkins’s *Mary Sunshine* suggests, of Roxie’s crime) simultaneously reflect Glassman’s theatrical vocation and his self-consciousness about his Jewish roots. The end of the chorus (on “ten percent”) features a pre-cadential cantorial melisma crowned by a flat third, here intended as a “blue” note, as opposed to a borrowed pitch from Eastern European music.

With its verse in the minor key and jazzy refrain in the major, “Ten Percent” also epitomizes the cross-pollination of Jewish and African-American music in vernacular song in the twenties. Jewish Tin Pan Alley composers, none more important than George Gershwin, incorporated jazz elements into their music. There is, of course, an exploitative aspect to this sort of ethnic borrowing. As Samson Raphaelson claimed in his preface to the stage version of *The Jazz Singer*, “Jews are determining the nature and scope of jazz more than any other race—more than the Negroes, from whom they have stolen jazz and given it a new color and meaning.”³⁴ When the role of Harry Glassman was excised from *Chicago*, the writers transferred the exploitative aspect of his character onto the role of Mama Morton. It is important to bear in mind that Sophie Tucker, the model for Matron Morton, was Jewish and performed in blackface. Thus, “When You’re Good to Mama,” which mixes jazz and features associated with Jewish music, reflects the exploitive practices of blackface singers like Tucker, Al Jolson, and Eddie Cantor—as well as Jewish composers. By association, Mama Morton is a thinly veiled stereotype of the avaricious Jewish businessman. Glassman’s music acknowledges his ethnic roots, but Mama Morton sings what is intended as a jazz number

disassociated from its African-American roots. Such a relationship is less pronounced when a black actress plays the role of Mama Morton, which is often the case in the current Broadway revival and which is the case in the film, which stars Queen Latifa as Morton. What remains strongly in place in these versions is the vaudeville associations with the part.

The Broadway Revival and Film

The City Center “Encores!” series has been one of the darlings of the New York theater establishment since its inception in 1991. It has presented semi-staged versions of musicals from the past with their original orchestrations, including *Fiorello!*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*, *Carnival*, *Damn Yankees*, and *The Apple Tree*. None of these shows generated the excitement surrounding the production of *Chicago*, which took place in May 1996. As Kander and Ebb entered the theater, “the atmosphere was all of a sudden electric. You could sense it almost before the show started.” Ebb joked, “It was like we had invited everyone in the audience.” Ann Reinking appeared as Roxie, a role she had played during the original Broadway run, Bebe Neuwirth as Velma, James Naughton as Billy Flynn, and Joel Grey as Amos.

The Encores’s production spawned the Broadway revival, now in its tenth year, which in turn inspired the Academy-Award-winning film version in 2002. Reinking, Neuwirth, Naughton, and Grey all signed on to repeat their respective parts on Broadway, Walter Bobbie directed, and Reinking re-created Fosse’s original choreography, thereby introducing his style to a new generation. Ironically, Kander and Ebb were happy but not surprised that their 1975 musical still had some relevance. Not lost on Ebb were the headlines that made their “jaundiced worldview” seem almost fashionable, like the O. J. Simpson trial and the Monica Lewinsky scandal.³⁵ Kander humorously noted that the revival proved that “corruption never goes out of fashion,” and saw a historical connection to the successful revival of *Pal Joey*, which was first considered “just too mean.”

Marty Richards, one of the original Broadway producers of *Chicago*, was the driving force behind the film. He had purchased the movie rights for about \$500,000 during the final months of the original Broadway run. What followed was an arduous, twenty-seven-year period of ups and downs leading to the 2003 Academy Award for best motion picture.³⁶ So many directors, actors, and writers were considered for the film that its success is nothing

short of a miracle. Richards knew that turning *Chicago* into an effective film was not just a simple matter of reconfiguring the songs in cinematic terms and opening up the physical space of the Broadway version. To successfully transfer *Chicago* to film, the writer and director would have to find a filmic equivalent for Fosse and Ebb's concept. They would have to find, to quote Scott McMillin, "its own version of the theatre's fixed space." The Broadway version of *Chicago* draws attention to itself as a theatrical experience framed inside the proscenium of a vaudeville theater. Film can go anywhere, and the audience is willing to go along.³⁷

Richards's first choice for director was Fosse, who agreed only after much arm-twisting. When Fosse died of a heart attack in 1987, Richards lost all hope of getting the film made, but, a few years later, he got a call from Harvey Weinstein, the co-chairman of Miramax Films, who was interested in reviving the project. They signed an agreement in 1994.³⁸ Finding a new director who was agreeable to all parties was a long and arduous process. Richards wanted Baz Luhrmann, the director of *Strictly Ballroom*, but Luhrmann turned him down for fear of being compared to Fosse. Herbert Ross agreed to direct the film and stuck with the project for over a year, until he saw the Broadway revival. During this period, Larry Gelbart agreed to write the screenplay. In 1998 Richards turned to the director Nicholas Hytner and sent him Gelbart's screenplay. Hytner in turn asked Wendy Wasserstein to write a new screenplay. Miramax did not like either one. Word spread at the time that Goldie Hawn would play Roxie and Madonna Velma,³⁹ but Hytner felt that Hawn was too old for the part. He wanted Nicole Kidman for Roxie, but he soon left the project. Richards considered several other directors, including Milos Forman, Martin Scorsese, Alan Parker, David Fincher, and Robert Iscove, but eventually the studio hired Rob Marshall to direct and choreograph the film.

Ironically, Miramax courted Marshall for *Rent*, but he had his hopes pinned on *Chicago* and won over the studio with his concept for the film. Marshall brought a contemporary vision to the musical. More importantly, he came up with a filmic analogy for the vaudeville concept: all the songs occur in Roxie's imagination. The film medium allowed him to shift back and forth fluidly between the reality of the prison and a world of fantasy. Richards, who admired the use of this technique in the television series *Ally McBeal*, was confident that it would work for the film.⁴⁰ With Marshall signed, the studio and Richards still had to find a screenwriter, and Miramax suggested Bill Condon, the writer of *Gods and Monsters* and *The Usual Suspects*.

Marshall and Condon understood that the postmodern Hollywood musical needed to incorporate music more realistically than did its Broadway counterpart, and that one does not hear, or listen to, songs in film in the same way as one does in a Broadway musical. The different medium reorients the listener's relationship to music.⁴¹ As Fosse had done for *Cabaret*, Marshall and Condon established "a diegetic world in which the audience can recognize that song and dance are valid modes of expression."⁴² The film rests on the premise that Roxie imagines all of the musical numbers as a showbiz fantasy in which she is the star. This format maintained the performative framework of vaudeville but also provided the verisimilitude demanded by the film medium. Although a brilliant application of the film medium, this idea, as McMillin claims, "is a far cry from the metaphorical use of the stage in the musical as a space that stands for the places of the Chicago justice system."⁴³ What is lost in the new interpretation is the Brechtian disorienting effect of the stage version, which constantly draws attention to the artifice of theater. But the film succeeded in dealing with the reluctance of average filmgoers to accept the innate staginess of Broadway musicals and to overlook the fact that people do not break into song in real life. Marshall and Condon deconstructed Fosse and Ebb's material and humanized Roxie in a way that the stage musical never attempted. In effect, they focused on Roxie as the point-of-view character, whereas Fosse himself provided the point of view for the Broadway version.

An overview of Larry Gelbart's and Wendy Wasserstein's screenplays for the film illustrates why Marshall and Condon's works so well. Gelbart purposely avoided a film equivalent for the vaudeville framework and in general was not comfortable devising fantasy sequences. He sought cinematic realism, an aesthetic stance that kept him from fully embracing the proper frame of mind for the project. For instance, the female inmates in his version are scantily clad not to create a steamy sexuality with metaphorical potential, as Fosse did, but rather to reflect the insufferably hot conditions of the prison. Gelbart felt that the style should have a hard, cynical edge—not the sort for which Fosse was famous but more like that found in the films *Public Enemy* and *Little Caesar*. Whereas Marshall and Condon's version imparts a modern attitude about the topic without making any contemporary references, Gelbart wanted explicitly to link the theme of the story to modern times by starting with "Nowadays," the last song in the Broadway version, heard as underscoring during an opening montage made up of news clippings from the trials of O. J. Simpson, Lorena Bobbit, Michael Jackson, Mike Tyson,

and the Menendez brothers. Segments from television tabloid news shows, such as “A Current Affair” and “Entertainment Tonight,” are interspersed throughout. The bandleader counts out the beats “5, 6, 7, 8,” taking us back to Chicago of the 1920s.⁴⁴ Another change that he made to the story involves the Hungarian convict Hunyak, the only unequivocally innocent prisoner in the story. She dies not by hanging as in the Broadway version but in the electric chair. This change epitomizes the flatness of Gelbart’s version. On Broadway (and ultimately in the film), Hunyak’s hanging, witnessed by her sister inmates, is a powerful visual image, and it marks a turning point for Roxie, who finally takes seriously the possibility of her own execution.

Gelbart’s approach to the music was too literal, and it limited the ways in which he incorporated the songs, which have surprisingly little dramatic effect. For instance, in his second treatment, Billy Flynn, for whom he envisioned John Travolta, sings “All I Care About Is Love” after we already know all that there is to know about his character.⁴⁵ “Roxie” is reduced to a conventional wanting song, which Roxie sings between signing her confession and going to prison. “Cell Block Tango” occurs after Roxie and Velma meet, thus providing no suspense about the prison world into which Roxie is about to enter. Matron Mama sings “When You’re Good to Mama” directly to Roxie while squeezing her for money, thus robbing the song of its metaphorical value. In “We Both Reached for the Gun” Roxie, now nobody’s dummy, simply answers the barrage of questions from the reporters herself. By way of contrast, Marshall and Condon found an effective way to incorporate the majority of the songs from the Broadway score.⁴⁶

Wendy Wasserstein’s version is no more effective than Gelbart’s. It is a movie-within-a-movie told by Velma in an interview with Frankie Callahan, a female reporter who covered the trial and built her reputation thereupon. Throughout the film, we hear Velma introducing the scenes, starting with “The night it all started, I was playing a joint called Butch O’Malley’s.” Only at the end of the film is it revealed that Velma is giving an interview. Wasserstein tried unnecessarily to strengthen the connection between the action and the characters’ motivation. She invented a district attorney named Felix Fingerman, a son of Russian immigrants who wants to rid the city of corruption. Fingerman goes after Roxie’s conviction in order to set an example to other potential murderesses, and he believes he has an open-and-shut case. However, the mayor, who plays golf with Billy Flynn, pressures him to lay off the case. Once he realizes that pursuing Roxie is not in his best interest, he goes after Hunyak because he anticipates another easy conviction.

Mama Morton, an ex-theatrical agent, helps Roxie because she sees her as her ticket back into show business. During the end credits Wasserstein revives the old film convention of providing summaries about the ultimate fate of each character. Frankie (“Francine”) Callahan wins the Pulitzer Prize for her book, *Chicago*, which is the story told to her by Velma. The movie version of her book, the one we are watching, is a big hit. Roxie attends the premiere of the film with Cary Grant, Velma with Clark Gable. Mama Morton purchases the William Morris Talent Agency. Flynn wins in his bid to become mayor of Chicago. Felix Fingerman is arrested and exposed as a communist infiltrator.

Casting of the film was as difficult as signing a director and coming up with a workable screenplay. Back when Hytner was working on the project, both Bette Midler and Pam Grier were considered for Morton. At one point, the trio of Rosie O’Donnell, John Travolta, and Nathan Lane were envisioned in the roles of Mama Morton, Billy Flynn, and Amos Hart, respectively. Toni Collette was a contender for Roxie, and Kathy Bates for Morton. Miramax tried to get Brittany Spears to play a small part, but Marshall and Richards vehemently objected. When casting began in earnest, Richards wanted Kevin Kline to play the role of Billy Flynn, but the actor was unwilling to take on any negative roles. Richards’s second choice, Kevin Spacey, also turned down the role. Richard Gere agreed to play the role but would not audition, as was also the case for Catherine Zeta-Jones and Renée Zellweger.⁴⁷

In the buildup to the release of the film, the press made much of the fact that Catherine Zeta-Jones, Renée Zellweger, and Richard Gere were appearing in a musical. However, only Zellweger lacked significant stage musical experience. Raymond Knapp has argued that her lack of any musical theater experience was one of the film’s strengths. “The strategic casting shakes the characters loose from the glib dance-based personae of the stage versions, allowing then—particularly Roxie—to achieve a kind of reality that the highly stylized Broadway mounting categorically denies them, for the ‘real world’ of more naturalistic film is where they most seem to belong for audiences familiar with their other work.”⁴⁸ Not only was Zellweger’s inexperience effective in the role of Roxie, but it also allowed for the film to find itself in cinematic terms. The brilliant editing of the film makes Zellweger’s dancing appear seamless and polished, as no single shot takes in enough movement to reveal her lack of dancing experience.

Kander and Ebb were generally pleased with the film. However, Ebb had one major complaint regarding the opening setup.

There's a terrific mistake in the movie. I kept quiet about it . . . it makes me crazy, but it's there. It doesn't make any sense. She [Velma] gets out of her car. She walks into a nightclub. She washes her hands. She tears a sheet. I mean, obviously you're supposed to think that she just committed the crime. He says, "where's your sister?" "Oh, I'm gonna do it alone tonight." Another spotlight comes on. She comes out and sings "All That Jazz." Where did that act come from? This is Velma. And all the boys appear. Where the hell are you? Who is that girl? Later, you hear in "Cell Block Tango," "I was in Cicero with my sister. I went out . . . I came back and shot em." So what's that beginning ["All that Jazz"]? Where was she then? It makes *no sense*. . . . And then John writes *reams* about what a wonderful opening that is. It's not. I mean, it is. It's a wonderful number, but it's not dramatically sound. It's not logical. It's not true. It's not right. And it drove me nuts.

Despite this objection, Ebb, like Kander, was happy that the film was such a big hit. Kander and Ebb did not participate in the development or shooting of the film, but they did retain control of the musical material. Late in the process, Miramax Studio hired Janet Jackson to write and record a song to play during the credits, hoping to snag an Academy-Award nomination for best song. Harvey Weinstein was so determined to use Jackson that he even asked Kander and Ebb to collaborate with her, an indignity reminiscent of what the writers suffered during the filming of *Funny Lady* (see Appendix). They flatly refused and wrote "I Move On," which, in the final cut of the film, the two divas sing during the credits. (Sony did include Jackson's song, "Love Is a Crime," recorded by Anastacia, on the soundtrack, and Kander and Ebb were powerless to do anything about it.)⁴⁹ "I Move On" received an Academy-Award nomination, although it lost to "Lose Yourself" from the film *8 Mile*.⁵⁰

Chicago is one of the most unsympathetic musicals ever written, second only to *The Threepenny Opera* in its cynical view of humanity. It takes great pleasure in attacking the mythology of fame in America. It has no love story, and every attempt to include one, such as a request by Miramax Studio, was ultimately rejected. The darkness of *Chicago* may account for why ticket sales for the original production paled in comparison with those for *A Chorus Line*. It is ironic that *A Chorus Line*, which recently returned to Broadway, comes off today like a period piece, whereas *Chicago* seems timely. *A Chorus Line* is about feeling, and we sympathize with each of the young dancers. *Chicago* lacks the warmth of *A Chorus Line*. Only Amos and Hunyak are honest human beings, and they alone deserve our sympathy, but the system destroys

them.⁵¹ The film, as Knapp claims, “performs a major act of rescue, making the reality of Roxie’s limited perspective and resultant pain sufficiently vivid, through montage, that we can take her seriously as someone who suffers and may not be discounted as *merely* cynical.” Ebb probably never looked at the film in these terms, and if he did he probably would not have approved of the change. Of course, the film offers a healthy dose of cynicism mainly through the realistic scenes when Roxie is not imagining herself a star.

The success of the film spurred the making of other movie musicals, such as *Dream Girls*, *Hairspray*, and *Sweeney Todd*. *Chicago* had a relatively small budget of \$45 million, but it grossed over \$450 million. Kander and Ebb received little actual revenue from the film, though, and Richards claims that Miramax owes him money, for which he has initiated legal proceedings.⁵² Despite this unpleasantness, Richards has few regrets. He has confessed, “This picture has been like a present, a joy, but it’s always come with a little bit of heartache.”