

A Chorus Line: Does It Abide By Rules Established By Actors' Equity Association For The Audition Process?

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A CHORUS LINE: DOES IT ABIDE BY RULES ESTABLISHED BY ACTORS' EQUITY
ASSOCIATION FOR THE AUDITION PROCESS?

by

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B.M. East Texas Baptist University, 1991

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

I have been cast as “Bobby” in A Chorus Line at Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre in Orlando. I will use this opportunity as my thesis role. As part of my thesis defense, I will combine an analysis of the character of “Bobby” in A Chorus Line with an assessment of Actors’ Equity Association’s audition policies from 1970 to the present, and investigate whether the audition held in the show abides by the policies established by AEA for Broadway calls.

“Bobby” has an interesting arc of development as he actually gives the director what he (the director) does not want, yet is still cast in the fictitious Broadway show. Why he would choose to stray from the director’s instructions is an interesting question and demanding study. To facilitate my research on the character (aside from script and score analysis), I will interview Thommie Walsh (about for whom the role was written and the original “Bobby” on Broadway) as well as other men who have played the role to get insights into the character that will enhance my performance. Mr. Walsh will also elaborate on his real-life relationship with Michael Bennett and how that compares and contrasts with the relationship between “Bobby” and “Zach.” I also will interview as many of the original cast members as possible (namely Baayork Lee) to get contributing memories and anecdotal evidence from the original production.

A Chorus Line captures the one element all performers experience – the audition. The audition process has changed over the years, and I will focus on the development of protocol from the early 1970’s (when A Chorus Line takes place) to the present. I will explore the manner in which the process has evolved and what A Chorus Line’s contribution was (if any) to that process. This show has become so much a part of the musical theatre vernacular that historical exploration of procedures would also clarify how this work was structured. Were

actors subjected to that intense style of audition on a huge stage in the early 1970s? Are they still today? My research will trace the history and rules governing auditions, performers and staff as delineated by Actors' Equity Association. I will also include a comparison of Equity to the variety of non-Equity auditions. Other sources will include rulebooks from AEA and interviews with dancers (past and present), AEA staff and Patrick Quinn, President of AEA.

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Jillian Johnson, and the cast and crew of Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre's A Chorus Line (2004).

Actors' Equity Association.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This thesis serves three purposes. It is the partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements set forth by the University of Central Florida Conservatory Theatre for the completion of a Masters of Fine Arts Degree. It is also the culmination of work presented in conjunction with the performance of the thesis role of “Bobby” in A Chorus Line at the Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre in Orlando, Florida. The second purpose is to determine if the show A Chorus Line abides by the rules and regulations set forth by Actors’ Equity Association for Broadway Chorus Call Auditions. Moreover, the third purpose is to explore how, if at all, A Chorus Line influenced Actors’ Equity in regard to said auditions or in regulations governing them and their policies governing the creation of shows in workshop and showcase productions.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY OF THE SHOW

Background

A Chorus Line is one of the most critically acclaimed, awarded, creative, historically significant, and brilliant musicals to ever grace the Broadway stage. Every part of the show is unique and cutting-edge, especially for its time. From its inception to its status as the longest-running Broadway show of all time (at the time), every aspect of its turbulent history tells of its exquisite brilliance.

A Chorus Line opened at the Shubert Theatre on Broadway on July 25, 1975 and ran until April 28, 1990 for 6,137 performances. A Chorus Line won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1976, making it only the fifth musical in history to receive the award (www.pulitzer.org). In 1975, the show garnered the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Musical, seven Obie Awards, and a Special Theatre World Award was given to every original cast member and member of the creative staff. In 1976, A Chorus Line won a total of nine Tony Awards: Best Musical, Actress (Donna McKechnie), Featured Actress (Kelly Bishop), Featured Actor (Sammy Williams), Director (Michael Bennett), Choreography (Bennett and Bob Avian), Book (James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante), Score (Marvin Hamlisch and Edward Kleban) and Lighting (Tharon Musser). It won Drama Desk Awards for Best Book, Score, Director, Choreographer and Actress (a tie between McKechnie and Bishop). And the show garnered several awards from Los Angeles (LA Drama Critic's Circle Distinguished Achievement Awards for Best Production, Direction, Book, Choreography and Lighting) and London (London Evening Standard Award for Best Musical of 1977). In 1978, A Chorus Line was awarded a Gold Record from Columbia Records for its cast album, and in 1984 the show was given a Special Tony as the Longest

Running Show in Broadway history (Stevens 234-236). Upon opening, critics nearly unanimously praised the show; audiences came and stayed for almost fifteen years.

But this was not really the beginning of the show. There were two workshops, hours of taped interviews, and brainstorming that began with two individuals – Tony Stevens and Michon Peacock – who are not widely known for their contribution to the final product. A Chorus Line began, like many other creative ventures, with two business associates wanting to establish more control over their careers.

History of A Chorus Line

During the days of Ziegfeld and his Follies, the heyday of the Broadway chorus was in full swing. There were choruses for singers, dancers, and statuesque showgirls. Casts of hundreds were assembled and costumed at times simply for stunning effect. Many, many performers were employed during this time. However, due mainly to the changing economic climate, these huge choruses slowly diminished in number and became combined. By the 1970's, the two separate choruses for dancers and singers were usually combined into one, making it now incumbent for performers to be able to multi-task in order to be cast.

Tony Stevens and Michon Peacock were dancers in the Broadway community during the 1960's-70's. Realizing the changes occurring on Broadway (smaller choruses and fewer shows), coupled with the reality of the dancer's brief career, Stevens and Peacock set out to give something back to the Broadway hooper. They originally wanted to create a commune – a safe haven for dancers to experience and explore other forms of performance so they could phase into other aspects of their careers. However, they realized that without the backing of a titanic force – a powerful director or a financial benefactor – they were only dreaming. They approached

Michael Bennett, a young and talented director with a solid Broadway track record. Together, they invited dancers from the established Broadway community, the cream of the crop, to a rap session. In January 1974, they all convened at the Nicolaus Exercise Center on the Lower East Side for a midnight dance class/information gathering session. After the class, they sat in a circle and told their real name, stage name if it was different, where and when they were born, and their astrological sign. This session eventually opened up into their childhoods and how they started dancing. Many realized they were very similar to the others in the room. Many had endured years of dance lessons, sacrifice and terrible family situations. Common threads emerged, and the bonds between dancers began to form – even between those who disliked or barely knew each other. They left the dance studio in the wee hours of the morning elated and energized from the experience.

A second taping session was planned, and two very important stories came from this second attempt. Nicholas Dante, the eventual co-author of A Chorus Line, told his emotional story of being sexually abused by strangers and performing as a pony dancer (dressed as a girl) in a drag nightclub act. His story was directly integrated into the show as Paul San Marco's monologue. Also, Mitzi Hamilton was very frank about her newly acquired breast augmentation, which, in turn, became Val's solo number "Dance 10, Looks 3." Subsequent private tapings were also held in Bennett's office. Prominent interviews included those with original cast members Baayork Lee and Pamela Blair.

In the spring of 1974, Peacock, Avian and Dante formed the Ensemble Theatre, Inc. (originally called the Broadway Creative Commune) with the group of taped dancers to continue their idea of helping and continuing their performance careers. Although this did not prove to be

a reckoning force artistically, it did prove to be the amalgamation of these dancers' commitment to this yet-to-be-named dancer project.

With Bennett on board as director/choreographer, Dante set to pen the project and Edward Kleban and Marvin Hamlisch as songsmiths, they began the first of the two workshops in August of 1974. This was historic for a few reasons. First, the workshop process had never been used for writing and developing a new work. Second, there was really no music or script before the actors attended the first rehearsal. It was created "on their bodies" (specifically for the individual actors' strengths) while they were there. Third, the script was taken from the taped rap sessions, and the actors were constantly being observed and questioned to further refine the script and characters. During this time, the actors were being paid \$100 per week for their participation. Out of this workshop emerged early versions of "At the Ballet," "I Can Do That," and "Nothing." On the last day of the workshop, Bennett planned to fake an injury to see what the dancers would do and how they would react. While leading a dance combination, he fell to the floor, grasping his knee. Dancers scattered – some to Bennett's aid, some to the phone to call for help, some frozen in fear. After a few minutes, he got up and restaged the scene according to what they had done when he fell. This was the beginnings of the "Alternatives Scene," the segment that discusses what the dancers will do after they cannot dance anymore (Flinn 63-64). Bennett also realized that he did not own the rights to these people's stories, so he asked the cast to sign over their life stories for one dollar. They did, and it was a decision several of them have lived to regret. It was also clear to Bennett that Dante was struggling with the writing duties. James Kirkwood, a popular novelist and Dante's favorite writer, was brought on to help.

Another workshop session was held in early 1975. At that time, the cast was given raises to \$150 per week, and after additional songs, retooling the piece (and drastic cuts), all was ready for the first performance at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre at Joseph Papp's Public Theatre in April 1975. The audiences were simultaneously devastated and mesmerized. The raw emotion of the piece sliced close to the bone in audience members from all walks of life. It became the hottest ticket in town. Movie stars, socialites and other glitterati sat on the stairs just for a chance to see the show. After about three and a half successful months at the Beaumont, A Chorus Line closed for one week on July 13, 1975 and moved uptown to Broadway's Shubert Theatre (Papp notification letter).

The first Broadway preview was held July 25, 1975, and the cast's salaries were raised again – this time to \$650 per week. Almost immediately after they got to Broadway, a musician's strike forced the official opening to be postponed until October 19, 1975. Reviews were unanimous in their praise. Awards were heaped upon the show, its creative team and its actors. Since then, it has spawned numerous national tours, countless regional productions and has played almost every major world city in their native languages. On September 29, 1983, A Chorus Line became the longest-running Broadway show surpassing the musical Grease. A special performance was given in the Shubert that night with Bennett bringing in companies from all over the globe – including the original cast – to perform sections of the show. A Chorus Line closed on April 28, 1990 after playing its 6,137th performance.

That is the history of A Chorus Line. What many people do not realize was how influential this show was to be.

**CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH: DOES A CHORUS LINE ABIDE BY RULES SET
FORTH BY ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION?**

A Chorus Line: What Is Unchanged

Does A Chorus Line abide by rules for auditions established by Actors' Equity Association – the union for stage actors and stage managers? The short answer is “yes, it does.” But first, one must determine what kind of audition is taking place during the production of A Chorus Line. For Equity actors, there are three types of auditions: The Agent Call, the EPA, and the Chorus Call.

The first, the Agent Call, is a submission from an agent. An actor's agent will submit the actor's headshot (a picture, usually only of the face) and his acting resume to the casting director or other representative of a project – in this case, a musical. If the actor is appropriate for a role, he might be called to audition. These auditions are usually brief and consist of singing a song or two, a monologue and/or a cold reading from the script. There is usually no dancing at this time.

The EPA (Equity Principal Audition) is an audition that is open to any member of Actors' Equity Association in good standing. There is a guarantee of one minute of uninterrupted time that the actor can be seen. Depending on what kind of show, actors can either sing or do a monologue at this type of audition. However, the rules governing this type of audition have changed over the years. At the time of A Chorus Line (1975), an actor would have to wait outside in a line in order to be seen by a casting team/individual. The actors would sign up in the order in which they arrived, and then they would audition in that same order. Since then, the procedures for the EPA have been changed in order to allow maximum flexibility for the actor. Although actors still have to wait outside and sign up for an audition, they may sign

up for any time slot within the audition for that day, allowing them to leave and return ten minutes before their scheduled time (Casting Call *EPA* www.actorsequity.org). There is no dancing at an EPA. Obviously, A Chorus Line is neither an agent submission nor an EPA.

A Chorus Call is the closest thing to a “cattle call” that an Equity actor will attend.¹ A sign up sheet is available one week prior to the scheduled audition. The actors must go to the Equity Audition Center in New York and sign the sheet for the audition. Thirty minutes prior to the call time for the audition, all actors on the sheet must be in attendance when their name is called. They then will receive a “dance card” with an audition number on it. After all names are called, anyone who missed their name or anyone who did not sign up on the list may be given a card. The Chorus Call is usually the type of audition held for chorus singers (singing anywhere from eight to thirty-two measures of music) or dancers. The dancers are usually called in groups of twenty to thirty people, depending on the size of the room (Casting Call *Chorus Calls* www.actorsequity.org). They are taught a dance combination, perform it in smaller groups, and a cut is made. After everyone is seen the first time, more combinations may be taught with cuts made afterwards.

A Chorus Line depicts several dancers auditioning with four dance combinations: a jazz combination (“The Opening”), a ballet combination (also in “The Opening”), a stylized combination (“One”), and a tap combination (“The Tap Combination”). They also spontaneously dance throughout the rest of the piece. However, three of the four dance combinations have already been taught prior to the start of the show. “One” is taught off stage

¹ A “cattle call” is a term used in the acting industry for an audition where there are large numbers of people attending.

and polished during the song's numerous choruses. These three learned combinations tell the audience these dancers have already been there quite a while.

Through examining the different types of auditions, it is clear that the audition happening in A Chorus Line is a Chorus Call. It is also clear that preliminary cuts have been made or that this is some type of dancer "call-back." Call backs are subsequent auditions where the casting staff would like to see more of an individual, but does not have time on the first day – basically, it is another audition.

There are many aspects to Actors' Equity Association's governance. Most of it pertains to protecting the actor while on the job and helping provide a solid future with insurance and pensions. Very little is written in the Equity rulebooks regarding auditions. The only rules that Actors' Equity Association specifically mandated in 1974 (the time period of the original A Chorus Line workshops) is that Equity members are to be seen before any non-Equity actor, that auditions may be held over two days, and that safe and sanitary provisions must be made for the actors in attendance; the length of the audition is entirely up to the casting panel (AEA 1970 Agreement 4-5). Nothing is addressed regarding performance requirements or speaking frankly about oneself. Therefore, while it is unorthodox to ask performers to talk about themselves, it is allowed by AEA. Major tours and productions, particularly if they are directed by original cast members such as Baayork Lee and Donna Drake, often continue this protocol.

Generally, auditions for the actual show can be a perplexing process. Every major audition for A Chorus Line (including Bennet's workshops and subsequent replacement calls) began with a Chorus Call to select adequate dancers first. The next step is usually a singing audition, and finally the actor must continue the tradition of telling his or her life story.

It is ironic, however, that nineteen principal actors would be auditioned using a Chorus Call audition since principals are usually auditioned through agent submissions or EPA's. However, since A Chorus Line is about chorus members who are strong dancers (and who will be dancing in a chorus of an unnamed show), it is necessary (and traditional) to hold a Chorus Call first. Although these characters all sing and act, it is mandatory that they all primarily dance well. This reflects somewhat of a contradiction within the system, and proved to be troublesome during the Off-Broadway contract negotiations.

A Chorus Line: What Did Change

Contracts

A Chorus Line was instrumental in changing the way Actors' Equity Association looked at shows. Prior to this time, all principal actors were issued white contracts, and all chorus members were assigned pink contracts.² Up to this point, it was a very objective process as the very clear line between the two categories never blurred. Since A Chorus Line is about chorus dancers, and since all of the replacement/understudy auditions had been Chorus Calls, AEA naturally assumed that all dancers in the show would be issued pink contracts. However, as stated previously, these dancers were not only principal actors in the show, but they were instrumental in the creation of the show. When Equity tried to make them sign pink contracts, the cast went into an uproar. Kelly Bishop remembers:

“Equity came in at one point and said, ‘You can’t be on white contracts, you have to be on pink contracts.’ But there was no way I was ever going to see another

² Actors' Equity Association issues standard, pre-written contracts for each performer's classification. Leading actors are issued white contracts that stipulate rules, payment, etc. for that level. Chorus members are issued pink contracts stipulating the terms of the contract for that level. Either can be amended to satisfy either performer or producer or both, but for a chorus member, the white contract signifies somewhat of a promotion.

pink contract in my life. You see, to chorus people, a pink contract means you're just another part of a crowd. But a white contract represents being an individual. A white contract was important to more than just me. A white contract was important to everyone because it means 'I'm an individual in an ensemble situation.' We had to put our little feet down.

"I remember Michel Stuart saying to Equity, 'You people have got to broaden your thinking. You've got to think in different terms. This is a *different thing*.'

"And the Equity people said, 'No-you-don't-understand-see-if-you're-on-pink-contracts-because-you're-backing-up-so-and-so-and-then-if-you-get-your-number-here-you-can-make-so-much-more-money-and...'

"And Michel was basically speaking for all of us very articulately when he said, 'We could care less about making more money. We care about what we are doing.'

"I've been in a couple of unprecedented situations that Equity had no way of dealing with, where they pretty much let the actors tell them what they wanted to do. So we basically told them what we wanted to do, and we always stayed on a white contract" (Viagas 164-165).

It is imperative for the production staff to see the actors demonstrate the necessary skills to perform that particular show. For A Chorus Line, it is primarily the ability to dance. Therefore, it is necessary to dance all actors for this show first. Because the original audition for the workshop was a Chorus Call, this initially confused Actors' Equity officials, who automatically sent over pink Chorus contracts. A Chorus Line proved instrumental in persuading

Actors' Equity to evaluate shows and roles on a case-by-case basis. To Actors' Equity Association's credit, union representatives took a second look at the specifics of the show and assigned white Principal contracts to all dancers on *The Line* and all original "Cut Dancers" who understudied *The Line*. However, all replacement understudies were placed on pink Chorus contracts (Mandelbaum 290). Actually, this gives the understudies an opportunity to make more money. Through the use of riders (addendums to basic contracts stating specific additions) and specifics established by the creative staff, many understudies throughout the run refused opportunities to replace members of *The Line* in lieu of the more lucrative understudy contracts.

Showcase Code Reform

The New York theatre culture has changed dramatically since the days of Vaudeville. Originally, the only theatre done in New York was done in what is now known as Broadway houses – large theatres that were located on and around the street of Broadway in mid-town New York City. Eventually, smaller, more experimental companies began forming downtown – theatre that is now known as Off-Broadway. Then Actors' Equity Association allowed a non-paying option for its members: the Showcase (sometimes called Off-Off Broadway). The Showcase is exactly what it sounds like – an opportunity for actors to showcase or demonstrate their craft for low- or non-paying audiences to gain exposure and experience in the New York market. This option is still immensely popular in New York today, as it does not require cast salaries to be paid. However, in the 1970's, this was still a relatively new form and rules were vastly different from what they are today. *A Chorus Line* was actually workshopped under the Showcase Code, and because of the financial windfall for Bennett, Joseph Papp and the Public Theatre, Actors' Equity Association formed a committee to revise the Showcase Code.

The committee published their revisions in the August – September, 1975 Equity News. Many of the revisions were based on producers' budgets, the grant money they had received, and how much they charged for admission. Some of the producers mentioned as flagrant violators included Papp, Manhattan Theatre Club, Playwrights Horizons, Riverside Church Theatre, among others (Showcase Minority Report 1). The committee stated: "What we propose is a system whereby we can reclaim some of the territory that has been lost to producers in recent years, and further to block producers' efforts to undermine our present contracts and the union as a whole. We go to the the [sic] table demanding what we need to live, not what producers need in order to further exploit us" (Showcase Minority Report 8). In short, Actors' Equity wanted a more equitable remuneration for its actors instead of producers making a profit at the actors' expense.

One of the most controversial proposed changes in Code added an allowance for uniform disbursements of profit from any Showcase that had contributions from Actors' Equity members. It stated:

All members of Equity involved in a showcase production which has not previously been produced under a union contract in any form and has rehearsed for four weeks or less shall become owners, at no cost to the A.E.A. members, of two per cent, present and future, of the production on an equal ownership basis, share and share alike, after recoupment. If the showcase production has rehearsed for more than four weeks, participating Equity members shall become owners, on the above terms, of eight per cent of the production after recoupment (Equity News August - September 1).

The latter would have applied to the cast of A Chorus Line. Instead, the thirty-seven who had sold their stories for a dollar were offered one-half of one percent of only Bennett's profits – not the net profit – to be split among the entire group. Within that group, there were three levels of disbursement depending on their involvement (Mandelbaum 297).

Unfortunately, the members of Actors' Equity Association fought the proposed changes. A meeting was held August 25, 1975 at the Majestic Theatre to overflowing crowds, most of which were vehemently against the changes. Joseph Papp spoke at the meeting congratulating the members for stopping the proposed changes. Although these changes favored the actor, and although producers threatened to blacklist all Equity members from Showcase productions, the members voted to delete this provision (along with others) on the grounds of lack of consultation (Equity News October 2). It would take years before the issue could again be addressed.

CHAPTER FOUR: SHOW ANALYSIS

Structural Analysis

Aeschylus is the originator of modern play analysis. Through his template, one can analyze many plays, stories and even songs. However, one can analyze A Chorus Line only superficially using Aeschylus's traditional structural analysis. A Chorus Line is not constructed as a traditional musical or play. While it does have a thin plot, the show is written as a "concept show," and utilizes a main idea or theme as the most important conceit, rather than merely telling a chronological story. Ken Mandelbaum states: "It can be considered a 'concept musical' like Company, in that it lacks a linear plot, substitutes characters and confession for a conventional book, and is organized and held together by the concept of an audition" (Mandelbaum 189). Nevertheless, a brief Aeschylan analysis of A Chorus Line follows.

As some people consider the show "timeless," many theatres prefer to set A Chorus Line "Now" and "Here" as Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre did. However, the script specifies the time of A Chorus Line as 1975, and place as an empty or "dark" Broadway theatre. In 1975, the theatre district of New York (approximately 42nd Street up to the mid 50's on and around Broadway – an Avenue that cuts diagonally through Manhattan) was not the wholesome family-drawing tourist area of the late 1990's and today. There were pornography stores and strip joints up and down 42nd Street with prostitutes and drug dealers on most every corner. This is where dancers, actors and singers, artists, bankers, architects and myriad people came to pursue their dreams. In a time where "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" and "Jaws" were on the silver screen (www.oscars.com), "All in the Family" and "M*A*S*H" were on television (www.popculturecrazy.com), "Get Down Tonight" and "The Bertha Butt Boogie" made the

Billboard charts (www.cylist.com), President Nixon had resigned, the US was still reeling from Vietnam, and many Americans were socially radical and sexually aware. This atmosphere is accurately reflected on stage in the characters of A Chorus Line.

The culture of a Broadway audition is very specific and very broad at the same time. It is specific in that Actors' Equity Association has established rules that govern Broadway auditions – who can attend, in what order they dance, who is watching the auditions, etc. It is a very structured process. Most dancers who attend Broadway Chorus Call Auditions reside in New York City and the surrounding area, and most belong to Actors' Equity Association. Therefore, it is limited in numerical scope due to accessibility. Conversely, the dancers attending one of these Chorus Calls are people of many economic, religious, political, ethnic, sexual and social backgrounds. A Chorus Line reflects this vast and broad cultural spectrum of people (although some make the case that it is not broad enough). The dancers are mostly Caucasian but include an Asian female (Connie), an African-American male (Richie) and two Puerto Ricans (Paul and Diana). While no actual financial backgrounds can be discerned for sure, it can be assumed most come from middle-class American homes with a few coming from lower income areas and at least two from upper-middle class homes. Specifically, Diana Morales was born in the Bronx, an area not known for its affluence (Kirkwood 17). Paul was probably not raised with a great deal of money as his father, who worked nights, took him to see cheap movies on 42nd Street (Kirkwood 70). On the other end of the financial spectrum, Bobby was brought up in an upper-middle class home (Kirkwood 23), and Greg was raised on the Upper East Side of New York City (Kirkwood 14) – an exclusive and gentrified community. Two males are specifically mentioned as homosexual – Greg (Kirkwood 52) and Paul (Kirkwood 71). There are only four

references to religion in the show. Greg has a Hebrew name that he refers to as his “Jewish name” (Kirkwood 14), Mark goes to a Catholic confessional (Kirkwood 41), Diana prays to Saint Mary – a Catholic practice (Kirkwood 45) and Paul was kicked out of a Catholic school (Kirkwood 70).

The inciting incident (the circumstances prior to the show) is in process as the show begins. There is an audition for dancers in progress on a Broadway theatre’s stage. Prior to the inciting incident, three dance combinations have been taught. The show begins as the dancers are still working on the last few counts of the jazz combination. There are several dancers in attendance competing for an unnamed Broadway show. Some dancers are inexperienced, but most are seasoned Broadway veterans. After they perform the jazz and ballet combinations, Zach, a prominent Broadway director/choreographer, cuts a few dancers. The remaining dancers give their headshots to the dance captain and stand on a line, drawn down stage.

Complications arise when Zach informs the remaining dancers they must now tell him and everyone else about their own lives. He tells them there are small but important roles that will come from the chorus, and knowing more about the dancers will be the only way he can tell who is right for what role. Zach calls on dancers randomly to tell their story. Each tells his or her story in different ways – some in a song, some in a monologue (or both), and some in spurts of information throughout the piece. The first few dancers (Mike, Bobby, Sheila, Maggie, Bebe and Kristine) tell of early family life and how they began dancing. In the “Montage” sections, Mark, Connie, Diana, Don, Judy, Greg and Richie describe their lives during puberty and in school. Adult life and careers are the topic with Val, Cassie and Paul. These stories appear random when seeing the play for the first time, but they were carefully constructed to follow the

flow of life. “In short, Michael [Bennett], in passing the story from dancer to dancer chronologically, told the story of a typical dancer’s life, thus giving the material the impression of a plot” (Flinn 103-104).

These stories build in intensity to adulthood. The early monologues and songs deal with life in a more lighthearted way. Although “At the Ballet” may deal with the harshness of life, the singers all have their own way of escaping reality into their fantasy world of dance. The teenage years are always full of drama and strife – whether real or imagined. These stories are by far the funniest – Judy tells of shaving her sister’s head and Greg relates how his genitals have a mind of their own. The two most intense stories come from Cassie and Paul. Cassie is a former chorus dancer who graduated to smaller roles. In fact, she has stopped two shows cold. She has a past romantic relationship with Zach that ended when she moved to Los Angeles to pursue a television and film career. When Zach tells her she does not belong in the chorus or at the audition, she fights back with all her strength to prove she is good enough to fit back into the chorus. Finally, intensity culminates with Paul’s heart wrenching story, the most emotionally charged account of all the dancers.

After Paul’s devastating tale of sexual abuse and family acceptance, the dancers return to the stage for the final portion of the audition. They learn another dance number, and when Zach cannot make up his mind for the final cut, they dance the “Tap Combination.” The audition is back in full swing, but suddenly Paul falls and damages his knee. Everyone onstage immediately knows Paul’s career is over. He is taken away to the hospital, and Zach asks the dancers what they will do when they cannot dance anymore. After the shock wears off, all of the dancers finally tell their innermost thoughts. It is this conversation, known as the “Alternatives Scene,”

which solidifies Zach's choices for the final cast. He calls the dancers back to The Line, and when they are back, there is an empty place for the missing Paul.

Zach calls the names of several dancers, and they are to step forward. He calls Don, Greg, Al, Kristine, Bebe, Sheila, Connie, Maggie and Diana to the front line (the characters of Don, Bebe and Connie were omitted in the Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre production). However, Zach wants Diana back in line with the others. The climax (and surprise) occurs when Zach dismisses the front line – the line usually indicating the people who have made it to another round – and informs the back line they have won the jobs.

As a resolution, all dancers who have been on The Line get a final moment of glory and return to participate in the finale “One.”

The moment of climax has been debated since the show was written. One option for the climax of the piece is Paul's accident. While it is a climactic moment with falling action coming after, it is not the climax. The climax is the moment of the final cut. After Paul's accident, Zach and the audience are still getting to know the dancers throughout the “Alternatives Scene” (which could still be considered rising action), and the suspense that is created at the moment of the final cut is palpable. Not only does he call forward the “wrong” line giving the audience and dancers a false ending, but he also calls out Diana and puts her back in the line again. Although this makes for a rapid fall in action, it is the culmination of all the action thus far. The reason these people are there is to win jobs, and this provides a dramatic and manipulative climax to the evening.

Artistic Analysis

One of the most surprising and interesting facts about A Chorus Line is how intricately woven the show is. The script, based on interview tapes, originated as long, indulgent monologues and had very little cohesive matter. Through the workshop process (particularly in the second workshop), the script became much more integrated into the score. “It is virtually impossible to separate the book, score, and staging components of A Chorus Line and discuss them as distinct elements. Not only were they totally integrated in the play, but because of the material’s development in workshop, they were all created together and became inextricable” (Mandelbaum 151).

The Script

Cutting-edge for its time, James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante’s script is brutally honest and deals in subject matter rarely seen on the Broadway stage. Characters (the dancers) speaking frankly regarding their own homosexuality, plastic surgery, and actual private lives are all previously unexplored phenomena in musical comedy. These issues alone make the script unconventional. But the source material was also obtained in an unconventional way. Instead of using existing material or one author inventing and writing the show, the basis for the characters is the 1974 taped sessions. These tapes provided the material, and many times the actual phrasing, of the dialogue. Especially in the first workshop, these stories were recited in long monologues one after another. However, by the end of the second workshop and run at the Public theatre, the stories were consolidated, reassigned, combined and manipulated to form the new characters. “The roles in the final text of A Chorus Line, with the exception of Paul, are composites. Some are based predominantly on one dancer, while others combine two or three.

All are fictionalized to a degree, and aspects of one dancer's life were often distributed among as many as six different characters" (Mandelbaum 179). The following is a breakdown for each character and his or her inspirational dancer(s): Don (Michael Bennett, Wayne Cilento and Andy Bew); Maggie (Donna McKechnie); Mike (Sammy Williams, Cilento, Bennett); Connie (Baayork Lee); Greg (Michel Stuart, Bob Avian, others); Cassie (Leland Palmer, McKechnie, Judy West); Sheila (Kelly Bishop, McKechnie, Charlene Ryan); Bobby (Thommie Walsh, Bennett); Bebe (Bishop, Michon Peacock); Judy (Trish Garland, McKechnie, others); Richie (Candy Brown); Al & Kristine (Steve Boockvor and Denise Pence Boockvor, Renee Baughman); Val (Mitzy Hamilton, Pam Blair); Mark (Bennett); Diana (Pricilla Lopez); Paul (Nicholas Dante) (Mandelbaum 179-180).

Again, by the second workshop, the final script was taking form. And it became exceedingly more integrated into the musical fabric of the show. Many spoken lines are brief and segue into musical passages – and vice versa. This is particularly true of all of the “Montage” sections where spoken lines and lyrics are completely inseparable. A prime example of this is Mark's monologue that is dotted with sung passages. If an actor tries to do this monologue out of the context of the show, it is impossible for him to do the monologue without incorporating the sung lines – even if they are just spoken. If omitted, there are obvious holes in the story line.

The style of the piece is conversational and remarkably undated. Since the dialogue was lifted from people speaking extemporaneously, the show has a conversational quality throughout. Bennett was constantly telling the cast to just talk – don't act – and don't do anything weird to the words (Mandelbaum 174).

The Score

The score to A Chorus Line is not the traditional score that Broadway was used to. The 1960's and 70's had their share of musicals composed in the pop idiom – Company; Promises, Promises; Hair – and A Chorus Line was no exception. Something, however, is different with A Chorus Line. Since the score is so inextricably intertwined with the script, the show is mostly underscored. As Marvin Hamlisch was mainly a film composer, he understood the emotional impact that music can have on the audience and the actors. He composed a score that “plays for more than ninety minutes of the show’s two-hour running time...” (Mandelbaum 162). Truly, the score has led the way for many through-sung musicals such as Les Miserables, Phantom of the Opera and The Light at the Piazza.

While many dismiss the score as dated and unintelligent, Hamlisch uses his techniques to tell a story more than adequately. The rolling dissonant chords in “At the Ballet” tell of angst-ridden and distracted childhoods. In the “Montages,” he uses multiple layers of scat and onomatopoeia to outline the carefree play and fun of adolescence. The sexy saxophone and slides of the trombone set Val up for a marvelously risqué burlesque. These techniques can also be seen in his attempt at a hummable show tune in “What I Did For Love.” While critics and the artistic team ultimately derided the song as predictable, the audience loved it. “Hamlisch’s score contains brief references to classical sources, but actually refracts generic Broadway brassiness through a pop idiom” (Viagas 127). Hamlisch uses his bag of tricks to pay homage to typical motifs the audience will recognize that began in show business. The opening seven notes – *ba-dum, ba-dum, dum, dum, dum* (Figure 1) – are often heard at the beginnings of songs and were probably used quite often in the days of Tin Pan Alley.



Figure 1: "Opening: I Hope I Get It" (Introduction)

The closing of "I Can Do That" is a dissonant version of "shave and a haircut" from the days of Vaudeville (Figure 2).



Figure 2: "I Can Do That" (Measures 82 - 83)

The score is inspired in that it takes old fashion ideas, uses a newer musical genre, and still pushes the musical theatre medium to new territory in its evolution.

Regarding the character of Bobby, Hamlisch scores the character in a cool, elegant jazz idiom reflecting Bobby's suave sophistication. In Figure 3, Hamlisch employs seventh chords on various scale steps and utilizes the triplet and dotted eighth/sixteenth note motif to give it a blues feel. Although the passage looks like it is in the key of D flat Major, it really is in the

region of E flat Major. Note that the pitches of G flat and D flat are not used until measure thirty-three (the last measure of Bobby's passage), and then it is used as a transition into the next section.

The image shows a musical score for a scene with two parts: Bobby and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Moderate 3' and the time signature is 3/4. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The score covers measures 130 to 133. Bobby's part is in the upper staff, and the Piano accompaniment is in the lower two staves. Bobby's lyrics are: 'I'm gon-na be a mov-ie star'. The piano part includes the instruction 'colla voce - "bluesy"'. The score features various musical notations including triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Figure 3: "Montage-Part 1: Hello Twelve" (Measures 130 - 133)

Bobby's next sung line is in "Montage-Part 3" (Figure 4). Although he sings basically the same line, the accompaniment is only a skeleton of what came before. It outlines only a pedal tone, and gives an introductory melody to aid the singer's entrance. Once again, Hamlich uses a dominant seventh chord to keep the jazz sound. Again, although measures 63 through 67 look as if they are written in the key of E Major, note that only pitches in the key of E flat Major are used, essentially making it the same key, although written with accidentals.

The image shows a musical score for a song. The top system is for measures 63 and 64. The tempo is 'Moderato'. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 3/4. The vocal line (Bobby) starts with a rest in measure 63 and begins in measure 64 with the lyrics 'If Troy Don - a - hue could be a mov - ie star.'. The piano accompaniment (Piano) consists of a treble and bass clef. The bass clef has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The bottom system is for measures 65, 66, and 67. The vocal line (Bobby) has a triplet of eighth notes in measure 65, followed by a quarter note in measure 66, and a quarter note in measure 67. The lyrics are 'then I could be a mov - ie star.'. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) has a triplet of eighth notes in measure 65, a whole note in measure 66, and a quarter note in measure 67.

Figure 4: "Montage-Part 3: Mother" (Measures 63 - 67)

During the “Tap Dance” (Figure 5), Hamlich accomplishes the same melodic idea written in the previous examples while stating his idea in a different style. This song is soft shoe tapping which accentuates a “boom-chunk” style in the accompaniment. Still he writes in the key of E flat, keeping it consistent with Bobby’s previous two solo lines, and again employs seventh chords through out the passage, ending on an embellished I chord.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Tap Dance" from the musical "Chicago". It consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 27 to 29, and the second system covers measures 30 to 31. The vocal line is for Bobby, and the piano accompaniment is for the Piano. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics for Bobby are: "If George Ham - il - ton can be a mov - ie star, then I could be a mov - ie star." The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand, with triplets and accents used for rhythmic emphasis.

Figure 5: "Tap Dance" (Measures 27 - 31)

Theme – What is this show about anyway?

At first glance, this show is about dancers competing for a job. It is a relatively simple idea. The late Clive Wilson states it eloquently: “It’s a simple show....Everybody loves a contest. Everyone likes to root for someone, everyone wants to see who’s going to win. The format of the show is almost foolproof” (Viagas 283). Current popular television reflects that the desire to watch someone win a contest is still a compelling creative force. “American Idol,” “Big Brother,” and other reality TV shows are testament to the world’s fascination with a

competition. This is not a new idea. However, this show is about more than just winning the prize – “...the characters speak of their secret hopes because the audition isn’t for a job. It’s for life” (Mordden 218).

Indeed, everyone has his or her own idea about what this show is about. Donna McKechnie muses, “You’re not alone, we’re all the same” (Viagas 190). Robert LuPone states that “ACL is a sexual, physical experience. It’s a kinetic, emotional experience. It’s not a cerebral experience...” (Viagas 190). Robert Emmet Long says that “In A Chorus Line, the concept is focused by the dancers’ inner anxiety of identity” (Long 240).

Yes, this show is about all those things and more. Getting a job, the American Dream, overcoming adversity, and sexual awakenings are all themes that can be explored in A Chorus Line. However, the most staggering analysis comes from Ken Mandelbaum: “Broadway had seen many smash hits before, but A Chorus Line’s trump card was not its score, its book, or even its staging, but its ability to leave audiences emotionally devastated” (Mandelbaum 175). Audiences were completely blown away by the show. Nightly, the audience members would stay in their seats dumbstruck after the show ended. This show was not about dancers. This show was about us. This show is about me. No matter what people’s occupation or nationality, the overriding universal themes of acceptance and success speak to all walks of life. The show raises the questions of “What if that is me?” or “What if I’m the one who does not make it?” or “What if my career is over tomorrow?” The universality of this show extends boundlessly past that of Broadway dancers in New York – it speaks to all.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Robert Charles Joseph Henry Mills, III

Analysis of the character of Bobby in A Chorus Line must be considered in three ways. The first manner of exploration is founded in the textual clues in the script. The second is based on oral tradition passed from director to actor and accepted relationships between the actor originating the role (Thomas J. Walsh, III) and other original cast members. The third is probably the most interesting and allows for the most subtext. It is based on relationships between the current actor (myself) and the actors who fill out the current cast. All three circumstances will be explored.

Textual Analysis

One of the first attributes about Bobby the audience sees is that he is an exemplary dancer. Since he is auditioning (and ultimately makes the final cut) for a Broadway show, it is usually taken for granted that he would be a Broadway-caliber dancer. While this is a correct and safe assumption, there is a textual clue in the form of stage directions that give proof that he is one of the best dancers in attendance. On page 9 of James Kirkwood's and Nicholas Dante's script, it states of Bobby's group, "THIRD GROUP BOYS dance the combination perfectly..." In an interview with Kurt Cerny, former Bobby who has performed the role for Broadway alums Mitzy Hamilton and Danny Herman, Kurt also agrees that when it comes to getting the job, Bobby is all business: "Despite Bobby's sarcasm, he always puts it out there to get the job" (Cerny). This is a challenge I took very seriously for several reasons. First, this is my thesis role and it should demonstrate the culmination of skills learned in the UCF Conservatory program. Then, I was quite a bit older than most of my cast at Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre;

therefore, I needed to prove I could compete with younger dancers. Lastly, since Bobby obviously is hired for the unnamed Broadway show for which he is auditioning, it means he must demonstrate his abilities better than most of the cast. These were the challenges that pushed me to work very hard at dancing the original choreography of a brilliant and difficult show.

The character of Bobby actually contributes very little to the actual conversation on The Line. In the version I performed at Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre, certain characters were cut (and/or combined with other characters), so Bobby's first line "Go on, Miss Wong" (Kirkwood 14), was cut as there was no Connie. Although that section, including that line, was cut, it reveals two things: his confidence (even at a big audition in front of an influential director) and his sarcasm. The deletion of this line does not alter Bobby's character, but it does provide these clues to the actors.

Bobby's next line (and my first) was his introduction. "I'm Robert Charles Joseph Henry Mills III, that's my real name too. I come from upstate New York near Buffalo, I can't remember the name of the town...I blocked it out. Born March 15, 1950" (Kirkwood 15). This line may sound expositional, and it is. However, for such a small line, it has a rich history. Joseph is Thommie Walsh's middle name (in honor of the original actor), and both actor and character are the third male in their family with their respective name. Bobby's birthday is Thommie's as well (Viagas 55). Thommie and Bobby are both from upstate New York, but Thommie is from Auburn, and Bobby is from Buffalo, Michael Bennett's hometown (Flinn 12). Again, Bobby's sarcasm shines with his quip about blocking out his hometown.

“Oh, Jesus” (Kirkwood 16) is Bobby’s next line³. Bobby mocks Mark’s youth when Mark reveals that he is only twenty years old. This line always strikes me as humorous, not just because Bobby is being condescending, but he is only five years older than Mark. Being thirty-five when I played the role, I know that neither one of them know too much more than the other.

After the introductions, Zach tells The Line of dancers that they are to tell him about themselves – with total honesty, just being themselves. Zach begins with Diana, who crumbles. Seeing that the ice needs to be broken, he starts with Mike, someone who is known for being verbal and outgoing. After Mike’s show-stopping number (the only male solo in the entire show), Bobby is next. Bobby begins with his attempt at a comedy routine, but Zach calls him on it. Although Bobby says he is not going to do a routine, he continues to entertain The Line with his childhood stories. Again, his sarcasm comes through with comments like “I came from this quasi-middle-upper or upper-middle class, family-type home. I could never figure out which but it was real boring...” (Kirkwood 23), “I went to P.S. Shit...” (Kirkwood 25), and “...to commit suicide in Buffalo is redundant” (Kirkwood 26).

Bobby’s “suicide in Buffalo” line has a very interesting history as well. When Neil Simon was asked to unofficially doctor the script (without pay), one of the lines he tinkered with was Bobby’s introduction. Simon clarifies: “The joke about Buffalo, sometimes I think I wrote it, and then I’m pretty sure that Mark Twain wrote it...and it wasn’t Buffalo, it was someplace else, like Philadelphia or something” (Stevens xvi). As Buffalo was Michael Bennett’s hometown, it was also a bit of an inside joke to the individuals involved. Apparently, there is a particular line reading (to the Buffalo/redundant line) author James Kirkwood preferred. In a

³ At Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre, the line was altered to “Oh, geeze!” because of conservative clientele.

recent interview, Thommie Walsh reveals to Robert Tunstall that Kirkwood insisted upon a pause before the word redundant. During the Gala performance, Walsh forgot the line reading. “I didn’t put a pause before saying the word redundant. He [Kirkwood] was so angry with me” (Tunstall www.achorusline.org). This is information I wish I had during the production at Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre so I could remain close to the director’s concept to capture the original intent of the authors.

But there is more to Bobby than just a smart mouth and quick feet. Through his catty comments, he reveals a strained home life, in particular, a poor relationship with his father. He jokes that his father drinks heavily but then dismisses it as normal. However, as Bobby keeps talking, he reveals more and more of the pain from his relationship with his father. He explains how his father was so disappointed with his lack of sports acuity that his father told everyone that Bobby had polio. Bobby handles it again with jokes. To celebrate the holiday, Bobby limps for his father on Father’s Day. Stereotypically, gay men (although Bobby’s sexual orientation is never specifically mentioned in the script) have a tense relationship with their fathers. Gays can also develop a quick tongue as a defense mechanism, since they are usually beaten up at school and possibly “slammed into lockers and stuff like that” (Kirkwood 25).

Bobby was bitten by the showbiz bug early. He put on bizarre garage recitals (Kirkwood 23), and his only three sung solo lines reflect this as well. “I’m gonna be a movie star” (Kirkwood 43) in Montage 1, “If Troy Donahue can be a movie star, then I can be a movie star” (Kirkwood 48) in Montage 3, and “If George Hamilton can be a movie star, then I could be a movie star” (Kirkwood 91) in “The Tap Combination” tell of Bobby’s desire to be in show business. A profession in the performing arts is difficult– particularly for a dancer. There is a

very brief shelf life to a dancer's career, and dancers often risk financial hardship, injury and failure for the chance to perform. Bobby obviously has the drive and the ability to make a career in dance.

Puberty is the next topic of conversation to which Bobby contributes. After Greg tells about his inopportune erections, Bobby chimes his agreement with "I did too. I mean, it didn't go down for three years" (Kirkwood 52). Again, his sense of humor is exemplified, and his honesty echoes what most men experience during puberty.

"Here, Cassie" (Kirkwood 82). A line containing only two words may seem inconsequential, but they are actually very telling of Bobby's relationships and his character. Being in the small Broadway community, Bobby and Cassie would definitely have at least known of each other. Both are chorus dancers, but Cassie has been featured and has stopped two shows. This surely would have attracted Bobby's attention. However, it can be safely assumed by his helpfulness that he knows Cassie fairly well and possibly even knows some of her history with Zach. Therefore, he is eager to help her continue auditioning for the show. The line also reveals that despite his sarcasm, he is a caring person and values his friendships.

His helpfulness can also be seen during Paul's accident. When someone tries to encourage Paul to get up, Bobby says, "What are you doing?" (Kirkwood 93). In other words, *until we figure out what is wrong with him, Paul should not be moved*. Bobby has wisdom in crisis. "Are you alright?" (Kirkwood 94) displays his compassion toward a hurt dancer and his friend Paul. Bobby is the first person on the scene, faster than even the other dancers tapping with Paul at the time. Bobby is a compassionate leader with tremendous focus. He takes charge but then relinquishes the reins when Zach reaches the stage. It is also assumed that Bobby will

help Paul into the cab to the hospital. He is not asked, nor does he ask to help – he takes it upon himself without question or debate to handle the problem. Only after Zach looks around for help does Don (or in the case of the Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre production – Al, since Don’s character was enveloped into Al) say that he will help. Bobby has already started to take care of the situation.

After Bobby and Al return, Zach starts the “Alternatives Scene,” the scene that discusses what each of the dancers will do when they cannot dance anymore. Bobby is fairly quiet until Bebe (our Christine) says something about Broadway dying. Bobby is quick with his correction in this case: “Don’t worry, honey – it’s not” (Kirkwood 99). While he realizes that a Broadway dancer’s career is a short one, he knows that Broadway – in some form – will continue on indefinitely. It is his way of assuring her but also correcting any misinformation. He has been around the Broadway community for a while and is pretty business savvy. This is echoed just a few lines later when Richie is talking about dancers spending most of their time on the unemployment line with “Oh, please, give me a break” (Kirkwood 99). He knows that the dancers who are shrewd and talented will continue to work as long as they can adapt to the changes that are being made to the Broadway chorus.

For having such a colorful family life and upbringing, Bobby is a fairly well-adjusted person. While he knows his “shelf life” as a dancer is short, he accepts that. When Mike makes the comparison of dancers to athletes, Bobby is at his most forceful. “Well, I’m sorry – I can’t worry about any of that now. ‘Cause I plan to go on kicking these legs as long as I can and when I can’t ... Well, I’ll just do something else” (Kirkwood 101). His unwillingness to even mention another career tells that Bobby will always consider himself a dancer – regardless of his

profession, age or mobility. “He could be in a wheel chair, but he will be a dancer in a wheel chair, not a former dancer in a wheel chair” (Cerny). His leadership and self-assured, come-what-may outlook is prevalent throughout the “Alternatives Scene.” He demonstrates this leadership again after those on *The Line*, now dispersed all over the stage, begin talks of actual career choices. He says to all and then to Sheila, “Well, if we all had to pick another career ... Go on, pick a career. What would you like to be when you grow up?” (Kirkwood 102). Here he is playing game show host, directing his question to his good friend Sheila, knowing she will have some sarcastic answer to lighten the atmosphere. And when it comes right down to things that are important, Bobby realizes the true place of his career in his priorities. He just wants to be happy (Kirkwood 103), whether he is dancing or not. Bobby is not only a wise guy, but he is a wise man.

Original Cast Relationships and Oral History

Original cast relationships and oral history of *A Chorus Line* are two very important tools to interpreting character and the show. Because the show was written based on actual dancers’ lives, the roles reflect those people’s personalities. Likewise, their relationships are the building blocks to the action in the play. These pre-existing relationships provide a strong structure with which to begin character analysis.

Thomas J. Walsh, III was a very popular and accomplished dancer in the Broadway community beginning in the 1970’s. However, Thommie, as he was known to most everyone around him, was somewhat of a polarizing figure. People either liked him or avoided him, although he would usually win them over with his wit, style and professionalism. Original cast member Rick Mason states, “...I’d heard of Thommie Walsh before, that he was a holy terror. I

adore him but he's got a mouth like a viper" (Flinn 55). Donna Drake had the utmost respect for Thommie and his abilities. She states that both Thommie and Bobby have a *joie de vive*, a flamboyant style, positive outlook, handsome face, loving heart and fiendish humor (Drake). Michel Stuart agrees: "Thommie was wonderful. I really admired him because he was just so cool and he knew what he was doing and talked back to Michael Bennett" (Viagas 175).

Through research into Thommie's life, I was able to make interesting and fact-based choices when I performed the role. Thommie describes himself as a "twisted kid...this little demented villager" (Viagas 36). I took that as free rein to be a bit devious when the opportunity presented itself. For example, when Zach instructs The Line that he wants them to tell about themselves – about their personalities – I noticed that the spotlight always hit me on that particular sentence. When the light would hit me (and the line coordinated at the right time), I would grin devilishly, as if wondering what terrible story I could shock Zach and the group with.

Bobby's monologue is contained within the song "And." It alternates sections of dialogue with sung solo and group lines. While the others are singing, Bobby pantomimes to continue his story (this is a tool used by several characters throughout the show). Prior to the first pantomime section, Bobby tells of breaking into peoples' houses and rearranging their furniture. During that section, I chose to pantomime getting caught in the act with the amorous owners returning to their home mid-copulation. I would pretend to escape from behind the "couch" to get me back into the spotlight for the next section of the monologue. The next pantomime section is followed by Bobby telling about how he would set his brother on fire. So prior to that section of speech, I chose to use one of Thommie's real-life experiences to fill that section. "A confessed 'pyro' and a lover of pranks, Walsh left his mark on the Sunshine State by

breaking into a local theater, trying on the wigs and costumes, and then setting the building on fire for entertainment” (Viagas 56). This story provided the inspiration for my “sneaking” into the theatre’s “dressing room” and trying on numerous “costumes.” My favorite version (and the cast’s as well, apparently) was the “Tina Turner fringe dress.” During my pantomime, I would sneak over to the costume rack, guiltily choose the dress, slip it on, then shimmy and strut around the stage like Tina Turner in concert. The first time I did that, the cast could barely continue. They laughed through the entire rest of the song/monologue. That version stuck. After every choice of costume, though, I would pretend to hear someone coming, get out of the costume, and set the costumes on fire. That would lead me into the next section of dialogue about setting my brother on fire.

When working on any project, it is natural that the people working together will become closer. Pre-existing relationships will often grow stronger or even shift to other individuals. This was certainly the case with the original cast of A Chorus Line. During the workshops, cast members began to polarize into cliques, in some part due to Michael Bennett himself. Bennett had his “cabinet of dancers whose feedback he would solicit periodically. Aside from Baayork Lee and Tony Stevens there was [Kelly] Bishop, Walsh, [Renee] Baughman, and [Trish] Garland” (Viagas 120). There was also a small group who frequented Dobson’s, a café on Columbus Avenue and Seventy-Sixth Street. This group included Walsh, Bishop and [Priscilla] Lopez with Lee and [Sammy] Williams joining irregularly (Viagas 120). Obviously, their off-stage relationships influenced their on-stage ones – Thommie and Kelly stood next to each other on *The Line* as Bobby and Sheila – and more face time with Bennett soon turned to more material and responsibility in the show.

Then there was the strong Buddhist influence during the 1970's. Several cast members (including Michael Bennett for a while) were involved in the religious movement to varying degrees. Renee Baughman, Nicholas Dante, Trish Garland, Robert LuPone, and Michon Peacock were all Buddhists while involved with the show. Several would chant together before the show, and many of them cite chanting as part of their healing process during and after the whirlwind of the show.

Then there were those who were not part of the "in" crowd at Dobson's and not a part of any other group like the Buddhists. Rick Mason and Ron Kuhlman felt continually frustrated amid the social freeze-out. This not only meant little or no camaraderie, but often, those out of the loop were given little or no material during the workshops, eventually resulting in smaller roles (Viagas 122-124).

There is another undeniably important part of interpreting these characters. Oral history passed down from director (or former cast members) to current cast members is just as vital as any other piece of information. The one "urban theatre legend" that gets passed down to those playing Bobby is humorous, but can be very useful to three actors involved in any production of A Chorus Line. The story is that Bobby, Sheila and Zach have had a three-way sexual liaison the night prior to the audition in A Chorus Line. If one chooses to use this tale for back-story, it can be used to justify some behaviors of Bobby and Sheila. First, both Bobby and Sheila are familiar with Zach, the Broadway director and choreographer. Apparently, that relationship extends intimately into their personal lives. How did the evening happen? Did they go out? Did they have drinks at someone's apartment, and one thing led to another? Was it specifically planned – and by whom? This could lead the players to assume that Zach promised them roles in this

upcoming, unnamed Broadway show. It could also explain the reason why both Bobby and Sheila are so cavalier in their dialogue with Zach. Bobby does a comedy routine and maybe does not feel the need to dig too deeply into his life to get the role. Sheila, on the other hand, perhaps wants to remind Zach of their past indiscretion. Is this motivated by wanton lust? Or is it because Sheila feels threatened by Cassie? No one knew that Cassie would be attending the audition. Cassie was “bigger” than that now – she had an agent and was supposedly going for roles instead of pursuing the chorus at open calls. This story may be based in truth, or it may not. However, it gives all three actors lots to think about and plenty of subtext with which to work:

Unlike audience members, actors in the show are aware of their characters’ relationship to every other character onstage, and each has his or her own ‘interior monologue’ never heard by the audience. For example, the actor portraying Greg is supposed to be aware that he is the oldest on the line – older than Sheila, who talks openly about aging – and this gives him a special rapport with Sheila throughout the evening. The relationship between Sheila and the two characters next to her on the line, Cassie and Bobby, was based on the real-life relationships of the actors who created the roles. ...These are characters who seem to have a life offstage, and this is because of the information underlying what the characters say and do (Mandelbaum 159).

Relationships at Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre

As outlined previously, actors sometimes carry their lives and relationships onto the stage. Our director’s concept was similar in approach. She wanted to remain as close to the

original production as possible while dealing with the constraints placed upon her. So, to fulfill her wishes, I wanted to continue the tradition that Bennett set forth: “he [Bennett] did not want ‘performances’; he wanted the actors to be themselves” (Mandelbaum 173). Likewise, in my efforts to keep it real, I sought out members of the cast with whom to develop friendships. I was already familiar with some cast members; others I was not. Some I felt drawn toward naturally; some I sought out specifically. Pivotal relationships that influenced my performances are:

- **Maggie Winslow (Blanca L.)**: Blanca and I hit it off immediately. She is a beautiful, young woman with a family. She is incredibly talented and works very hard. She twisted her ankle during the finale circle, but kept going. She has “it,” and the entire cast responded to her magnetism. Her portrayal and singing of Maggie was truly inspiring.
- **Gregory Gardner (Tony N.)**: Tony and I became friends very early on in the show. We were the two “senior” men, so we naturally gravitated toward each other. Many times, instead of joining the cast in the green room during breaks and down time, we would tend to stay in our dressing room. We found it natural to be able to share with each other, so that relationship became more “real” onstage as well. As a matter of fact, we would decide very often to play our relationship differently each night. Sometimes we were good buddies, the next show we would be bitter competitors. Tony always made the relationship fun and unexpected.
- **Cassie Ferguson (Jillian J.)**: Jill was not only playing Cassie, she was our director. Since I was Equity on waiver, I think she took some heat for selecting me. After a contentious meeting with my producer regarding the issue, Jill was reassuring when she told me that she would not have done the show without me. She is a terrific dancer and

commands not only an audience's attention, but an entire cast's respect (she taught the entire show in two weeks). In that regard, she was a perfect Cassie. At the end of the show, when both of us are standing after the cut, we always hugged and had a very professional show of respect – a wink, a supportive smile. She also would hold my hand in the dark until we reached the curtain line as a continuation of that support.

- **Sheila Bryant** (Janine P.): If you know anything about A Chorus Line, you know that Bobby and Sheila are fast friends, and there is not much they will not do for a kick. At the first rehearsal, I immediately sought out Janine and struck up a friendship. She is a solid, dependable performer with a family (her daughter was on our crew and her sixteen-year-old-son was my understudy). We have a mutual respect for one another and enjoyed telling stories of our past shows and experiences.
- **Judy Turner/Bebe Benzenheimer** (Elizabeth J.): Elizabeth was our one casualty. She re-injured her back pretty early in the run resulting in her missing some performances. I became her in-cast massage therapist. She also had problems with “At the Ballet” so she came to my apartment, and I worked with her on her vocals, which continued throughout the run. Because of her injury and her insecurity with her singing, she played her uncertainty with me as her onstage sounding board.
- **Valerie Clark** (Tiara Y.): Tiara and I probably had the most history together going into this production. Tiara was an undergrad at UCF and was one of my voice students. Tiara and I also performed at UCF in the theatre department's production of Assassins together. She is a studious and methodical performer. Her drive is commendable. She works very hard on her craft. Despite her great sense of humor though, she is sometimes easily

shocked – a quality which I exploited quite often for a laugh. This is ironic considering she plays one of the most overtly shocking characters in the play. Unfortunately, because we were on opposite ends of The Line, we had very few instances when we could react to one another. One of the only exceptions was in the “Alternatives Scene,” when we were standing close to one another in a random formation.

- **Diana Morales** (Regina F.): Regina was another undergrad at UCF. While I did not have as much prior interaction with her as Tiara, we knew each other fairly well going into production. We knew that our relationship should translate on stage (almost as much as Bobby and Sheila) so we both extended ourselves to further our familiarity with each other. When Bobby says that all he wants is to be happy, Regina grasped my hand, giggled and knowingly asked me if I was happy, but she (as Diana) already knew.
- **Zach** (Sam L.): Sam is an alumnus of the UCF Conservatory. We knew the same teachers and had the same points of reference from UCF. We also shared a dressing room. As a matter of fact, he was right next to me. We talked a great deal backstage when we had the opportunity, particularly before the show. One day, when the audience was not very responsive, I threw him a curve at the end of my monologue. Instead of just doing “the swan” bow, I fell over to one side making it “The Dying Swan.” Sam, unfortunately, caught a case of “the church giggles” and could not control them in time for him to say, “OK, Bobby. Back in line,” without laughing through it. From that point on, I always tried to warn him when I tried something new so he could prepare himself and remain in control.

Personal Experience and How It Influenced My Interpretation of Bobby

Like Bobby, I lived in a small town growing up, and it was “real boring” (Kirkwood 23). One of my only escapes was performing in front of my mirror. Although I never gave garage recitals, my obsession with performing and dance started quite early. My earliest recollection of a dancer was in a Three Stooges short film on television. She was a beautiful ballerina doing *fouette* turns. I was so enthralled, I got up, went outside and attempted (fairly successfully, I might add) the turns watching myself in the sliding glass door. This could explain why I turn better to the left – I was mirroring her turning right. Although my upbringing was far less colorful than Thommie Walsh’s, I do have other things in common with him. I was ridiculed at school, and my ability in sports was pretty much non-existent.

As soon as I could (one month shy of my 28th birthday), I moved to New York City to “make it” as an actor. Although I had worked in regional markets, I found New York very daunting. In smaller markets, I am a dancer. Not so much in New York. I could not keep up at dance calls. I could do the moves, but I did not have the training and muscle memory that most dancers possess to retain a combination quickly. I would always “find myself in the alley with the other rejects” (Kirkwood 59). Add that I am too short to be a dancer, and it made for frustrating circumstances. I soon learned what production staffs were looking for – and usually, it was not my type. I sat for EPA’s at 6:30 a.m. in the rain, cold and snow and pounded the pavement looking for acting and singing jobs as well. Those came a bit easier, but not as frequently as I had hoped. In short, I am personally aware of and participated in the New York acting scene, and I am all too familiar with its grueling, stressful way of life.

Eventually, I moved from NYC. From the stresses of pursuing an acting career to the devastation and shock of 9/11, I was ready for a change. When I had the opportunity to audition for Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre's production of A Chorus Line, word had already spread around the nation about their troubles with Actors' Equity Association. However, I was in the market for a thesis role and decided to audition anyway. I was eventually granted an Equity Waiver on the basis that the role would fulfill a requirement for my degree. Although I had been granted the waiver, that was not the end of the troubles with the show. Karen, the theatre's owner and producer, would not change the program to reflect my Equity status. At that point, she also went out of her way to be unfriendly and unhelpful. When I approached her about having my thesis chairman attend a rehearsal (a mandatory component of my evaluation process), she declined the request stating that she was too busy for him to attend. Mid-way through the run, one of my paychecks bounced. Then to add to her financial problems with Equity and her actors, Florida was blasted by four hurricanes during the summer of 2004. Hurricane Charlie affected our production. Not only did we have to cancel performances, but we were not paid for missing the shows – even though other theatres around Central Florida paid their actors. This became a huge problem during the last week of production. Morale had been on a steady decline during the run due to mismanagement in the office, and the hurricane made it drop right to the bottom. Karen told me that she had to write a “hot check” so she could replace the food that had spoiled so we could get the show back up and running. Some of the cast knew the partial check was coming – some did not. Both camps were surprised at how small the check was (some as little as \$25.00 for an eight-show week), and many tore up their checks, placed them back in the envelope, and handed it back to the stage manager – Karen had not even

bothered showing up to our final night's performance. "Outsiders are often surprised to hear that being in the original cast of A Chorus Line was not the joyous, thrilling experience it would appear to have been" (Mandelbaum 188). Unfortunately, being a cast member at Orlando Broadway Dinner Theatre, in its own way, proved to be just as daunting.

Actors (and producers for that matter) are human. They sometimes cannot help but bring their personal lives to the stage. Whether they rebelliously leave their problems in the wings and throw themselves into a performance or wear their problems as another costume piece, it affects the show. These circumstances play into Michael Bennett's admonition to keep it real. His manipulation, his brilliance and A Chorus Line are legacies to live life to the fullest and to work hard to fulfill your dreams – sometimes despite surrounding circumstances.

CHAPTER SIX: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE JOURNAL

Wednesday, June 16, 2004

Today wasn't "rehearsal." It was "class," and it was optional. In other words, it was a non-paying rehearsal. Let's face it; we have two weeks to learn this show. Who in their right minds wouldn't show up? I know I don't want to be the one who doesn't know anything on the first day of official rehearsals. We learned the opening combination after an extensive warm-up. It is really hot in the theatre, and there are so many people, I'm afraid this is going to turn into "A Chorus Semi-Circle" to get everyone on stage. It was a very productive "class." I do have to admit, it has been a very long time (8 years) since I have danced in a show this heavily. Part of me is intimidated; part of me is thrilled. It feels really great to be doing a challenging show again. I didn't succeed at grasping the entire combination, but I think I have it in my head. My goal is to write down all the choreography so that I will have it in the future to direct the show.

Wednesday, June 23, 2004

We cleared up the blank spots in our memories in the opening combination. Everyone is looking a lot better than they did last week. I was very excited to learn that our director/Cassie (Jillian Johnson) learned the show from Donna McKechnie (A Chorus Line's original Cassie). So we are third generation A Chorus Line members. Actually, now that I will know the show, I would love to do the show with somebody like Baayork or Donna Drake – you know, bump myself up a generation. However, Jill really pushed her luck with my brain today. We learned the men and women's ballet combinations and got about halfway through the tap combination. The men's ballet combination was easy, and I was very impressed with myself that out of all the combinations, I found the ballet was the easiest. That is a scary thought. The tap combination is

hard. It all looks the same, and all the steps seem to come from the wrong way. The weight changes are going to kill me. Needless to say, I didn't remember a thing about the tap, even five minutes after we dismissed.

Friday, June 25, 2004

Jill called and invited us to an extra class to keep getting ahead and to clear up the tap combination. It's a good thing that she did. We finished learning it and started clarification. I'm still not 100%, but it's getting better. We also started "One" today. I feel like I really need to be very good in this role for two really big reasons: 1.) It's my thesis, and it needs to showcase my talents impressively, and 2.) My character makes the cut for the Broadway show. I feel like I need to dance better than at least half of the other guys. I don't think it will be a problem, but then we get into the character analysis of why Bobby gets the show. Does he get it only because Paul gets hurt? Why did he get the show when he doesn't give Zack what he asks for? That means Bobby has to be a very good dancer for Zack not to dismiss him. I can't wait until we get scripts so I can start doing memorization and research.

Wednesday, June 23, 2004

Another class day. Continued to work on dances. They are coming back to me, but I still don't have the tap combination completely. Fewer people are showing up to the classes.

Friday July 2, 2004

Today is the official beginnings of rehearsals. We went through all the administrative stuff like rules for the theatre, how we could eat at the buffet and how much it would cost, etc. Then we had a read-through making cuts as we went. Since the roles of Bebe and Judy, Don and Al are combined and the role of Connie is cut completely, lines were omitted and some were

reassigned. I felt I had a really good reading of my lines. I got a lot of laughs. The Southern Belle accent that I'm using for the first set of my monologue is going to work. Generally everyone had a good reading of their material.

Music rehearsal was a joke. The music director played the tape and we sang through it. If (and many people did) anyone missed a note, we just kept going. To his credit, he did make us fantastic rehearsal tapes for each individual. I've only worked with one other MD who did that. But I've never had a musical director who just sat there and didn't even comment. What am I in for?

After multiple phone calls to producer Karen Good, I finally got an audience with her regarding my Equity waiver and the correct spelling of my name. She immediately resisted, but knew ultimately that it was for everybody's good that I do the show. Her first response was to ask me why I didn't tell her at the auditions that I was Equity. My response was that she would have kicked me out before even seeing me audition. That is the truth. I would not have been able to audition had she known, and honestly, my need for a thesis role is much more important to me than her knowing my life story. After she explained her situation with Equity, she told me that I was not going to have AEA listed next to my name, and that she wasn't going to do anything more with it – even if I needed it. After I told her that the only paperwork that would need to be done was mine for UCF, she finally agreed. I then gave my waiver to Berry Ayers, the company manager (also playing Paul), and he looked as if I had slapped him when I told him. Again...not my problem.

Saturday, July 3, 2004

Off

Sunday, July 4, 2004

Independence Day. Such is the life of an actor: always working on National Holidays.

Today we rehearsed at a dance studio. It was nice to spread out a bit. We learned the “BaDa,” “Doo Dit,” “Bows” and most of the “Montage” (including “Shit Richie”). It was a very hard five hours. There was a lot of information and no meal break for lunch. We were so hungry for a long time, but then it just stopped. I love dancing, and I think I can do it well, but I retain very little. It has always been a problem for me in auditions. But we all rally to each other and help each other when someone forgets something. The cast is always working.

Monday, July 5, 2004

Today we began blocking of Act I. We finished up to the end of the audition before lunch at 1:00 PM. Oh, brother... we are never going to get this show off the ground. People are talking and horsing around. It bothers me, and I know it bothers Jill, but she has a style of directing that just ignores most of it, and she plows right through. We ended up staging 60 pages. My brain hurts. How many times and ways can one choreographer use step-touch? It's very confusing to keep straight.

Tuesday, July 6, 2004

Worked on Act II today. Jill finished it in record time. Not bad. We had time to go back and start running from the top of Act I. We got up to my monologue, but we just sped through it for spacing and called it a night. I think the two hardest numbers in the show are the “Montage” and “One.” There is just so much to remember and many, many details. Where do we go next? What was the cut? What choreography do we do when we get there? These are all typical questions, but it is just in break-neck speed – learning it and performing it. I have been working

on it outside of rehearsal, so everything is coming back, but I really need the repetition. My brain is older than it used to be....

Wednesday, July 7, 2004

We had a later rehearsal today from 5PM-10PM because of the Annie matinee. We worked through the “Alternatives” section a few times (changing it every time....), but running a small bit of the show a few times felt like time well-spent. Then we cleaned the main dance for “One – Finale.” Again, it was time very well spent. I wish we could clean everything that thoroughly. When you do a show of this magnitude, there needs to be more time than two weeks. I don’t know how people do this show in two weeks without learning the dance portion separately. I would cry all the time had we not done that. At least now, I will have it on my resume. Oh! I actually remembered all of the tap combination without any help today! That is a major accomplishment. We also ran the show tonight. I felt like I did a pretty good job on my monologue. I still need to clean some memorization up and explore a few more choices, but I think it’s coming along. Like I said, I wish we just had more time. I wonder if I could twist Earl’s arm into helping me with it. That would be great, but I don’t know if we can find the time.

Thursday, July 8, 2004

Off

Friday, July 9, 2004

What a tedious day. We cleaned the entire show. Boy! Did we need it. OK....I needed it. I’m exhausted though. There were several things I was missing, and the rehearsal helped immensely. I’m still not 100% on some things. The tap is very frustrating. It makes no sense.

There are funky weight changes where your body feels like there should be none. I'm also still not getting all of "One" (finale or first time). We have to know that number really well since we have to do it in a round. I'm still somewhat confused on the order of all the choruses too. I hope this sinks in....

Saturday, July 10, 2004

Off – boy do I need a break....

Sunday, July 11, 2004

Today was run-throughs with the costume change. Words on paper cannot begin to express my feelings about this costume change. Not only has the director moved me to before a "cut" dancer, but now I'm number four in the line to come out. Paul and Zach have plenty of time to change. Al is next, but he gets cut and has more time than me. Then I am there until the bitter end, and I have no dresser (yet... I'll fix that!), and I'm also going before Greg who also gets cut. Height lines stink! So I have enlisted the help of one of the understudies to help me. Please, don't ever let him go on! We ran the change about three times, but I never made one of them completely dressed. The Velcro keeps getting turned under and I can't find how to get it undone from the inside of the costume. My sweater (yes....a sweater) is too big. I look fat. I am, but I don't need any help. The theatre provided lunch, and we just kept right on plugging.

My notes were as following:

1. My chin needed to be higher during Paul's solo during the picture gathering.
2. Everyone needed more energy
3. "Go on Diana" needed more reaction

4. Monologue needed to stay closer to the line, more energy and I need to assume a lower position during Val's solo
5. Ba-da chorus was "awful."
6. Shit Richie arms needed work
7. The Mistake Chorus had no mistakes, but the Zombie chorus was full of them.
8. Alternatives Scene everyone needed to be louder.

Note: After speaking with producer Karen Good, my chair Earl Weaver will not be allowed to attend any rehearsals because "We are too busy and have too much work to do." This, I fear is a consequence of her poor relationship with Actors' Equity Association and my subsequent waiver discussion with her. She was short and rude when I asked. This will be noted in my thesis under the observations that Earl is supposed to include. Quite frankly, she is only hurting herself in this issue. A bad relationship with AEA does not mean you have to have a bad relationship with your community. Jill, the director, agreed that it was a bad idea not to let Earl observe and apologized for Karen.

Monday, July 12, 2004

Today was photo call and setting lights. Hello? Equity? Do I have to stand here like everyone else? This is retarded that we have to stand here for them to focus and set lights. We don't even do that at school. I'm so glad I'm able to zone out and still pay attention. Then we had another run-through. I got closer with the costume change, but I'm still not quite there. I keep forgetting my monologue. It is very frustrating. Some parts are stream of conscience, but some things I just flat out can't remember. I have done it at home, with the TV, at work while trying to type, in the car with the radio blaring. These are all successful attempts, but I just get

on that stage and go completely blank. I hate monologues (I can't wait for Working in the fall....). My notes were as follows:

1. Everyone again needed to be louder (the audience is deaf, and they are reading lips anyway.)
2. Mistake Chorus: mistakes need to be huge.
3. Shit Richie: need to do the "Aaahhhh....!" Then move to the onion and peel off.
4. There are grapevines at the end of each of the choruses in "One."
5. Alternatives scene: enunciate.
6. Dropped lines in monologue and transitions need to move quicker.

Tuesday, July 13, 2004

We worked a lot of the show before we did two run-throughs. My body is so tired. I called in sick for work today and tomorrow already. I'm exhausted. We really need another week of rehearsals to do this show. I'm very worried. I still screwed up my monologue – in the same place (School....you want to know about school....). I am so mad! Am I ever going to get this stinking monologue? I did get closer on the costume change. Andre, my dresser, and I have just not found the right combination to make it work. We're close, though. We had dinner, and most people wanted to have another complete run through. Jill, instead, suggested a speed through for lines and blocking except for songs – which is most everything anyway. I nailed my monologue!!! Yea! And I actually made the costume change completely for the first time. My notes were as follows:

1. Louder on the monologue (I'm trying!!!)
2. Don't make fun of my character's name (III). That's information, not a joke.

I was also pulled aside by Karen, the producer, and told me to stop “acting” and to pull back a bit. I thought that’s what Bobby was supposed to be doing is “acting” not being truthful....

Wednesday, July 14, 2004

OPENING DAY

Things went very well for me. Generally, the show was pretty solid. There were a few mistakes, but pretty solid. I’m still getting the “follies chorus” of “One” mixed up. I didn’t back up into the final line facing the mirror on time, and the boys never know which way to *tendu* first. It’s so confusing. However, I made the costume change. I was so happy until I went backstage after the show and realized that my collar was up. ...But I was dressed!

Thursday, July 15, 2004

Two show day today. I’m beat. I feel like I did very well today. Didn’t botch the monologue, made the costume change (although I never can find the snap for my bow tie). Jill said I still needed to be louder on the first part of the monologue, but the rest was fine. Now that I know what level to be at, I can adjust more effectively. It’s hard to know exactly how far to go in a vacuum. Second show’s audience was great. It was padded with 2-fers with area contacts since it was a press night. Erin S. is still on for Judy since Elizabeth hurt her back. She is supposed to return Friday, but in my opinion and experience, that is too soon for such a physical show. Oh well, I’m not the doctor.

Friday, July 16, 2004

I am looking forward to some days off. We are all getting to the end of our ropes for endurance. Today’s show was pretty good. The audience was a bit strange, but I feel like I

explored some new ground with the monologue and found some new intonations. Made the costume change (this is getting easier) with no problem. I was so “on time,” I thought I was in the wrong place! No notes from this performance. Erin is still on for Elizabeth in the role of Judy.

Saturday, July 17, 2004

Two shows were done today. The matinee audience was very receptive. However, I was told that Sheila (Janine) and I were talking too much on the line. Me? Talking too much? Nah! At any rate, I was telling Janine that she had something on her lip. Janine told me anytime that she had something wrong with her face (eyelashes askew, lipstick smudge, etc.) that I – as Bobby – would and should tell her. So I did. Jill laughed it off and told me I did the right thing. I’m still exploring in the monologue, but I still have a habit of vocally going down in pitch at the end of the joke, and it’s not landing. I must fix this.

The evening performance was one for the record books. The audience was weird again, and they clapped for my monologue after I returned to the line – not on my bow. I did really well on it – although I dropped the line about Astroturf out on the patio. Then during the ba-da chorus, I blurted out a “ba” too early and the whole cast was in stitches. They were all laughing hysterically. Then, I had the most embarrassing experience I’ve ever had on stage. During the costume change, my zipper was down too far and got caught in the material. I was completely dressed with my shoes on, and I still couldn’t get the zipper up. Now... this is not a look that can be sported during the finale.... So I thought for sure that I was going to have to miss the finale. Finally Andre, my dresser, got the zipper started. Tony (playing Greg who follows me in line in the bows) yelled “should I go?” I said “YES!” So I finally got the costume completely

fastened, went out for my bow, and it was like a black hole. No applause. I thought “Fine! I didn’t like you all anyway!” So, I finish the number. I get off stage, and I look down. OH MY GOSH! My zipper had come out of the bottom of the tacking, and it looked like a penis. I was mortified! No wonder people didn’t applaud! They thought my penis was hanging out! One of the waiters came up to me during post-set, and he said, “Now....I’m not saying that you could see it all the way up at the booth, but..... that’s where I was standing!” Jill offered me a dollar for every performance that I leave it sticking out.... She’s not funny.

Sunday, July 18, 2004

Doing better on the monologue, and didn’t have a wardrobe malfunction. I brought needle and thread to fix the problem. Worked like a charm.

Wednesday, July 21, 2004

Today is the first show back after having days off. Felt more like a brush up than a performance. Earl Weaver, my thesis chair, was there for his first observation (“early performance”). I danced well, but my monologue wasn’t exactly on. Earl was very supportive though. Other performances were weak as well. People aren’t taking the show seriously, and they aren’t warming up physically or vocally. Voices were cracking all over the place.

Thursday, July 22, 2004

I took some of the things that Earl had said that other Bobby’s have done, and tried to incorporate some of those ideas into my monologue. I had everyone cracking up. I mooned people and pantomimed a story that I read about Thommie Walsh burning down a theatre. Of course, I went up on my very last line and ad libbed that I cracked myself up to get me over the hump. Thank God I thought of it. But I think I’ll be a bit more conservative for a while.

However, Andre – my dresser and a cut dancer from the beginning – fell between shows (doing something stupid, no doubt) and is now out of the show due to a mild concussion. I enlisted my understudy to help with the costume change. We had to rearrange the dance formations for the beginning and I ran into Brian (“Mike”) when we did the ballet combination.

Friday, July 23, 2004

Well, tonight’s show was a complete disaster. People are continually talking when our backs are to the audience (“At the Ballet”), and the cast’s performance overall was the worst on record. When anyone made a mistake, everyone would start laughing. I was so angry. Every time I go on stage, I try my best. I cannot stand it when people who say that they are pursuing this professionally don’t act that way. If I were the director, I’d be screaming. But we never get notes. And when we do, it’s things that don’t matter. People are still doing things wrong – singing and dancing – and nothing is being said or fixed. And I ran into Brian again during the ballet combination again. I’m going to tell him if he does it again. ...not that I should have to. He should know that I’m coming that direction. He has his head up his butt! Selfish actors....

Saturday, July 24, 2004

Well, I spoke too soon. Jill called a brush up rehearsal for after the show on Sunday. At NINE O’CLOCK???? I’m so mad. The people on staff here are so bitter. And now they are starting to take it out on us. I do have to say, the show was much better today. People are still talking in line though. Someone said something to the people who were talking and they just laughed some more. Then I agreed that it was terribly distracting, and they all got this look on their face like they’d been slapped. I’m glad. I didn’t come here to make friends. I came here to do my thesis role (and hope that it was a better experience than UCF). Had trouble with the

costume change because James put my hat on my chair and I almost sat on it. The night show was very good. The audience was very weird though. They were very appreciative, but also felt the need to comment on our dialogue. I hate that! We are not a movie or a TV show. WE CAN HEAR YOU!!! My monologue was probably the best ever. I threw in some extras. I boureed for the traffic directing and somehow Paul Lynn came out of my mouth on “real, real strange.” The Line keeps telling me how they can’t stop laughing at me, so I think I’m doing my job. I’m quite proud of that. But Jill tells me that I’m whispering again. Now I can take a note when I feel it is applicable, but I am NOT whispering. The room is reverberating when I speak. You cannot tell me that I am whispering. She is so wrong. Now they have moved the brush ups (yes, plural now) to Wednesdays after the matinee. Not that certain people don’t need it, but I am getting very upset that she is lumping me into the category of the show “sucking.” I’m so put out by the way that this theatre is run. I’m seriously considering quitting the show after my committee has seen it. These people are real creeps to work for.

Sunday, July 25, 2004

Quite honestly, I am tired of working with people who don’t care about what they are doing on stage. Most people in the show are only doing about half of what they should be doing. I missed the double turn for the second show in a row. My monologue went well, but the audience was weird again and didn’t laugh at me, but laughed hysterically at the overdone mugging of Wesley’s Al. There’s no accounting for taste. Rebecca came to see the show with her mother and didn’t even mention my “classmates’ surprise” in my monologue’s pantomime section. I’m very disappointed in her.... After the show, Karen came up to me and asked if all of my committee had seen the show yet. I find that question very curious and devious. I think

she may be trying to fire me. I think after my committee comes to see the show, she's going to let me go. There is absolutely no basis for her to fire me, but I think in her twisted little mind, she hates me so much for the Equity Waiver situation, that she'll see to it that I am "punished" for it. The more I work with her, the more she reminds me of Dorothy Tabuchi.

Wednesday, July 28, 2004

Today we had our first brush up rehearsal. Boy....did it do the trick. Just the mention of having to rehearse and people shaped up already. It's so sad people don't have any work ethics on their own. People are just lazy. Well, these people anyway.... The show went well, but things will be better now that we've had another rehearsal – even though it was only supposed to last one hour and it lasted for two.

Thursday, July 29, 2004

As expected, the show went much better. Now if we could only tighten up the music. People are all over the place. I feel like I'm getting more comfortable with Bobby and his material. He is really elusive. Just about the time you think you have him figured out, a new line reading pops up from someone else and I'm just guessing as to how Bobby would react in the current arc I have for that show. It baffles me....

Friday, July 30, 2004

Things are still going well. I dropped a line in my monologue. Sometimes I can't think very well. My head gets all preoccupied, and all of a sudden, my mouth says something that my brain didn't tell it to. I did the same thing in Kiss of the Spider Woman. I know what the line is – it just didn't come out of my mouth. I'm still having trouble with my quick change. Since Andre got hurt, I've had to share dressers, and I am just not making it. I'll be glad when he

comes back. I've also been missing my double turn in the opening combination. I've figured out why though. When Andre is here, I am in a group of four and I spot off the person who is in front of me. I have a hard time spotting off things that are far away. When he is out, we rearrange into a group of three, and I'm on the front row. YUCK!

Saturday, July 31, 2004

I still missed the turn in both shows. I'm going to start singling the turn until I get it back or Andre comes back. And I still didn't make the costume change. So frustrating!

Sunday, August 1, 2004

Well, today was the worst costume change since tech rehearsals. I came out half dressed. Nobody clapped after the final scene, and sound started the tape almost immediately. I barely had anything on at all, much less zipped and Velcro'd. When will Andre ever come back??? Actually he was at the show tonight and said that he would be back on Wednesday. Thank God! I did throw in a surprise for the cast. I let my swan bow turn into the dying swan of Nonsense. The cast peed themselves. Zack, not knowing what to say, said "back in line." And as I got up he said, "There ya go." I was crying.

Wednesday, August 4, 2004

We had our second brush up today. We cleaned some more things, but quite frankly, they didn't need that much cleaning. What we really need cleaning is the music. So, I asked. Jill seemed receptive but didn't make plans for it or anything. The shows are getting tighter, and it just feels like a much better show. People are straying from their original character concepts though, and nobody is real anymore. She really needs to address that more than just saying "be

real.” These 18-year olds don’t know what real is – much less what NYC dancer “real” is. She needs to explain it in more detail – not that they would understand that either.

Thursday, August 5, 2004

Now I feel like we are ready to open. You just can’t mount ACL in less than two weeks without qualified people. Now we are beginning to gel. Andre came back yesterday, and my costume changes are a breeze. Love it. Now my turns are better because I can spot. Terrific. And Elizabeth came up to me and asked if I could help her with her music on “At the Ballet.” After a few run-throughs, I asked Maggie if she could come join us, and things were so much better and were great during the run. Now, you cannot tell me that she has been working with her tape all this time. I tell you, if I couldn’t sing the right part, I would be working my rear end off to learn it....especially since her understudy was brilliant.

Friday, August 6, 2004

The houses just keep getting more receptive. I guess (I hope) that it’s in direct correlation to the show getting better. I was so tired from working and doing the show, I left work early and slept for two hours before the show. I felt so much better. Too bad I can’t do that all the time. I’m dropping a line consistently, and it bothers me. It’s the “...better that than find him lying on his office floor” line. At least it’s not a totally gross mistake.

Saturday, August 7, 2004

WOW! Tonight was not only the best audience we’ve ever had here, but it was also THE best show we’ve done to date. The audience really cheered during the opening dances, then Mike (Brian) knocked it out of the park on his song – ending with a standing back flip (although, to quote him,....I can do that...). Then it was my turn. That is the best feeling to ride the

audience like a wave. I felt like a professional surfer. My timing was impeccable. I would wait until the laughter would subside a bit, and then continue before it totally died out. I fired bullet after bullet after bullet, and the audience ate it up...including the dead swan at the end of my bow. It was like that throughout the entire show. What a great time.

However, I noticed online that my paycheck didn't go through. Karen bounced my paycheck. When I told Berry, he turned white. But he did say that he would pay me in cash by the end of the night – including my bank fees. Well...terrific. Thank God I didn't bounce anything either.

Sunday, August 8, 2004

Karen made an announcement at half hour regarding the bouncing paychecks. Apparently, I wasn't the only one. As a matter of fact, there were SEVERAL. She said she was embarrassed, and that everyone would get paid, but the theatre was NOT in trouble. Yeah, right. Ollie told me that Karen had put both of the cast houses on the market to sell. I smell trouble...

Well, there's always penance, payback. Today's audience I think was flown in from Turrentine Jackson Funeral Home. What's worse is they sat in that very front table. Three of them. Fat. Bored. Their stomachs full of carbs. You could see their attention spans winnowing away from the moment we started the show – and our backs are to them!

Wednesday, August 11, 2004

Business as usual. Brush up didn't last very long at all.

Thursday, August 12, 2004

Hurricane Charley is brewing down in the Gulf, and Karen is still talking about doing a show tomorrow. She's insane if she thinks we should be in a theatre during a hurricane. Hopefully, common sense will prevail.

Friday, August 13, 2004

SHOW CANCELLED DUE TO HURRICANE CHARLEY

Saturday, August 14, 2004

Sunday, August 15, 2004

SHOWS CANCELLED DUE TO THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE CHARLEY (NO ELECTRICITY AT THEATRE AND LOSS OF FOOD FOR BUFFET)

Tuesday, August 17, 2004

Went to the theatre to pick up my paycheck since there was no answer at the theatre when I called. Karen was running around like a chicken with her head cut off. Then she springs it on me that she is going to dock our pay for missed performances due to "an Act of God." Excuse me???? Isn't that what insurance is for? I was counting on that money for rent!and I'm overdrawn at the bank.

Wednesday, August 18, 2004

SHOWS CANCELLED DUE TO THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE CHARLEY (NO ELECTRICITY AT THEATRE AND LOSS OF FOOD FOR BUFFET)

Thursday, August 19, 2004

Well, I was nervous for these performances anyway because of not doing the show for a week, but this was ridiculous. These shows had to have been some of the worst I've ever been

involved with and certainly the worst of the run. Everyone talked and giggled and carried on all through both shows. I am so glad I didn't have my committee come today. I am so embarrassed by this. People didn't pay attention, talked while Zach was talking, and Bryan (Mike) and Wesley (Al) were in the back screwing around backstage and missed the entire first two sections of the One Choruses. After the show, Berry "yelled" at them, and they were made to apologize – which consisted of "sorry." I tell ya, if this cast thinks that they are going to act like this in front of my thesis committee, they have another thought comin'. I'm about to have me a "Come to Jesus Meetin'."

Friday, August 20, 2004

Well, tonight was a little better. At least no one was acting like jackasses. However, tonight was a sold-out benefit for the group called Mustard Seed, a group that helps those who have been affected by natural disasters. How appropriate. We just finished Hurricane Charley, and our show could be classified as a disaster. This audience was so weird. They laughed at subtle stuff but didn't even respond to my monologue at the end. They'll laugh at "milky discharge," but won't laugh at my stuff? Strange.

Saturday, August 21, 2004

My committee came today. They seemed to really enjoy it. But today was a day of "issues." My dad is having health issues. There are issues with my thesis. It was a truly manic morning. However, the audience was very supportive in the first show – especially when we lost electricity because of a passing storm. It was during the "One" rehearsals. We just kept plowing through, and the lights eventually came up. But we had to wait until the last half of the "Ghost Choruses" to get sound. When we finished the audience cheered loudly. We were a bit worried,

I must admit. But by the time we got to the alternatives scene, I was at my wits end. The day had been so emotional. When I said, “I can’t think about any of that right now. Because I plan to go on kicking these legs for as long as I can. And when I can’t....well, I’ll just do something else.” I couldn’t take it anymore. My voice cracked, and the tears came (even though they’re not supposed to). Well, that’s all it took. Between everything with my issues, my committee being there, and our payroll issues (we were docked pay from missing shows due to Hurricane Charley), everybody was in tears. Sheila couldn’t hold it together and rewrote her line, Christine and Judy were gone. With everything that was going on, it finally came to a head. During intermission, we were talking about walking out on the last half of the show tomorrow due to our payroll situation, but there are such bleeding hearts in this group. It’s ridiculous. Some said: “Well, we didn’t actually do any shows....” To that, I say that I have a contract with no provision for “An Act of God.” I need my money for rent! We agreed to table the discussion until the next intermission, but we still were not in agreement. Jill has been so supportive of me and my thesis process, and she understands what kind of garbage the producer is pulling on us. Some of these kids don’t have the life experience to know that they are being duped. Then, others don’t want to have a part in making the theatre close even faster. My philosophy is that she is going to shutter anyway. Why should another cast go through this? Why not get what is coming to us before it is too late?

The night performance was more in accordance to business as usual. Chris, Rocky and Patrick came to the show, and I reinserted my “class inside joke” to much amusement – especially Rocky.

Sunday, August 22, 2004

Well, we went on anyway. We couldn't come to a consensus and Gin was being really belligerent about the whole thing, so we just went on without striking. Karen didn't even have the common courtesy to attend closing night but provided sparkling wine and carrot cake (Boy! That makes it all better!). When we got our paychecks, I was paid the full amount as I had already been docked, but everyone else received their partial checks. Ouch! People were so unhappy, they tore up their paychecks, put them back into the envelopes and handed them back to the stage manager. I think everyone knows how unhappy we are... Late night, lots of booze, and I start class and rehearsals in Daytona tomorrow. Yikes.

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