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## Chicago

### Cambridge Theatre, London



Touted as the sexiest musical around, *Chicago* has been running in London's West End for ten years and shows no sign of hanging up its fishnet tights. Opening at the Adelphi Theatre in 1997, the original lineup included Ute Lemper, Ruthie Henshall and Henry Goodman. Since then a rotating principal cast has seen such household names as Marti Pellow, Frances Ruffelle, Bonnie Langford, Duncan James, Denise Van Outen, Alison Moyet, Jennifer Ellison and even David Hasselhof grace its slinky stage. In 2006 the show moved to the Cambridge Theatre, its original London home - the show started there in 1979 and ran for 603 performances.

Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly are talented girls dreaming of vaudeville careers, fame and fortune. They get their breaks - via a spell in Cook County Jail on charges of murder. Enter Billy Flynn, a money-hungry lawyer with zero morals and a penchant for a pretty face. He's already got the press clamouring for Velma and proceeds to launch Roxie as well while the girls - already sworn enemies - compete for his attention and a court date. A caustic comment on the American judicial system back in the seventies when it was written, *Chicago* discusses themes of corruption, greed and fame celebrity for questionable talents that remain very relevant today - wrapped up in some belting

tunes.

*Chicago* really is sexy, slinky and very stylish. The stage is kept simple and uncluttered with the excellent orchestra arranged on platforms at the back of the space, giving the music the central position it rightly deserves in this show. Muted trombone solos help to heat up the action on stage, with banjo, violin, drum kit, brass section, two pianos and accordion adding their own dimensions to the brazen, jazzy music.

Costume is all black - tight trousers and waistcoats for the boys and sexy knickers, bra and fishnet combinations for the girls, with corsets, sequined black slips and a variety of kittenish headwear making an appearance too. With costumes like that you'd expect good figures but the *Chicago* cast redefine the washboard stomach and sculpted, athletic look, proving their suppleness and strength with impressive lifts and eye-watering splits.

None of the principal performers made a good first impression, but I warmed to a few of them as the show went on. Josefina Gabrielle is coltish and wide-eyed with a beautiful, unaffected voice and graceful dance moves. She plays a very goofy, oversexed version of Roxie which works well once you get in to the swing of her comical expressions, childish excitement and general clowning around. Alongside is Annette McLaughlin as Velma, whose voice - though powerful - is less natural. She plays the character well but the comedy feels a little forced. The final dance duet between Velma and Roxie is chic and full of fun though, the women brandishing canes and tipping bowler hats to the audience in front of a glittering golden curtain.

Clarke Peters is Billy Flynn, playing the smarmy lawyer well, if a little woodenly tonight. His vocal performances seem unsure and I much prefer Clive Rowe, playing Amos Hart. He has a real sensitivity and sadness behind his performance that's very endearing.

Kelly Osbourne is the celebrity turn, starring as Matron Mama Morton. Though the role of a matriarch is beyond her 22 years in a literal sense, she manages to turn the character in to something a bit different and owns it completely, with assured acting and an unexpectedly rich, soft vocal performance.

*Chicago* is bold, brassy and whip-smart. Packed with classy tunes and sophisticated dance moves, laced with adrenalin and shot through with a heavy dose of humour, it's a thoroughly enjoyable night out. With its ever-changing principal cast, it's a great way to get to see your favourite celebs strutting their stuff too.

**Cast List**

Josefina Gabrielle - Roxie Hart  
Clarke Peters - Billy Flynn  
Annette McLaughlin - Velma Kelly  
Kelly Osbourne - Mama Morton  
Clive Rowe - Amos Hart  
T Solomon - Mary Sunshine  
Amelie Munier - Hunyak  
Tobias Walbom - Fred Casely

**Directed By**

Walter Bobbie

*Reviewed September 2007 by Laura Kidd*