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Vixens and vice

THURSDAY, MARCH 4 2010
By [Jeanne Theismann](#)



If you can't be famous, be infamous — it's the next best thing for new girls on the cell block Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly in the blockbuster musical *Chicago*, a tale of vixens, violence and vice now playing at The Little Theatre of Alexandria.

Filled with treacherous tramps and salacious scandal, *Chicago* is based on the 1926 play of the same name by Maurine Dallas Watkins, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune whose sensational coverage of the murder trials of Beulah Annan and Belva Gaertner riveted the nation during the prohibition era 1920s and gave birth to the concept of "celebrity criminals."

Adapted as a musical by theatre luminaries Bob Fosse, John Kander and Fred Ebb in 1975, the show has since garnered international acclaim, winning six Tony Awards in 1997, a Grammy in 1998 and six Academy Awards for the 2002 film version of the play.

The shows takes place in the Cook County jail, where no woman has ever been put to death for murder and a jilted Roxie Hart — on death row for killing her lover — has no intention of being the first. But first she must vie for public sympathy with Velma Kelly, a vaudeville entertainer who murdered her husband and sister after discovering their affair.

With the help of publicity-seeking lawyer Billy Flynn, the cunning competitors do their best to capitalize on their notoriety and manipulate the media to gain their freedom and catapult their careers.

Taking the LTA stage by storm is newcomer Jordan Hougham in the tour de force role of Roxie Hart. A true "triple threat" talent, Hougham is crafty and cunning and effortlessly delivers a benchmark performance.

But hell hath no fury like a woman knocked off the front page and Alexandria's own Bethany Blakey as Velma Kelly serves up the perfect combination of cynicism and sass. Full throated and lusty — and with legs just made for fishnets — Blakey plays the homicidal housewife to perfection.

As Bill Flynn, Andy Izquierdo razzle dazzles with reptilian charm and brings a velvety voice to the role of the press-manipulating lawyer. Izquierdo's duet with Hougham — *We Both Reached for the Gun* — is an especially impressive display of precision timing and theatrical talent.

Jon Keeling returns to the LTA stage as Roxie's simple-minded husband Amos. His tender performance of *Mr. Cellophane* in the "invisible" role is one of the most memorable of the night.

Other superior performances include Jennifer Strand — last seen in a g-string in LTA's production of *Gypsy* — as the predatory prison matron and Melissa E. Stamps as the gullible gossip columnist Mary Sunshine.

Signature Kander&Ebb songs include *All That Jazz*, *All I Care About* and *Razzle Dazzle* and the ensemble cast is especially exceptional in *Cell Block Tango*.

The original Broadway production was directed and choreographed by Fosse and under the acutely stylish direction of Susan Devine and with come-hither and sophisticated choreography by Amy Carson, LTA captures and brings the essential legacy of one of theatre's greatest icons to the LTA stage.

Under the musical direction of Paul Nasto, the incredible 14-piece orchestra frames the stage like a courtroom witness stand and earns an ovation of its own.



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Produced by Marion Holmes and Eddie Page and with especially effective lighting by Ken and Patti Crowley, the colorful cast and crew vibrantly recreate the dark debauchery of the self-defined tale of "murder, greed, corruption, violence, exploitation, adultery and treachery."

While the subject matter may require discretion for children under 12, there is no denying the appeal in the sharp humor, Fosse-esque dancing and trademark Kander & Ebb tunes. LTA's reputation for pulse-racing revivals of Broadway extravaganzas continues to grow and *Chicago* — with its perfect combination of actors and musicians — is without a doubt one of the best entertainment values in town.

Chicago is playing now through March 20 at The Little Theatre of Alexandria, 600 Wolfe St. For tickets or more information, call 703-683-0496 or visit www.thelittletheatre.com.

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