

CHICAGO “Razzle Dazzles” Audience

The show’s comedic style allows the acting, singing, and dancing to shine

By Ellie Symons

When I think of the 1920s, or “Roaring 20s”, thoughts of jazz, fast cars, and wild parties come to mind. The 20s are seen as a classier time, a time of liveliness and mutual respect for fellow citizens. So, imagine my shock when within the first few minutes of The Kravis Center’s CHICAGO, a musical set in the city during the 1920s, several murders were glorified in “Cell Block Tango”. And I loved every second of it.

In CHICAGO, two female murderers, Velma, played by Kailin Brown, and Roxie, played by Katie Frieden, strive to prove their innocence and get the attention of the paparazzi. Throughout the play, they hurt people in their lives in order to reach their selfish goals, which is portrayed extremely well through irony. In “Cell Block Tango” the girls awaiting their murder trials in jail explained how they killed various men, followed by the chorus of, “He had it coming”.

The songs in the show included various bits of humor during each of their musical numbers, making them more entertaining for the average listener. My biggest problem with most musicals is that most of the songs feel as if they don’t have a purpose. CHICAGO is anything but, with each song serving a unique purpose, such as to showcase a character, display emotion, or propel the plot. Lines of witty dialogue often interrupted songs, such as in “Funny Honey” a song where Roxie professes her love to her husband, Amos, purely because he is covering up her murder. This sense of humor made the characters and acting feel much more believable as they were able to have a sense of humor about their actions.

Not only are the songs witty but performed and choreographed beautifully. Choreographed by Ann Reinking and directed by Walter Bobbie, the performances shone when accompanied by perfectly synchronized dances. Oftentimes, these dances showcased the literal meaning of what the singer had just mentioned, such as in “Roxie” when Roxie sang about how she would have boys surrounding her in her dream vaudeville act, and the boys in the ensemble joined the dance.

This choreography is only further emphasized by the minimalistic set design. Changes in the scene were instead conveyed by the actual events in the plot and dialogue, which allowed the acting and singing to shine. Because the plot of CHICAGO revolves around murder, the director had to find creative ways to show death. This was portrayed in numerous ways, the most popular being witty dialogue lines by the murderer, followed by a gunshot sound and a flash of red light. I thought this was a subtle, yet funny way of showing this. Lighting was used in the show extensively, with spotlights showing us who was the main focus of each scene, and colored lighting (red, blue, and purple), which made me feel immersed in the mood.

On a similar note, the cast was dressed simply, with both Velma and Roxie wearing all black. However, the style of what they wore, including Velma’s 1920s-style bob, felt personalized to

the characters and time period. I enjoyed these stylistic choices because they allowed the acting to feel even more raw and real.

My favorite part of the musical was the attention to detail presented throughout the show. Every time my eyes wandered to a member of the ensemble, they were still acting, through hand motions or facial expressions that conveyed their reactions to the scenes. It just goes to show that the cast and crew of this show went above and beyond to make this an enjoyable experience for the viewer.

Overall, I believe the production's main intention was to entertain and give the audience laughs. However, I think there is also a deeper meaning behind CHICAGO. When the news is turned into entertainment, things quickly become corrupt. I think this show achieves its goals and message perfectly through its expert directing and acting, and I would recommend seeing it if you are comfortable with adult themes.

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