

'Chicago' at Tibbits: So good, it's a crime

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For the Enquirer

Coldwater — Does crime pay? It seems that since reporter Maurine Dallas Watkins wrote the play "Chicago" in 1926, and Bob Fosse put on his musical version in 1975, things have only gotten worse — or for high-profile criminals and their lawyers, better. We are no longer shocked by the parade of criminals-turned-celebrities, the book-and-movie deals, and, perhaps above all, our own insatiable appetite for gossip and the inside scoop.

But if the shock value is long gone, what makes "Chicago" endure? The movie adaptation was a blockbuster in the ever-jaded year of 2002, and the 1996 revival is still alive and kicking on Broadway. The Tibbits Opera House production answers the question brilliantly — we are all in on the joke, and the joke is on us.

This production is the "lightest" rendition I have seen yet, and I mean it in the best sense of the word. Veering from the dark sensuality and slick-but-cold feel that have characterized so many productions, this stage is satire with sexy fun: no more all-black costumes; the women convicts are immensely human; the famed dance numbers are delicious rather than in-your-face.



From left, Altamiece Cooper as Matron Morton, Richard Baker as Billy Flynn and Amy Lamberti as Velma in "Chicago" at the Tibbits Opera House. PROVIDED BY TIBBITS OPERA HOUSE

IF YOU GO

» **WHEN:** 2 p.m. Wednesday, 8 p.m. today, July 19-21.
» **WHERE:** 14 S. Hanchett St., Coldwater.
» **COST:** \$10-\$27.
» **INFO:** tibbits.org; 517-278-6029.

one off for even the worst crime. Amos, the loser that can either come across sympathetic or pitiful, is turned extremely lovable and funny by Chad Tallon.

Much of the credit must go to the director and choreographer, Kevin Halpin. The fusion of top-form song and dance with tight storytelling leaves the audience wanting more even after nearly two and half hours of running time. But it's the fun and light touch he infuses the show with that chased away any bitter aftertaste that a biting comedy may leave behind in less-capable hands.

It'll be a crime — pun intended — if the excellent band, directed by Kristen Lee Rosenfeld, and the most colorful yet effective costume design I have seen anywhere for this musical, by Theresa Hartman, are left out. For a show that relies so heavily on sight and sound, they really capture you from the get-go.

I say: Go do the crime and the time with the Tibbits gang.

We all know the story: Women get enraged by their men. Women take matters into their own hands. Women manipulate the system like the best of them to save themselves. Roxie, a cunning chorus girl on trial for fatally shooting her lover, gets her gullible husband, Amos, to hire hotshot lawyer Billy Flynn for her defense. Add the former criminal-flavor-of-the-month, Velma, with her jealousy of Roxie's new status, the jail matron, "Mama," who runs her turf like a well-oiled politician, other fellow inmates full of stories to tell, plus Mary Sunshine, your sucker for a tabloid reporter, and you have the best show you can ever find in a single cellblock.

The opening night started

with slight unsureness, and the sound volume could really be turned up a notch. But soon enough the cast settled down. Aisling Halpin truly turns Roxie into a star — the wide-eyed ambition in her eyes and the sass in her moves make for a killer combination. Amy Lamberti's Velma isn't going to let the new girl steal her limelight, and she doesn't. These two are a well-matched odd couple that can turn anyone's head, men or women.

But if you think no man could ever shine in this hot booty bonanza, you would be wrong. Richard Baker brings so much charm to Billy Flynn, the big shark lawyer — and a beguiling voice to match — you believe he can indeed get any-

Chicago BCE

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