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For Immediate Release

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CHICAGO OPENS 2007-2008 Main Stage Musical Season at Warner!

TORRINGTON, Conn. 68 Main St. (October 12, 2007) –The Warner Stage Company opens its 20th Anniversary Season with the **seven-time Tony Award-winning** Broadway sensation **CHICAGO**. The legendary musical makes its Warner Theatre premiere November 3-10 in a razzle-dazzle, tour-de-force production complete with that winning score and unforgettable choreography! The musical opens the theatre's 2007-2008 Main Stage Musical Season. Other musicals in the 2007-2008 season include **GREASE**, **MISS SAIGON**, **CRAZY FOR YOU** and **THE KING & I**.

CHICAGO centers around Velma Kelly (**Roxie Quinn**) and Roxie Hart (**Marcia Maslo**), two murderesses who find themselves on death row together in 1920s Chicago. Velma, a professional vaudevillian, and Roxie, a housewife with aspirations of being a star, fight for the fame that will keep them from the gallows.

With music by **John Kander**, lyrics by **Fred Ebb** and book by Ebb and **Bob Fosse**, Chicago is directed at the Warner Theatre by **Les Ober** (**ALL MY SONS**), with musical direction by **Neil Pagano** (**GUYS & DOLLS**) and choreography by **John Carter**.

The musical is based on a 1926 play of the same name by **Chicago Tribune** reporter **Maurine Dallas Watkins** about actual criminals and crimes she had reported on.

On March 11, 1924, **Belva Gaertner**, a twice-divorced cabaret singer, shot and killed her lover Walter Law (a married man with one child). Law was found sprawled out dead in the front seat of Belva's car, a bottle of gin and a gun with three shots fired lying beside him. Belva, found at her apartment with blood-soaked clothing on the floor, confessed that she was drunk and had been driving with Law, but couldn't remember what happened. She was defended by William Scott Stewart in a trial covered by Watkins.

Weeks later on April 3, 1924, **Beulah Sheriff Annan** shot **Harry Kalstedt** in the back. She sat drinking cocktails and playing a foxtrot record, "*Hula Lou*," repeatedly for about two hours as she watched Kalstedt die, then called her husband to say she'd killed a man who "tried to make love" to her. Her version of events changed numerous times. First she claimed she shot Kalstedt in self-defense, fearing rape; later, she confessed to the murder. Then she claimed she had told Kalstedt she was leaving him, and that he reacted angrily and she shot him. Her husband **Albert**

Annan hired noted attorney **W.W. O'Brien** to defend her and stood by her throughout her trial, again covered by Watkins.

In her reporting, Watkins focused on the sensational aspects of the two cases, two "jazz babies" corrupted by men and liquor, characterizing Beulah as "beauty of the cell block" and Belva as "most stylish of Murderess Row."

Later, in Watkins' play Belva Gaertner became "**Velma Kelly**", Beulah Annan became "**Roxie Hart**", Albert Annan became "**Amos Hart**", and the two lawyers, William Scott Stewart and W. W. O'Brien, became a composite character, "**Billy Flynn**". The play was directed by George Abbott, and produced on Broadway in 1926, running for a respectable 172 performances. A 1927 silent film version produced by **Cecil B. DeMille** and starring **Phyllis Haver** as Roxie Hart, was remade as **ROXIE HART** in 1942 with **Ginger Rogers** in the title role. This version eliminated the character of Velma Kelly.

Gwen Verdon read the play and asked her husband, **Bob Fosse**, about the possibility of creating a musical based on it. Fosse approached Watkins multiple times to ask her permission to adapt the play as a musical, but he was rejected in each instance. Following her death in 1969, Watkins' estate sold him the rights, leading to the development of **CHICAGO: A MUSICAL VAUDEVILLE** with a score by John Kander and Fred Ebb. It was first produced in 1975 starring **Chita Rivera** as Velma Kelly, **Gwen Verdon** as Roxie Hart, and **Jerry Orbach** as Billy Flynn.

In 1997, it was revived and reworked as **CHICAGO-THE MUSICAL**, winning seven Tony Awards and becoming the longest running revival in Broadway history. The cast included **Bebe Neuwirth** as Velma Kelly, **Ann Reinking** as Roxie Hart and **James Naughton** as Billy Flynn. The cast recording of the revival won a **Grammy Award**.

In 2002, **CHICAGO** was released and became a **six-time Oscar-winning film** starring **Catherine Zeta-Jones**, **Renee Zellweger** & **Richard Gere**.

The show runs at the Warner Theatre on Saturday, November 3 & 10 at 8pm; Sunday, November 4 at 2pm; Friday, November 9 at 8pm and Saturday, November 10 at 8pm. Tickets are \$24.50, \$21.50, \$18.50.

For information, please call or visit the Warner Theatre Box Office at (860) 489-7180 or purchase tickets online at warnertheatre.org. Group Discounts are available for all Warner Main Stage Musicals.

CHICAGO is sponsored by **Commercial Sewing** with Radio Media Sponsor **FM97.3 WZBG**. Additional support is provided by the **Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism**.

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About the Warner Theatre

Built by Warner Brothers Studios and opened in 1931 as a movie palace, the Warner Theatre was described then as "Connecticut's Most Beautiful Theatre." Damaged extensively in a flood, the Warner was slated for demolition in the early 1980s until the non-profit Northwest Connecticut Association for the Arts (NCAA) was founded and purchased the theatre. The Warner reopened as a performing arts center in 1983, and restoration of the lobbies and auditorium was completed in November 2002. Today, the Warner is in operation year-round with more than 160 performances and more than 92,000 patrons passing through its doors each season. NCAA's mission is to preserve the Warner Theatre as an historic landmark, enhance its reputation as a center of artistic excellence and a focal point of community involvement, and satisfy the diverse cultural needs of the region. To learn more about the Warner Theatre, visit our website: www.warnertheatre.org.