

CHICAGO

THE MUSICAL

The 14 piece jazz orchestra on stage is the clue. Trombones, trumpets, a couple of saxes - a tubahorn fer chrissakes.

This is an in-your-face, faux Runyonesque, post-modern, musical experience that screams ATTITUDE!!!!

Sinuous dancers, in the sort of costumes that would make Cher look overdressed, throw their bodies into amazingly sexy jazz routines while they belt out the numbers at full decibel level. With few exceptions, every song is a full chorus production number delivered in a witty, self-parodying style familiar to Australian audiences but unexpected in a show with US origins. And in spite of the convincing American accents, the cast is entirely local.

Write the plotline on the back of a postage stamp. Roxy Hart shoots her lover when he is on the point of leaving her. She is in jail awaiting her trial.

Her wimpish husband Amos stands by her and hires Billy Flynn, a criminal lawyer whose professional ethics do not allow him to fudge figures. Forget about whether the client is guilty or innocent or even a drug fiend. What Flynn wants to know is "Have you got five thousand dollars. If Jesus Christ had lived in Chicago and he had five thousand dollars, things would have been different," he tells Amos.

Flynn may be a bottom line operator but he is worth every cent. This is a practitioner who understands his jurisdiction: "Chicago is a tough town. It's getting so tough they shoot the girls out from under you. But Chicago can still be touched by a reformed cynic."

Flynn's cases are played out in public long before they get to court. He runs the media circus like a pro, with hacks salivating on his every word. But he is also representing a couple of other women who have killed their husbands/lovers. One of them, Velma Kelly, becomes increasingly worried about Roxy's ability to become and maintain the media's centre of attention. The women vie with each other for Flynn's professional expertise. But their offers of a quid pro quo of the up-close-and-personal kind are wasted. Money is the only currency Flynn will accept as payment. Inevitably, both women find themselves cast aside and their dates delayed by the latest, and

richest, of Flynn's clients, an heiress to a pineapple plantation.

Roxy, however, shows some media savvy of her own. When interest in her starts to flag, she announces she is pregnant. The hacks are ecstatic. Mary Sunshine, the columnist of the *Evening Star*, tells Flynn: "I don't see how you can possibly delay the trial date a minute longer. My readers wouldn't stand for it."

Never loath to seize an opportunity, Flynn walks Roxy through her courtroom performance. "when you get on the stand I want you to be knitting a baby garment."



Her testimony will now be that she and her lover both grabbed the gun and that she fired it in self-defence in order to protect her unborn child.

Flynn's approach to criminal trial preparation is refreshingly relaxed. "It's a three-ringed circus", he tells his client, before launching into the slow jazz number "Give em the old razzle dazzle."

Readers will already have gleaned that this is a trial lawyer who never loses a case, so it

will come as no surprise that Roxy is acquitted. But avoiding the hangman's rope is neither here nor there for Roxy when she realises she is left to pick up the pieces after Flynn's media circus has moved on and the intoxication of being an overnight celebrity has worn off. Futile, then to wonder about the point of it all. There is none. If life is just a game, then she intends to win it - on her terms next time.

The dialogue, like the set-design and costumes, is minimalist. The songs tell the story in an unending series of brilliant one-liners delivered with the dead pan wit and timing of the best stand-up comics. The denouement, like the entire musical is unsentimental and a rather grim picture of American society. Perhaps each performance should be preceded by the equivalent of the standard publisher's waiver about any resemblance the characters may bear to real persons, living or dead, is purely illusory etc etc.

Caroline O'Connor and Chelsea Gibb share top billing as Velma Kelly and Roxy Hart. They are both outstanding. So is John Diedrich as the deliciously cynical Billy Flynn.

*Reviewer: Evelyn McWilliams
(Evelyn McWilliams of the Law Society of New South Wales reviewed for Balance)*

Chicago was created by...

John Kander and Fred Ebb (the Cabaret team) and Bob Fosse (memorably played by Roy Schneider in *All that Jazz*) and the present production as garnered more awards than any other show on Broadway.

Chicago is currently showing...

at the Capitol Theatre in Sydney and due to popular demand, will be until the end of the year. Tickets are \$65.

SHOW TIMES

Tues - Sat	8pm
Wed	1pm
Sat	2pm
Sun	5pm

For further information contact:

Tel: (03) 9349 1313

