

arts/entertainment

'Chicago' sings some songs about the 20s

By Betsie Ammons

A brittle view of the decadent 1920s, complete with loose morals, show girls and bootleg booze, was given in *Chicago*, staged this weekend at Omaha's Orpheum Theater.

The production, presented by a traveling company containing many of the original Broadway show's players, was basically flawless but a bit hard-edged for this reviewer's taste.

theater review

Written by Bob Fosse, with music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb, *Chicago* is a series of vignettes telling the stories of Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly, two showgirls accused of murdering their men.

The show's resemblance to *Cabaret* is striking, but not surprising, as Fosse is responsible for both plays.

But *Chicago* is lacking in the warmth and humanity in *Cabaret*. It is, instead, a hard-hitting, flashy picture of just how rotten life was in Chicago during that decade. Both Roxie and Velma feel no remorse for the murders and both are looking out for the same thing—themselves.

Despite the play's jaded view of life, the performers were excellent. Kirsten Childs was a standout as Velma. Childs was understudy for the original Velma, Chita Rivera, on Broadway. Her energetic dancing and fine singing added to the play's appeal.

Character players also were important in *Chicago*. Jane Judge as the jail matron and Donald L. Norris as Roxie's simple-minded husband Amos were especially good. Norris did a funny bit called "Mister Cellophane", executing a soft-shoe in oversized clown footwear.

M. O'Haughey as Mary Sunshine gave the play an element of mystery. Sporting a five-octave singing range, no one guesses until the end that the "M" stands for Michael. While his acting was fine and singing phenomenal, it was disappointing not to be able to understand a word he said.

The set, while simple in appearance, was complex because of its different lighting techniques. It was interesting



Chorus line from the musical, "Chicago."

to see the wiring of neon-like signs, such as one would see on a television variety show, on an Omaha stage.

The costumes can best be described as bizarre. They were not realistic but rather designed to give the viewer the illusion of reality. Two toned leotards, body stockings and flimsy robes were designed as tuxedos, and outfits for the courtroom scenes and the dancers.

A talented chorus and dancers added to the overall quality of the production. They kept the play's energy level high at all times.

The play was presented by Dick Walter Attractions, an Omaha-based booking agency responsible for bringing high-quality entertainment both to the Orpheum Theater and the Omaha Civic Auditorium.

Gill novel, 'Kiki,' reads like television movie

By Scott Kleager

At the end of John Gill's new novel, *Kiki*, is a short piece about the author's life. Part of it reads: "Besides novels he has written plays for American and French television." For good reason this bit of information is kept from the reader until the end, following the last short

book review

chapter. Most readers will begin reading it as some sort of epilogue to the story and in bewilderment realize that it's only about the author. But the attempts to hide it only serve to further the fact that the novel reads like a television movie.

The shocking, horror-like personality of the main character, Sarge; the mysterious ingredients of photographic hide-and-seek style that keeps the reader (viewer?)

from the entire plot until well into the story; and the intuitive feeling one gets when reading that somehow the bad guy will get caught; all make this novel nearly second-rate.

The author also gives so little view of the surroundings, presumably because he writes through the eyes of a main character who is familiar with the area, that not until near the end of the book does one find out all this is happening in Paris. One knows it's in France quite early but never is Gill specific enough with his narration to allow the reader to know that it's Paris he's talking about. So not only are the specifics of the plot kept from the reader, but the stylistic details of tone also are mostly hidden.

One reason why the plot is so sketchy may be that there's little plot to the novel. Basically this is it: Sarge, the main character, loses his only daughter to an abortion performed by someone who doesn't know what he's doing. Sarge reads her diary and discovers it was one of his friends, that made her pregnant, so he plans revenge. He builds a prison in his basement, lures his friend, Peter, to

his house, drugs him and from then on keeps him in the soundproof basement jail for revenge. A policeman begins snooping around his house. Sarge gets nervous, makes a couple of big mistakes and is caught.

The author has what one may consider to be a weak metaphorical sense. This may be because on television metaphors are conveyed by the camera. For instance, at the start of the novel Sarge looks up and to the west and hears, "... the first thunderclap of the approaching storm." It wouldn't be so bad had he said "an approaching" instead of "the approaching". The story is full of images that allude to problems that lie ahead for the main character, images that are simply too obvious.

The only thing that (almost) saves the novel is the twisted ending, although it seems too dramatic to be enjoyable. In a way it ends as though the author wrote the ending first and everything else leading up to it after that. Nonetheless, the finish is shocking and the book is short. So if you don't have a television but you wish you did, read *Kiki* by John Gill. But try not to change the channel before it's over.

'Sally' rediscovers early roots of rock 'n' roll

By Michael West

Perhaps the most fun thing about early rock 'n' roll music was its accessibility to both the listener and the musician. Without a lot of equipment or even a lot of talent you could put a band together and actually play it.

review

Recently, many musicians have been reaching back to this older sound, not out of nostalgia, but in order to rediscover the musical roots of rock and the simple pleasures of performing it. This, according to band members, is what the local group Sally is about.

"Popular rock has been pasteurized and homogenized,"

said lead guitarist Vel Garnett, "We're trying to tap the primal roots of rock prior to 1968."

"Most of us (in the band) don't have any great ambitions of going anywhere in music," he said. "We're just having a good time and doing what we like."

Along with Garnett on lead guitar, Sally features Terry Wood on drums, Mike Johnson on bass, Deb Stephens on vocals, Donna Arnold on percussion, and Bob Davis on rhythm guitar. The band, with its present personnel, has been together about three weeks.

In its performance last weekend at the Mountains (formerly Elsie's Tap), Sally displayed a high level of showmanship and a tightness of style that promises to get better with age. The material was varied, spanning a decade or two, ranging from "Jail House Rock" to "Take Me to the River." It was apparent that the band was picking what was playable and what they wanted to play, regardless of popular trends. The product was danceable and

a refreshing change of pace.

Though the band itself is new to the music scene, most of its members aren't. Bob Davis, for instance, was a guitarist for Buddy Miles when Miles was still in Omaha. Garnett, Johnson and Wood all have several years of performing experience and it shows. The instrumental sound of the band at this point speaks of four individual talents waiting to merge.

The vocals were good but not the band's strongest feature. This may have been because of acoustics and mixing. Nevertheless, the band shows good potential in this area. Mike Johnson and Deb Stephens sang particularly well on some numbers.

An interesting sidelight is the meaning of the band's name. According to Garnett, they had in mind the verb form of the word sally, which means to move forth from a resting place, as in "sally forth."

Sally will return to The Mountains, 311 S. 11th, on December 28 and 29.