

SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE PRESENTS

A CHORUS LINE

Music by Marvin Hamlisch

Lyrics by Edward Kleban

Book by James Kirkwood, Jr. and Nicholas Dante

Conceived and Originally Directed and Choreographed by Michael Bennett

Directed by Bill English, Music Direction by Dave Dobrusky, Choreography by Nicole Helfer

June 22 – September 9, 2023 (*opening night: June 28*)

SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (8 May 2023) — **San Francisco Playhouse** concludes its 20th Anniversary Season with the hit Broadway musical *A Chorus Line*. In this groundbreaking work, twenty-four hopeful dancers undertake a grueling audition for eight coveted spots in the back-up chorus of an unnamed Broadway show. Exploring the inner lives and bittersweet ambitions of performers, *A Chorus Line* captures the spirit, tension, and hope of a high stakes audition. Directed by **Bill English** with music direction by **Dave Dobrusky** and choreography by **Nicole Helfer**, *A Chorus Line* will perform **June 22 – September 9, 2023** (*opening night: June 28*) at San Francisco Playhouse, 450 Post Street. For tickets (\$15-\$100) and more information, the public may visit sfplayhouse.org or call the box office at **415-677-9596**.

A Chorus Line was created from the real-life stories of working Broadway dancers, including eight who appeared in the original cast. Their deeply personal tales, shared in workshop sessions hosted by dancers Michon Peacock and Tony Stevens, caught the attention of director/choreographer Michael Bennett who had also been considering a show centered on the singular life of chorus dancers. *A Chorus Line*'s 1975 Broadway debut changed the face of musical theatre, with *The New York Times* proclaiming, "It is an occasion of joy, an affirmation of Broadway and a smoke-signal to the world that the musical can touch unexpected depths in the human heart." The show has also been credited with literally saving Broadway, which was struggling with attendance at an all-time low of 6.6 million before the show premiered. *A Chorus Line* helped bring in 8.8 million playgoers the following year, became the centerpiece of a New York City tourist promotion, led to the revitalization of Times Square, and went on to run for an unprecedented 15 years. In 1983 it became the longest running musical in Broadway history, a title it held for another 14 years until it was finally surpassed by *Cats*. The show won nine Tony Awards, the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, four Drama Desk awards, and three Obie Awards. Of this enduring classic, *Time Out* said, "The show remains an enormously powerful and affecting piece of work: one of Broadway's all-time greats, with more kick than most other shows combined." San Francisco Playhouse's new production is several years in the making—it was originally scheduled to be presented in its 2020-21 season before being cancelled due to theatre closures during the pandemic.

For this production, San Francisco Playhouse has assembled a stellar cast of talented actor/singers, starting with frequent San Francisco Playhouse choreographer **Nicole Helfer** (she/her), who takes on her first onstage role at the Playhouse as the proud and defiant Cassie, a once-featured performer who is reduced to seeking a part in the chorus. As an actress, she won a Shellie Award for her performance in *Les Misérables* at Contra Costa Musical Theatre and has performed with 42nd Street Moon and Center

Repertory Company. Recently winning San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle (SFBATCC) Award for her choreography of *Indecent*, Helfer has choreographed for San Francisco Playhouse since 2019 in productions including *Cabaret* (SFBATCC and Theatre Bay Area – TBA - Award finalist), *Groundhog Day the Musical* (SFBATCC nominee), *Songs for a New World*, *Starting Here Starting Now* (SFBATCC nominee), *Twelfth Night* (SFBATCC award), *Follies*, *As You Like It*, and *Clue*. Additional choreography credits include The Mountain Play and Ross Valley Players' *She Loves Me* (SFBATCC award); 42nd Street Moon's *Dames at Sea* (TBA finalist and SFBATCC nominee) and *No, No, Nanette* (TBA finalist and SFBATCC nominee); Broadway By the Bay's *The Music Man* (TBA finalist), *West Side Story* (TBA Award), and *In the Heights* (TBA Award); and Ray of Light Theatre's *Lizzie* (SFBATCC nominee), among many others.

Seen in the Playhouse's productions of *Company*; *Into the Woods*; *Starting Here, Starting Now*; and *She Loves Me*, **Keith Pinto** (he/him) returns to the Playhouse as Zach, the director of the unnamed musical holding auditions. An actor, director, and choreographer, Pinto has performed on leading Bay Area stages, including American Conservatory Theater, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, Center Repertory Company, Shotgun Players, 42nd Street Moon, Cinnabar Theater, Campo Santo, San Jose Stage Company, and Hillbarn Theatre. Pinto is a co-founder of the San Francisco-based hip hop band Felonious, which has recorded numerous albums and has performed shows with Black Eyed Peas, De La Soul, LL Cool J, The Roots, Pato Banton, and Erykah Badu. **Ann Warque** (she/her) returns to the Playhouse as Lori, Zach's assistant, after performing in *Follies*. Warque has also performed with Berkeley Playhouse, Town Hall Theatre, FaultLine Theater, and Tri-Valley Repertory Theatre.

Broadway actor **Alison Ewing** (she/her) makes her Playhouse debut as Sheila, a sassy and sophisticated dancer. Ewing has been seen on Broadway in *Mamma Mia!* and Roundabout Theatre Company's *Cabaret*. She has performed in the national tours of *Anastasia*, *An American In Paris*, *Cabaret*, *Flashdance*, and *Mamma Mia!*. In the Bay Area, she's appeared onstage with TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, San Jose Stage Company, Marin Theatre Company, San Jose Repertory Theatre, Center Repertory Company, Playhouse West, and Theatre On San Pedro Square. Her TV and film credits include "Ally McBeal" and "Six Feet Under." After performing in *As You Like It*, **Jillian A. Smith** (she/her) returns to the Playhouse as Bebe, a quiet and insecure dancer. Her acting credits include shows with 42nd Street Moon, Ray of Light Theatre, South Bay Musical Theatre, and Custom Made Theatre. After being seen in *Follies* last summer, **Danielle Cheiken** (she/her) returns to the Playhouse as the sweet and dreamy dancer Maggie. She has acted with Shotgun Players, San Francisco Opera Guild, Bay Area Musicals, Berkeley Playhouse, 42nd Street Moon, Broadway By The Bay, and Hillbarn Theatre.

Melissa WolfKlain returns to the Playhouse as Val, a brassy dancer who finds she books more roles after plastic surgery enhancements to her figure. WolfKlain performed in the Playhouse's productions of *Cabaret* and *Starting Here, Starting Now*. She won a TBA Award for *Dames at Sea* at 42nd Street Moon as well as SFBATCC Awards for her appearances in Broadway by the Bay's *Singin' in the Rain* and *Crazy for You*. Seen in the national tours of *White Christmas* and *42nd Street*, WolfKlain has also performed at regional theatres including TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, Hillbarn Theatre, and Arizona Repertory Theatre, and her film and TV credits include FOX TV's "America's Most Wanted" and Lifetime's "The Truth about Jane."

Samantha Rose Cárdenas (she/her) returns to the Playhouse as Diana Morales, a tough and determined dancer who admits to feeling nothing in acting class. She was previously seen in *City of Angels*, for which she received SFBATCC Award, as well as in *Follies* and *La Cage aux Folles*. She also received a TBA Award for her performance in *Heathers: The Musical* at Ray of Light Theatre, and has been seen

at 42nd Street Moon, Broadway By the Bay, Foothill Theatre Arts, Contra Costa Musical Theatre, and Mountain Play Association. **Tony Conaty** (he/him) makes his Playhouse debut as Mike, a cocky tap dancer who picks up dance after watching his sister taking classes. His theatre credits include 42nd Street Moon, Northern Stage, Music Theatre of Connecticut, New London Barn Playhouse, and Disney Cruise Line. **Alex Rodriguez** (he/him) makes his Playhouse debut as Paul, a gay Puerto Rican dancer who survived a difficult childhood. Rodriguez is a co-Artistic Director for Ray of Light Theatre and an award-winning performer, choreographer, and director. Seen in the national tour of *Miss Saigon*, he won TBA Awards for his performances in Ray of Light's *Triassic Park*, Bay Area Musicals' *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and Broadway By the Bay's *Evita*.

Performing in *Follies*, **M. Javi Harnly** (he/him) returns to the Playhouse as Al, a macho dancer newly married to fellow dancer Kristine. Harnly has acted with Berkeley Playhouse, Broadway By the Bay, Ray of Light Theatre, and Tri-Valley Repertory Theatre. **Adria Swan** (she/her) makes her Playhouse debut as Kristine, a somewhat scatter-brained dancer who admits she can't sing. She has also performed with Contra Costa Musical Theatre, Contra Costa Civic Theatre, Connecticut Repertory Theatre, Clinton Area Showboat Theatre, and Theatre Under the Stars, and Holland America Cruise Line. **Zeke Edmonds** (he/him) returns to the Playhouse after performing in *As You Like It* as optimistic and naïve dancer Mark. He has also appeared onstage at McCarter Theatre Center, Signature Theatre (Virginia), Westchester Broadway Theatre, and Syracuse Stage. **Ruri Kodama** (she/her) makes her Playhouse debut as Connie, a dancer whose beaming personality outshines her tap ability. A current student at Molloy University/ CAP21, she has performed onstage with Palo Alto Players and Cupertino Actor's Theatre. Her TV and film credits include HBO's documentary *My So-Called High School Rank* and "Department of One."

Returning to the Playhouse after appearing as Touchstone in *As You Like It* and as Phaedra in *La Cage Aux Folles*, **Nicholas Yenson** (he/him) plays flamboyant and funny Bobby. His theater credits include performances with Shakespeare Theatre Company, McCarter Theatre Center, American Conservatory Theater, Arena Stage, Signature Theatre, Wellesley Repertory Theatre, and 42nd Street Moon. Concert appearances include Espaço das Américas (São Paulo), Qantas Arena (Sydney), the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (West End), and the New Amsterdam Theatre (Broadway) and the upcoming *Pacific Overtures* at Signature Theatre. **Maggie Connard** (she/her) makes her Playhouse debut as Judy, a gawky and nervous dancer. She has acted with Shotgun Players, Diablo Theatre Company, Contra Costa Musical Theatre, Broadway By the Bay, and Presidio Theatre.

Zach Padlo (he/him) makes his Playhouse debut as Don, a self-assured ladies' man. Padlo has appeared onstage with Berkeley Playhouse, Summer Repertory Theatre Festival, and Madison Theatre. Performing in *Follies* last summer, **Chachi Delgado** (he/him) returns to the Playhouse as Richie, a cool and laid-back dancer. Delgado has also appeared onstage at the Mountain Play, San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Company, African-American Shakespeare Company, and Oakland Theater Project (Ubuntu Theater Project). **Dalton Bertolone** (he/him) makes his Playhouse debut as Greg, a smart aleck who has worked with the director before. Bertolone has performed with Broadway Palm Theater, Arizona Broadway Theater, Playhouse on Park, New London Barn Playhouse, Utah Festival of Opera, Connecticut Repertory Theatre, Sierra Repertory Theater, and Norwegian Cruise Line.

Gabi Chun (she/her), **McKay Elwood** (he/him), **Dian Sitip Meechai** (she/her), **Elihu Guerrero** (he/him), **Erin Rose Solorio** (she/her), **Michael C. Kennedy** (he/him), and **Joel Ochoa** (he/him) make their Playhouse debuts, rounding out the cast. **Gabi Chun** plays Tricia. Chun has performed with Bay Area Children's Theatre, Ray of Light Theatre, and CAP21. **McKay Elwood** plays Tom. Elwood has

acted with 42nd Street Moon, East Bay Children's Theatre, Berkeley Playhouse, New Conservatory Theatre Center, and Hale Center Theatre. **Dian Sitip Meechai** plays Vicki. She has performed with Pocket Opera, Lamplighters Music Theatre, Berkeley Playhouse, Presidio Theatre, and San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Company. **Elihu Guerrero** plays Frank. Guerrero is a hip hop dancer and recent graduate of Jessup University, where he performed in their production of *The Music Man*. **Erin Rose Solorio** plays Lois. She has also performed with 6th Street Playhouse and Lewis Family Playhouse. **Michael C. Kennedy** plays Roy. Kennedy has performed with Berkeley Playhouse, Cabrillo Music Theatre, Pacific Festival Ballet, Shenandoah Summer Music Theatre. His TV and film credits include *Santa Girl* and "Gilmore Girls." **Joel Ochoa** plays Butch. Currently earning his MFA at Academy of Art University, Ochoa has performed with Marin County Shakespeare, Springfield Theatre Center, and Pipe Dreams.

PRODUCTION TEAM:

A Chorus Line features assistant direction by **Louis Parnell**, music direction by **Dave Dobrusky**, choreography by **Nicole Helfer** with **Keith Pinto** as associate choreographer and **Clint Calimlim** as assistant choreographer, scenic design by **Heather Kenyon** and **Bill English**, lighting design by **Mike Oesch**, costume design by **Abra Berman**, and properties design by **Keili Elliott**.

CREATIVE TEAM:

Marvin Hamlisch (Composer) won every major award, including three Oscars, four Grammys, four Emmys, a Tony, three Golden Globes, and the Pulitzer Prize (for *A Chorus Line*). Only Hamlisch and Richard Rodgers have won a "PEGOT" (P.E.G.O.T. = Pulitzer, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, Tony awards). For Broadway, Hamlisch wrote the music for *A Chorus Line*, as well as *They're Playing Our Song*, *The Goodbye Girl*, and *Sweet Smell of Success*. Additional theatrical scores include *Jean Seberg* (1983) and *The Nutty Professor* (2012). He was the composer of more than forty motion picture scores including his Oscar-winning score and song for *The Way We Were* and his adaptation of Scott Joplin's music for *The Sting*, for which he received a third Oscar. His prolific output of scores for films include original compositions and/or musical adaptations for *Sophie's Choice*, *Ordinary People*, *The Swimmer*, *Three Men and a Baby*, *Ice Castles*, *Take the Money and Run*, *Bananas*, *Save the Tiger* and *The Informant!*. His last musical score was for *Liberace—Behind The Candelabra*, aired on HBO and winner of several Emmys. Hamlisch was Musical Director and arranger of Barbra Streisand's 1994 concert tour of the U.S. and England as well as of the television special, *Barbra Streisand: The Concert* (for which he received two of his Emmys).

Edward Kleban (Lyricist) won the 1975 Tony Award, the Pulitzer Prize and the Drama Desk and Olivier Awards for his work on *A Chorus Line*. His score for the musical *A Class Act*, a musical biography of Kleban's life that was produced posthumously, was nominated for 2001 Tony and Drama Desk Awards, and won an Obie Award. Throughout the sixties he produced original cast albums as a record producer for Columbia Records while developing his own musicals in BMI Musical Theatre Workshop. Every song that he wrote for *A Chorus Line* was tested in the BMI Workshop. During the 1980s he taught songwriting in the workshop. In Kleban's will, he created and endowed The Kleban Prize, a unique grant that is bestowed not for a writer's previous achievements, but for the promise of creativity to come, chosen by a panel of Broadway's most respected artists. Recipients have gone on to garner four Tony Awards, 30 Tony nominations, 10 Drama Desk Awards and four Obie Awards.

James Kirkwood, Jr. (Book) was an American playwright, author and actor. He received the Tony Award, the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Book of a Musical, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his work on *A Chorus Line*. Kirkwood began his career as an actor, appearing on television in *Valiant*

Lady and Perry Mason, and on Broadway in *Small Wonder* and *Dance Me A Song*, among others. As an author, he penned the semi-autobiographical novel *There Must Be a Pony*, along with *P.S. Your Cat Is Dead*, *Good Times/Bad Times*, *Some Kind of Hero*, and *Hit Me with a Rainbow*. In 1970, he wrote the non-fiction *American Grotesque*, about the trial of Clay Shaw. His comedic play *Legends!* toured the United States starring Mary Martin and Carol Channing. He later wrote an account of the experience, titled *Diary of a Mad Playwright: Perilous Adventures on the Road with Mary Martin and Carol Channing*. Following his passing, friends and admirers established the James Kirkwood Literary Prize to honor new generations of fiction writers for their literary achievements.

Nicholas Dante (Book) was an American dancer and writer, co-writer of the book for *A Chorus Line*. Born Conrado Morales in New York City, Dante began his career as a dancer and performer, appearing on Broadway in *Applause*, *Ambassador* and *Smith*, among others. In 1974, Michael Bennett invited Dante to participate in interview sessions with Broadway dancers who generally, almost anonymously, serve as a backdrop behind star performers. Collaborating with Bennett and James Kirkwood Jr., Dante co-created *A Chorus Line*, earning the 1976 Tony Award and Drama Desk Award for Best Book of a Musical and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The character of Paul was based primarily on Dante. Sammy Williams, who originated the role, won the 1976 Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical. Dante later assumed the role himself.

Michael Bennett (Conception, original Director/Choreographer) was an American musical theatre director, writer, choreographer, and dancer. He won seven Tony Awards for his choreography and direction of Broadway shows and was nominated for an additional eleven. Bennett's choreography credits also include *Henry*, *Sweet Henry*; *Promises, Promises*; *Coco*; and *Company*. He directed and choreographed *Follies*, *Seesaw*, and *Ballroom*, among others. In 1976, he won the Tony Awards for Best Direction of a Musical and Best Choreography for *A Chorus Line*. Under the aegis of producer Joseph Papp, Bennett created *A Chorus Line* based on a pioneering workshop process. In 1982 Bennett directed and, with Michael Peters co-choreographed, *Dreamgirls*, winner of six Tony Awards, including Best Choreography.

Bill English (Director, he/ him) is the co-founder and Artistic Director of **San Francisco Playhouse**. Alongside co-founder Susi Damilano, he has guided its growth from a bare-bones storefront to the second-largest nonprofit theatre company in San Francisco. English designed the Playhouse's first theatre space at 536 Sutter Street and reconfigured its current space from a 700-seat hall into the current gracious and intimate 199-seat venue. Over the last twenty years, he has served as director, actor, scenic designer, and sound designer, winning SFBATCC nominations or awards in each of those categories. Bill is also an accomplished musician and builder. Milestone accomplishments include introducing Pulitzer Prize winner Stephen Adly Guirgis to the Bay Area by directing three of his plays; commissioning over thirty playwrights including Theresa Rebeck, Aaron Loeb, Lauren Gunderson, Lauren Yee, and Christopher Chen; and developing World Premieres from workshops to Sandbox Series to Mainstage Season to Off-Broadway (including the Off-Broadway transfers of *Ideation* and *Bauer*), and presenting the very first production of *Grounded* by George Brant which later played at the Public Theater. He coined the phrase "the empathy gym," which drives everything at the Playhouse.

SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE:

Founded by **Bill English** and **Susi Damilano** in 2003, **San Francisco Playhouse** has been described by *The New York Times* as "a company that stages some of the most consistently high-quality work around" and deemed "ever adventurous" by *The Mercury News*. Located in the heart of the Union Square

Theater District, **San Francisco Playhouse** is the city's premier Off-Broadway company, an intimate alternative to the larger more traditional Union Square theater fare. The Playhouse provides audiences the opportunity to experience professional theater with top-notch actors and world-class design in a setting where they are close to the action. The company has received multiple awards for overall productions, acting, and design, including the SF Weekly Best Theatre Award and the Bay Guardian's Best Off-Broadway Theatre Award, as well as three consecutive Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards for Best Entire Production in the Bay Area. *KQED/NPR* recently described the company as "one of the few theaters in the Bay Area that has a mission that actually shows up on stage. Artistic director Bill English's commitment to empathy as a guiding philosophical and aesthetic force is admirable and by living that mission, fascinating things happen onstage." The Playhouse is committed to providing a creative home and inspiring environment where actors, directors, writers, designers, and theater lovers converge to create and experience dramatic works that celebrate the human spirit.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

- WHAT:** **San Francisco Playhouse** concludes its 20th Anniversary Season with the hit Broadway musical *A Chorus Line*. In this groundbreaking work, twenty-four hopeful dancers undertake a grueling audition for eight coveted spots in the back-up chorus of an unnamed Broadway show. Exploring the inner lives and bittersweet ambitions of performers, *A Chorus Line* captures the spirit, tension, and hope of a high stakes audition. This one singular sensation became an instant smash hit, with *The New York Times* proclaiming, "It is an occasion of joy, an affirmation of Broadway and a smoke-signal to the world that the musical can touch unexpected depths in the human heart." It won nine Tony Awards, the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, four Drama Desk awards, and three Obie Awards.
- WHEN:** Previews: Thursday, June 22 – Tuesday, June 27, 2023
Opening: Wednesday, June 28, 2023
Closes: Saturday, September 9, 2023
- SHOWS:** Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays: 7pm
Fridays: 8pm
Saturdays: 3pm & 8pm
Sundays: 2pm & 7pm
- WHERE:** San Francisco Playhouse (450 Post Street, San Francisco)
- TICKETS:** For tickets (\$15-\$100) or more information, the public may visit <https://www.sfplayhouse.org/sfph/2022-2023-season/a-chorus-line/> or call the box office at 415-677-9596.

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available: <http://cbpr.co/press/achorusline>