



Synopsis & Historical Perspective



Synopsis

At an audition for a Broadway production, a director (Zach) and choreography assistant (Larry) are putting numerous auditionees through their dance combinations. As the dancers sing *I Hope I Get It*, they are being put into groups for evaluation. Zach narrows the group down to 17, and Larry directs them to stand on a line across the stage.

Zach tells them he is looking for a strong dancing chorus of four men and four women. He then tells them to talk about themselves, because he wants to learn more about them. This turns out to be a very difficult thing for them to do, but Zach is inflexible and insists that they try.

Diana is unwilling to talk about herself, and Zach lets her off the hook until later. Then Mike tells his story, reluctantly at first, but he soon gets into it. In the light-hearted song/dance *I Can Do That*, he recalls his first experience with dance, watching his sister's class when he was a preschooler. Certain he could do it too, he took her place one day when she refused to go – and he stayed a dancer the rest of his life.

Bobby, an overgrown class clown, is next. He tells outrageous stories about his acting out as a youth. Attention shifts back and forth from him to the rest of the dancers, who express their misgivings about this strange audition process in the song *And...* but since they all need the job, the session continues.

After Sheila gives Zach a hard time, she opens up in the song *At The Ballet*, a poignant tribute to the escape that can be found in dance. She realizes that ballet is a relief from her painful family life. Joining her in the song, Bebe adds that she likes ballet as she was not beautiful as a child and everything in ballet seems beautiful. Maggie sings that she loves ballet because someone is always there, unlike the father she never had.

Zach next calls on Al and Kristine, a married couple. When Kristine speaks, Al finishes her sentences. Their hilarious number *Sing!* makes it clear that Kristine is tone deaf, and Zach moves on to Mark, a young dancer who is eager to be on Broadway. His embarrassing stories about early sexual curiosity lead the group into *Hello Twelve, Hello Thirteen, Hello Love*, a montage sequence in which all of the dancers share memories of their traumatic early teens. Greg speaks about his homosexuality, and Connie tells about being too short to be taken seriously as a dancer. Diana recollects her horrible high school acting class in the song, *Nothing*.

In another montage called *Mother*, Don relates his experiences working in strip joints on his way to legitimate dancing, and Judy sings about being ashamed of her mother as she grew up. Richie was a sports star in school, and intended to become a teacher before he got bit by the dancing bug. *Dance Ten, Looks Three* follows, with Val's explanation that talent doesn't count for everything with casting directors. She chose plastic surgery in order to get their attention.

Zach starts asking questions of Paul, who is clearly more sensitive than the others. Zach pushes him too hard, and the other dancers express their disapproval. A break is called, and Zach takes this opportunity to speak alone with Cassie. We soon learn that Cassie has risen above the level of chorus dancer, and Zach can't figure out what she's doing at this audition. We also learn that Zach and Cassie have had a serious romantic relationship in the past. Her solo song/dance

The Music and the Mirror tells of her love of dance and of her need to dance. Zach allows her to stay and audition with the others, and he calls Paul back on stage for a private talk. Paul delivers an emotional monologue in which he comes to terms with his early career, manhood and sense of self.

The group comes back onstage and begins a grueling drill of the production number *One*, during which Zach and Cassie confront each other and their romantic past. Everyone is tired, and even Larry is showing impatience at Zach's difficulty making his decisions. Larry starts drilling the tap number when Paul falls and aggravates an old knee injury, requiring a trip to the hospital. After this traumatic jolt that emphasizes the risks of being a dancer, Zach once more engages the group in conversation, this time about what they will do when they can't dance any more. There are various reactions in the discussion that follows, from well-thought-out plans to outright denial that such a time will ever come. Diana epitomizes the dancer's dream that she'll never grow old, and she leads the group into *What I Did for Love*, which expresses the emotional drive that keeps them focused, ever hopeful, and free of regrets. This number fades into the final elimination process as the last eight dancers are selected. Zach is all business, talking about contracts and performance dates.

Blackout.

The stage is transformed into a spectacle of color and lights. In *One* (reprise/finale), all of the characters in the show (now dressed in spangled gold costumes) come back on stage. After a brief individual bow, they all merge into nameless, faceless chorus dancers, the goal they had all aspired to in this audition.

Historical Perspective

A Chorus Line is a Broadway musical that opened at the Shubert Theatre July 25, 1975 and closed there April 28, 1990 after 6,137 performances. It held the distinction of being the longest running show on Broadway until it was surpassed by *Cats* in 1997 and *The Phantom of the Opera* in 2006. It currently holds the record for the fourth longest-running musical, after *Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats* and *Les Miserables* (in that order).

The musical is based on two taped sessions with Broadway dancers, including eight of the actors/actresses of the original Broadway cast. The show was conceived, directed and choreographed by Michael Bennett, with music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Edward Kleban. The book was assembled by James Kirkwood, Jr. and Nicholas Dante (and script-doctored by Neil Simon). It had a successful Off-Broadway run at the Public Theater before opening on Broadway.

A Chorus Line also toured successfully, including a run at the Pantages Theatre in Hollywood. A Broadway revival opened at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre on October 5, 2006 and is running still today.

A Chorus Line received 12 nominations for the Tony Awards in 1975, winning nine: Best Musical, Best Actress (Donna McKechnie), Best Featured Actor (Sammy Williams), Best Featured Actress (Carole Bishop), Best Director (Michael Bennett), Best Musical Book (Dante and Kirkwood), Best Score (Hamlisch and Kleban), Best Lighting design (Tharon Musser) and Best Choreographer (Michael Bennett and Bob Avian). It also won the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for drama, one of the few musicals ever to receive this honor.