



Theo UbiqUe Cabaret Theatre
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FEATURE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHESSE, A ROCK MUSICAL ABOUT LIFE AND HEART

Theo UbiqUe's Production the First in Chicago in 20 Years

Chicago, February 21 -- Theo UbiqUe Cabaret Theatre's production of *Chess*, running March 7-April 25 at No Exit Café, combines cabaret theatre and concert concept styles. Although the backdrop is international chess competitions with grand masters from the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War, the story is really about the woman in the middle.

It is the first time *Chess* has been produced in Chicago in 20 years.

The central character is Florence, played by Maggie Portman, the "number two" and former lover of the United States grand master Freddie, loosely patterned after the notorious Bobby Fischer and played by Courtney Crouse. She falls in love with the Soviet Union's grand master Anatoly, played by Jeremy Trager and an amalgamation of various Soviet grand masters, including Anatoly Karpov. Add to that, Cold War intrigue.

Other featured cast members are Stephanie Herman as Svetlana, John B. Leen as Molokov, John Taflan as Arbiter and Anthony Apodoca as Walter. Ensemble members are Jenny Guse, Jenny Lamb, Ben Mason and Travis Walker.

The Illinois Chess Association is providing counsel and props for the production as well as members participating in Thursday night talk-back sessions and Saturday dinner hour chess blitzes.

Interpretation

"Florence's struggle is symbolic of our life struggle. The opening scene is a flashback of when Florence was a little girl and the last time she sees her father in Hungary. Her father's lesson is that by learning the game of chess is to learn the game of life," explained Fred Anzevino, co-director and co-founder/artistic director of Theo UbiqUe.

"The father is teaching Florence about how to be alone and survive alone, and he does it with a board game," adds Brenda Didier, co-director and choreographer. "The music and lyrics are very emotional, and the dance serves as a backdrop to the music. Combined, it brings the audience to the root of the story about the human condition."

Diverse musical styles are represented in *Chess*, ranging from light opera to rock to rap. The choreography is as diverse as the music. "The 80s meet East, meets modern," Didier said. "It's tricky because the dance and script are a backdrop to the rock concert. A traditional musical is the other way around."

"The diversity of musical styles requires an orchestra that at times provides a solid floor, other times a partner, and other times an atmospheric backdrop," said Ryan Brewster, music director. "Reducing the score from a full pop musical orchestra to a small pit band/chamber orchestra allows the right focus at the right times. In general, the vocals take the center stage, expanded in strategic spots to add depth to the sound. The goal is musical spectacle, but with intimacy and focus."

The same quality, talent and energy from last season's production of *Evita* by Theo Ubique are being brought to Chess. All three directors worked together on *Evita* and walked away with Jeff Awards for Production/Musical, Direction, Choreography and Musical Direction. Portman also won a Jeff Award for Principal Actress/Musical.

Anzevino's vision of reinventing big stage musicals into an intimate cabaret theatre breaks down the "fourth wall" of theatre and minimizes set and space to focus on the story elements. Actors interact with the audience as servers before and during the show.

Background

Chess lyrics were written by Tim Rice shortly after he finished *Evita*. It was the early 1980s after Ronald Reagan became U.S. President in 1981 when he started the project. Initially, Rice wanted to collaborate with Andrew Lloyd Webber as he did with *Evita*, but Webber was busy with another project.

Rice then turned to Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus of ABBA as composers, who were looking for new challenges. Together they released the concept album in 1984, and the world hit single, *One Night in Bangkok*. *Chess* premiered as a rock musical in 1986 in London, the same year Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with the role of Florence played by Elaine Paige.

The song *I Know Him So Well* from *Chess* has gained some recent popularity with a 2009 video of Elaine Paige singing it with Susan Boyle (on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF1hIaHKANK>). Paige originally sang the duet with Barbara Dickson in the London production.

Director Michael Bennett (*Chorus Line*) had planned to bring a new version of *Chess* to Broadway, but backed out two weeks before rehearsals started, due to illness. Trevor Nunn took over as director, but inherited Bennett's lavish vision, properties and a book by playwright Richard Nelson (a Chicago native) not in the London production. The role of Florence was played by Judy Kuhn.

Marriott Theatre was the last Chicago theatre company to produce *Chess* in 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall and Soviet Union. *Chess in Concert* is the most recent production of the musical as a PBS concert with Josh Groban in London's Albert Royal Hall and presented on PBS' "Great Performances" last June.

Show and Ticket Information

Tickets for "Chess" are now available online at www.theoubique.org or through the ticket order line at 800-595-4849. Theo Ubique's ticket information line is 773-347-1109, where updated theatre and show information are available.

Previews are 8 p.m., March 5-6, and preview tickets are \$15. Regular performance tickets for March 7-April 25 are \$25 for Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays and \$30 for Saturdays. A show/dinner package is optional for \$45 and \$50. Free parking is available at the parking lot on the corner of Morse and Ravenswood with free transport on the Lifeline shuttle van to and from the lot. The No Exit Café is by the Morse stop on the Red Line. Special discounts are offered through Theo Ubiq e-news announcements, which are available by signing up through the web site at www.theoubique.org or www.theo-u.org.

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Founded in 1997 by Fred Anzevino, Artistic Director, Theo Ubiq Cabaret Theatre is a Rogers Park-based cabaret-theatre company. It initially began performing at the Heartland Studio, producing an array of straight drama, comedy and musicals, and in 2004 started the cabaret-theatre trend in the Chicago area when it began producing musicals and revues at Michael James' No Exit Café—its home since then. During its 13-year history, Theo Ubiq produced 31 productions (including Chess) and received 18 Jeff Awards Non-Equity and 3 After Dark Awards. The name Theo Ubiq (pronounced thee-oh oo-bah-kway) is a combination of Greek and Latin words reflecting the company's mission to engage actors and audiences in an intimate and honest conversation with great theatrical works. Visit the web site at www.theoubique.org.