

Tiré à part



American Musicals

Stage and screen / L'écran et la scène



Anne Martina
& Julie Vatain-Corfdir (dir.)

SUP

What happens when American musicals travel from Broadway to Hollywood, from Hollywood to Broadway – or indeed to Paris? Taking its cue from the current partiality towards cross-media interaction, this collective volume aims at reassessing the role and impact of stage/screen transfers on the genre, by blending together academic and creative voices, both French and American. The bilingual chapters of the book carefully explore the musical, dramatic and choreographic repercussions of transposition techniques, evidencing the cinematographic rewriting of theatrical processes from Lubitsch's screen operettas to Fosse's *Cabaret*, or tracking movie-inspired effects on stage from *Hello, Dolly!* to *Hamilton*.

The focus being at once aesthetic and practical, equal attention has been paid to placing performances in a critical framework and to setting off their creative genesis. Musicals are approached from the varied angles of dance, theater, film and music scholarship, as well as from the artist's viewpoint, when Chita Rivera or Christopher Wheeldon share details about their craft. Taking full advantage of the multimedia opportunities afforded by this digital series, the chapters use an array of visual and sound illustrations as they investigate the workings of subversion, celebration or self-reflexivity, the adjustments required to "sound Broadway" in Paris, or the sheer possibility of re-inventing icons.

Que se passe-t-il quand une comédie musicale américaine voyage de Broadway à Hollywood, d'Hollywood à Broadway... ou à Paris? Le penchant ambiant pour l'intermédialité et le succès grandissant du *musical* en France ont inspiré ce volume collectif qui, en croisant les voix universitaires et artistiques, françaises et américaines, entreprend de réévaluer l'impact des transferts scène-écran sur le genre. Les chapitres bilingues de cet ouvrage sondent les répercussions musicales, dramatiques et chorégraphiques des techniques de transposition, mettant au jour la réécriture filmique de procédés théâtraux depuis les opérettes cinématographiques de Lubitsch jusqu'au *Cabaret* de Fosse, ou pistant les effets de cinéma sur scène, de *Hello, Dolly!* à *Hamilton*. Dans une visée à la fois esthétique et pratique, la genèse créative des œuvres est envisagée aussi bien que leur cadre critique. Les *musicals* sont ici abordés sous l'angle de disciplines variées: danse, théâtre, cinéma, musique; ainsi que du point de vue de la pratique, lorsque Chita Rivera ou Christopher Wheeldon témoignent de leur art. Au fil de chapitres enrichis d'un éventail d'illustrations visuelles et sonores grâce aux ressources de l'édition numérique, les auteurs interrogent les mécanismes de la subversion, de l'hommage et de l'auto-réflexivité, les ajustements nécessaires pour « chanter Broadway » à Paris, ou encore la possibilité de réinventer les icônes.

Anne Martina & Julie Vatain-Corfdir (dir.)

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FOREWORD

Anne Martina & Julie Vatain-Corfdir

The history of American musicals is that of constant, complex, and fruitful media interaction. And yet, media crossovers long escaped enquiry. Artists themselves were often to blame for a biased perception of their work, particularly in film. In the many interviews they gave, Busby Berkeley or Gene Kelly were keen to present their work, and the history of film musicals in general, as a growing emancipation from stage models. Following their lead, early film critics showed a tendency to analyze Hollywood musicals produced in the 1930s, '40s, and early '50s as *cinematographic* achievements, characterized by a refined use of the codes of classical Hollywood cinema. When increasing economic difficulties arose in the mid-fifties – due to the collapse of the old studio system, the rise of television, and gradual shifts in public tastes – Hollywood was compelled to devise a set of strategic responses, leading to the evolution of the film musical (some would say its decline). The first, and most conspicuous reaction was to limit financial risk by increasingly foregoing original works in favor of adapting successful Broadway shows as faithfully as possible. A second response was to use rock 'n' roll music, and later pop music, to cater to younger generations, thereby often altering the classical syntax of the genre through increased subservience to the record industry (examples abound from *Jailhouse Rock* to *Woodstock* and *Moulin Rouge*). A third, more creative reaction was to scatter the script with elements of *auto-critique*, at the risk of undermining the mythologizing process at the heart of the genre and alienating its traditional audiences (from *A Star is Born* and *It's Always Fair Weather* to *All That Jazz*, *Pennies from Heaven* or *La La Land*).¹ From these combined factors stemmed the common belief that artistic achievement in Hollywood musicals was synonymous with aesthetic autonomy and narrative originality, while decline was entailed by a growing subjection to other media forms.

Conspicuously enough, reciprocal trends have been pointed out – and found fault with – on and off-Broadway, where musical versions, sequels or prequels of profitable films and Disney movies are a staple cause for complaint or irony among critics and audiences alike. Scholars of the stage musical have in fact shown the recent evolution of the genre to respond to economic pressure in ways that mirror the choices made

¹ See Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1987, pp. 120-121.

earlier by the film industry – some, like Mark Grant and Ethan Mordden, explicitly lamenting the supposed collapse of musical shows. Grant’s catchy (albeit reductive) book title, *The Rise and Fall of the Broadway Musical*, encapsulates a Spenglerian model, according to which the demise of the genre has been entailed, since the late 1960s, by radical economic and aesthetic shifts – the rise of entertainment conglomerates functioning as theatre producers, the popularity of spectacle-oriented “megamusicals,” and the proliferation of adaptations. All of which testify to Broadway’s increased dependence on mass media, in particular music videos and film.

6 Yet laments about the end of a so-called “Golden Age”² characterized by artistic integrity do not resist critical investigation. Not only are they imbued with nostalgic overtones, implying that musical works produced before and after the “Golden Age” have less artistic value and cultural depth than those from the pivotal period, but they also ignore the complex, ceaseless interaction between Broadway and Hollywood *throughout* the history of the genre, which more recent research has brought to light. The rise of cultural and intermedial studies in the 1990s was critical in this respect. Opening new avenues for research on the American musical, it has led to a fruitful reassessment of the influence of Broadway stage forms and aesthetics on iconic Hollywood films. This has been exemplified by Martin Rubin’s illuminating investigation of the way Busby Berkeley’s art is indebted to 1910s and 1920s Broadway shows³ or, more recently, by Todd Decker’s insightful study of the many rewritings of *Show Boat*.⁴

However notable and influential such analyses have proven to be, much remains to be investigated. This reliance on recycling other media to spur creativity prompts enquiry into the nature, shape and influence of Broadway-to-Hollywood or Hollywood-to-Broadway transfers, as well as into the interactions and cross-fertilizing processes they generate. Current research indicates that such sustained investigation is under way. Theater-driven reference works on the American musical⁵ have shown a growing interest in film, though chapters that truly focus on cross-media transaction are still rare. In France, a 2015 international conference – from which five of the essays in this

2 For a critical assessment of the term “Golden Age” in the field of musical comedy, see Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman, “After the ‘Golden Age’”, in Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, Stacy Wolf (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011, p. 111.

3 Martin Rubin, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle*, New York, Columbia UP, 1993.

4 Todd Decker, *Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2013.

5 See Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf, *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011; William Everett and Paul L. Laird, *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 3rd ed., Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2017.

volume proceed – directly addressed those issues, while the three-year “Musical MC” research project headed by Marguerite Chabrol and Pierre-Olivier Toulza has been comprehensively exploring the influence of cultural and media contexts over classical Hollywood musicals. Simultaneously, on the Paris stage, a reciprocal interest in the reinvention of classics has been displayed, for instance, in the Théâtre du Châtelet’s widely-acclaimed productions of *An American in Paris* (2014), *Singin’ in the Rain* (2015) and *42nd Street* (2016), all of which have been hailed as fully creative rather than derivative.

Such contemporary partiality – and curiosity – towards intermediality provided the inspiration for the present volume, which aims at reassessing the role and impact of stage/screen transfers (in both directions) on American musicals, by blending together academic and creative voices, both French and American. The essays and interviews collected here carefully explore the musical, dramatic and choreographic repercussions of transposition processes, evidencing the wide range of rewriting and recoding practices encompassed in what is commonly referred to as “adaptation.” How does re-creation for another medium affect the shape and impact of a musical, both aesthetically and practically? How can the “adapted” version assert its status and value with regards to the “original,” striking a balance between due homage and legitimate creative claims? These questions are tied to issues of authorship and authority, as well as to the notion of self-reflexivity, which can prove equally conducive to celebration or to subversion. They also call into question the audience’s reception of the work, in particular when it comes to iconic scenes, or to characters illustriously embodied by a famous performer. In fact, any study of the relations between Broadway and Hollywood would be incomplete without reflecting upon the impact of *human* transfers – not only in terms of stars, but also in terms of directors, composers and lyricists, choreographers or costume designers.

The chapters of this volume fall into three sections, the first of which focuses on formal innovation and re-invention. It opens with an investigation into Ernst Lubitsch’s endeavors to invent a cinematographic equivalent to the operetta around 1930, when the norms and form of the musical picture were yet to be established, ultimately showing how music, in such early examples, becomes a way to create a fictional world on screen (Katalin Pór). While this study offers a chronological foundation stone to analyze subsequent transfers and influences, the second essay provides a more theoretical perspective on the question, by comparing directorial choices in adaptation over a wide range of periods and production types (Dan Blim). From *Damn Yankees!* to *Hamilton*, the chapter explores the ways in which stage and screen

media deal differently with breaks and “sutures” in a musical’s narrative continuity, thereby shedding light on the specificities of each medium. These insightful inaugural essays then make way for the in-depth study of such canonical examples as the screen-to-stage transfers of *42nd Street* and *An American in Paris*. The two shows are carefully compared in terms of their “conservative,” “innovative” or “reflective” approach to adaptation, and placed in the context of constantly refashioned Hollywood and Broadway motifs (Anne Martina). This is given further resonance by the following roundtable with the creators of *An American in Paris*, which provides a mirrored point of view on reinvention from the artists’ and producers’ perspective. The precision and generosity with which they discuss the show’s genesis, musical construction and color palette offer a unique insight into the vision behind this contemporary (re-)creation (Brad Haak, Van Kaplan, Craig Lucas, Stuart Oken, Christopher Wheeldon).⁶

8 The second section delves into the political and cultural implications of adaptation, using several case studies of major musicals which have been rewritten, reinterpreted, and sometimes transferred back to their original medium. The first of these analyses offers a refreshing outlook on *My Fair Lady*, by suggesting that the musical’s romanticized ending may not be as out of line with George Bernard Shaw’s original feminist vision as is commonly assumed. This leads to a detailed exploration of romantic and feminist ramifications in the crafting and filming of the musical (Aloysia Rousseau), and is followed by a performer’s perspective on the same work – and others – from the point of view of a professional singer of musicals in France today (Julien Neyer). The next two essays then continue with the study of famous adaptations from the 1960s, by focusing on shifts in the political and racial significance of *Finian’s Rainbow* (James O’Leary) or the consequences of tone and scale alterations in *Hello, Dolly!* (Julie Vatain-Corfdir & Émilie Rault). Francis Ford Coppola’s screen version of *Finian’s Rainbow* is thus shown to revise the stage show’s politically-oriented innovations in order to align the script with New Left conventions, while Gene Kelly’s adaptation of *Hello, Dolly!* is analyzed as the somewhat maladroit aesthetic product of contrasting tendencies towards amplification on the one hand, and sentimentalization on the other. Moving on from the last of the optimistic “supermusicals” to one of the finest examples of a darker and more cynical trend, the last essay in this section focuses on the successive rewritings of *Cabaret* for the stage, screen – and stage again. Amid this circular pattern, Bob Fosse’s version of the iconic musical emerges as a re-defining moment not only for the show, but also for the evolution of the genre itself (Anouk Bottero).

6 All of our interviews are transcribed and published with kind permission from the speakers.

The third section of the volume takes a closer look at the challenges facing the performers of musicals on stage and screen, in particular when it comes to singing and dancing – live or in a studio. A shrewd analysis of Gene Kelly’s career – short-lived on Broadway but stellar in Hollywood – shows how his choreographic bent towards perfectionism evolved, from *Cover Girl* to *Singin’ in the Rain*, and how his apparent doubts about his acting talents came to be expressed and answered through his screen dances (Jacqueline Nacache). This is followed by the direct testimony of a legendary dancer and Broadway performer, who talks at length about the expressivity of “character dancing,” the different lessons in focus learned on stage or in front of the camera, or the joys of working with Leonard Bernstein, Jerome Robbins or Bob Fosse (Chita Rivera). Building on this dancer’s experience, the following chapter asks the question of how to re-choreograph a cult scene and dance it anew, using examples from Robbins’ choreography for *West Side Story* (Patricia Dolambi). Finally, shifting from dance to song, the last interview of the volume turns to the evolution of singing practices and spectators’ tastes, from opera to “Golden Age” musicals and on to contemporary musicals. Voice placement and voice recording are discussed, along with specific techniques such as “vocal twang” or “belting,” by a singing coach with experience both in the US and in France (Mark Marian). This comparative perspective re-emphasizes the fundamental dynamic of the volume, which is that of transgressing borders – between media, disciplines or, occasionally, reception cultures – bringing together the voices of music, dance, film and theater scholars as well as performers and producers, in order to shed light on creative phenomena which, though they are as old as the advent of the talking picture, still prove multifaceted and prolific today.

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TROISIÈME PARTIE

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“JUST GO FOR IT, AND PUT THE WORK IN”

Chita Rivera on her career in musicals

A former student of the School of American Ballet, Chita Rivera has gone on to have a stellar career on Broadway, originating such memorable parts as Anita in West Side Story, Rosie in Bye Bye Birdie, Velma Kelly in Chicago – or more recently, Aurora in Kiss of the Spider-Woman. She is the recipient of two Tony Awards, a Kennedy Center Honors Award, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. We are honored and grateful that she took the time to talk to us about the combined talents of performers in musicals, the rewards of dedicated training, and the joys of singing for Bernstein or dancing for Fosse.

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This interview was conducted over the phone on May 8th, 2017.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — I'd like to start by asking about your training as a performer. If I'm not mistaken, your original calling was the ballet: how did you then train as an actress, and a singer? I'm particularly curious about this since combining all three talents is fairly rare in France, where we have much less of a tradition for musicals (though they've been becoming more and more popular).

Chita Rivera — I started out in a little dance school in Washington, D.C., run by an African-American ballet teacher from Boston who was an extraordinary dancer. My mother put me in this school when I was about ten years old because I had a lot of energy, and she wanted to focus it. Mother was a beautiful, graceful woman who I'm sure would have liked to dance herself. I studied and studied, and one day the New York City Ballet sent some scouts down for the School of American Ballet, because they had heard that our school had some very good students. My dance partner in D.C. was Louis Johnson, who later became the first Black male dancer to join the New York City Ballet. The scouts observed our classes and chose the two of us to go up and audition for Mr. Balanchine.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — George Balanchine himself!

Chita Rivera — Yes, we didn't know it was Mr. Balanchine, thankfully – we would have died, I think. We auditioned individually and it was a very sweet story – a blister broke on my foot and this sweet grandfather-like gentleman insisted that somebody get a band-aid; I had my foot on his lap and straightened my tights and everything; then I went back to my *fouettés* or whatever it is I was doing. And, lo and behold, I found out later, after I had gotten the scholarship, that it was Mr. Balanchine who had been so graceful!

I was quite nervous, coming from another state altogether, and everybody being so totally different – all those long-legged ballerinas! So I studied at the School of American Ballet diligently, and one day went with a friend of mine to audition for a show called *Call me Madam*.¹ The audition was on Broadway, but it was for the road – the national company – and Elaine Stritch was to star in it [taking over from Ethel Merman]. This girlfriend of mine asked me to keep her company because she was very nervous; she needed a job since she was not on scholarship. I'm afraid I just didn't understand and I was a little bit of a snob, so I felt very bad for my friend that she had to lower her standards and do a Broadway show! But I was brave and I went down front. The audition was conducted by the show's choreographer, Jerome Robbins; it was both ballet and folk. I got the job and my friend didn't. So I suddenly found myself faced with a dilemma – I'd never earned any money before and, all of sudden, another door was open for me. They offered me one of the four principal dancers, and that's how my life changed.

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Julie Vatain-Corfdir — With, presumably, a different style of dancing from ballet school?

Chita Rivera — Well, Jerome Robbins was from the ballet, so his style was balletic as well as original. It also included character dancing. Obviously, he thought that I had something that could be worked with, and that's how it all changed.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — So you learned to work on character and acting *through* dance?

Chita Rivera — Absolutely. At the School of American Ballet, there was a wonderful teacher of character dancing, so we had both classical and character lessons. Character dancing is a bit more free – that's why it goes by the name of “character”, doesn't it?

¹ *Call Me Madam*, music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, original staging by George Abbott, choreography by Jerome Robbins, 1950.

There's more personality in that. In classical ballet, the *prima ballerina* has whatever changes there are to her particular character, but other than her, generally the *corps de ballet* are all identical in emotions, in technique, step-wise – everything. But character dancing has more individuality.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Including, perhaps, more facial expressions?

Chita Rivera — Oh yes, necessarily. I always figured that, should I have joined the company (which is what I originally wanted to do), I would probably have ended up doing more character dancing. I certainly was capable of being one of the girls in the *corps de ballet* – but I like to laugh too much, I like to be myself too much.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Which is why we get such a great sense of fun and enjoyment 225
from your performances.

Chita Rivera — I just love it! And if you radiate that, the audience gets it and, possibly, enjoys the show even more. But I never go beyond what's written in the script – when a character has a comical side, for instance: it's got to be in that particular part for me to do it.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — And how did you learn to sing?

Chita Rivera — By auditioning, and listening, and being courageous. You just go for it, you know; don't run away from it! Once you're in rehearsals, if they feel you have what it takes, they *work with you*, and that's how you learn. I think that's true about life, period: you learn as you go along, and you find out more about yourself as you live. I can honestly say that Leonard Bernstein taught me to sing – that Cy Coleman taught me to sing, that Kander and Ebb taught me to sing!

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — So you learned from the best.

Chita Rivera — Yes! I have to admit that without the particular period around which I came along, without the genius of these amazing people, I don't know what I would be doing or even what kind of person I would be. It was quite remarkable to work with them. I would love to be thirty years old again, you know, but then I would have missed out on all of that!

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — When you're given a new part, how do you go about working on it? Do you usually start with the spoken lines, the dance steps, the through-line of the character...?

Chita Rivera — It depends, but I usually get the script first and learn the lines. I will even ask for the music and go to a voice person to rehearse it, so that when I go in to the first day of rehearsal I am prepared to some degree.

226 I must say I was very fortunate with *West Side Story*² because Leonard Bernstein taught me the music to it. We had *no idea* that we could sing this music. You said that today, in France, dancers, singers and actors were usually different people – that is exactly the world we were in back then. Dancers danced, singers sang, actors acted, and that was it. I'll never forget what Lee Becker Theodore said to me once. She was a brilliant dancer, the original Anybodys in *West Side*, and later went on to have a company of her own. There was an audition for something and I said "Let's go!," but she said "Are you crazy? You have to sing for that!," so I said "I know, but we can fake it, give it what we've got," and I remember this coming out of her mouth: "Dancers dance, we don't sing". It's all changed now, and sometimes when people try to do all three, they give up one of them. It's harder work of course, but you learn, you get stronger – your lungs get stronger. I can thank Steven Sondheim, Leonard Bernstein and Jerome Robbins as well as Peter Gennaro, who was his assistant – I can thank all of them for teaching me and for giving me the stamina to be able to do this. You've just got to keep working. Today people go the gym, but in those days we simply went to classes! And in rehearsals you do it every single day, and everything gets stronger.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — In short, you never stop working on yourself.

Chita Rivera — Exactly. And it doesn't stop the older you get. I'm sitting here looking at that exercise ball and that bicycle that I don't really want to get on, but I know I'm going to have to do those exercises sometime today!

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Since one of the focuses of this collection of essays is the way musicals can be transferred and adapted from stage to screen or from screen to stage, I wanted to ask how different it feels, as a performer and a dancer in particular, when

² *West Side Story*, music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by Arthur Laurents, original staging and choreography by Jerome Robbins, 1957.

you're dancing in front of the camera rather than on stage. Is it a thoroughly different experience, because it's all fragmented on film?

Chita Rivera — Filming is a different experience as far as putting the number (or the story) together is concerned, because sometimes they have you do the end before the beginning and they piece it together later, and you stop and start a lot – so your head has to go *there*, to that particular point in your role. When you're joining certain things together, you have to remember how you felt the first time you did it, because you have to duplicate it, so it's another lesson in focus. But still – if you're doing a dancing role, you have to dance to the fullest and best of your ability, that doesn't change. And if you have someone like Fosse or Robbins – a theater choreographer – you can almost feel as though you're in the theater. Except that if they tell you to not sing so loud, you don't; or if they tell you not to travel as far as you normally would on the stage, you don't either.

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Julie Vatain-Corfdir — To a viewer, the choreography of the “Big Spender” number from *Sweet Charity*³ feels fairly similar in the movie version and in recorded staged versions: did it feel that way as a performer too?

Chita Rivera — That one, yes – because in the movie we did it from top to bottom, without stopping.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — What was it like to work with such a legend of American dance as Bob Fosse?

Chita Rivera — He was amazing; his style was like no one else's style. And for somebody who loved to fly as much as I did – I used to love to dance with the boys in ballet class because they usually had more energetic and dynamic combinations – for somebody that liked that kind of energy so much; I had to learn to pull it way back. And I found that to be as valuable and as exciting a movement as anything else. Dance is the possibility of everything, isn't it? You fly, you crawl, you spring... you take tiny little steps and each small movement is as important as a huge one. If I had to go back and do it all over again, I think I'd still like to be a dancer.

3 *Sweet Charity*, music by Cy Coleman, lyrics by Dorothy Fields, book by Neil Simon, original staging and choreography by Bob Fosse, 1966.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — I wonder if you could tell me about the workshopping process of musicals since, if I'm not mistaken, they're partly developed through rehearsals, with numbers going in and out – does the choreography tend to change from day to day as well?

Chita Rivera — It does. We didn't use to call it workshop though, it was simply rehearsals. You didn't suggest anything unless you were asked. We would rehearse in New York, and then go out of town for a few weeks – to Philadelphia or New Haven for instance. And that was where the show would totally do a 360, because you'd be trying it out on an audience for the first time, and the director and choreographer would go by the way the audience received it out of town. Then you went back to New York.

228 Nowadays they don't do that as much; now they call it workshops. Because of the cost of things, I suppose, sometimes they also make the productions much smaller. Take *Chicago*,⁴ for instance. It's a good thing that the score and the choreography are wonderful, because today the set and the company are nothing like the original production with Gwen Vernon, myself and Jerry Orbach. Tony Walton had designed an extraordinary set for it – huge and magnificent, with the orchestra sitting on stage, up these spiral staircases on either side; it was absolutely unbelievable. And Velma's entrance was phenomenal, with drums playing as these doors opened and she was revealed on an elevator. Today they've stripped it to something much smaller – but if it's a good script and score, and if there's something in it that can really sell it, then the show lives on, just as *Chicago* is living now.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Can I ask who your inspirations have been, and are?

Chita Rivera — First of all, Gwen Vernon – such an extraordinary dancer. Also Carol Haney. I didn't watch a lot of movies, but the elegance of Fred Astaire! And I thought Gene Kelly was great. My original idols – or at least, people I wanted to be like – were ballerinas, because that's what I wanted to do at first: Nora Kaye for instance, and Maria Tallchief, both beautiful ballerinas. Tommy Rall and Max Mattox were fabulous dancers as well; and so were the choreographers, like Jack Cole of Bob Fosse. They all had different personalities. So I guess you could say my inspirations were a mixture of ballet and other things.

⁴ *Chicago*, music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb, book by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse, original staging and choreography by Bob Fosse, 1975.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Out of all the parts you've played, are there any that you feel closer to (or is it always the part you're going to play next)?

Chita Rivera — I can honestly say that *West Side* was very much a part of me. It was also a show that catapulted all of us; we were all very lucky and very blessed to have done it. But *Chicago* was fun too, I liked Velma, she was sensational – though you never saw the killer side of her because Roxie took over that part. I think all of them had a part of me. Rosie from *Bye Bye Birdie*⁵ was great fun too. I have to tell you, all of these shows – I've been lucky!

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — I guess, perhaps, when you're bringing a character to life for the first time, you can put more of yourself into it?

Chita Rivera — Well, that's all you have. You follow the stage directions and the director, but you have to put yourself in it. And you're all working on it together; the director and the choreographer have the upper hand, but they give you a certain amount of freedom so they can see what you're got to offer. You go in to rehearsal as yourself, you take whatever it is that got you that audition, and you just throw that out – and if the casting is right, then you're on the nose. I always figured I had qualities of most of those characters, automatically, because I understood them.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Because you had been cast right?

Chita Rivera — Yes; I was lucky. All those incredible shows I was involved in – *Zenda*,⁶ *1491*,⁷ *Can-Can*,⁸ *Guys and Dolls*.⁹ And those great shows still live, for other people to do – that's the proof of the pudding!

And one thing you have to know: when you're on stage, whether you're dancing, speaking or singing – acting is in every single one of these elements. Dancers act through the music and through their bodies, even if they never open their mouths. You

5 *Bye Bye Birdie*, music by Charles Strouse, lyrics by Lee Adams, book by Michael Stewart, original staging and choreography by Gower Champion, 1960.

6 *Zenda*, music by Vernon Duke, lyrics by Lenny Adelson, Sid Kuller and Martin Charnin, book by Everett Freeman, staging by George Shaefer, choreography by Jack Cole, 1963.

7 *1491*, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson, book by Meredith Willson and Richard Morris, staging by Richard Morris, choreography by Danny Daniels, 1969.

8 *Can-Can*, music and lyrics by Cole Porter, book by Abe Burrows, original staging by Abe Burrows, choreography by Michael Kidd, 1953.

9 *Guys and Dolls*, music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, original staging by George S. Kaufman, choreography by Michael Kidd, 1950.

don't really need the words, you can live through the body. You can also live through just the word, or just the music. Each element is very valuable and very satisfying.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — I had an acting coach who used to tell us, “If you can't interest me when you're silent on stage, then I'm not interested in anything you have to say.”

Chita Rivera — I completely agree, and it was a wonderful thing when someone said “I can't take my eyes off you when you're listening.” Physical bodies can speak without words, because the performers should still be thinking and listening. If you're listening, what is inside you is very strong, and it shows. Another great thing is that you don't have to face front. People think you have to face front, but your back is as important as your front! When I'm in the audience, my eye goes straight to the least obvious thing on stage. You get an awful lot from watching the person that receives, as opposed to the person that gives. The theater is a wonderful place!

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Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Thank you for sharing your expertise, your stories and enthusiasm. As a final question, I would simply like to ask what your next project is.

Chita Rivera — Tomorrow I'm opening at the Carlyle for two weeks; I'll be doing my club act, which was originally written by Fred Ebb and John Kander, and is full of wonderful songs, along with some stories from those shows that I've done. After that I'll be doing *Voices Across America*, and then I'll be going to London for the 60th (I can hardly believe it!) anniversary of *West Side Story*. So yes, I'll be very busy!

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E-THEATRUM MUNDI

La collection « *e-Theatrum Mundi* » considère le théâtre sous tous ses angles et dans tous ses états. Dans la continuité de la collection papier à laquelle elle est adossée, elle se veut un lieu de réflexion sur les diverses manifestations d'expression théâtrale à travers le monde, et rassemble des travaux de recherche sur l'écriture, le jeu, les pratiques et les formes scéniques, la mise en scène et le spectateur. Sa particularité est de proposer uniquement des volumes interdisciplinaires, en lien avec le Programme de recherches interdisciplinaires sur le théâtre et les pratiques scéniques de l'université Paris-Sorbonne (*PRITEPS*), dont elle reflète les activités. En croisant les angles d'approche, la collection vise à provoquer des confrontations fructueuses entre les scènes, les langues et les méthodologies, dans le domaine des études théâtrales.

DÉJÀ PARUS

La Scène en version originale

Julie Vatain-Corfdir (dir.)

La Haine de Shakespeare

Élisabeth Angel-Perez & François Lecercle (dir.)

