

PRESS RELEASE 1 – PLAY BALL – GENEVA UNDERGROUND PLAYHOUSE

For immediate release

“CHICAGO”, BY ANY OTHER NAME...

The big reaction arising from Geneva Underground Playhouse’s announcement that it will be presenting the 1926 comedy/drama “Play Ball” by Maurine Dallas Watkins might well be summed up as “So what?” Who would care about an obscure play from the roaring twenties depicting a red-headed Chicago murderess named Roxie Hart who shoots her lover and learns to use the ensuing media circus to finesse her way to freedom? It sounds just like the plot of “Chicago”, one of the longest running musicals in Broadway history.

That’s because it *is* the same plot.

“Play Ball” or “Chicago – the Non-Musical” is the play upon which the 1975 Kander, Ebb & Fosse musical is based and which has been unseen in the Chicagoland area for decades. Also the basis for a 1927 silent movie version and the 1942 Ginger Rogers film “Roxie Hart”, this play was originally titled “Chicago”, obviously a more marketable name. Why in the world would anyone want to publicize it as “Play Ball?” And why isn’t it done more often?

“It’s contractual,” says GUP president Steve Lord. “Unlike most plays, ‘Play Ball’ is not licensed by one of the major New York play companies. The rights reverted to the author’s estate and they’re not easy to acquire; but we wanted to present something terrific that hasn’t been seen a million times at every community theatre in the area. This is a new twist on an old favorite, by virtue of using the old twist instead of the newer musical. It has to be called ‘Play Ball’ because the producers of the Broadway musical insist on it, in order to avoid confusion

with the musical – they have to sign off on every production in the world, so we need to do as they say. Hence, ‘Chicago’ is now ‘Play Ball’.”

Roxie Hart (Tia Prince Srachta of St. Charles), philandering wife of a sad-sack mechanic named Amos (Ken Schaeffer, Worth), shoots Fred Casely (Dave Amato, Glen Ellyn – also playing newspaper photographer Babe) when he attempts to end their affair. In the circus that follows, Roxie is tutored in the Chicago ways of publicity manipulation by wise-cracking reporter Jake Callahan (Jack T. Smith, Lombard), simpering sob-sister Mary Sunshine (Aimee Kennedy, Aurora) and especially high-priced criminal attorney Billy Flynn (Bill Barry, Jr., Carol Stream).

How different is the play from the musical?

“It’s meaner,” says director Craig Gustafson. “Sharper, tangier, more bitter. If you think ‘Chicago’ is cynical, wait until you see ‘Play Ball’. If you love the musical, you have to see this. The plot and many of the lines are the same, but there’s a totally different slant to it. This is one of the greatest, sharpest satires ever of the legal system and its relationship with the news media. And in a society with Roman Polanski and the Octomom, it’s funnier and more relevant than ever.”

Other cast members include Angelicque Cate (Naperville) as Machine Gun Rosie, Amanda Fisher (Bolingbrook) as the psychotic Liz, Margie Gustafson (Lombard) as the pathetic Moonshine Maggie (the play’s equivalent of Hunyak in “Chicago”), Keith Laug (Carol Stream) as Judge Canton, Mark Mocarski (Chicago) as Sgt. Murdock/Bailiff, Cheryl Rice (Elmhurst) as Velma, Brenda Scharlau (Batavia) as Mrs. Morton, Steve Schroeder (Warrenville) as state’s attorney Harrison and Nicole Warren (Montgomery) as Go-to-Hell Kitty. The play is produced

by Polly Ludena (North Aurora), assistant directed by Pam Terry (Wheaton) and stage managed by Angelicque Cate.

“Play Ball” or “Chicago – the Non-Musical” will be presented by Geneva Underground Playhouse from March 12 – April 3. Performances are at 8:00 Fridays & Saturdays and 3:00 Sundays. The theatre is located beneath the Urban Grille restaurant, 524 W. State Street in Geneva (southeast corner of State and Sixth). For ticket information and reservations, call (630) 232-7683 or visit www.GenevaUndergroundPlayhouse.com.

Should people contacting the theater be asking for “Play Ball” or “Chicago”?

“It’s ‘Play Ball’ for you,” says Gustafson. “For me, it’s ‘Chicago’!”

To the Editor:

Could you please include the following information in your theatre listings through April 3? This play has been unseen for decades in this area – for feature story information, please contact Steve Lord at slord@scn1.com. Thanks!

WHAT: “Play Ball” or “Chicago – the Non-Musical” by Maurine Dallas Watkins

WHO: Geneva Underground Playhouse (directed by Craig Gustafson)

WHEN: March 12 – April 3. 8:00 Friday & Saturday; 3:00 Sunday.

WHERE: 524 W. State Street, Geneva (southeast corner of State & Sixth)

HOW MUCH: \$20 adults, \$15 students and seniors