

Lincoln Center presents

January 30–April 20, 2013

American Songbook

Wednesday Evening, February 6, 2013, at 8:30

Ring Them Bells! Rob Fisher Celebrates Kander & Ebb

featuring **Marin Mazzie** and **Jason Danieley**
with special guests **Joel Grey** and **Chita Rivera**

Rob Fisher, Musical Director and Piano

Steve Kenyon, Clarinet and Saxophone

Anneke Schaul-Yoder, Cello

Greg Utzig, Banjo and Guitar

Dick Sarpola, Bass

Erik Charlston, Percussion

David Garrison, Writer and Director

This evening's program is approximately 75 minutes long and will be performed without intermission.

Major support for Lincoln Center's American Songbook is provided by Fisher Brothers, In Memory of Richard L. Fisher; and Amy & Joseph Perella.

Additional corporate support is provided by Bank of America and PVH Corp.

Wine generously donated by William Hill Estate Winery, Official Wine of Lincoln Center.

This performance is made possible in part by the Josie Robertson Fund for Lincoln Center.

Steinway Piano

The Allen Room

Jazz at Lincoln Center's Frederick P. Rose Hall

*Please make certain your cellular phone,
pager, or watch alarm is switched off.*

Kander and Ebb

by Barry Singer

Theatricality. No writers for the musical theater ever embraced that one little word with more brazen abandon and bittersweet affection than John Kander and Fred Ebb, who together injected 13 original Broadway musicals with songs that were the quintessence of spotlight exultation.

Today we think of *Chicago* when we think of Kander and Ebb, and why not? The show defines them in so many ways: its all-American bawdy musicality, its vernacular cynicism, its humor, its unapologetic pathos (and bathos). That *Chicago* was under-appreciated in its initial Broadway run, only to triumphantly return and conquer Broadway (and Hollywood) the second time around, could easily sum up the trajectory of most of Kander and Ebb's signature songs: from loser to winner takes all, and back again.

Initially brought together by the music publisher Tommy Valando, who purposefully introduced them in 1962, Kander and Ebb were already promising comers on a Broadway career track that still existed in the 1960s—Kander as a pit and rehearsal pianist initially, then as a dance arranger for the musicals *Gypsy* and *Irma La Douce*; Ebb as a lyricist for hire and a contributor of material for nightclub acts, revues, and the satirical television show *That Was the Week That Was*. Both had just endured big flops in 1962—Kander in his Broadway debut as a composer for a show called *A Family Affair*, produced by Harold Prince in his debut as a director; Ebb with lyrics for *Morning Sun*, which lasted eight performances Off-Broadway. “We came to each other fresh from our failures,” Ebb later remembered. “Our neuroses complemented each other. It was a case of instant communication and instant songs.”

Their first success was “My Coloring Book,” recorded by Barbra Streisand as her second single, released in November 1962. Prince then hired them to score *Flora, The Red Menace*, a satirical take on 1930s radicals in Greenwich Village, co-written and directed by Prince's mentor, the legendary George Abbot. *Flora* was not a hit in 1965, but it did make a star out of a teenager named Liza Minnelli, while establishing Kander and Ebb's bona fides on Broadway.

Cabaret, in 1966, gave them their voice as fire-breathing provocateurs. An in-your-face celebration of Weimar-era decadence and a scalpel-edged indictment of Germany's complicit descent into Nazism, *Cabaret*, directed by Prince, won the Tony Award for Best Musical, ran for 1,165 performances, and was immortalized on celluloid in 1972 by Bob Fosse, with Minnelli baring her soul as Sally Bowles and Joel Grey reprising his astonishing performance as the Emcee. A Broadway revival in 1998 starring Natasha Richardson and Alan Cumming, co-directed by Sam Mendes and choreographer Rob Marshall, reaffirmed the timeless power of *Cabaret* and of Kander and Ebb's incomparable score.

The Happy Time (1968), *Zorba* (1968), and *70, Girls, 70* (1971) are not widely recollected today but each had moments of vivid Kander and Ebb-style theatricality—particularly “Life Is,” the tenacious opening/closing number that bracketed *Zorba* with an affirmation of life lived to the hilt, or, to put it simply, life lived Kander and Ebb style.

Practically alone among their contemporaries, the two found work in Hollywood throughout the 1970s. And they delivered. After contributing six songs to *Funny Lady*, Streisand's *Funny Girl* sequel, in 1975—including the marvelous "How Lucky Can You Get?"—Kander and Ebb handed Martin Scorsese four new songs for his old-fashioned movie-musical *New York, New York*, starring Minnelli and Robert De Niro, including the title song. Needless to say, Frank Sinatra grabbed "New York, New York" and sent it around the world.

Still, the film was not a hit with critics or at the box office. Neither was *Chicago*, in 1975. Eclipsed by the arrival of *A Chorus Line* on Broadway and misunderstood by many critics, who found its cynical revels off-putting, *Chicago* outlasted the doubters and ran for 936 performances, on the strength of scintillating work by its stars, Gwen Verdon and Chita Rivera, and a month-long stand-in appearance for Verdon by Minnelli. It took an Encores! series revival of *Chicago* in 1996 to clarify for audiences and critics alike what an extraordinary achievement the show was: an ahead-of-its-time skewering of celebrity culture in America and a seamless uniting of Fosse's angular choreographic genius with Kander and Ebb's perfect expression of that genius in song.

Clearly Kander and Ebb were exceptional collaborators—with one another, and with their many brilliant colleagues. Their ability to complement and inspire artists like Prince, Fosse, Abbot, and so many others was exemplary. Their ability to shape songs for stars was unequalled, from Minnelli, for whom they wrote *The Act* in 1975, to Lauren Bacall, who starred in *Woman of the Year* in 1981, to Verdon in *Chicago* and Rivera, for whom they tailored *The Rink* in 1984 and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* in 1992.

Both men possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of American popular song, and both were meticulous craftsmen. Their unique gift was to conjure the breadth of American popular music, capture it, and comment on it simultaneously. Simplicity and directness were their trademarks, and irony the engine for their songs, but the way they wove those three elements into their work was not simple at all; it was intricate and layered with meaning.

The later years of their collaboration remained productive and occasionally groundbreaking. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* proved yet one more example of a Kander and Ebb musical coming off the canvas after being counted out. The show was lacerated by critics during its lengthy workshop at the State University of New York–Purchase College in 1990 and soon folded unceremoniously, only to return from the dead, premiere on the West End in 1992, and claim the Tony Award for Best Musical in 1993—a truly singular feat of survival, even for Kander and Ebb.

Their final collaboration was the incredibly audacious *The Scottsboro Boys*, in which a shameful American racial tragedy was reimagined, and re-examined, as a minstrel show. Fred Ebb's death in 2004 ended Kander and Ebb as a team but not this final project. The show managed at last to reach Broadway in 2010.

Kander and Ebb claimed never to have had an argument in 42 years of collaboration. "When we're at our best, we sound like one person," Kander would insist. True. And yet, the music that they made sang in so many different voices, as all great musical theater must. It was more than razzle-dazzle. It was art.