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National Museum of African American History and Culture

Playbill for The Piano Lesson

Extracted on Mar-28-2024 07:41:11

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[[image]]
 Martha Swope
 Michael Bennett's A Chorus Line examined and celebrated the life of the B'way gypsy

MICHAEL BENNETT

A kid in love with Broadway, Bennett danced in shows for Kidd and Gennaro, but his motivation to create his own dances could not be contained for long, and he assisted with some of the steps for the shows in which he performed. His first official assignment was assisting Ron Field in 1962 with the short-lived *Nowhere To Go But Up*. Bennett had his share of early flops, but his work always stood out, and he was nominated for a Tony for each show on which he worked (he eventually won seven).

With *Promises, Promises* (1968), Bennett had his first hit, and, like Fosses, used stylized movement to heighten what was still a conventional, book-oriented musical. In the Katharine Hepburn musical *Coco*, Bennett began developing the fluid, cinematic style that would become his trademark. The show featured little actual dancing, but Bennett made the show's series of fashion parades into elegant dance series, and assumed some of the directional duties during perviews.

Harold Prince, Who has more Tony Awards than anyone else, had established himself as one of the major director of musicals by the late sixties, but, unlike Robbins, Kidd, Fosse, Champion, Layton or Field, he was not also a choreographer. He was soon calling on the services of Bennett, first in the landmark 1970 musical *Company* and then in the 1971 *Follies*, which Bennett choreographed and codirected (with Price).

Bennett assumed control of an entire musical production for the first time when he took over the ailing *Seesaw* (1973) on the road and completely revamped it, bringing in a solidly professional musical. But the out-of-town chaos he witnessed on *Seesaw* demonstrated to him that the standard way of developing musicals - rehearsals, out-of-town tryout, previews and opening - was no longer efficient. He wanted to return to a period of his life when he was just one of the kids, not responsible for every aspect of the show. *A Chorus Line* (1975), longest-running show in B'way history, was the result. ->

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A taste of another culture



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