

Bainbridge Performing Arts 2010-2011 Season

News from Bainbridge Performing Arts

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Slide Talk with Award-Winning Journalist and Author Douglas Perry
The Girls of Murder City: Fame, Lust, and the Beautiful Killers who Inspired Chicago
Saturday, May 28 @ 3:00 p.m.
Free @ Bainbridge Performing Arts (BPA)

Journalist and author **Douglas Perry** will present a slide talk based on his 2010 book, *The Girls of Murder City: Fame, Lust, and the Beautiful Killers who Inspired Chicago* on May 28 at BPA. The presentation will explore the real-life personalities and social history behind the award-winning musical, which plays at Bainbridge Performing Arts from May 13 to May 29.

Chicago was first a Broadway play, then a 1927 movie, then a 1975 musical by John Kander, Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse, and finally, in 2002, an Oscar-winning movie-musical. It all began with Maurine Watkins, a demure young woman from a small Indiana town who, in 1924, managed to talk her way into a job as police reporter at the *Chicago Tribune*.

The Girls of Murder City is ostensibly about accused murderesses Beulah Annan and Belva Gaertner, who provided the raw material for the characters Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly, and the reporter who was inspired by them. In actuality, the book captures a glittering moment in 1924 Chicago when six women's life hung in the balance as they awaited trial in the Cook County Jail, while Chicago newspapers, staffed for the first time with ambitious, modern, female reporters, competed fiercely for stories.

Although the evidence against them was overwhelming, both Annan and Gaertner were acquitted, largely because juries in Chicago at that time were made up only of men who considered pretty women incapable of murder. Watkins learned to be a hardboiled newspaper reporter and then returned to Yale Drama School to write the play that became *Chicago*.

The May 28 presentation will be a chance to explore not only the history of the musical, but also the social history behind the story. Beulah Annan, for example, took a short-cut out of an extramarital affair: She gunned down her lover—and convinced her husband to pay for her defense. In prison, she joined Murderesses' Row, a

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veritable chorus line of women accused of knocking off their men for one flimsy reason or another. Their crimes were viewed as symptoms of a troubled era. Prohibition was backfiring spectacularly. Everyone, women included, seemed to be drinking, and everyone, women included, seemed to be packing guns.

Another aspect of the story is the emergence of the celebrity culture (still alive and well today) in those early days of the mass media. Watkins endeavored to expose, in her satirical play, how that culture had corrupted both the newspaper business and the legal system. Finally, *The Girls of Murder City* provides a fascinating glimpse of the history of journalism as it recreates the newsroom of the day. In *Chicago*, six papers engaged in vicious competition. At the center of the fray were the headline-grabbing stories that are vividly retold in *The Girls of Murder City*.

In addition to *The Girls of Murder City*, Doug Perry is the co-author of *The Sixteenth Minute: Life in the Aftermath of Fame*, and an award-winning journalist whose work has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, *The Oregonian*, *Details*, and many other publications.

Douglas Perry appears Saturday, May 28 at 3:00 p.m. at BPA, 200 Madison Avenue North, Bainbridge Island. The event is free and concludes with refreshments and a book signing of *The Girls of Murder City* organized by Eagle Harbor Book Co.

The slide talk with Douglas Perry is funded, in part, by **Humanities Washington**. Bainbridge Performing Arts extends special thanks to CHICAGO Title Sponsors **Town & Country Markets** and **Ace Hardware**, and Media Sponsor **KUOW 94.9 Public Radio**. BPA is supported, in part, by the **Arts & Humanities Council** and **One Call for All**.

Find out more about BPA at www.bainbridgeperformingarts.org. Check online for the latest on theatre and symphony auditions, complete theatre school and adult class offerings, performance listings, tickets, cast lists, video promos, posters, press, and more. Click on “Join Mailing List” to receive electronic performance announcements and behind-the-scenes news.

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