

MICHEAL BENNETT

CHOREOGRAPHER & DIRECTOR

b. April 8, 1943

d. July 2, 1987

He was a seven-time Tony Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway choreographer, best known as the creator of "A Chorus Line."

"I think I am now the king of backstage musicals, and you know what? I like it."

Michael Bennett was a seven-time Tony Award-winning Broadway choreographer, director, dancer, and writer, considered one of the most influential artists of his generation. Known for his work on musicals such as "Promises, Promises," "Follies," and "Dreamgirls," he is most famous for creating, choreographing, and directing the Pulitzer Prize-winning hit "A Chorus Line."

Michael Bennett DiFiglia was born in Buffalo, New York, to a Jewish mother and an Italian father. He started dance lessons at age 3 and staged productions in high school before joining the touring cast of "West Side Story" at 16. Early in his career, he met Larry Fuller, who became a significant romantic partner.

Bennett first danced on Broadway in "Subways Are for Sleeping" (1961). He made his Broadway debut as a choreographer with "A Joyful Noise" in 1966. Though commercially unsuccessful, the work earned him his first Tony nomination. Around this time, he appeared on the TV musical variety series "Hullabaloo," where he met Donna McKechnie, who would become his muse.

In 1968, with Neil Simon's "Promises, Promises," Bennett experienced his first commercial success for choreography and earned another Tony nomination. Three years later, he won his first two Tony Awards for Stephen Sondheim's "Follies."

In 1973, before the play "Seesaw" was set to open, Bennett was called to rescue the production. In the process, he pioneered and popularized the modern workshop method — a way to test a Broadway musical before it premiered.

During the 1970s, work for Broadway chorus dancers was difficult to find. To better understand the problem, Bennett recorded 20 hours of interviews with Broadway dancers. Those rich and poignant conversations eventually formed the basis of "A Chorus Line," which debuted off Broadway in 1975. It starred Donna McKechnie, whom he married in 1976. The marriage ended two years later, but they remained close.

"A Chorus Line" won nine Tony Awards and the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Its spectacular success created tremendous personal and professional pressure. Bennett turned to drugs and alcohol for relief, ultimately developing an ongoing substance-abuse problem.

Bennett's next musical, "Ballroom," failed financially but earned him another Tony Award. In 1981, "Dreamgirls," his final Broadway triumph, opened to immense critical acclaim.

Because of the stigma associated with queer sexuality at the time, Bennett was discreet about his romantic liaisons with men. He died of AIDS-related lymphoma at age 44 and left a portion of his estate to organizations battling AIDS.



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