



Dramaturgy Guide



The National Theatre
Washington D.C.

A Bronx Tale

The National Theatre

March 26-31, 2019

Book by Chazz Palminteri

Music by Alan Menken

Lyrics by Glenn Slater

Based on the play by Chazz Palminteri

Packet prepared by Dramaturg Linda Lombardi

ABOUT THE SHOW

Based on the critically acclaimed play that inspired the now classic film, this streetwise musical will take you to the stoops of the Bronx in the 1960s—where a young man is caught between the father he loves and the mob boss he'd love to be.



The National Theatre
Washington D.C.

For almost 200 years, The National Theatre has occupied a prominent position on Pennsylvania Avenue – “America’s Main Street” – and played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Washington, DC. Located a stone’s throw from the White House and having the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as its “front yard,” The National Theatre is a historic, cultural presence in our Nation’s Capital and the oldest continuously operating enterprise on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The non-profit National Theatre Corporation oversees the historic theatre and serves the DC community through three free outreach programs, *Saturday Morning at The National*, *Community Stage Connections*, and the *High School Ticket Program*. These programs provide the greater Washington area with access to high quality performance arts experiences while promoting and employing local and regional artists.

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DRAMATURG'S NOTE

"The saddest thing in life is wasted talent, and the choices you make will shape your life forever."

On Belmont Avenue, working class families and wise guys live side by side. As a young boy, Calogero witnesses a violent act which sets in motion events that will change his life forever. When Sonny, the local mob boss takes him under his wing, Calogero's father Lorenzo fights to keep his boy safe. But Calogero (or "C" as Sonny calls him) is attracted to the power and charisma of the streets. As the years pass, he pulls further and further away from his father, drawn deeper into a life that could end up killing him.

As a coming of age story, *A Bronx Tale* has everything you could want—a son finding his way, a father doing his best, and a battle between right and wrong. What kind of man will Calogero become? Will he follow Sonny's path or Lorenzo's? But Chazz Palminteri's story goes beyond these traditional expectations. On so many levels, *A Bronx Tale* is a love story. The love between father and son, boy and girl, youth and experience. It is about pride, family, the ties that bind, and the communities that shape us.

The upheaval in Calogero's life reflects the turmoil of the 1960s. Racial tensions, revolutions, and violence swept through American communities, and the border between Belmont and Webster Avenues in the Bronx was no exception. One neighborhood was deeply Italian, the other African-American. Only blocks apart, but they may as well have been completely different worlds. Despite this division, Calogero and Jane find each other. But will their love bridge the divide, or cause a deeper rift? In the tradition of *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*, Calogero and Jane show us the power of choosing love over fear or hate.

Both Lorenzo and Sonny see potential in Calogero and want a better life for him. In different ways, they teach him to follow his heart and trust himself. The choices Calogero makes growing up influence the man he becomes. All because of lessons he learned on the streets of the Bronx. But ask anyone from the neighborhood and they'll tell you...

"This is just another Bronx tale."

CHARACTERS

MAIN CHARACTERS:

Calogero – Narrator of *A Bronx Tale*, who tells his story growing up on Belmont Avenue. Italian-American. A good-hearted young man finding his way in the world.

Sonny – The local wise guy and top mob boss in New York. Italian-American. Believes it's better to be feared than loved. Takes Calogero under his wing and teaches him lessons from the street.

Lorenzo – Calogero's father. Italian-American. Believes the saddest thing in life is wasted talent. A local bus driver who works hard, loves his family, and wants a better life for his son. Does not agree with Sonny's way of life or the lessons he's teaching Calogero.

Jane – A girl at school and Calogero's love interest. African-American. Smart, independent, confident. Loves her neighborhood, but eager for life outside it, too.

Rosina – Calogero's mother and Lorenzo's wife. Italian-American. Strong, caring, not shy about speaking her mind. A homemaker who loves her family.

OTHER CHARACTERS:

Carmine

Crazy Mario

Doo Wop Guys

Eddie Mush

Frankie Coffeecake

Frieda

Gang Leader

Handsome Nick

Jesse

Jojo the Whale

Man with Bat

Police Officer

Rudy the Voice

Shally Slick

Tony 10 to 12

Tyrone

SUMMARY

(INCLUDES SPOILERS)

Act One

1960. The Bronx. It's 3am, and in that lonely hour four figures step into the light, crooning a wordless Doo Wop melody. Calogero Anello enters and introduces us to his beloved neighborhood of Belmont Avenue. An Italian-American neighborhood where wise guys and working class families mix and live in harmony (mostly). Stickball, transistor radios, the Bronx Bombers, and folks sitting out on their stoops, hanging out on the corner, or having a drink at Chez Bippy's. "A universe on one little block."

Adult Calogero serves as our narrator of his story, which began when he was nine years old living at 187th and Belmont with his parents, Lorenzo and Rosina. The number one man in the neighborhood is Sonny, the top wise guy. In Calogero's eyes, Sonny was a god. Everyone revered and respected him. But he never paid any attention to Calogero. Until one day.

Calogero witnesses Sonny shoot and kill a man outside Chez Bippy. When the cops try to get Calogero to ID the shooter, he doesn't turn Sonny in. That begins a bond between the mobster and the boy—who Sonny calls "C" for short—that lasts the next eight years.

As the bond between Sonny and Calogero grows, the boy begins to see his father in a different light. A bus driver beloved by everyone on his route, Calogero has always loved and respected Lorenzo. And Lorenzo dotes on his son; loving him, protecting him, teaching him. Lorenzo believes Calogero can do anything. His greatest life lesson—"The saddest thing in life is wasted talent."

But as Sonny's influence grows, Calogero begins to flout his father's authority, disrespect him, and even wonder if Lorenzo—a working man—is a chump. Little does he know what his father has sacrificed to give his family the life and comforts that they have.

One night, Sonny gets Calogero to roll the dice for him in a craps game. When Calogero wins big for Sonny, he becomes the mob boss's lucky charm. Sonny takes him under his wing, against Lorenzo's wishes, setting up a conflict for Calogero between the father he loves and the mobster he admires.

Fast forward eight years. Calogero is now 17. Still on the inside with Sonny, who is now the capo di tutti capi (boss of all bosses), which causes more and more tension with his father. Calogero now runs with his own crew as well. And a girl at school has caught his eye. Jane. She's smart and beautiful, and she's noticed Calogero, too. Trouble is, she's a black girl from neighboring Webster Avenue, and in 1968, tensions ran hot between the two groups, and race meant that you didn't cross the border between Belmont and Webster Avenues.

Act Two

Despite warnings from her friends, Jane agrees to go on a date with Calogero. They know they're "enemies" in everyone else's eyes, but they can't deny their attraction. They can't be seen in the other's neighborhood, so they agree to meet after school and go to the movies. Calogero goes to Sonny for advice and Sonny tells him that a man only gets three great loves in his life, and if Calogero thinks Jane could be one of the great ones, then race doesn't matter. Nothing else matters. Sonny tells Calogero a sure-fire "test" to find out if Jane is a great love and loans him his car for the big date.

Meanwhile, Jane's brother, Tyrone, and his friends get jumped by Calogero's friends. Calogero shows up and pulls his friends off Tyrone, breaking up the fight before the cops come.

At home, Calogero gets ready for his date with Jane. When Lorenzo finds out Jane's black, the prejudice of even a good man rears its ugly head and the two argue. Lorenzo leaves and Rosina tells Calogero some things about his father he's never known.

Calogero meets Jane, but Tyrone has told her that Calogero was part of the fight. Not knowing what to believe, she cancels the date. Crushed and angry, Calogero returns the car to Sonny and goes off with his friends who are looking to pick a fight, but Sonny's men haul him off. Meanwhile, Tyrone lets it slip that Calogero actually tried to stop the fight, so Jane goes looking for Calogero.

Sonny confronts Calogero about a bomb in his car. Upset that Sonny doesn't trust him, Calogero runs off and his friends find him. They're planning to drive by Tyrone's club and throw Molotov cocktails. Calogero's about to go with them when Sonny shows up and pulls him out of the car. They make up, but Calogero's seen a side of Sonny he can't unsee—the side that doesn't trust anyone.

Jane finds Calogero and the two make up and share their first kiss. Calogero remembers his friends' plans and the two rush to Tyrone's. But they're too late. The car blew up and all of Calogero's friends are dead. Calogero runs to Chez Bippy's but can't make his way through the crowd before someone from the past shoots and kills Sonny.

In the final scene, Calogero mourns Sonny at his funeral. Lorenzo surprises his son by showing up to pay his respects. In very different ways, both Lorenzo and Sonny taught Calogero the difference in life between being loved and being feared; and what it takes to follow your heart.

SETTING: 1960-1968 TIMELINE

COLOR CODE: WAR & PEACE • POLITICS • POP CULTURE • REVOLUTIONS

- FEBRUARY 1960 – First sit-ins protesting segregation at “whites only” lunch counter at Woolworth department store in Greensboro, NC.
- APRIL 1960 – African-American college students form Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Raleigh, NC.
- SEPTEMBER 1960 – First televised Presidential debate airs between candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon.
- NOVEMBER 1960 – Kennedy elected President.
- DECEMBER 1960 – Viet Cong emerge in South Vietnam.
The first birth control pill available.
- APRIL 1961 – Bay of Pigs invasion.
- MAY 1961 – Freedom Riders leave DC, heading to southern states to protest segregation.
- OCTOBER 1961 – Kennedy warns US of possible nuclear attack.
- DECEMBER 1961 – U.S. military buildup in Vietnam begins under President Kennedy.
- AUGUST 1963 – Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his “I Have a Dream” speech.
- NOVEMBER 1963 – John F. Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson sworn in as President.
- FEBRUARY 1964 – The Beatles appear on Ed Sullivan Show.
- JUNE 1964 – Three young civil rights activists (Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney) go missing in Mississippi. Their bodies are found in August.
- JULY 1964 – Johnson signs Civil Rights Act.
- AUGUST 1964 – Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, allowing President Johnson to wage war against North Vietnam without formal declaration of war.
- NOVEMBER 1964 – Johnson elected President.
- FEBRUARY 1965 – Malcolm X assassinated.
- MARCH 1965 – First anti-war “teach-in.”
- AUGUST 1965 – Johnson signs Voting Rights Act.
Watts Race Riots in Los Angeles leave 34 dead.
- OCTOBER 1966 – Black Panther Party Founded.
- DECEMBER 1966 – Martin Luther King, Jr. announces his opposition to the war.
- APRIL 1967 – 400,000 march to UN building to protest war.
- SUMMER 1967 – Summer of Love
- AUGUST 1967 – Thurgood Marshall confirmed as first African-American Supreme Court Justice.
- JANUARY 1968 – Tet Offensive was the turning point in the Vietnam War where the Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces led surprise attacks on towns and cities all around south Vietnam.
- MARCH 1968 – Mai Lai Massacre was the mass murder of South Vietnamese civilians, including young girls and women, by the U.S. troops.
- JUNE 1968 – Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy assassinated in Los Angeles after winning California primary.
- AUGUST 1968 – Riots and violence at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.
- NOVEMBER 1968 – Shirley Chisholm becomes first African American woman elected to Congress.
Richard Nixon elected President.

VIDEOS & CAST RECORDING

Chazz Palminteri: Living 'A Bronx Tale'



In this WSJ interview, Chazz Palminteri explains his inspiration for writing the story of *A Bronx Tale*. He talks about how the story is from some of his own life experiences when he was growing up in the Bronx.

<https://youtu.be/ltEhlqrlRZw>

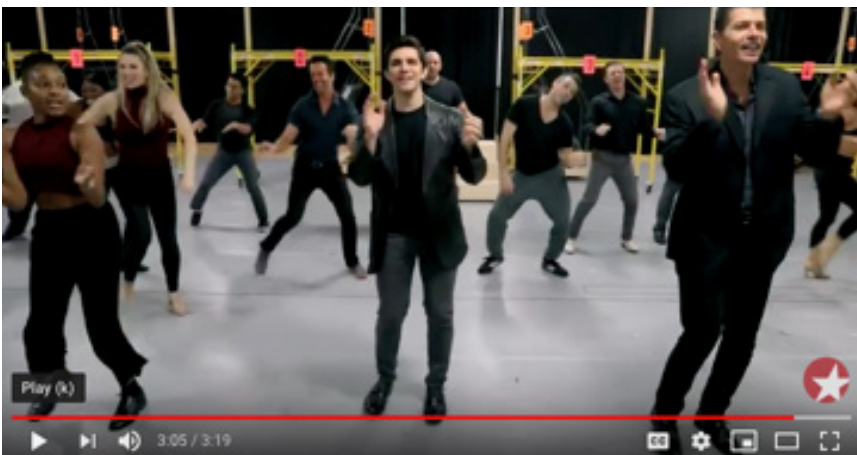
Chazz Palminteri On How "A Bronx Tale" Was Made

Chazz Palminteri was originally offered \$250,000 dollars (increased to \$500,000 and eventually \$1 million) by a movie studio for his one-man show. The only catch was he had to walk away and not be involved in the production. He turned them down, even though he was broke, because he wanted to play Sonny and write the screenplay.



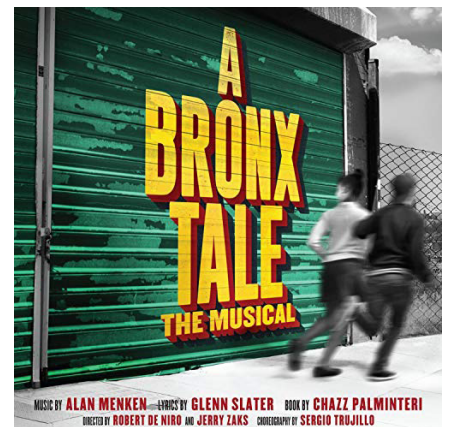
<https://youtu.be/BWMtGPzbmc0>

Watch the Touring Cast of A BRONX TALE Doo Wop in Rehearsal



<https://youtu.be/Bzt3pe8nFQY>

Cast Recording



Spotify link: <https://open.spotify.com/album/3iADBrZopjWzfDYVgXuKhY>

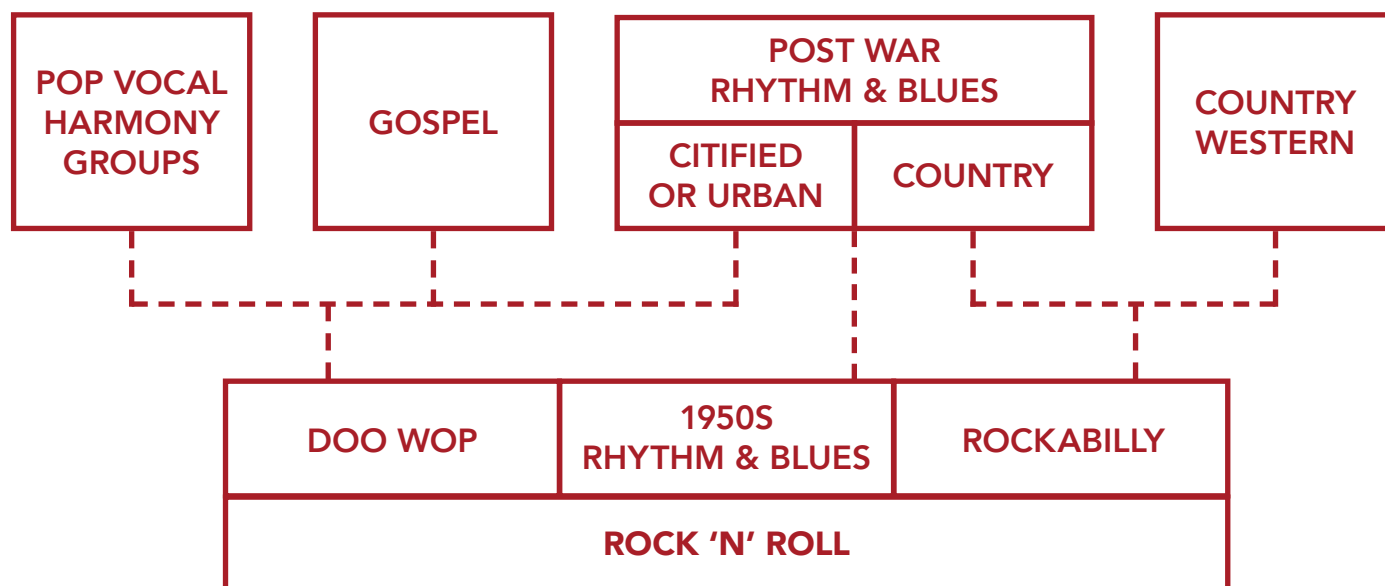
DOO WOP: THE MUSIC OF A BRONX TALE

A style of music popular in the 1950s and 1960s, doo wop music was a blend of rhythm and blues and early rock and roll. Doo wop groups generally consisted of a lead tenor vocalist backed by a trio or quartet singing harmony.

ELEMENTS OF DOO WOP

- group harmony
- a wide range of vocal parts
- nonsense syllables
- a simple beat
- light (or no) instrumentation
- simple music and lyrics

THE EVOLUTION OF DOO WOP



THE DOO WOP QUIZ

Many doo wop songs utilize so-called “nonsense” syllables to replace traditional instrumentation. Below is a number of examples to test your ability to decipher these mysterious background chants from some of the most popular doo wop songs. (Answers on page 11).

1: bomp ba-ba bomp, ba bomp ba bomp bomp,
ba-ba bomp ba-ba bomp, da dang da-dang dang,
da ding-a-dong ding

2: bob bob sh-wada

3: deh doom, ba-ba doom, ba-ba doom,
ba-ba doe doe

4: doe doe-doe doe do

5: dom dom dom dom dom, dom-bi doo-bi

6: doo-bop sh-bop

7: dooby doo

8: ooh, oo-wee-ooh, vooit vooit

9: ooh wah wah, ooh wah, wah,
chop chop chop chop

10: shoo doo'din shoo-bi-doo

11: tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat ti-oo-bi-oo-bi-oo

12: yip-yip-yip-yip yip-yip-yip-yip,
mum-mum-mum-mum mum-mum-mum-mum

POST-SHOW EXERCISES

Don't Waste Talent

Lorenzo tells Calogero, "The saddest thing in life is wasted talent." The line is a direct quote Chazz Palminteri's father told him as a boy. It became a motto for both Palminteri and Calogero. What's your motto?



Photograph of Macombs Road and Cromwell Avenue in Morris Heights, the Bronx, circa 1964.

Love or Fear

We've all heard the saying, "It is better to be feared than loved." Sonny read Machiavelli while he was in prison and adapted his philosophy. Everyone in the neighborhood seems to worship and respect Sonny. Lorenzo, on the other hand, argues that it's better to live by love than fear, but no one seems to pay him much attention. Even his own son disrespects him. Which would you rather be—loved or feared? Why?

"This is a DC Tale"

Calogero opens the show singing about his neighborhood and taking us into the story of growing up in the Bronx. What story would you tell from your life that captures what it's like to grow up in DC?

The Doo Wop Quiz Answers:

1: Blue Moon, 2: Stay, 3: Why Do Fools Fall In Love, 4: Goodnight, Sweetheart, Goodnight, 5: Come Go With Me, 6: I Only Have Eyes For You, 7: Denise, 8: Sincerely, 9: Sorry (I Ran All The Way Home), 10: In The Still Of The Nite, 11: Unchained Melody, 12: Get A Job

Sources:

A Bronx Tale: The Musical, <https://abronxtalethemusical.com>

The Sixties: The Years That Shaped a Generation, PBS, https://www.pbs.org/opb/thesixties/timeline/timeline_text.html

What Is Doo Wop?, History of Rock, <https://www.history-of-rock.com/doowop.htm>

Excerpt of quiz from The Doo Wop Box Set, Rhino Records, 1993



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