

# With this revival, a 'Chorus' of memories

By **LYNNE HEFFLEY**  
*Times Staff Writer*

**T**HE leggy blond sits at a utilitarian desk, black bodysuit revealing the long, lean lines of a dancer, repudiating her fiftysomething age. Trish Garland, between clients at her Sherman Oaks storefront Pilates studio, has just returned from the recent opening of the Broadway revival of "A Chorus Line."

Garland's interest in the show was more than casual. She was one of the original Broadway "gypsies" — veteran chorus dancers — in Michael Bennett's groundbreaking blockbuster and, as Judy Turner, she was with the show until 1977, from its workshops in 1974 and subsequent off-Broadway production through its 1975 Broadway opening and first national tour.

It is bittersweet, seeing it from the audience now, she says, although the show's young dancers "are terrific. They're just slamming it out and giving you the best show you can imagine.

But when I looked on that stage, there was a part of me that went, 'Oh, my gosh. I'm not dancing.' You're watching, you're so proud that you had anything to do with it at all, and yet you can feel a part of yourself dying inside," she says, misty-eyed. "We created those roles."

Garland was in her 20s and a veteran of such shows as "Cabaret" and "Follies" when she found herself among a group of dancers invited to a late-night meeting with wunderkind choreographer Bennett one winter evening in 1974.

The mystified dancers climbed the stairs to the studio asking one another in whispers, "What's happening, what's happening?" Garland recalls. It turned out to be the first of two intense, taped Q&A sessions, as Bennett probed the dancers' private lives, their frustrations, challenges and passions. Garland was hesitant to share too much, inhibited by the presence of her older sister, Jackie, another dancer.

"I thought she was going to hate me for the rest of my life because I'm now telling them that I'm the way I am because she

was always first."

The taped responses formed the basis for "A Chorus Line," a musical about Broadway hoofers auditioning for a musical.

(The dancers interviewed sold the rights to their stories for \$1. Through Bennett, who died in 1987, they received a percentage of the royalties. Whether that arrangement stands in relation to the new Broadway production has reportedly become a matter of dispute. "It's the same production, it's the same script. It's us," Garland stresses.)

As the show was workshopped and shaped by Bennett and writers Nicholas Dante and James Kirkwood, some of the dancers' stories were combined or dropped; snippets of others were shared among the cast members. Then, after sharing their intimate stories — "we gave our blood and guts to that" — Garland and others had to audition for their roles with monologues not necessarily their own.

Garland had to read her sister's material. She remembers the sheet of paper shaking visibly in her hands, her trembling legs making her bell-bottoms swing. She asked if they had heavier paper and got a laugh. "Michael told me later that's when I came to life for him." She got the part... her sister didn't.

But Garland's days in the spotlight would be numbered. She sustained a serious knee injury in 1977, during a performance in L.A. As her career as a dancer diminished, she went on to direct and choreograph regional productions of "A Chorus Line," pursued a television career and found her calling as a Pilates and fitness guru. Today, as a member of the National Dance Education Organization, Garland is speaking out on injury prevention for young dancers.

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The original "A Chorus Line" would win multiple Tony Awards and the Pulitzer Prize. It would help revive a moribund Broadway, set a precedent with its workshop process, run for 15 years in New York and spawn countless productions around the world. Garland says she came to realize why.

"People identified with us — whether you were straight or gay or tall or thin, short or fat, had a mother who was mean to you or a father who drank. That's when I began to realize that we weren't just a flash in the pan. We had touched on a human story."

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BRIAN VANDERBRUG *Los Angeles Times*

**HER STORY UP THERE:** *Trish Garland shared her experiences as fodder for "A Chorus Line," then performed in the play's 1975 Broadway debut and later toured until sidelined by injury.*