

# A Bronx Tale

## Synopsis

*A Bronx Tale*, a new musical set in the early 1960s, is based on the autobiographical play written by Chazz Palminteri. It tells the coming-of-age story of Calogero Anello, a young boy from a working class family who finds himself caught between his loving father and a charismatic mob boss. In Act One, Calogero witnesses Sonny, the mob boss, murdering someone right in front of his house on Belmont Avenue; Calogero covers for Sonny when questioned by the NYPD. Calogero's father, Lorenzo, who is an MTA bus driver, wants to instill a strong sense of right and wrong in his son, but Calogero goes against his father's wishes. After Sonny is released by the police with no charges against him, he takes Calogero under his wing and helps him get involved with the "glamorous" world of organized crime.

Sometime later, Calogero is all grown up and a full prodigy of Sonny, but his father has no idea he has continued to see Sonny. Calogero has also developed a group of Italian-American friends that Sonny thinks is a bad influence over him and encourages Calogero to stick to his schoolwork. Calogero meets an African-American girl, Jane, on Webster Avenue which is a very different side of the Bronx than where Calogero lives. He asks his father for advice on what he should do when he and Jane go on a date. Calogero's father doesn't exactly approve of him going out with Jane because he is concerned for his son's safety, considering the high racial tensions on the time period, but Lorenzo still gives him advice.

In Act Two, Calogero and Jane are in a relationship, and things are going well. Some of the Italian-American boys beat up some African-American boys, including Jane's brother, because they were in the Italian neighborhood. Calogero had tried to stop his friends, but did not succeed. Willie, Jane's brother, mistakes Calogero as one of the attackers, which leads to chaos. See for yourself what happens at the end of *A Bronx Tale*!

## Character Breakdown

### Calogero Anello

The only son of a bus driver and stay-at-home mom, 9-year-old Calogero lives on Belmont Avenue and is entranced by the local mob scene led by Sonny. As a boy, he falls under Sonny's influence. Once in high school, Calogero falls for Jane, who is African-American and lives in a different neighborhood, leading to problems for the two teenagers. In both scenarios, Calogero must make a difficult choice between the sides.

### Sonny LoSpecchio

Sonny is the leader of the local mob scene. He takes Calogero under his wing, showing him the ropes of the "family business." As he does so, Sonny, contradicts many of the values Calogero's father has taught him.



Bobby Conte Thornton, Nick Cordero, and Lucia Giannetta-BroadwayBox.com

<http://www.broadwaybox.com/daily-scoop/5-burning-questions-with-a-bronx-tale-star-bobby-conte-thornton/>

**Jane Williams**

Jane is an African-American girl who lives on Webster Avenue and falls in love with Calogero. Neither family nor neighborhood is happy with the choice the lovers make.

**Lorenzo Anello**

Lorenzo is Calogero's father and a bus driver who works long hours to provide for his family. When he tries to pass along his belief system to Calogero, his son turns toward the rough and tumble world Sonny inhabits.

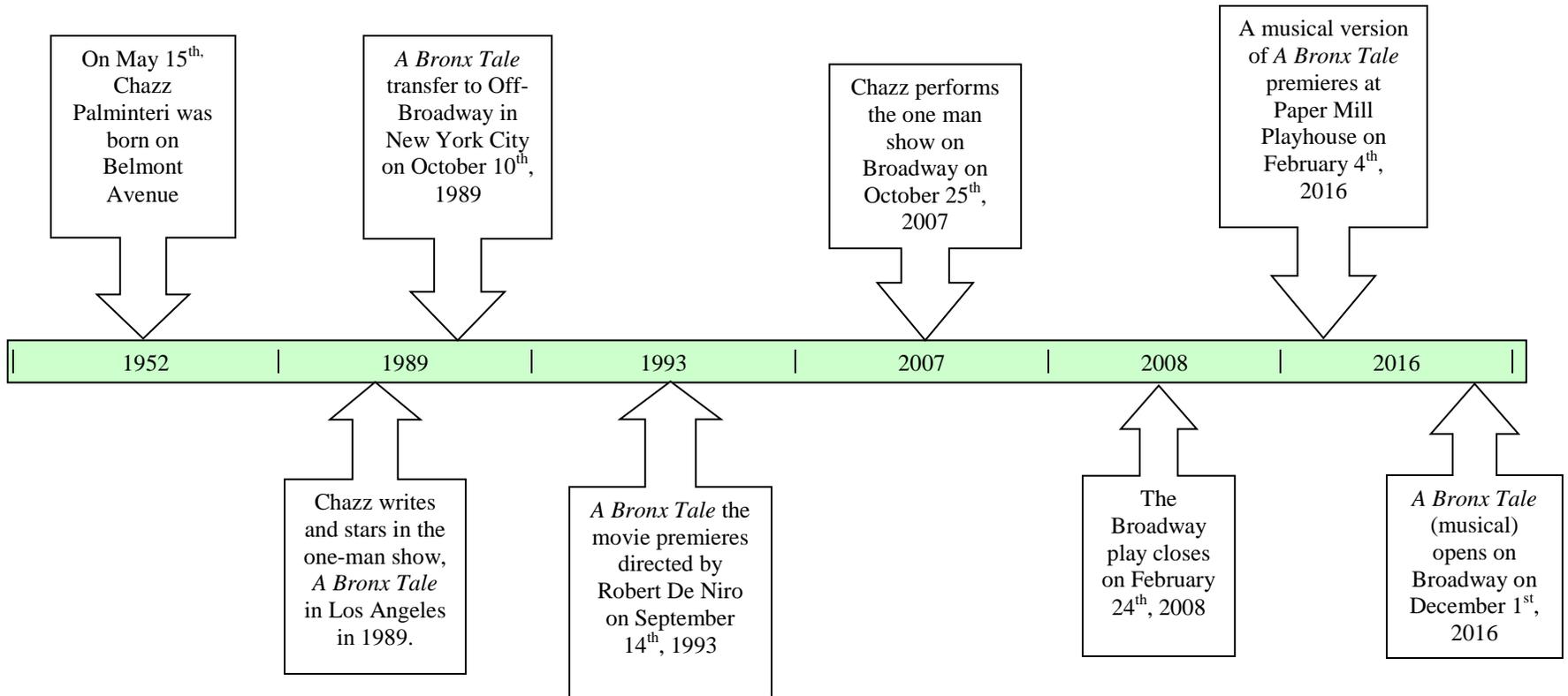


Richard H. Blake, Lucia Giannetta, and Hudson Loverro-Paste Magazine  
<https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2017/01/review-a-bronx-tale.html>

**Rosina Anello**

Calogero's mother Rosina stays at home to keep the house running on Belmont Avenue. She is constantly trying to keep track of her son and keep peace in her small family.

# *A Bronx Tale* Timeline





## New York City Timeline – 1960s and 1970s

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|--------------|---|---|
| <b>1963</b>  |    | Construction completed on Cross Bronx Expressway, which cuts through the South Bronx. This caused decay in several of the neighborhoods featured in <i>A Bronx Tale</i> . |
| <b>1964</b>  |    | Race riots erupt in several neighborhoods after police kill a 15-year-old boy in Harlem   |
| <b>1966</b>  |    | 12-day transit strike stops buses and subways for millions of commuters   |
| <b>1968</b>  |    | Sanitation strike causes garbage to pile up on streets for 9 days   |
| <b>1968</b>  |   | Tension between teachers' union and minority communities leads to teachers' strike  |
| <b>1973</b>  |  | Arab oil embargo leads to recession and gasoline shortages  |
| <b>1974</b>  |  | Inflation tops 10% nationwide   |
| <b>1975</b>  |  | Knapp Commission investigates police corruption in NYPD   |
| <b>1975</b>  |  | City faces bankruptcy; President Ford refuses to fund bailout   |
| <b>1977</b>  |  | City-wide blackout leads to widespread looting and vandalism, especially in poor neighborhoods  |
| <b>1970s</b> |  | New York State passes harsh drug laws; crime and incarceration rates soar   |
| <b>1970s</b> |  | Mass transit system falls into disrepair  |

## Broadway Spotlight: Interview with Alan Menken

MICHAEL MENACHEM JANUARY 1, 2017 IN NEW YORK CITY MONTHLY

(RETRIEVED ON 9/28/17: [HTTPS://NYCMOONLY.COM/ARTICLE/BROADWAY-SPOTLIGHT-INTERVIEW-WITH-ALAN-MENKEN/](https://nycmoonly.com/article/broadway-spotlight-interview-with-alan-menken/))

If you are merely breathing, then you probably know a host of timeless songs by Alan Menken. He's the composer of Disney movie classics such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, *Enchanted*, *Tangled*, and the music from a completely different animated hit from this past summer, *Sausage Party*. Menken is also the mastermind behind the beloved scores of Broadway musicals *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Newsies*, and *Sister Act*. His next act is adapting the autobiographical Chazz Palminteri 1993 film *A Bronx Tale* into a new musical. Other heavyweights involved in this venture include co-directors Robert De Niro and Jerry Zaks (*Guys and Dolls*, *Sister Act*), lyricist Glenn Slater (*School of Rock*), choreographer Sergio Trujillo (*On Your Feet!*), and producer Tommy Mottola.

Let's also not forget that Alan Menken himself is an eight-time Academy Award winner, an 11-time Grammy winner, and a Tony Award winner, making him one of the most decorated composers of all time, known for favorites "Under The Sea," "Colors of the Wind," and "A Whole New World." The one constant in *NYC Monthly's* chat with Menken is that stage shows need to be fluid, with a story and music and components that make the audience say "I get it." We found out what the global appeal of Menken's songs means to him, how New York energizes his creativity, and why *A Bronx Tale* is worth seeing.

***Assuming you saw A Bronx Tale years ago, could you ever have imagined it as a musical, and how did you become attached to the score?***

Yeah, I could have imagined it. It had to have the emotional intensity; the challenge was just to write the musical vocabulary and with the right approach. I had worked with Chazz years ago and at that time he had talked to me about *A Bronx Tale*. How would it work? Fast-forward 10 years and Tommy Mottola said "you have to do this," and it's like going back to my *Little Shop* roots in terms of the era. All the songs are doo-wop and rock 'n' roll and it's much broader stylistically than *Little Shop*, except this one is dead-serious in terms of the musical DNA. The Shirelles, Otis Redding, Sinatra, Bobby Darin, The Supremes, Motown. To me that's the best sandbox in the world.

***What was most important to book writer Chazz Palminteri and co-directors Robert De Niro and Jerry Zaks in terms of how the music plays a role in the new show?***

These are all men who are successful and smart and very cynical about Broadway. So they had to go through this incrementally. First I came aboard, then Glenn Slater, a very smart lyricist. I had to nurture the trust between Chazz and Tommy and Bob with Glenn.

There's a lot of "what do we keep and how do we organize it and create a compelling end of act one and closing of the show?" The whole look of the show, whole sound of the show, and tone of the show are all integrated into the same thing — a memory piece of the time. An ethos, the Belmont Avenue Italian push and pull between the working man and the wise guys and two blocks over the black neighborhood and dealing with racial prejudice.

*Little Shop* and *Hunchback* have a world of darkness in them, but you know, it's not about dark and light it's about how you're telling the story. If it's a dark story and you overdo it or apologize for its darkness; the point is it all comes down to the audience saying "I get it."

***You are a New Yorker, born here in the city. What makes you most proud to be a New Yorker and do you attribute any of your talent or perspective to being from here?***

Number one, New York is a melting pot of everything in the world. And New York is an aggressive, driven place. And I'm proud that I know how to be a New Yorker. I am also proud that I know how to get away from that. I actually now live upstate and I love it. I can balance being really aggressive and really workaholic and at a certain hour just stop it and take my dogs for a long walk in the woods and just chill out, and I'm just a lucky man that way.

***Are there some bars or piano bars or places you visited frequently while studying at NYU?***

I went to NYU in The Heights, which was up in the Bronx. The clubs I remember when I started out, I performed at The Ballroom on West Broadway, Reno Sweeney — Peter Allen, Ed Kaufman, and Bette Midler and cabaret acts, Barry Manilow. Tramps was another club. I remember I saw Cream down on MacDougal Street or Frank Zappa also on MacDougal Street. It was an incredible scene; that was back in the 60s.

***What is a moment you can share about one of your films or shows that really sticks with you over the years from a fan?***

There are so many moments and they blindsides you. I have people that just cry saying "your music means so much to me." Part of you thinks well, this music's mine but really music belongs to the world. It's those moments when a young person comes up to me and releases their emotions to that degree, it stuns me.

I'm very privileged, but I want to explain to them that it's not about me, it's that I'm part of something bigger; there are actors and singers and writers. The lesson is you're a part of something bigger; don't ever have it be just about you.

***Are there other young composers or songwriters on your radar?***

Both Lin-Manuel Miranda and Bobby Lopez have been on my radar since they were kids. They went through Hunter College Elementary and High Schools. Pasek and Paul are really talented, of *Dear Evan Hansen* (and *La La Land*). It's a new generation of new writers but some of them are just so good.

***Why do you think A Bronx Tale is the show to see?***

It's a memory play that allows you to see the genesis of how someone came from these roots to becoming a man.

It's all about the choices you make and how they make you. The big line is "The saddest thing in life is wasted talent." It's about growing up and family and father figures and learning to find your own path. I think it's a wonderful show. There are a lot of great shows to see, but I think it's one of my best scores; it's rich, it's fun, it's just brilliant.

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**Bronx Native Makes Broadway Debut in 'A Bronx Tale.'**

EDDIE SMALL FEBRUARY 20, 2017 IN DNA INFO

(RETRIEVED ON 2/20/17: [HTTPS://WWW.DNAINFO.COM/NEW-YORK/20170220/BELMONT/JANELLE-MCDERMOTH-A-BRONX-TALE-INTERVIEW](https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20170220/belmont/janelle-mcdermoth-a-bronx-tale-interview))



Janelle McDermoth in front of the A Bronx Tale logo-DNA Info

<https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20170220/belmont/janelle-mcdermoth-a-bronx-tale-interview>

Janelle McDermoth grew up in The Bronx and now she's singing about the borough on Broadway. The 24-year-old actress recently made her Broadway debut in "A Bronx Tale," a musical version of the 1993 Robert De Niro and Chazz Palminteri movie about an Italian-American boy named Calogero torn between the lives of his father, a local bus driver, and Sonny, a local mobster, in The Bronx during the 1960s.

McDermoth plays Frieda, a friend of Calogero's love interest, Jane, who cautions her about the dangers of interracial dating in their neighborhood at the time.

"Frieda as a character is interesting to me because she is not reasonable, but definitely reminds Jane what time period she's in — you know, lets her know it's 1968," McDermoth said. "These things that you're trying to do, run around with this boy, is not safe."

McDermoth now lives in Washington Heights, but was raised on Cruger Avenue and gained some of her first experiences with theater attending Bronx Bethany Church of the Nazarene.

Simply growing up in The Bronx helped pique her interest in the arts as well, given the defining role that music has played in the history of the borough.

"We grew up listening to a lot of gospel music and a lot of reggae gospel music," she said, "but you can't deny the hip-hop culture that The Bronx has, so church in particular was this site where all those things were intersecting for me."



Janelle McDermoth with Chazz Palminteri- The Picta  
<http://www.thepicta.com/user/janellemcdrmth/283881996>

However, she did not decide she wanted to pursue acting as a career right away, saying she first expected having to settle for a "sexy marketing job" while at college before getting cast in a traveling production of "Hair" during what would have been her junior year.

"I had a wonderful experience. I was the youngest person on the whole tour," she said.

"There was this moment of being a kid from The Bronx in New York and waking up in Japan and going 'Oh, this is my life now,'" she continued. "It's pretty cool."

She began playing the role of Frieda in "A Bronx Tale" on Feb. 7, and although the musical does not focus on the Allerton neighborhood where she grew up, she said she still relates to some of its themes, namely how broad the definition of family can be in the borough.

"My upbringing in The Bronx was about family and extended family. I lived with my parents and my siblings, but down the street were my cousins, and playing outside was just as important," she said. "At the top of Act Two, the Webster Avenue kids are sitting on the stoop and hanging out with their friends, and that's just a very real way that my cousins and I would operate."

She is happy that her Broadway debut is giving her a chance to represent her home borough and said she would like the show to help lead to a greater amount of spaces in the borough dedicated to the arts.

"I love The Bronx, and I will always love The Bronx," she said. "It's where I'm from, and it's just tied to the joy of childhood."

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