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INTRODUCTION

The concept of the “vamp” as a dramatic creature of seduction and danger is not a new one. You can go all the way back to Homer’s time to find its earliest use in literature, when, in *The Odyssey*, world-weary wanderer Odysseus is lured to a craggy island by the enchanting voices of the Sirens, beautiful half-women/half-bird creatures whose angelic voices draw unsuspecting sailors to the island, only to have them dashed to pieces on the treacherous rocks along the shoreline. The subject of the *femme fatale* has been used in literature ever since.

Musical theater was, of course, a natural milieu for this concept, as the idea of a beautiful, but dangerous, woman with an attractive voice and seductive mannerisms created all kinds of possibilities for playwrights. Characters have run the gamut of the idea, including good girls gone bad, good girls pretending to be bad, bad girls trying to lure good guys to their doom, or just plain bad girls using their charms for evil purposes. Some were simply naughty girls who use their feminine wiles to attract, lure, entice, and even torment their poor, helpless targets. Others were just having fun being themselves.

This collection highlights songs sung by many of the classic alluring female characters from Broadway over the past eight decades. No matter when the songs were written, in the free-spirited 1920s, the restrictive ’30s and ’40s, or the sexually liberated years since the 1960s, the running theme remains: the girl you can’t take your eyes, or ears, off of.



In *Kiss Me Kate* (1948), the main characters are a once-married, now divorced, couple who take their personal battle to the stage as actors in a production of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. The show-within-a-show musical starred Alfred Drake and Patricia Morison. Cole Porter’s “Always True to You in My Fashion” is sung by the morally confused Lois Lane (Lisa Kirk) in explaining her views on romantic fidelity to her boyfriend, inveterate gambler Bill Calhoun (Harold Lang). In the song, Lois justifies her indiscretions, citing the tangible luxuries that come with them.

Chicago (1975) focuses on the seamy and sultry side of the vaudeville world during the 1920s. Voluptuous vixens Velma Kelly and Roxie Hart constitute a double-barreled threat; both are chorus girls who use their sexual power to get what they want. Velma (Chita Rivera) is the more hard-boiled of the two, and her fame is threatened when Roxie (Gwen Verdon) becomes the new kid on the block. The opening number, “And All That

Jazz,” is sung by Velma, who sets the stage and the decadent atmosphere for the show (“I’m gonna rouge my knees and roll my stockings down...”). In “Cell Block Tango,” Roxie, having been arrested for killing her lover, is serenaded by Velma and five other murderesses who revel in the details of their respective crimes, each one justifying her actions by saying, “He had it coming.” An even more malevolent character is “Mama” Morton (Mary McCarty), the corrupt cell block matron who explains her system of reciprocity in “When You’re Good to Mama.”

Johnny Mercer and Harold Arlen’s score for *St. Louis Woman* (1946) proved to be much better than the show itself, which received mixed reviews before closing after only 113 performances. Based on the 1931 novel *God Sends Sunday*, the plot concerns horse racing in turn-of-the-century St. Louis. It was staged as a play in 1937 before being transformed into a full-fledged musical in 1946. Created as a vehicle for Lena Horne, the show’s production was

WHATEVER LOLA WANTS

(Lola Gets)
(from "Damn Yankees")

(Cue:) **LOLA:** And do like Lola tells you to do.

Words and Music by
RICHARD ADLER and JERRY ROSS

Bolero ♩ = 112-116
Bbm

Lola:

What-ev - er

Lo - la wants Lo - la gets And, lit - tle

man, lit - tle Lo - la wants you. Make up your

Chords: Bbm, C7(b9)/Bb, Cm7(b5)/Bb, Gb7/Bb, Ebm6, F7