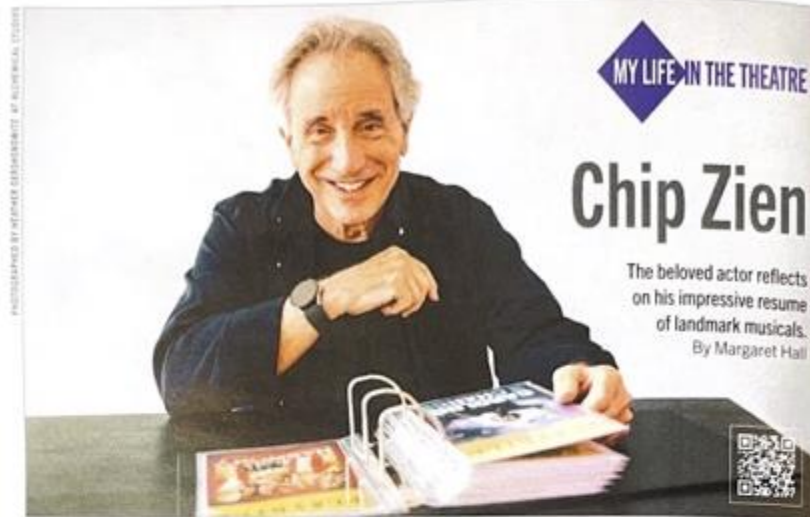


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**IT WOULDN'T BE LIFE IN THE THEATRE WITHOUT A LITTLE DRAMA.**

For Chip Zien, the theatrics came to him honestly. Born and raised in Wisconsin, the future Broadway veteran got his start at an all-boys summer camp as the go-to performer of the female roles. "I played Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*, I played Lola in *Damn Yankees*. I played Annie in *Annie Get Your Gun*... I set the gold standard," Zien smirks. When his 11-year-old artistic integrity was questioned by the camp's director, he decided it was high time for a proper scene.

"I stormed out of the theatre camp, and I jumped into a canoe, and I paddled to an island in this lake... I was screaming from the island, 'Get somebody else to play Eliza, get someone else! I'm not doing it! Find someone else!'" Zien laughs, quipping, "Gold standard for human behavior."

Thankfully, that particular show of dramatics was not the end of the line for Zien, back on Broadway this season in Barry Manilow and Bruce Sussman's new musical *Harmony*. Along the way, Zien has cemented himself in the history books as the originator of several now-classic musical theatre roles, including the deeply influential Baker in *Into the Woods*.

When Zien was first approached to work on an early workshop of Stephen Sondheim

and James Lapine's fairy-tale musical, it was a barely formed idea that seemed to be going nowhere. Originally asked to read for Cinderella's Prince ("He's Prince Charming, some handsome, tall guy—you know, me."), Lapine lambasted his performance, leading to Zien exiting the project, which was taken back to the drawing board.

The dramatic exodus, which sent Zien to California, proved to be exactly what was needed. Plus some machinations from musical midwife Ira Weitzman—a producer at Off-Broadway's Playwrights Horizons, which was workshopping *Into the Woods*.

"[Ira] said, 'Don't fly back to New York and audition for James and Steve. They're so confused, and they may change their mind if they actually see you in person.'" On Weitzman's orders, Zien said that he couldn't leave California due to his filming schedule. Lo and behold, a few days later, he was offered the role of the Baker sight unseen, cementing him in musical theatre legend for generations.

"In a weird way, I lied my way into *Into the Woods*, which is all about integrity and morality and responsibility," Zien laughs. "I blame Ira!"

To see Zien share more stories from his Broadway career (including what made him walk offstage in shame during *Les Misérables*), scan the QR code above or visit [Playbill.com/My-Life-in-the-Theatre](https://Playbill.com/My-Life-in-the-Theatre).