In 1980, fresh off of their success with Evita, lyricist Tim Rice suggested writing a musical about Chess to Andrew Lloyd Webber. The idea was inspired by the 1972 chess match between American Bobby Fischer and Russian, Boris Spassky. When Lloyd Webber proved too busy with CATS, he turned to ABBA duo Benny Anderson and Bjorn Ulvaeus to write the music.

A concept album was released in 1984 to huge acclaim and the song “One Night in Bangkok” became a Top 40 hit for Murray Head. The West End production, produced at a budget of $12 million, opened in 1986 and ran for three years. It was nominated for three Olivier Awards, including Best Musical, which ironically, it lost to Lloyd Webber’s Phantom of the Opera. The show was radically rewritten, prior to its opening on Broadway in 1988, with a new book by Richard Nelson. The production was a massive critical and box office failure, closing after only 68 regular performances.

Chess has continued to be reworked and rewritten in major professional and amateur productions around the world. The licensed script contains the following note from Tim Rice: “Anyone mounting a production of Chess, should not be afraid of changing the order of the songs and scenes. In particular, referencing the original recording of the work may inspire some alternate choices to the version presented in this book.” In the dramaturgy for this production, I spent months looking at scripts for five major versions of Chess, including the West End, Broadway, US National Tour (with revised book by Richard Coc), the 1990 Melbourne, Australia production (which has numerous new songs, never recorded or notated) and the Royal Albert Hall concert in 2009. Our production is a hybrid of all of these shows, and as instructed by Rice, we found our ending in the original concept album.

The story has been streamlined with a focus on the chess match and the love triangle between Florence, Freddie, and Anatoly. Confusing subplots and musical numbers involving the CIA, the KGB, Cold War Politics, and Florence’s father, have been reduced.

As part of our re-imagisation of Chess, Michael Rabinoff, Associate Dean of Visual and Performing Arts and Producer at Theatre Sheridan presented myself and set designer Tyler Sainsbury with the exciting idea of challenging the space of MacDonald Heaslip Hall. Tyler’s exquisite design, which you see before you, was inspired by traditional Thai Buddhist temples, the Bangkok Oriental Hotel and the Tanya Moisevitch thrust stage at the Stratford Festival.

The collaboration with Tyler influenced not only the physical world of the production but the story as well. Created in the mega-musical era, the licensed script has 29 locations in two different countries. To streamline our storytelling, we condensed the time frame, set all of the action in Bangkok, occurring at nine locations at the Bangkok International Hotel. None of this would have been possible without invaluable insight from Choreographer, Julie Tomaino and Music Director, Adam White, who had to piece together a score from various productions and create new arrangements for our band.

There has been a joyous collaboration re-imagining Chess with the extraordinary performance and production students, instructors, and staff at Theatre Sheridan. We hope you enjoy the show!
MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT ONE:
1. Prologue
2. Story of Chess
3. Freddie’s Entrance
4. Where I Want to Be
5. Diplomats
6. Arbiter’s Song
7. Chess #1
8. Quartet
9. Florence and the American
10. Nobody’s Side
11. Terrace Duet
12. Who’d Ever Think It?
13. Hymn to Chess
14. Chess #2
15. Florence Quits
16. Pity the Child
17. Heaven Help My Heart
18. Reporters
19. Anthem

ACT TWO:
1. Golden Bangkok
2. One Night in Bangkok
3. Someone Else’s Story
4. You and I
5. Where I Want to Be / You and I Reprise
6. Freddie Goes Metal
7. I Know Him So Well
8. Endgame
9. Chess Music
10. You and I Reprise
11. Heaven Help My Heart Reprise
12. You and I Reprise