THE MORNING LINE

DATE: Tuesday, October 23, 2012

FROM: Emily Meagher, Michael Strassheim
       Ryan McPhee, Jessica Gordon

PAGES: 15, including this page
The popular TKTS booth in Times Square, which sells discount tickets for Broadway and Off Broadway shows, is expanding its box office services in an effort to provide more options to theater-goers who line up daily for deals, executives said on Monday.

Starting this week, tickets for both matinee and evening performances will go on sale as soon as the booth opens; matinee tickets have customarily been sold first, with evening tickets sold from 3 p.m. onward. In addition, the booth will begin operating more like theater box offices by selling full-price tickets to future performances of all shows, as well as selling full-price tickets to same-day performances of shows that are not offering discounts at the booth. Until now the Times Square booth has never sold full-price tickets.

The added services may yield some new revenue for the Theater Development Fund, the nonprofit that runs the TKTS booth and charges a $4 service fee for every ticket sold there. But Victoria Bailey, executive director of the fund, said on Monday that the new services were not intended to be moneymakers -- she predicted they would only break even -- nor did she believe that TKTS would emerge as a direct competitor to theater box offices. She noted, for instance, that theaters can sell full-price tickets to any performance, while TKTS will not sell full-price tickets to same-day performances for shows that already sell discounts at the booth for that date. All but the biggest hit musicals usually have discounts at the booth.

Ms. Bailey said that theater owners, who make money on their box office sales, did not try to discourage the fund from offering these new services.

"What we're trying to do is offer more theater options for folks who are already at the booth," she said. "Now, for instance, people who come Wednesday and Saturday mornings to buy matinee tickets might think about sticking around and seeing an evening show as well. Or people might buy a discount ticket for that day and then, while they're at it, get their full-price ticket for another show later on.

"If we were going to be a direct competitor to theaters," she added, "we'd sell all day-of performances at full price. But that's not what TKTS does."

The fund will offer the new ticketing services for at least the next several months to gauge customer interest as part of a pilot program, then assess the results. The two ticketing ideas have been under consideration for a couple of years, Ms. Bailey said, in response both to consumer requests and new technology that simplified ticket purchases at the booth. Now in its 40th year, the TKTS booth underwent a major modernization several years ago and re-opened in 2008.

Relatively recent innovations like the "play only" ticket window will continue at the Times Square booth. The new services will not be offered at the TKTS satellites at South Street Seaport and in downtown New York.
The operating hours at the booth will expand to accommodate the new services: It will now open at 10 a.m. Monday through Saturday, and 11 a.m. on Sunday, to sell full-price tickets only. Discount tickets will go on sale at 10 a.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays; 11 a.m. on Sundays; 2 p.m. on Tuesdays; and 3 p.m. on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays.
The 1980s musical "Pump Boys and Dinettes" will return to Broadway next spring in a new production featuring direction and musical staging by John Doyle ("Sweeney Todd"), the producers said on Monday. The new production is conceived and written by the original team of John Foley, Mark Hardwick, Debra Monk, Cass Morgan, John Schimmel and Jim Wann. A theater will be announced later, as will dates and casting.

"We are thrilled to bring this musical back for today's audience in a fully interactive and immersive experience with onstage seating and a bar to boot," one of the producers, Abby Lee, said in a statement on Monday.

"Pump Boys and Dinettes" is set on Highway 57 between two towns in North Carolina and brings together four guys at the local gas station with two sisters cooking up a storm at a nearby roadside eatery. The musical opened Off Broadway in 1981 and moved to Broadway at the Princess Theater in February 1982, running for 573 performances. It was nominated for both Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Musical.
THEATER REVIEW

Beware Dinner Talk on Identity and Islam

By CHARLES ISHERWOOD

October 22, 2012

Watching the fierce clash over the salad course during a dinner party in “Disgraced,” the rollicking new play by Ayad Akhtar, feels at times like observing a hotly contested game of Twister. As two couples exchange observations about faith and politics in the modern world, the intellectual thickets they find themselves in become increasingly tangled. The language grows more testy, tempers begin to flare, and you have the unsettling sense that someone is going to lose his or her balance and take a hard fall. You’re just not sure who it’s going to be.

The players are a quartet of accomplished New Yorkers of differing races, creeds and, yes, colors, although they have all arrived at the same high plateau of worldly achievement and can agree on the important things, like the tastiness of the fennel and anchovy salad and the banana pudding from Magnolia Bakery. What they cannot agree on — and what will ultimately tear apart at least one of the relationships in the play — is who they really are and what they stand for, once the veneer of civilized achievement has been scraped away to reveal more atavistic urges.

“Disgraced,” which opened on Monday night at Lincoln Center’s Claire Tow Theater in a sleek production directed by Kimberly Senior, is a continuously engaging, vitally engaged play about thorny questions of identity and religion in the contemporary world, with an accent on the incendiary topic of how radical Islam and the terrorism it inspires have affected the public discourse. In dialogue that bristles with wit and intelligence, Mr. Akhtar, a novelist and screenwriter, puts contemporary attitudes toward religion under a microscope, revealing how tenuous self-image can be for people born into one way of being who have embraced another.

The principal characters are a married couple living the Manhattan high life: Amir Kapoor (the spiky, excellent Aasif Mandvi of “The Daily Show With Jon Stewart”), a corporate lawyer at a major firm specializing in mergers and acquisitions, and Emily (Heidi Armbruster), an artist whose profile is on the rise. They share an Upper East Side apartment lusciously upholstered in furnishings from the latest high-end design catalogs. (The set, by Lauren Helpern, offers its own witty commentary on the characters’ identities.)

Amir was born in Pakistan and raised Muslim, but he has thoroughly left his beginnings behind. Emily has far more respect for Islam and employs imagery from Islamic art in her work; Amir derides his forefathers’ religion as “a backward way of thinking, and being.” (For purposes of his career, he doesn’t mind if people assume that he’s Indian.)

Secure as he seems to be in his assimilated life — he’s expecting to be made a partner soon — Amir cannot entirely shake the responsibilities that family and his former faith impose. His nephew — himself restyled as Abe Jensen after being born Hussein Malik — has become agitated about the arrest of a local imam who, he feels, is being unjustly persecuted. At Emily’s insistence, Amir reluctantly agrees to participate in the case. His appearance in court in support of the imam, though he’s not acting as his official counsel, becomes a matter of
public record and private trouble when his presence is mentioned in an article in The New York Times.

It also becomes prime fodder for intensive debate when Amir and Emily host that intimate dinner for four. Their guests are Jory (Karen Pittman), Amir's African-American colleague who is also on the rise at his firm, and her boyfriend, Isaac (Erik Jensen), a Jewish art curator who is putting together a show that will be a good fit for Emily's art. Amir's participation in the case opens up a discussion of the history of Islam and its tenets that becomes a tense set-to when he reveals some unexpected sensitivities.

Seething when Isaac leaps to the defense of Islam, Amir analyzes with an edge in his voice just why he believes his former religion and the modern world are a bad combination. “There's a result to believing that a book written about life in a specific society 1,500 years ago is the word of God: You start wanting to recreate that society,” he says. “After all, it's the only one in which the Koran makes any literal sense. That's why you have people like the Taliban.”

Perhaps more startling is that despite his disdain, he still feels a tug of “pride” in the advances Islam has made in the contemporary world, even at the cost of great violence.

Mr. Mandvi's fervent performance made me believe, at least in the moment, that Amir's seemingly contradictory impulses were coming from a conflict between his mind and his gut. Those who know this talented performer only from his perky mock-commentaries on “The Daily Show” may be surprised to discover what a skilled stage actor he is. (Mr. Mandvi first made a splash on the New York theater scene more than a decade ago in his solo show, “Sakina's Restaurant.”)

His co-stars are no less accomplished at rendering the nuances of their characters lucidly. Ms. Armbruster (a dead ringer for Laura Linney) plays the ambitious Emily with a natural poise. Mr. Jensen handles the main combat chores with aplomb in the pivotal argument with Amir. And although her role is the least substantial of the four principals, Ms. Pittman makes Jory's cool, appraising looks speak volumes.

There's more than a little contrivance in the interlocking relationships among the play's characters and in their schematically contrasted religious and cultural backgrounds. Admittedly, the workings of the plot in “Disgraced” are a little too preprogrammed to maximize conflict. When a late-coming revelation about a sexual secret is added to the mix, this pinball machine threatens to flop into tilt mode.

And yet as the play rockets along — it's less than 90 minutes and one act — you're not likely to note infelicities of design, because Mr. Akhtar's cut-crystal dialogue is so stimulating. Everyone has been told that politics and religion are two subjects that should be off limits at social gatherings. But watching Mr. Akhtar's characters rip into these forbidden topics, there's no arguing that they make for ear-tickling good theater.

Disgraced

By Ayad Akhtar; directed by Kimberly Senior; sets by Lauren Helpern; costumes by Dane Laffrey; lighting by Tyler Micoleau; sound by Jill B C Du Boff; stage manager, Megan Schwarz Dickert; managing director, Adam Siegel; production manager, Jeff Hamlin; LCT3 artistic director, Paige Evans. Presented by LCT, Lincoln Center Theater, under the direction of André Bishop and Bernard Gersten, by arrangement with the Araca Group. At the Claire Tow Theater, 150 West 65th Street, Lincoln Center; (212) 239-6200, telecharge.com, lct3.org. Through Nov. 18. Running time: 1 hour 20 minutes.
WITH: Heidi Armbruster (Emily), Erik Jensen (Isaac), Aasif Mandvi (Amir), Omar Maskati (Abe) and Karen Pittman (Jory).
Culture Blogger

here comes
the sun

As Annie returns to Broadway, Danielle Nussbaum looks at the musical’s colorful history.

Before Carrie Bradshaw rocked NYC in Sex and the City, Sarah Jessica Parker was the lead in the Broadway musical Annie, based on the comic strip about a spunky little orphan. The original production—which premiered with great fanfare on the Great White Way in 1977 and starred the incomparable Andrea McArdle before SJP took over—instantly won the hearts of every Broadway baby. And when a movie adaptation hit the big screen five years later, it won the hearts of little girls all over the world (including me, and not just because I played the sassy orphan Pepper in my camp production when I was eight).

When Annie returns to Broadway this fall, eleven-year-old Lilla Crawford, whose debut was in the musical Billy Elliot, will take over the lead role—and the responsibility of reminding audiences that the sun will come out tomorrow. “I think a lot of people like it because of Annie’s optimism,” Lilla says of the show. “It has so many great messages. Annie keeps everyone’s hopes up and motivates everyone.”

And although in real life she doesn’t sing as she does her chores, like the fed-up orphans who belt out “It’s the Hard-Knock Life” (“When I take the trash out, sometimes I hum. Maybe like quiet singing,” she admits), Lilla hopes to be like her character by inspiring folks, too. “I’m just really excited to meet little girls,” she says. “I met a few, and they only called me Annie. It’s really funny.” She hasn’t gotten a chance to say hi to Miss Parker yet, though. “I met Matthew Broderick at Nice Work If You Can Get It. That’s sort of the same thing, right?”
Get ready for ‘Motown The Musical’

Motown is coming to midtown. Glamorized, souped-up and ready to go, the Manhattan arrival is not a show about cars but a salute to the motor city and Berry Gordy, its most accomplished record label founder. Spotlighting the music that shattered barriers and shaped lives, “Motown The Musical” is slated to premiere at the Lunt-Fontanne Theater on April 14, 2013.

Top-heavy with original music from Detroit, a sneak preview of the season’s most highly anticipated world-premiere event attracted A-listers and insiders invited for a first glimpse of the production.

Detroit’s most-famous daughter Aretha Franklin joined Gordy, Claudette Robinson, former backup singer with the Miracles; Otis Williams, original member of The Temptations, Clive Davis and Doug Morris, record company moguls, songwriters William “Smokey” Robinson, Lamont Dozier, Brian Holland, and Valerie Simpson; producer Suzanne DePasse, dancer/choreographer Debbie Allen, Rev. Jesse Jackson, former LaBelle singer Nona Hendrix, music manager Vickie Wickham, Rhonda, Gordy’s daughter with Diana Ross and entertainment insiders to get a first night view of the musical based on Gordy’s book “To Be Loved.”

The first authentic production to showcase the rise of Detroit’s most acclaimed record company stars Brandon Victor Dixon and Valisia LeKae as Gordy and Diana Ross.

Already, both are being touted as ‘discoveries’ destined for major stardom. On her first outing before a critical crowd, LeKae won raves.

She channels the Boss and struts a Diva personality only an opera star could rival.

With just a snippet of her portrayal of the label’s best-known female, Ross’ real life daughter Rhonda led a standing ovation to a rousing approval of the Supreme character.

The stage production combines the use of footage from the documentary of the same name with dancers and singers to choreograph a biographical salute to the insightful and talented music innovator.

While the musical spotlights Gordy and the galaxy he created in the middle of America, the show also reminisces the period of Jim Crow when Blacks endured racism and discrimination in the south during the struggle for Civil Rights.

“Broadway has never seen anything like this,” producer Kevin McCollum said.

And while there are also inside-stories to this presentation, audiences will leave singing the praises of Motown and Gordy.

“It’s thrilling to bring together the musical legacy of Berry Gordy” and Broadway to tell the gripping story behind the hits Robinson made after finding his unique voice and watching Diana skyrocket to stardom.

Robinson auditioned as a singer and after being hired emerged one of the label’s principal songwriters.

The hits he wrote for the Temptations, Four Tops, Diana Ross & The Supremes, Martha & The Vandellas, Marvin Gaye, Tammi Tyrell and others placed him in a special relationship where they partnered and saw the label skyrocket to the top.

To see Berry fight against the odds that turned his improbable dream into a triumphant reality is nothing short of spectacular.

As the biographic storyline goes, on January 12, 1959 a young African-American songwriter named Berry Gordy founded Tamla Records in Detroit with a loan of $800 from his family, marking the birth of the “Motown Records Corporation.”

Gordy’s legendary Motown Records made its mark not just on the music industry but society at large, with a sound that has become one of the most significant musical accomplishments of all time. The Detroit label communicated and brought together a racially divided country and segregated society, touching people of all ages and races around the world. No other music company in history has exerted such an enormous influence on both the style and substance of popular music and culture.

Catch You On The Inside!
12:36 A.M. **Jimmy Fallon** (Ch.4)
Tom Hanks; Victoria Justice;
Aimee Mann performs. (N)
CAST INVITED TO ‘PARTIES’

By Gordon Cox

Jeremy Shamos, Sam Robards and Mark Blum have joined the cast of “The Assembled Parties,” the new play by Richard Greenberg bowing on Broadway in the spring.

Shamos, currently appearing in the revival of “Glengarry Glen Ross,” plays a guest at a 1980 dinner party on the Upper West Side. With Jessica Hecht and Judith Light playing, respectively, a former movie star and her sister-in-law, Robards is on board as the husband of Hecht’s character while Blum appears as the husband of Light’s character.

Three more parts remain to be cast in the Manhattan Theater Club production, to be helmed by a.d. Lynne Meadow. Greenberg has a busy season ahead of him, with “Assembled Parties” on the sked alongside a Broadway staging of his adaptation of “Breakfast at Tiffany’s,” aiming for a February start, and the spring Off Broadway berth of “Far From Heaven,” the tuner version of the 2002 pic.

MTC staging begins previews March 19 ahead of an April 17 opening.
Manilow to play Broadway

Concert run set for 17 performances

By GORDON COX

Barry Manilow will play a concert engagement on Broadway in the winter, skedding 17 dates at the St. James Theater.

The stint, which starts Jan. 18, steps into a venue that will be vacated at the end of the year by the tuner "Bring It On." Theater is poised as well for a legit booking later in the spring, although a tenant has not yet been confirmed.

Manilow's Broadway berth follows on the heels of the recent success of other brief concert or stand-up outings on the Rialto this season. Last week, the limited run of "Frankie Vallie and the Four Seasons on Broadway" pulled in about $635,000 in just three perfs, while Lewis Black's show "Running on Empty" grossed $250,000 in two.

Manilow has previously done concert stints on the Main Stem in 1976 and 1989.

Contact Gordon Cox at gordon.cox@variety.com
'Misery' sets stage cast

Day, Gerroll to star in Bucks County bow

By GORDON COX

Johanna Day and Daniel Gerroll are set to star in the world preem of the stage adaptation of "Misery," with James DeMarse rounding out a cast of three.

New legit outing from Warner Bros. Theatrical Ventures, Castle Rock Entertainment and Playhouse Prods. is on the calendar to play a brief developmental engagement this fall at Pennsylvania's Bucks County Playhouse. No future life for "Misery" has been announced, but given the high profile of the title and the strong fan base of scribe Stephen King (who penned the 1987 novel), the show seems plainly geared for further incarnations.

Producers have tapped a pair of legit veterans for the show's first outing. Day ("Proof," "August: Osage County"), taking on the role that won Kathy Bates an Oscar for her perf in the 1990 film version, plays crazed fan Annie in the show, while Gerroll ("Chariots of Fire"), last on Broadway in the 2003 revival of "Enchanted April," plays the writer Annie rescues from the scene of a car crash. DeMarse ("Dividing the Estate," "The Orphans' Home Cycle") is on board as the town sheriff.

William Goldman, who wrote the screenplay for the pic, also pens the stage version. Production is set for an 11-perf run at Bucks County Nov. 24-Dec. 8.

Contact Gordon Cox at gordon.cox@variety.com
Ayckbourn speaks to West End

Kendal stars in 'Relatively Speaking' revival

By DAVID BENEDICT

LONDON -- "Relatively Speaking," Alan Ayckbourn's 1985 breakthrough comedy, will be revived in the West End in spring 2013.

Produced by Theater Royal Bath Prods., the comedy of pre-marital infidelity and mistaken identity will begin previews at Cameron Mackintosh's Wyndham's Theater beginning May 14. The staging is led by U.K. box-office favorite Felicity Kendal, who appeared in the original 1973 West End production of Ayckbourn's "The Norman Conquests," the tragicomic trilogy that, in a more recent production, won the 2009 Tony for revival.

Helmed by Lindsay Posner and designed by Peter McKintosh ("The 39 Steps") the case also includes Jonathan Coy, Kara Tointon and Max Bennett.

Contact David Benedict at benedictdavid@mac.com
PACINO, VALLI OPEN BIG
B.O. demand strong for early perfms

By Gordon Cox

Al Pacino cemented his status as one of Broadway’s top box office draws last week, with the Pacino-toppled revival of “Glengarry Glen Ross” logging stellar sales in a frame that also launched similarly strong B.O. at Frankie Valli’s current concert engagement.

“Glengarry” posted a boppo $703,775 from just a quartet of previews. Average ticket price, a good measure of demand since it repays the amount theatergoers are willing to shell out for an attraction, hit $164.47, putting the show almost in the same orbit as “The Book of Mormon” ($1,655,294), which last week averaged $189.13 paid per duet.

“Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons on Broadway” posted receipts of $633,900 from only three perfms, with an average price paid coming in at $125. Based on the long-running success of Four Seasons broturner “Jersey Boys” ($1,058,814), it was already pretty clear the band had a following willing to flock to Broadway for a recreation of the group’s music and career; last week’s B.O. confirmed they’ll turn out for the real thing, too.

Lewis Black also did well, with his solo-standup outing “Running on Empty” pulling in $254,816 from only two shows, and the revival of “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” ($332,346) spiked by 50% in the wake of the strong reviews it earned last week.

All that helped drive overall Broadway come up by around $1.4 million to $22 million for 29 shows on the boards. A number of individual shows climbed, but many of them didn’t upick by much.

In the Top 10, a seemingly revivified “Nice Work If You Can Get It” ($1,105,092) continued to settle into a spot in the millionaires’ club, while Tony winner “Once” ($1,063,940) remained similarly strong: Previewing productions also added to the Rialto pot, with “Annie” ($733,775) going up from seven perfms to eight and reporting decent if unspectacular sales.

“The Heiress” ($707,850) was slightly off after playing only seven perfms last week rather than the full eight performed over the prior sesh, while “Scandalous” ($241,613 for seven perfms) continued to have trouble attracting crowds, playing to houses that averaged 66% of capacity. The Roundabout Theater Company’s revival of “The Mystery of Edwin Drood” ($176,694 for five perfms) also joined the fray, while the company’s staging of “Cyrano de Bergerac” ($249,257) saw sales rise by 19% thanks to strong response in the press.

Overall attendance was up by about 14,000 to 228,349. That’s a bit less than the overall turnaround reported over the same week last year, when only 26 shows were playing. Overall attendance for the frame hit 86%, down from 88% in 2011.

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<th>Show</th>
<th>(Theater/Prod. category/Sets)</th>
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<th>Prev. week’s gross receipts</th>
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<th>Avg. Seat</th>
<th>Attendance Capacity</th>
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Reported box office receipts are followed by the week’s paid attendance (including standby) and percentage of the week’s total capacity represented. The theatrical week begins Monday and extends through the following Sunday. Unless otherwise specified, the week consists of eight performances. Abbreviations and designations are (P) play, (M) musical, (G) solo, (O) opera, (S) summer, (B) multiple-bill, (R) revival, (F) feature, (L) foreign, (L) language presentation, (T) estimated figure, (perf) performance, (pre) previews, (PW) previous week, (LW) last week. (Suite) indicates a subscription-based venue, while (BA) indicates that the production is presented under the Broadway Alliance plan. © 2012 Variety Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction or distribution strictly prohibited.