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THE MORNING LINE

DATE: Thursday, November 12, 2015

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PAGES: 10, *including this page.*



The New York Times

November 12, 2015

Review: ‘Henry IV,’ Donmar Warehouse’s All-Female Version

By Ben Brantley

Leave it to an army of sharp-witted women to point out just how much [Shakespeare](#)’s “Henry IV” plays are — how shall we put this? — manhood-measuring contests. As embodied by a rousing all-female cast in this seriously entertaining [Donmar Warehouse](#) production, which opened on Wednesday night at [St. Ann’s Warehouse](#) in Brooklyn, Shakespeare’s soldiers, nobles and carousers seem to be forever engaged in vociferous argument as to who has the bigger

Well, fill in the blank: heart, courage, entitlement to contested lands, right to be in charge, capacity for alcohol — and for whoremongering and warmongering — and the ability to put a lesser fellow in his place. Whether the tone is drunken rowdiness or somber statesmanship, conversation sooner or later tends to turn into a testosterone-fueled competition for top dog.

That may well have been your impression, at least in part, from earlier encounters with “Henry IV, Parts I and II,” which have here been condensed into one compact and explosive whole (and an intermission-free 2 hours 15 minutes). These are the plays, after all, that include those immortal, oppositional forces of braggadocio, Falstaff and Hotspur.

But there’s something about putting these fighting words into the mouths of women that makes us listen with newborn ears for the ring of absurdity and desperation within. Directed by [Phyllida Lloyd](#), this production out of London reminds us that casting against the grain can be a potent tool in theater.

Ms. Lloyd’s “Henry” is, among other things, a celebration of the metamorphic wonder of live stage acting, and of the distinctive insights it affords as we watch people transform themselves into others. It’s an ideal inaugural production for [the newly relocated](#) St. Ann’s, a bastion of adventurous theater, which has now settled into handsome riverside quarters in a 19th-century tobacco warehouse in Dumbo.

The first time I met Ms. Lloyd’s Shakespearean band of sisters was two years ago, at St. Ann’s temporary lodgings just blocks away. The play was “[Julius Caesar](#),” and it established the *mise-en-scène* that Ms. Lloyd deploys again here. The setting, we are asked to infer, is a women’s prison, and the inmates are putting on a show.

So once again, we find a playing space that resembles a scruffed-up institutional gym, enclosed in chain-link fencing with imposing uniformed turnkeys keeping close watch. (Bunny Christie and Ellen Nabarro did the set, with space-defining lighting by James Farncombe and reality-grounding sound by Tom Gibbons.) The cast

members wear regulation gray sweats, and they enter, carrying their makeshift props and costumes, with the dutiful, dull-eyed manner of people accustomed to moving under duress as an orderly unit.

Then they arrange themselves into patterns that suggest an internal pecking order. That one woman must be in charge — older, more sure of herself, probably a survivor of many years in this place. You can't buy that air of authority. She's a natural for the king, Henry IV. And, by the way, the woman who plays the woman who plays the king is Harriet Walter, one of the great [Shakespearean interpreters](#) of her generation.

Let me say right away that Ms. Walter, a truly noble Brutus in the Donmar "Julius Caesar," was born to play Henry IV, and thank God she was given the chance. Careworn, eternally wary, hard-schooled in creating the illusion of omnipotence, this Henry would command in any production.

But this is not merely equal-opportunity Shakespeare. Placing his works within the context of a penitentiary lends added resonance to plays about the struggle for power. "Julius Caesar," with its depiction of internecine plotting and conspiratorial assassins, suggested automatic parallels to life behind bars. That work was perhaps tighter and tenser than this latest offering.

Yet the relative expansiveness of "Henry" makes it, in some ways, even more of a pleasure. As we follow the paths of the besieged Henry and his wayward son, Prince Hal (Clare Dunne), through an England rife with rebellion, the performers keep coming up with new ways to define the vast land under contention. (In one scene, when a map is asked for, the cast members draw it onto the stage in spray paint.)

They also bring to the production the combustible energy of pent-up souls who have finally been allowed a source of physical release. Hotspur, the rebel nobleman and martial monomaniac, is played by Jade Anouka as a braggart boxer à la the young Muhammad Ali, with taped fists and a personal gym. He may be a blowhard, but his sheer kinetic youthfulness is irresistible.

Ms. Dunne's Prince Hal has the fiery radiance of not just a royal heir but also a hedonist high on the cocaine to which he liberally treats himself in the play's tavern scenes, with his boon companion Falstaff (Sophie Stanton, a cutup to reckon with, who does a dizzying drag act to "[Money \(That's What I Want\).](#)") Cocaine is notorious for inspiring big talk. And it seems right that it should be the fuel in the Eastcheap tavern scenes in which Hal and Falstaff trade ever more inflated insults, most memorably when each man impersonates Hal's regal dad. But that's all in fun, or so it seems. Similarly grandiose declarations are made in perfect earnest by the likes of Hotspur and, hilariously, [Glendower](#)(Jackie Clune), the rebel Welsh nobleman who explains how fabulous he is by describing his birth as a cosmic event.

And what of the women of "Henry"? Well, there aren't many (two exactly), a fact of which you become achingly aware, and they are dismissed with phrases like, "You may be able to keep a secret, but you're still a woman." At one point, the mockery of a tavern hostess (Zainab Hasan) by Falstaff and company segues into a non-Shakespearean litany of vulgar, misogynistic insults that causes its target to break into tears and storm offstage.

That's one of the few instances in which we're pulled out of the reality of the play and into the alternate reality of the prison setup. Another occurs at the end, in which the cruelty demanded by power is taken too much to

heart by one of its recipients. This causes enough of a panic to force the prison — and production — into lockdown.

Mostly, though, it's an exultant spirit of freedom with which these captive women burn. Before the show begins, they are herded through the lobby in single file, heads bent. But once they're let loose on that provisional stage, they grow taller, straighter, stronger.

It's a multilayered act of liberation. Prisoners are allowed to roam the wide fields of Shakespeare's imagination; fine actresses are given the chance to play meaty roles that have been denied them; and we get to climb out of the straitjackets of our traditional perceptions of a venerated play.



The New York Times

November 12, 2015

Review: Michael Flatley's New Show Has Unicorns, Rainbows and Some Footwork, Too

By Brian Seibert

The main reason to see Michael Flatley's "[Lord of the Dance: Dangerous Games](#)," which opened on Tuesday at the Lyric Theater, is to watch [Michael Flatley dancing](#). It's your last chance. This Irish-American step-dancing star, now 57, has announced that he will retire from performing at the end of this eight-week run. The trouble is, to see Michael Flatley dancing, you have sit through a Michael Flatley show.

This has been the problem for 20 years, since he transformed traditional Irish dance into souped-up spectacles. First came "[Riverdance](#)," followed by the original "Lord of the Dance," productions that conquered the world and sold out stadiums. The current "Lord of the Dance" (created, produced, directed and choreographed by Mr. Flatley) begins with a self-promotional video about defying naysayers to create "the biggest-selling dance show of all times."

Only at the very end of the production does Mr. Flatley briefly appear in person, and that makes for a long wait. But even if he were starring, there would still be a lot to endure. The production is flooded with stock-image videos of unicorns, rainbows, waterfalls and white stallions. There are flaming torches, dry-ice fog banks and explosions.

Buried within all that and spread across some 30 numbers is a faint toward drama. The ostensible hero, the Lord of the Dance, loses his prize belt to a cyborg-like Dark Lord and wins it back with the help of a Little Spirit, a small and irritating gymnast who looks as if she were drizzled with glue and then rolled in sequins. A blond good girl fights with a brunette seductress for the hero's affections, but don't expect the virgin-whore dichotomy to hold. A distinguishing feature of Mr. Flatley's universe of clichés is that the good always win by removing more clothing.

All of this is indicative of Mr. Flatley's decades-old rebellion against the prudishness, rules and restraint of traditional Irish dance. He took a genre of ethnic-pride competitions and small spaces (Irish dance lore is full of stories of dancing on doors taken down off their hinges or even on plates), and he blew it up and gave it mass appeal.

The positive side of that transformation is evident from the first entrance of the Lord of the Dance, the handsome James Keegan, bounding across the stage in the Flatley fashion. His terrific footwork, tripling the

beat and slipping in extra sounds on the fly, is undeniably exciting. And the mass effect of martial lines of men hammering the floor in unison gives a thrill.

But it's the same thrill over and over. Every number has the same accelerating shape, the same applause-button ending. Good and bad may face off, but they all dance the same way. Gerard Fahy's music matches the décor, generally stomping on the beauties of Irish music with over-amplification and crude borrowings from pop power ballads or manipulative movie scores.

Even in the show's story, technology is both the enemy and the solution. (The Dark Lord is part machine, but there are good robots, too.) There's little in "Lord of the Dance" that feels truly live. You might as well be watching it on TV.

The best dancing, in fact, comes in a video, the one that starts the encore. It's Mr. Flatley multiplied, three images of him challenge-dancing one another. The sequence could almost be from a [Fred Astaire](#) or [Gene Kelly](#) movie, and if Mr. Flatley doesn't approach their imagination and artistry, his charisma is comparable, especially to Kelly's, selling his dance with self-love. His solo dancing has more variety than the rest of the choreography in the show, more fun. With his feet of world-record-setting speed, he grabs steps from tap dancing, flamenco, whatever he likes — he's Michael Flatley.

Appearing onstage in front of his cast, he does much less, but he presides with a happy, Elvis-in-Vegas swagger. Kissing the girls, shadowboxing, cheerleading and occasionally joining in the dance, he's a proud paterfamilias, directing attention to the dancers who will continue to populate his productions and follow the career path that he created. "Lord of the Dance" will live on after the Lord of the Dance retires, but something essential will be missing. Elvis will have left the building.



The New York Times

November 12, 2015

Review: In ‘The Bachelors,’ Three Men Are Mired in Frat-Boy Misogyny

By Alexis Soloski

It’s Friday night on fraternity row in the unnamed college town of Caroline V. McGraw’s “[The Bachelors](#).” But by the end of this unlikely comedy, presented by [Lesser America](#) and Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, no one feels much like a party.

Henry (Quincy Dunn-Baker), Laurie (Babak Tafti) and Kevlar (Blake DeLong) graduated a decade and a half ago. They are apparently employable — Henry is a cellular biologist, Laurie is a businessman, Kevlar (né Kevin) does something or other — but none have ever married or moved in with a girlfriend. The house is an accumulation of DVDs, old Playboys and beer bottles. These gentlemen still believe that [Slim Jims](#) are a legitimate food source.

This delayed adolescence and these moldy furnishings ought to be fertile ground for a comedy about unreconstructed masculinity, but Ms. McGraw’s script keeps asking its characters to behave in ways too absurd for comedy and not funny enough for farce.

For the satire to be more scathing, it ought to have some relation to observable reality. We accept that Laurie, upon returning from a business trip, finds Kevlar in a state of profound inebriation, but how drunk must you be to call down from the shower: “I can’t find my penis! Oh man, oh man, did I leave it down there?” And don’t most worldly men know not to touch a stripper while she’s working?

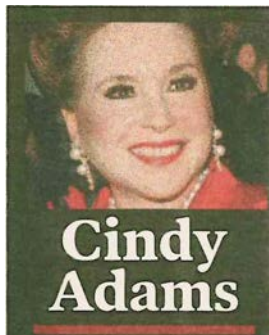
Still, under Portia Krieger’s direction, the fine actors are entertaining to watch. Mr. Dunn-Baker’s Henry may be an avowed sociopath, but that doesn’t prevent him from doing a droll lip sync to “[Help Me, Rhonda](#)” while scattering condoms like so much confetti. Maybe Rhonda can help with scripts, too?

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NEW YORK POST

November 11, 2015



Odds & ends

MANHATTAN Theatre Club Fall Benefit's **Alan Cumming**, **Cherry Jones**, **Nathan Lane**, **Phyllida Lloyd**, **Rob Marshall**, **Meryl Streep**, **Max von Essen** and 280 others honored **Christine Baranski**, who said: "I

thought it was supposed to be intimate!" ... MS. ex-governor/ex-VP candidate **Palin's** in town until Wednesday. Secret meetings ... **HALLE Berry** tattooed one main man's name on her rear. Came the divorce, she covered it (the tattoo, not the behind) with a large flower.

FOUR businessmen, caught smuggling 70,000 Viagra pills into the US?

They'll be sentenced to six months in prison. Hard time.

This is a joke going around **only in New York, kids, only in New York.**

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DAILY NEWS

November 12, 2015

CONFIDENTIAL

with Rachel Maresca

'BIRDMAN' IS A HOMING PIGEON

There was something of a homecoming for **Michael Keaton** when he went to see "Something Rotten!" at the St. James Theater — where he filmed his Oscar-winning movie, "Birdman." We're told the actor (inset) caught the show to see **Brian d'Arcy James** — his co-star in the movie "Spotlight" — perform. He hung out backstage after the show at "the theater he spent so much time at and recounted his favorite moment filming the infamous scene where he ran out of the theater into Times Square in his underwear," a spy said.





November 12, 2015

Cast Albums

Week of November 21, 2015

Two Weeks	Last Week	This Week	Title, Artist Imprint label	RIAA certification	Peak Pos.	Weeks on Chart
1	1	1	#1 Hamilton: An American Musical Original Broadway Cast Hamilton Uptown/Atlantic AG		1	6
	Re-Entry	2	Irving Berlin's White Christmas: The Musical Cast Recording Ghostlight/Sh-K-Boom Razor & Tie		2	23
2	8	3	Beautiful: The Carole King Musical Original Broadway Cast Recording Ghostlight/Sh-K-Boom Razor & Tie		1	81
3	2	4	Wicked Original Broadway Cast Recording Decca Broadway/Verve VG	▲ ▼	1	515
4	4	5	The Phantom Of The Opera Original London Cast Recording Really Useful/Polydor/Verve VG	▲	2	385
6	6	6	The Book Of Mormon Original Broadway Cast Recording Ghostlight/Sh-K-Boom Razor & Tie		1	234
15	3	7	The Lion King Original Broadway Cast Recording Walt Disney	▲ ▼	2	496
7	7	8	Something Rotten!: A Very New Musical Original Broadway Cast Recording Ghostlight/Sh-K-Boom Razor & Tie		1	23
	New	9	Be More Chill Original Cast Recording Ghostlight/Sh-K-Boom Razor & Tie		9	1
9	9	10	Finding Neverland Original Broadway Cast Republic		1	16