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BONEAU/BRYAN-BROWN
1501 BROADWAY, SUITE 1314
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10036
P: 212.575.3030 • F: 212.575.7534

THE MORNING LINE

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FROM: Melissa Cohen, Michelle Farabaugh
Lana Picciano, Angela Yamarone

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The New York Times

September 16, 2016

Arts, Briefly

'Something Rotten!' To Close in January

The musical comedy "Something Rotten!" will close on Jan. 1 after 742 performances.

The show, which opened at the St. James Theater in April 2015 and was nominated for 10 Tony Awards, centers on two Elizabethan playwrights trying to compete with Shakespeare.

Meanwhile, "The Humans," above, which this year won the Tony for best new play, will finish its run at the Schoenfeld Theater on Jan. 15. A new musical, "Come From Away," will begin performances at that theater on Feb. 18.

"The Humans," a family drama by Stephen Karam, began Broadway performances on Jan. 24 at the Helen Hayes Theater, and moved to the Schoenfeld last month. A spokesman for the show wouldn't rule out a continued run, adding in a statement: "We'll see what happens next."

MICHAEL PAULSON and
ANDREW R. CHOW



The New York Times

September 16, 2016

Review: 'Phaedra(s)' Goes Psycho With Isabelle Huppert

By: Charles Isherwood

Worst theater director's idea ever?

Maybe bringing onstage a large, high-resolution flat-screen television, on which is projected, multiple times, the shower scene from "Psycho."

I am by no means a worshiper at the altar of Alfred Hitchcock. Nonetheless, when that television screen slid onstage in "Phaedra(s)," a stultifying gloss on the story of the legendary Greek queen with an unfortunate love life, which can be endured — oh, sorry, seen — at the Brooklyn Academy of Music through Sunday, I became instantly transfixed. Here, at least, was vivid proof of a cogent directorial mind at work. Never before had I absorbed in such detail the brilliance of Hitchcock's shot-making in this most celebrated scene of violence.

Also, of course, it served as a happy (I guess) distraction from the ponderous if no less violent happenings onstage. "Phaedra(s)," directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, a Polish theater and opera director with a distinguished-sounding line of credits, stars the versatile French actor Isabelle Huppert, who gives a performance of terrific commitment, to little avail. The text is a mash-up of Sarah Kane's play "Phaedra's Love," a lurid but scabrously funny version of the legend; an adaptation of Euripides' and Seneca's dramas by Wajdi Mouawad; and, in its final sequence, a dramatized snippet from the South African Nobel Prize-winning novelist J. M. Coetzee's "Elizabeth Costello." (Technically, the text is described as being "after" Ms. Kane, Mr. Mouawad and Mr. Coetzee, since liberties are taken.)

In the first section, presumably "after" Mr. Mouawad, Ms. Huppert emotes frantically, even writhing on the floor like an animal in heat, in a zippered black miniskirt and white dreadlocks, her bloodied underpants at one point exposed. She is apparently initially meant to represent Aphrodite, goddess of love, and later transforms into Phaedra, who lusts after her stepson, Hippolyte (played by two actors, Gael Kamilindi and Andrzej Chyra).

Sample of the dialogue (spoken in French and seen in English supertitles): "When your heart thrills to an image ... you have no desire but to contemplate it. Nothing turns you away from it. You'd like to extinguish the stars ... and cover the world with a black sheet so that in the deepest darkness only that image can radiate with its full power. You give yourself to it, and it to you. You become vision. You become image."

It goes on, and on and on, from there.

If this kind of thing, which takes place in a vast spalike space with tiled and mirrored walls, is the kind you like, then by all means, "Phaedra(s)" — even the title is typographically annoying — will provide three and a half hours of sumptuous feasting. The continual parade of oddities includes a talking dog, an androgynous actor slinking around near-naked like a Vegas chorus girl, bits from Pasolini's "Teorema," simulated necrophilia and more.

Those who do not subscribe to the tenets of what is often called Eurotrash theater (sorry, beleaguered E.U.) should steer clear. These tenets might be summed up, to riff on the motto of the French republic, as “Obscurité, stupidité, éternité.”

The most comparatively engaging passages of the production come when Ms. Kane’s version of the Phaedra story take over, after a giant glass chamber slides onstage. By now Ms. Huppert has re-emerged looking rather more demure, playing Phaedra in a marcelled red wig and pale skirt and dainty shirt with a bow collar. She will eventually use that collar to kill herself, by the way, when things go wrong between her and Hippolyte (Mr. Chyra).

Hippolyte, looking skeezy and corrupt, shrugs at her advances and doesn’t seem particularly to enjoy it when Phaedra performs oral sex on him. “Can’t stand post-coital chats,” he says in a rare moment of levity. “There’s never anything to say.” He prefers to play with his remote-controlled toy car, and generally ignores “Psycho,” which is more than I could do. (“Psycho” was chosen, I suppose, because it’s sort of a reversion of the Phaedra story, about a boy with mommy issues, as opposed to a mommy with boy issues.)

Ms. Kane’s version pulsates with in-your-face vulgarity. In this loose adaptation the stage directions are included, as when Hippolyte blows his nose in a sock, and later ejaculates into another one. (Having fun yet?) A doctor (Alex Descas) interrogates Phaedra about Hippolyte’s zombielike mental state (“Does he have sex with you?”), but doesn’t get anywhere. Meanwhile, Hippolyte’s stepsister, called Strophe (Agata Buzek), wanders around in crystal-studded jeans and glittery heels, looking bored and mystified by her mother’s attraction to her stepbrother, at least until all hell breaks loose.

The evening concludes on a vastly different and rather tamer note, with Ms. Huppert appearing as Elizabeth Costello, the central character in Mr. Coetzee’s cryptic novel of that name, which consists primarily of a series of lectures given by Elizabeth, a noted Australian novelist.

Here she is being interviewed before giving a lecture about, vaguely, “eros,” and specifically the idea of sexual congress between mortals and gods that somehow gets around to including discussion of “Frances,” the movie in which Jessica Lange played the psychologically disturbed star Frances Farmer.

We see images from this movie, too, and while it cannot exactly be compared to the Alfred Hitchcock classic, it still provided a brief diversion from the interminably indulgent happenings onstage.



The New York Times

September 14, 2016

Jack Hofsiss, Stage Director of 'The Elephant Man,' Dies at 65

By William Grimes

Jack Hofsiss, who became the youngest director to win a Tony Award when, at 28, he was honored for his work on "The Elephant Man" in 1979, and who resumed his career after being paralyzed in a diving accident, died on Tuesday at his home in Manhattan. He was 65.

His sister Christine Schruntek confirmed his death. She did not give a specific cause but said that he had been experiencing respiratory problems for some time.

Mr. Hofsiss was directing for Joe Papp at the Public Theater in New York when he became interested in a play that had been staged in 1977 at the Hampstead Theater in London. Set in Victorian England, the play, by Bernard Pomerance, an American living in London, was based on the true story of the hideously deformed Joseph Merrick and his struggle to adapt to society.

With the producer Richmond Crinkley, for whom he had worked at the Folger Theater in Washington, and with Philip Anglim in the role of Merrick, Mr. Hofsiss mounted a pared-down production of "The Elephant Man" at St. Peter's Church in Manhattan. The reviews were ecstatic. In The New York Times, Walter Kerr called it "easily the most riveting new serious play we've had to contend with all season."

He added, "You don't want to miss the musically precise staging of Jack Hofsiss."

The accolades continued when the play transferred to the Booth Theater on Broadway, where it ran for more than 900 performances.

In addition to Mr. Hofsiss, Carole Shelley, who played Madge Kendal, the woman who takes an interest in Merrick, shared a Tony for best actress in a play with Constance Cummings for her role in "Wings," and Mr. Anglim was nominated for best actor. (David Bowie and Mark Hamill were among several actors who stepped into the role of Merrick.)

Mr. Hofsiss later directed the television version of the play, broadcast in 1982.

"Everything is there in the script," he told The Times in 1979, "yet it's as though you're carving a sculpture out of a beautiful piece of stone, frightening but rewarding."

Mr. Hofsiss suddenly found himself one of the most sought-after directors in the business. He took on projects for stage and television, and Hollywood beckoned. As part of a three-picture deal with Paramount, he directed Jill Clayburgh in "I'm Dancing as Fast as I Can" (1982).

But in late July 1985, just days before he was scheduled to start rehearsals for the Philip Barry play "Paris Bound" at the Berkshire Theater Festival in Massachusetts, he fractured three vertebrae when he dove into the swimming pool of a house he had rented on Fire Island and hit his head on the bottom. He was left paralyzed from the chest down.

“They told me unless something miraculous happened, I would never walk again,” he told People magazine in 1987. “I wanted to avoid that conversation as long as possible. I’m in show business. I don’t want reality.”

He did not walk again. But he did direct.

After working through suicidal depression and nearly a year of grueling rehabilitation, he returned to the theater to direct “All the Way Home” at the Berkshire festival. He continued to direct Off Broadway and regional productions, adjusting to his limitations.

“I was never a jump-up-and-show-the-actor-how-to-do-it kind of director, but I certainly worked off my nervous energy by pacing around,” he told The Washington Post in 1997. “That was no longer possible. As a result I was forced to become more articulate and concise — not such bad attributes, but not so easy either.”

John Bernard Hofsiss was born on Sept. 28, 1950, in Brooklyn and grew up there in the Canarsie neighborhood. His father, Christian, was an export executive with Bethlehem Steel. His mother, the former Cecilia Loughlin, was a parochial-school teacher.

He had a Jesuit education: Brooklyn Prep and then Georgetown University, where he had intended to study English literature but shifted his energies to the theater.

He acted in small roles at the Arena Theater in Washington and at Georgetown directed “Noon,” by Terrence McNally, and “Senior Prom,” a musical he wrote with Bill Bremer. A forerunner to “Grease,” it ran for nine months in Washington.

He joined the Folger Theater Group there, founded by Mr. Crinkley, and took the starring role in its first production, the rock musical “Dionysus Wants You.” More promisingly, he directed “Twelfth Night” and caught the eye of Mr. Papp, who brought him to the Public Theater.

He started out in the casting department there — he worked on “A Chorus Line” — and went on to direct Thomas Rabe’s “Rebel Woman” and three plays by Israel Horovitz.

After the success of “The Elephant Man,” Mr. Hofsiss accepted several television projects, including “The Sorrows of Gin,” one of three John Cheever stories dramatized in “Three by Cheever” on PBS in 1979, with Edward Herrmann and Sigourney Weaver in the lead roles. He also directed Henry Fonda and Cloris Leachman in the television movie “The Oldest Living Graduate” (1980) and Jessica Lange, Tommy Lee Jones and Rip Torn in “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” (1984).

Before his accident, he directed “Total Abandon” (1983), a short-lived Broadway play with Richard Dreyfuss and John Heard. He had greater success Off Broadway with “Poor Little Lambs” (1982), Paul Rudnick’s play about a year in the life of the Yale singing group the Whiffenpoofs.

The accident plunged him into an existential crisis. “Whenever good things happen to you,” he told The Post, “you say to yourself, ‘Of course! Good things should happen to me. I’m fabulous.’ When the bad things happen, you scream: ‘Why?!?’ Obviously, when I had my accident, that question made for six months of deep and profound thought. But there is no answer. Eventually, I realized I had to give up asking.”

For a long time he secluded himself in his apartment, resentful and despairing.

“He was going through a terrible depression and wanted to kill himself,” his full-time caretaker, Maureen Laffey, told The Post. “It got to the point where I wouldn’t leave him in the apartment with friends, for fear that

he would get them to help him. So I finally made a deal with him. I said: ‘If, after your first show, you still find that life is not worth it, I’ll do it. I’ll help you.’”

An invitation from Josephine Abady, then the director of the Berkshire festival, to direct “All the Way Home” turned out to be his lifeline. He went on to New York to direct “The Subject Was Roses” at the Roundabout Theater in 1991; a short-lived revival, in late 1994, of “The Shadow Box,” Michael Cristofer’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play about terminal cancer patients, and Kevin Elyot’s comedy-drama “My Night With Reg” for the New Group in 1997. His most recent effort was an Off Broadway production of Albert Innaurato’s “Doubtless” in 2014.

Mr. Hofsiss taught directing and acting at the HB Studio and at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. Besides his sister Christine, he is survived by two other sisters: Patricia Panagos, known as Tricia, and Judy Andariese.

Correction: September 14, 2016

An earlier version of this obituary misidentified the organization for which a production of Albert Innaurato’s one-act play “Doubtless,” directed by Mr. Hofsiss, was mounted in 2014. It was produced as part of the 59E59 Theaters’ annual Summer Shorts series, not for the New Group. The earlier version also misstated the circumstances under which Mr. Hofsiss directed a revival of the play “The Shadow Box” in late 1994. He did so after he was paralyzed in a diving accident, not before.

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Newsday

September 14, 2016

‘Marie and Rosetta’ Review: A Dazzling Look at Music History

By: Linda Winer

If much of the world has forgotten Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Marie Knight — and, certainly, a lot of us have — playwright George Brant makes an intimate yet spectacular case for correcting that wrong.

In just 90 minutes, “Marie and Rosetta” does more than introduce two women with a little-known story about black music in the mid-20th century. With Kecia Lewis as the raucously wise and been-around Rosetta, and Rebecca Naomi Jones as what the veteran calls her “high-church” prodigy, the production manages to tell their story, take us into the nuanced evolution of a musical collaboration and friendship, and deliver the music that, whether we know it or not, is part of rock and roll legend.

You don’t need Marie to say late in the succinct and touching play that Rosetta, with her gospel-flavored blues and her pioneering electric guitar, infused such rock and roll superstars as, for starters, Elvis Presley and Jimi Hendrix.

In director Neil Pepe’s sly, expert chamber musical at his Atlantic Theater Company, Lewis and Jones don’t just portray the women on what appears to be their first rehearsal in the casket room of a funeral parlor before their first concert in a tobacco warehouse in Mississippi, 1946. These actors also sing, whisper and wail the wonderful songs — including “This Train” and “Down by the Riverside” — and are so convincing at the piano and guitar that it’s hard to believe they are not playing. Fairness demands that credit goes to Felicia Collins and Deah Harriott behind the scrim.

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September 16, 2016



**Behind
the
Curtain**
MATT WINDMAN
amNewYork theater critic

'Groundhog Day'
confirmed for Broadway

As expected, the new musical adaptation of the **Bill Murray** film "Groundhog Day," which just opened to rave reviews in London, will open on Broadway in April, just before the Tony Awards eligibility date. It will play the August Wilson Theatre, where "Jersey Boys" is about to close. The production reunites director **Matthew Warchus** and songwriter **Tim Minchin**, who worked together on "Matilda." **Danny Rubin**, who co-authored the film's screenplay, is the musical's book-writer.

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VARIETY

September 15, 2016

Broadway's 'Something Rotten!' to Close in January

By Gordon Cox



Broadway's "Something Rotten!," a raucous Renaissance musical comedy, will close in January after a run of a bit less than two years.

The show, the tale of two brothers who accidentally invent musical theater in their attempts to overshadow Shakespeare, saw sales snowball to more than \$1 million a week in the wake of its April 2015 opening. Grosses remained in the millionaires' club throughout that summer, although they began to taper in the fall.

It's not yet certain whether the production will manage to recoup its \$14 million capitalization costs before it closes on Broadway. Either way, producers, led by Kevin McCollum, can expect additional revenue from a national tour that launches in Boston in January.

"Something Rotten!" has music and lyrics by Wayne Kirkpatrick with a book by Karey Kirkpatrick and John O'Farrell. Casey Nicholaw ("The Book of Mormon," "Aladdin") directs and choreographs. The cast, which originally starred Brian D'Arcy James ("Spotlight") in the lead role, is now headed by Rob McClure appearing alongside Will Chase, Josh Grisetti and Leslie Kritzer.

"Something Rotten!" will shutter at the St. James Theater Jan. 1. The next tenant of the venue hasn't yet been officially confirmed, but industry insiders widely expect it to be Disney's upcoming Broadway version of "Frozen," should that title remain on schedule.

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AP

September 16, 2016

Musical 'Something Rotten!' to close on Broadway on Jan. 1

By Mark Kennedy



NEW YORK (AP) — The Tony Award best musical nominee "Something Rotten!" — a valentine to Broadway shows — will close on the Great White Way early next year.

Kevin McCollum, the Tony-winning producer whose Broadway credits include "The Drowsy Chaperone" and "Rent," said Thursday the show will end its run Jan. 1 after 742 total performances. A national tour kicks off in Boston on Jan. 17 and McCollum said he's in talks for potential productions in Japan and London, among other places.

"I think it's a show that people will come to learn about and, hopefully like other shows like 'Chicago,' as it gets older, it gets more popular," he said in a phone interview. "It's a title that we're still building into a brand."

The comedy is set in 1595 England and portrays William Shakespeare as an arrogant, rock star playwright. Two brothers desperate to write a hit show in his shadow stumble on the notion of writing the world's first musical.

It opened in spring 2015 on Broadway at the St. James Theatre, one of the rare new musicals to not be based on a previous work, whether a book or a film. McCollum said the show "is well on its way to recoupment."

It ran the longest of any musical from that spring season, including "Fun Home," the best new musical Tony winner in 2015. "We definitely got more laughs per dollar than most," McCollum said.

Karey Kirkpatrick co-wrote the songs with his brother, Wayne, and co-wrote the story with John O'Farrell, all of whom made their Broadway debuts. O'Farrell is a British author and commentator known for the books "The Man Who Forgot His Wife" and "The Best a Man Can Get."

Wayne Kirkpatrick is a Grammy Award-winning songwriter of such tunes as "Change the World" for Eric Clapton and "Wrapped Up In You" by Garth Brooks. His brother is a screenwriter who helped write films including "Chicken Run," "James and the Giant Peach" and "Over the Hedge."

"We'll hear more from those guys. They're doing some great work," McCollum said. "I think we'll be doing a lot more together so I'm excited."

"Something Rotten!" originally starred "Next to Normal" star Brian d'Arcy James, Tony-winner Christian Borle ("Peter and the Starcatcher") and Tony-nominees John Cariani and Brooks Ashmanskas. Borle won a Tony as the rock star Shakespeare and the musical was nominated for best book, best score, orchestrations and best costume. James got a nod for best lead actor in a musical and Brad Oscar got one for featured actor. Director Casey Nicholaw was nominated for best direction and choreography.

"Something Rotten!" outlasted other musicals from the spring 2015 season like "The Visit," "The King and I," "Finding Neverland," "Gigi" and "On the Twentieth Century" and "It Shoulda Been You."

"Broadway — the economics are tough. Real estate is expensive. Advertising is expensive. Tickets are expensive," McCollum said. "A lot of the economics are built on full-price tickets but yet most of these shows have to survive at less than full price. And that's why we're seeing so much turnover right now."

Online: <http://www.RottenBroadway.com>