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THE MORNING LINE

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The New York Times

JANUARY 26, 2015

Arts, Briefly

Compiled by *Lori Holcomb-Holland*

Larry David Racks Up A Big Broadway Advance

Larry David's stage debut, "Fish in the Dark," has set a Broadway record for advance ticket sales for a play before performances begin, taking in \$13.5 million. It's an extraordinary number driven by audience demand and a willingness to pay high ticket prices of up to \$425, an amount that few plays have charged before. Plays with popular stars (**Bradley Cooper** in "The Elephant Man," **Bryan Cranston** in "All the Way") often have advance sales of several million dollars, while even many musicals — which tend to be bigger sellers than plays — often struggle to build an eight-figure advance. A spokesman for the play's lead producer, **Scott Rudin**, confirmed the figure on Sunday. It beats the previous record for a play, \$13.05 million for the 2013 revival of Harold Pinter's "Betrayal," another Rudin production, starring the real-life couple **Daniel Craig** and **Rachel Weisz**. Mr. David (above) is widely known as the star of HBO's "Curb Your Enthusiasm" and co-creator and head writer of "Seinfeld." He is both the author and star of "Fish in the Dark," his first play, a comedy about a death in the family. "Fish in the Dark," directed by **Anna D. Shapiro** (a Tony winner for "August: Osage County"), is scheduled to begin performances on Feb. 2 at the Cort Theater.

PATRICK HEALY

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The New York Times



January 26, 2015

Doctor in the House? Not After Sunday

By Laura Collins-Hughes

“Shlomo’s back!” was the triumphant slogan when “Soul Doctor,” the Broadway musical about the guitar-strumming rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, [reopened Off Broadway](#) in December. But the show, which lasted not quite three months [on Broadway](#) in 2013, won’t make it to the two-month mark at the Actors Temple Theater, where its last performance is Sunday.

Jeremy Chess, the retina surgeon who conceived the musical and is its sole producer Off Broadway, said the future of the show is uncertain, though there are “a few possibilities” for taking it on the road, including to Florida and Israel.

“Soul Doctor” began Off Broadway in 2008, where it returned in 2012 before being moved to the Circle in the Square theater on Broadway. Shortened after that run and retooled to work with fewer actors in a smaller space, the new production was meant in part to entice presenters into touring it. To be running during the Association of Performing Arts Presenters conference earlier this month was “one of our main goals,” Dr. Chess said.

The other goal, to keep the production going at the Actors Temple, proved too expensive, he said, though he declined to say how much the show had cost. “We came in way higher than we might have,” he said. “You really have to have a big hit to sustain that.”

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JANUARY 25, 2015

Daughters in the Business

A provocative play connects
Betty Gilpin and Halley Feiffer

By LAURA COLLINS-HUGHES



SAM HODGSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"I think you sort of have a love affair, a lot of girls do, with your dad," said Halley Feiffer, above at far right, with Betty Gilpin, who is starring in Ms. Feiffer's play "I'm Gonna Pray for You So Hard," at the Atlantic Theater Company's Stage 2, above left. Both women have fathers (and mothers) in theater.

A play looks at 'extreme narcissism and bottomless self-loathing.'

BETTY GILPIN AND HALLEY FEIFFER suspect they must have crossed paths as infants, lolling in some green room or other. The actor Reed Birney has told them he remembers them as little girls. Ms. Gilpin, 28, and Ms. Feiffer, 30, grew up belonging to the same hothouse subculture: the children of theater people.

"Halley and I both spent a lot of time in stage managers' booths with pacifiers in our mouths," said Ms. Gilpin, who went on to act herself (TV's "Nurse Jackie," Off Broadway's "Where We're Born"). The daughter of the actors Jack Gilpin and Ann McDonough, she never considered any other career — "and my parents begged me to," she said.

Ms. Feiffer also went on to act — and write. Her obsidian-dark comic drama "I'm Gonna Pray for You So Hard," which opened on Tuesday at Atlantic Theater Company's Stage 2, is set in the world of artists and their children, where talent is only one component of legacy.

Ms. Gilpin portrays Ella, an obscure 20-something actress whose father (played

by Mr. Birney) is an esteemed Broadway playwright. Ella worships him, but his love for her is tinged with contempt. He razzes her for even suggesting she might become anything but an artist. All he ever wanted was to be famous, and he pushes her hard to want that, too.

"I'm so interested in fame," Ms. Feiffer said the other evening in a tiny office on Delancey Street, where she writes for

"The One Percent," a coming Starz television series by the creators of the movie "Birdman." "This is something so many people, especially in this industry, are grasping for, and yet I don't know one person who it's ever made happy and filled the hole within them. It's a drug."

The daughter of the cartoonist, playwright and screenwriter Jules Feiffer and the monologist Jenny Allen ("I Got Sick Then I Got Better"), Ms. Feiffer was 12 when she got an agent and started auditioning for acting roles. By the time she was in high school at Horace Mann, she had taken up playwriting, too.

She and Ms. Gilpin got to be friends several years ago, when they kept running into each other at auditions. "We had done a couple of pilot seasons in L.A. together," Ms. Feiffer recalled. "We bonded over how fish-out-of-water we felt there."

But it was Ms. Gilpin's performance in Lucy Thurber's "Where We're Born," at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater in 2013, that persuaded Ms. Feiffer to send her the script for "I'm Gonna Pray," which the actress calls "an impassioned letter" to the theater.

"She really, really nails the simultaneous extreme narcissism and bottomless self-loathing that are hand-in-hand in most artists," Ms. Gilpin said. "One moment we could be like, 'I'm the worst actor in the world, I should leave the business, I'm terrible — but if I were to win an Oscar, what would I say? And what should I wear?'"

In "I'm Gonna Pray," Ella serves at first largely as a bolster to her father's enormous ego and as a target for his vicious flashes of temper. Their late-night drinking-and-drugging binge in the family's Up-

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SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

per West Side kitchen is a poisonous bonding ritual, filled with envy of their rivals and lust for acclaim. In the second section, five years later, there has been a rift between father and daughter; Ella's life is in a starkly different state.

"I think you sort of have a love affair, a lot of girls do, with your dad," Ms. Feiffer said. "And then something happens, like it does in the play, where it's almost like a breakup or something."

The play's setup tantalizes with echoes of real life, but Ms. Feiffer said her script is a what-if: a version of what her life might have been "in some other, horrible, alternate, demented, warped, nightmarish reality." The autobiography is in the emotions — like "the feeling when I was younger that I have to be successful or my life is nothing."

"Hopefully, I wasn't really like Ella, but like Ella divided by 7,000," she said.

Neil Pepe, Atlantic's artistic director, nonetheless senses echoes between Ms. Feiffer's work and her life. "To what extent this play is based on her relationship with her dad, to what extent it's not — maybe it's somewhere in between — there's no question there's resonance," he said.

The family resemblance shows up in the fearlessness of Ms. Feiffer's writing, he added: "I'm even thinking of Jules Feiffer's work like 'Carnal Knowledge.' You look at that film and you think, 'That's a pretty brutal, honest film about men going after women. He doesn't pull punches.'"

Ms. Feiffer stopped drinking six years ago, and since then alcoholism has been a theme in her work, including her 2013 play "How to Make Friends and Then Kill Them." In the 2013 movie "He's Way More

Famous Than You," which she wrote with Ryan Spahn, she stars as an alcoholic actress named Halley Feiffer, who makes a movie about her family called "Capturing the Feiffers." (She also kidnaps Ben Still-er: a fairly clear signal that this is not a documentary.)

Part of the impetus for writing the new play was to show the flip side of growing up with successful parents. "It's not always what it looks like," she said. "I don't think anyone's life is what you think it is."

Still, she does credit her own parents with giving her confidence in her ability to do anything she wants as an artist.

And neither the father nor the daughter in the play is a monster, she said; both are victims, and both are culpable.

"I've added in lines for the father where he says: 'I love being a father. I had no idea I'd love it so much.' And I think that's really true for him. Everything he does is to help her," she said. "It might be misguided, and it might not be actually in the long run very helpful, to put it mildly, but he's really working with the best tools he has. He just wasn't given a full set of tools."

For Ms. Gilpin, the "Halleyness of the writing" has posed an unusual, and welcome, acting challenge — "going as high in orgasmic ecstasy as you can go and then plummeting to the bottom of your depression in this-deep, dark well — and then you're up again."

"I spent a lot of time in college studying theater of the absurd and Beckett and Genet, and then I spent a lot of time after that at 'Gossip Girl' auditions, thinking, 'Wow, I really wasted my money,'" she said. "But now I think about that stuff all the time."

QUOTABLE

"We bonded over how fish-out-of-water we felt there."

HALLEY FEIFFER, ON MEETING ANOTHER NEW YORK ACTRESS DURING TV AUDITIONS IN LOS ANGELES, PAGE 6



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The New York Times

January 25, 2015

A Frightening and Feral First Love 'Let the Right One In,' a Stark Vampire Love Story

By Ben Brantley

Few bloodsuckers are as irresistible as Eli, the wan and abject heroine of "Let the Right One In," which quietly shivered open on Sunday night to wring your heart while scaring the mortal stuffing out of you. True, Eli is nothing like the beautiful It vampires who slither across screens in movies like "Only Lovers Left Alive" and the "Twilight" series.

As portrayed by the remarkable Rebecca Benson in this gut-clutching import from the National Theater of Scotland, now at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn through Feb. 15, Eli resembles some stunted woodland plant, long deprived of sun and nourishment. Her glamour quotient is nil, as are her social skills, and she is said to smell like a cross between pus and a wet dog.

Yet she speaks to that little creature in all of us that will always feel rejected and alone in this big, brutal world. And she somehow confirms your darkest suspicions that the human race isn't even worth belonging to. For a lad like Oskar (Cristian Ortega), a social pariah just entering puberty, she is oh so easy to love.

Adapted by Jack Thorne from a novel and screenplay by the Swedish writer John Ajvide Lindqvist, and killingly staged by John Tiffany and Steven Hoggett, "Let the Right One In" is both the bleakest and most compassionate of vampire stories. It provides the surface frissons you expect from portraits of the undead, with graphic bloodletting and a couple of great "gotcha" (in the neck) moments. (There's a reason the credits include a special effects designer, Jeremy Chernick.)

But the play is scary in deeper ways. In presenting an eternal, innocently murderous child as the ideal playmate for a bullied boy from a broken home, "Right One" addresses our most primitive instincts for retribution, the same ones that animated our adolescent revenge fantasies against everyone who spurned or humiliated us.

This work also plays subliminally with our fears that all love is doomed to decay. Don't expect exalted promises of a passion beyond the grave. The depiction of relationships in "Right One" ultimately has more in common with the gray fatalism of Ingmar Bergman than the purple romance of the "Twilight" fantasies.

The same emotional starkness was evident in the excellent 2008 Swedish movie, directed by Tomas Alfredson, which combined a heightened, anti-cosmetic naturalism with digital special effects. (I didn't see the 2010 American remake, "Let Me In.") It was hardly an obvious candidate for translation into a play.

Yet Mr. Tiffany and his longtime collaborator, Mr. Hoggett, have a gift for extracting a visual, expressly theatrical poetry from all sorts of sources. Their work ranges from "Black Watch," based on interviews with Scottish soldiers deployed to Iraq, to Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie," seen to revelatory effect on Broadway in 2013. An ache of unending solitude — and a longing for connection — infused every movement in their "Menagerie."

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The same sensibility pulses through “Right One,” which takes place in a somber, denuded variation on the classic enchanted forest. Well, technically it is set in a Stockholm suburb in the 1980s.

But as designed by Christine Jones, with phosphorescent lighting by Chahine Yavroyan, the stage is a spartan snowscape populated by tall, leafless trees that look as if they have been ill-used by humanity and nature. Murders have been happening in these woods when the play begins.

But this is also a place where townspeople regularly wander in the sort of trance that overtakes people getting lost in their daily business. The ensemble moves with the ritualized gestures, suggesting both quotidian monotony and restless inner aspirations, that have become Mr. Hoggett’s signature.

The cast members also bring in the minimal scenery required to evoke the interiors of Oskar’s unhappy existence. They include the locker room in the public school where he is abused daily by cockier boys, and the apartment he shares with his embittered, suffocating, alcoholic mother (Susan Vidler), in a sterile housing estate.

Oskar’s drab world is enlivened by the endlessly discussed local murders — in which the victims are hung from trees and drained of their blood, like animals in an abattoir — and the arrival of the elfin Eli with a gaunt old man (Cliff Burnett) she says is her father. Could these events be related?

But of course. “Right One” isn’t a mystery in the usual sense. (Only Olafur Arnalds’s pretty-creepy cinematic music suggests that it might be.) Most discoveries here aren’t those of the conventional thriller but of the classic coming-of-age story, in which a boy begins to see the grown-up world with disillusioned eyes.

Mr. Ortega conveys this awakening with a perfect, pathetic mix of anger and helplessness. What luck for Oskar to have met Eli. With her antiquated, affectless speech and utter cluelessness about all things contemporary, she is even more of a freak than he imagines himself to be.

But despite her small, frail-looking body, she is exceedingly strong and agile and when her stomach rumbles, it sounds like astral thunder. (Gareth Fry did the sensational sound design.) Mess with her at your peril.

I was certainly impressed by Ms. Benson’s performance when I saw it last summer in London. Watching it a second time has only increased my admiration. Her Eli is a feral creature, as amoral as a wolf cub, and yet possessed by a sad, all-too-human knowingness. She manages to be both completely un-self-conscious and equally, tragically self-aware.

When she cries out, “Help me,” in that tiny, broken voice, anyone’s impulse would be to rush to her aid. There is total sincerity and bottomless need in that cry. Of course the odds are she’ll destroy you if you come to her assistance.

But unlike the human beings she must live among, who ultimately aren’t so different in their basic impulses, she isn’t a hypocrite. Falling in love with her is probably not a good idea, for ever so many reasons. Yet in the context of this exquisitely sad and witty play, it’s not the worst choice a boy could make.

Let the Right One In

Adapted by Jack Thorne; based on the Swedish novel and film by John Ajvide Lindqvist; directed by John Tiffany; associate director/movement by Steven Hoggett; sets and costumes by Christine Jones; music by Olafur Arnalds; lighting by Chahine Yavroyan; sound by Gareth Fry; special effects designed by Jeremy Chernick. A National Theater of Scotland production, presented by arrangement with Bill Kenwright and Marla

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Rubin Productions, in association with Piece by Piece Productions, and presented by St. Ann's Warehouse, Susan Feldman, artistic director; Andrew D. Hamingson, executive director. At St. Ann's Warehouse, 29 Jay Street, at Plymouth Street, Dumbo, Brooklyn, 718-254-8779, stannswarehouse.org. Through Feb. 15. Running time: 2 hours 15 minutes.

WITH: Rebecca Benson (Eli), Cliff Burnett (Hakan), Graeme Dalling (Jonny), Andrew Fraser (Micke), Gavin Kean (Halmberg/Mr. Avila), Gary Mackay (Kurt/Jocke/Nils/Dad/Stefan), Angus Miller (Torkel/Janne/Jimmy), Cristian Ortega (Oskar) and Susan Vidler (Oskar's Mum).

The New York Times

January 25, 2015

A Valiant Cub Goes on the Hunt 'Lionboy,' a Fairy Tale Set in a Dystopian Future

By Charles Isherwood

The Disney feline that has bestrode Broadway for well over a decade has a lot going for it, obviously, but at "Lionboy," playing a few blocks south at the New Victory Theater on West 42nd Street, the audience gets to do something it doesn't at "The Lion King," namely let out a big, gutsy roar in the middle of the show.

The youngsters in the audience at this spirited, inventive entertainment, the first children's show from the acclaimed British troupe Complicite, clearly delighted in this moment of audience participation. But I heard just as much guttural bellowing from the adults, letting forth with their inner Katy Perry, I suppose.

Adapted by Marcelo Dos Santos from the trilogy by Zizou Corder (a pseudonym for the novelist Louisa Young and her daughter Isabel Adomakoh Young), and directed by Clive Mendus and James Yeatman, the production falls in with Complicite tradition by employing often minimal theatrical means to maximum effect. The simple set, by Jon Bausor and Jean Chan, is a large, weather-beaten disc on which the cast deploys a few basic props: a series of wooden and metal ladders become a boat or the walls of a prison cell.

The eight nimble actors in the cast use their bodies and their voices to do much of the storytelling, which involves generous passages of direct narration. This sometimes dampens the theatrical momentum, but given the fantastic realms into which the story ventures, the reliance on direct address is understandable. It would require a "Lion King"-sized budget, and then some, to fully dramatize onstage the events conjured in "Lionboy."

Set in a dystopian future in which corporations are more powerful than governments (that doesn't sound so very futuristic, does it?) and cellphones are powered by sunlight, the tale rockets into motion when the young hero, the London-dwelling Charlie Ashanti (Martins Imhangbe), comes home one day to find that his parents have disappeared.

This classic fairy-tale trope has political dimensions in "Lionboy." Charlie's parents are scientists who've been working on a cure for asthma, which has mysteriously spread to epidemic proportions. Charlie himself suffers from it, and he eventually learns that they have fallen foul of the malevolent Corporacy, a bigger-than-big-pharma company that controls much of the industry. And, purrs its C.E.O., played with sinister detachment by Mr. Mendus, "We offer the most incredible dividends to our shareholders."

We meet the feline cast of the show when Charlie turns to the local cats for reconnaissance about what happened to his parents. Charlie, it seems, can speak the language of cats of all kinds. Mr. Imhangbe, whose glowing performance as Charlie provides the show with an inviting emotional center, also portrays many of the assorted felines he comes across.

Charlie earns his nickname when he joins a French circus and displays a natural ability to keep the lions in line. As if Charlie's quest to find his parents didn't provide the story with enough of a heart-stirring through-line, he also takes responsibility for liberating those circus lions, whose oppression he witnesses in grim detail.

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The plot of “Lionboy” careers from England to France to Venice to Northern Africa, with Charlie meeting various fanciful characters, including the frisky cat Sergei (a charmingly vaudevillian Eric Mallett), who reveals that he, like many others, has been genetically modified by the Corporacy to be highly allergenic; and a lizard — sorry, I mean chameleon — named Ninu (Lisa Kerr), who reveals her own unusual linguistic skills when Charlie is trapped in the bowels of the Corporacy and she helps liberate him by speaking directly to the computer systems.

The vibrant cast and the exotic storytelling combine to propel “Lionboy” forward at a heady pace, although the adaptation is always clear enough for children to follow. In truth, adults accustomed to more linear narratives may have a harder time absorbing its twists. I occasionally found myself a bit fuzzy-headed in the busy second act, but part of the pleasure of the tale is its whimsical digressions.

And there’s certainly nothing too hard to follow about moral precepts in “Lionboy.” These are clarified, in case we hadn’t caught on before, in a climactic prizefight between Charlie and his erstwhile friend and neighbor, Rafi (a buoyant Angel Lopez-Silva), who’s gone over to the dark side and aided the Corporacy in its plot to ensnare Charlie’s parents.

This bout is really more of a debate than an exchange of punches, and the winning side’s argument (and the show’s message) can be boiled down to a few words: megacorporations, bad; cats and the people who love them, good.

Lionboy

Based on the novels by Zizou Corder; adapted by Marcelo Dos Santos; directed by Clive Mendus and James Yeatman; designed by Jon Bausor and Jean Chan; original lighting by Tim Mascal, revival lighting by Christopher Nairne; music by Stephen Hiscock; sound by Tom Gibbons; movement by Mr. Mendus and Kasia Zaremba-Byrne; production manager, Niall Black; company stage manager, Ian Andlaw; technical stage manager, David Blackmore; produced by Judith Dimant; associate producer, Marianne Dicker. A Complicite production, presented by the New 42nd Street, Cora Cahan, president. At the New Victory Theater, 209 West 42nd Street, Manhattan; 646-223-3010, newvictory.org. Through Sunday. Running time: 2 hours.

WITH: Femi Elufowoju Jr. (Maccomo/Aneba Ashanti), Victoria Gould (Madame Barbue/Magdalen Start), Martins Imhangbe (Charlie Ashanti), Lisa Kerr (Pirouette/Ninu), Angel Lopez-Silva (Rafi Sadler), Eric Mallett (Sergei), Clive Mendus (Chief Executive) and Dan Milne (Mr. Ubsworth/Major Tib/King Boris).

The New York Times

January 26, 2015

Shades of ‘Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-in’: Sock It to Me

By Neil Genzlinger

In its humor, “Everybody Gets Cake!” the comedy troupe Parallel Exit’s new show at 59E59 Theaters, is a throwback. Specifically, it’s a throwback to 1968.

That is the year “Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In” took television by storm (after having been introduced as a television special in 1967). “Everybody Gets Cake!” is so reminiscent of the show that it’s presumably a homage. Not only do the rear panels of the set have doors like the “Laugh-In” wall (and, yes, performers stick out their heads to deliver jokes), but some of the characters we see are also clearly descendants of Arte Johnson’s.

Structurally, too, the show is a child of “Laugh-In,” mixing recurring bits with one-shot gags. Less deliberately, it has the hit-or-miss quality of “Laugh-In.” The best material is wryly amusing, but not all of it works.

That makes “Everybody Gets Cake!” a thinner show than “Room 17B,” the troupe’s rollicking 2011 offering at 59E59. A skit about a Novocain abuse hotline is pretty hilarious, as is one about an invisible rake. But the tone wanders from vignette to vignette, which makes it hard to latch on to the overall package.

The troupe may be a victim of its own versatility. The performers — Danny Gardner (Ryan Kasprzak took over for him beginning on Saturday), Joel Jeske and Brent McBeth, under Mark Lonergan’s direction — can invoke Charlie Chaplin, Danny Kaye, Victor Borge or more recent comic styles pretty effectively, but that doesn’t mean that tossing them all together results in a consistent performance.

So go into this show expecting to admire technique rather than to laugh nonstop. The most satisfying skit is the one least interested in drawing guffaws: a recurring bit featuring an aged man in some kind of care center who waits daily for visitors who never come. It’s genuinely touching.

The show’s biggest surprise comes at the end. Given the number of characters who flit through, it’s startling when only three men materialize to take bows.

“Everybody Gets Cake!” continues through Feb. 8 at 59E59 Theaters, 59 East 59th Street, Manhattan; 212-279-4200, 59e59.org.

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The New York Times

January 26, 2015

Joe Franklin, an Enduring TV Personality, Dies at 88

By James Barron

Joe Franklin, who became a New York institution by presiding over one of the most compellingly low-rent television programs in history, one that even he acknowledged was an oddly long-running parade of has-beens and yet-to-bes interrupted from time to time by surprisingly famous guests, died on Saturday in a hospice in Manhattan. He was 88.

Steve Garrin, Mr. Franklin's producer and longtime friend, said the cause was prostate cancer.

A short, pudgy performer with a sandpapery voice that bespoke old-fashioned show business razzle-dazzle, Mr. Franklin, the star of "The Joe Franklin Show," was one of local television's most enduring personalities. He took his place behind his desk and in front of the camera day after day in the 1950s and night after night in the 1960s, '70s, '80s and '90s.

In 1993, he said that he had hosted more than 300,000 guests in his more than 40 years on the air. Another way to have interviewed that many people would have been to go to Riverside, Calif., or Corpus Christi, Tex., and talk to everyone in town. He may have been exaggerating, but whatever the number was, it was impressive.

And although he never made the move from local television in New York to the slicker, bigger realms of the networks, he was recognizable enough to have been parodied by Billy Crystal on "[Saturday Night Live](#)" and mentioned on "[The Simpsons](#)."

What came to be considered campy began as pioneering programming: the first regular program that Channel 7 had ever broadcast at noon. WJZ-TV, as the station was known then, had not been signing on until late afternoon before the premiere of "Joe Franklin — Disk Jockey" on Jan. 8, 1951.

Soon celebrities like Elvis Presley, Bing Crosby and John F. Kennedy were making their way to the dingy basement studio on West 67th Street — a room with hot lights that was "twice the size of a cab," Mr. Franklin recalled in 2002. He booked Woody Allen, Dustin Hoffman, Barbra Streisand, Bill Cosby and Liza Minnelli as guests when they were just starting out, and hired two other young performers, Bette Midler and Barry Manilow, as his in-house singer and accompanist.

"My show was often like a zoo," he said in 2002. "I'd mix Margaret Mead with the man who whistled through his nose, or Richard Nixon with the tap-dancing dentist."

Mr. Franklin claimed a perfect attendance record: He said he never missed a show. Bob Diamond, his director for the last 18 years of his television career, said that there were a few times in the days of live broadcasts when the show had to start without Mr. Franklin. But Mr. Franklin always got there eventually.

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And he always seemed to have a gimmick. He celebrated his 40th anniversary on television by interviewing himself, using a split-screen arrangement. “I got a few questions I’m planning to surprise myself with,” he said before he began.

Had he asked himself, he could have told viewers that he was born Joe Fortgang in the Bronx. He explained in his memoir, “Up Late With Joe Franklin,” written with R. J. Marx, that his press materials had long said that he had been born in 1928, “but I’m going to come clean and admit that my real birth date was March 9, 1926.” He was the son of Martin and Anna Fortgang; his father was a paper-and-twine dealer who had gone to Public School 158 with James Cagney.

By the time he was 21, he had a new name, a radio career, a publicist and a too-good-to-be-true biography invented, he wrote in “Up Late,” by a publicist. In that book, he denied an anecdote that appeared in many newspaper articles about him: He had met George M. Cohan in Central Park when he was a teenager. That led to a dinner invitation from Mr. Cohan, who let him pick a recording from his collection and take it home — or so the story went. It never happened, Mr. Franklin wrote in “Up Late.”

But a real invitation to pick records was his big break. He had been the writer for the singer Kate Smith’s 1940s variety program, which featured guests like Clark Gable, Myrna Loy and Edward G. Robinson — “all my childhood heroes” — when the radio personality Martin Block hired him to choose the records played on Block’s “Make-Believe Ballroom” on WNEW. Block arranged for Mr. Franklin to go on the air with a program called “Vaudeville Isn’t Dead.” After stops at several other stations in the 1950s, Mr. Franklin settled in at WOR in the mid-1960s with his “Memory Lane” program — “that big late-night stroll for nostalgics and memorabiliacs,” as he described it.

He was both. He owned a shoe of Greta Garbo’s, a violin of Jack Benny’s and a ukulele of Arthur Godfrey’s — not to mention 12,500 pieces of sheet music and 10,000 silent movies. His office was several rooms of uncataloged clutter, first in Times Square, later at Eighth Avenue and 43rd Street. “You know, I was a slob,” he said in 2002.

Mr. Franklin met his wife when she applied for a job as his secretary. Soon they were being mentioned in gossip columns. “Dorothy Kilgallen wrote that we were ‘waxing amorous,’ ” he wrote in “Up Late.” “Walter Winchell queried in his column, ‘What radio voice with initial J. F. seen ’round town with model Lois Meriden?’ ” Soon, she was attending his 6:30 a.m. broadcasts. “Lois made faces at me through the control room window, wiggling her ears and her nose,” Mr. Franklin wrote in “Up Late.”

They were married on a television show called “Bride and Groom.” Off camera, he wrote in 1995, “things weren’t going right — it’s been like that for 40 years.” He added, “Lois is happy, I’m happy, I live in New York, she lives in Florida.”

After his television show was canceled in 1993, Mr. Franklin repeatedly tried to cash in on his fame and his collection of memorabilia. In 2000, he lent his name to a 160-seat restaurant on Eighth Avenue at 45th Street. Eventually it became a chain restaurant with Joe Franklin’s Comedy Club in the back; later the restaurant and the comedy club closed. And in 2002, he sold some of his memorabilia at auction.

He continued to do a late-night radio show, on the Bloomberg Radio Network, almost to the end. Mr. Garrin said Mr. Franklin’s Tuesday show was the first scheduled broadcast he had missed in more than 60 years.

His survivors include his son, Bradley Franklin; a sister, Margaret Kestenbaum; two grandchildren; and his longtime companion, Jodi Fritz.

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On television, Mr. Franklin did not like to rehearse, and he never used cue cards or prompters. The opening monologue and the questions were all in his head.

“I was the only guy who never had a preproduction meeting,” he said in 2002. “You don’t rehearse your dinner conversation. I’m not saying I was right, but I lasted 43 years.”

Arts & Leisure

The New York Times

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2015

ON THE WEB

In this week's In Performance video, Tony Danza sings a number from the Broadway musical "Honeymoon in Vegas," accompanied by the show's composer, Jason Robert Brown, on piano:

nytimes.com/theater

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THE NEW YORKER

FEBRUARY 2, 2015

THE THEATRE

NOW PLAYING

I'm Gonna Pray for You So Hard

It's impossible to disregard the fact that Halley Feiffer, who wrote this unsparing drama, is the daughter of the famous playwright and cartoonist Jules Feiffer. The two characters are Ella (Betty Gilpin), a young theatre actress, and her father, David (Reed Birney), a boozy grandee of American playwriting. Up late in their Upper West Side kitchen, David spills out show-biz anecdotes and worldly (if wounding) advice, which Ella laps up with masochistic awe. Their dynamic is as toxic as it is keenly observed, and Birney, under Trip Cullman's direction, creates a vivid portrait of literary ego. In a late twist, Feiffer turns the tables on both her characters and the audience. Is the play autobiographical? Feiffer has found a riveting way of dodging the question. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111.)

Total Weekly Circulation – 1,055,542
Monthly Online Readership – 11,984,989

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fastchat { Patricia Clarkson }

There aren't many women who can say they take their top off for Bradley Cooper on a regular basis, but Patricia Clarkson can say it without lying.

The Emmy Award-winning actress is co-starring with Cooper and Alessandro Nivola in "The Elephant Man," running at the Booth Theatre through Feb. 22. Based on a true story, the play highlights the life of John Merrick (Cooper), a man born with incredible physical deformities, who is befriended by a doctor (Nivola) and actress (Clarkson). At a key moment, she turns upstage and lowers her top, providing Merrick with the kind of intimate moment he's never known before.

For years, Clarkson was something of an indie film diva, playing strong supporting parts in films such as "High Art," "The Station Agent" and "Pieces of April," finally getting a star turn in the rich romantic "Cairo Time" (worth Netflix-ing). She's also done TV ("Six Feet Under," "Parks and Recreation") and big Hollywood films ("Shutter Island," "Far From Heaven" and "The Maze Runner" as evil Ava Paige). She'll soon be seen in the upcoming "Maze" sequel, and "October Gale."

A New Orleans native, Clarkson, 55, met with Newsday contributor Joseph V. Amodio in her dressing room before a performance.

It must be challenging for you — in such an intimate show . . .

Yes.

. . . to be working with co-stars who are so . . . hideous.

Ahaaa. [She laughs.] You know, somebody's gotta do it — suffer every night onstage with Bradley Cooper and Alessandro Nivola. Somebody's gotta get naked for those two . . . and it's me. What can I say?

You do it for the art.

Exactly. No — seriously — it's crazy, isn't it? My friend

emailed me, "Patty, you're onstage with the two most handsome men in the world." And the best part is — their talent is so superior to their looks. They wouldn't seem so handsome if they weren't so talented. I mean they're just . . . they're just remarkable men.

It must be interesting for Bradley Cooper to play this role now, given the mad whirl his career has taken. He gets so much crazy attention, and

here he is playing someone on the bottom rung of society.

But I actually think he's in the perfect place to play this, because he understands what it is to be looked at and gawked at and judged. Although, it's interesting — people are very respectful of him in the theater. They might come screaming for him, but they leave crying. It's a powerhouse of a performance.

Merrick's life was a bit like a reality show before there were reality shows.

We like seeing people who are less than we are — who have a grotesque disadvantage. Sadly, I think it's human nature. But this play is about those who move beyond that.

Like your character.

She's a woman who takes a monumental shift in her life and has this deeply pure, romantic love affair. I don't think

she has the happiest life, or the greatest marriage. She doesn't have children.

Yes — she's a businesswoman and childless at a time when that wasn't done. Even now, a woman who chooses to not have kids gets weird looks.

Even now. As a childless woman, trust me. [She laughs under her breath and raises her eyebrows in a knowing look.] You know, it's very fluid what we do onstage, and I love that. Every night I just have to arrive ready. It's never easy to take my top off. I didn't realize how difficult that would be. I mean, I'm a grown woman. And it's not the nudity — it's because of how difficult that scene is, emotionally. And it's never gotten easier. I hope it never does.

I have to share something personal with you. New Orleans — it's one of my favorite places on Earth.

I'm so glad. I grew up in Algiers, right across the river. The suburbs. Went to public high school. My mother still lives down there. I love going home — I do. I'm a New Yorker, but my soul is New Orleansian, and that'll never change. Ever. Ever. It's just, well, all the clichés — the smells, rhythms, tastes. I love jazz. I love a beignet more than anything. My mother's Creole cooking. There's nothing else like New Orleans.

And your mom ran the place.

She was at the helm for many years, underneath the mayor-president of the city council — and it was thrilling to see her effect change. That city is in her blood. She gave it everything. [She suddenly leans forward, just slightly.] She never left it during Katrina. She's rallied for the city. And it's a city worth rallying for — and one I'll probably retire to. Or semi-retire to. I'll probably live eventually in New York and New Orleans. That's my goal.

Sounds good.

Yeah. [She chuckles.] It does, doesn't it?



GETTY IMAGES / EUGENE GOLOGURSKY

January 25, 2015



Michael Keaton (l.) and Edward Norton square off in "Birdman," a film that also takes jabs at a newspaper theater critic.

Critics get a taste of their own medicine

It's open season on critics. The new corrosive Off-Broadway comedy "I'm Gonna Pray for You So Hard" puts theater critics squarely in the crosshairs. And it comes out guns blazing.

Others are also taking aim.

At the Critics Choice Awards a week and a half ago, Judd Apatow lobbed his own snarky little grenade at, well, critics.

"You know, there's an after-party," Apatow said to the starry nominees and guests while presenting a prize. "You gonna go to the after-party? These critics, they will hang out with you if you want to... They'll talk to you all night... tell you all their opinions about all sorts of s-."

Talk about love-hate — and biting the hand that invites you to their shindig. So it goes.

Around the same time Apatow got dissy, "Life Itself," the acclaimed documentary on the



JOE DZIEMIANOWICZ
THEATER CRITIC

life of late movie critic Roger Ebert," got a thumbs-down from Oscar nominators. A casualty of Hollywood's fractious relationship with reviewers? Who knows.

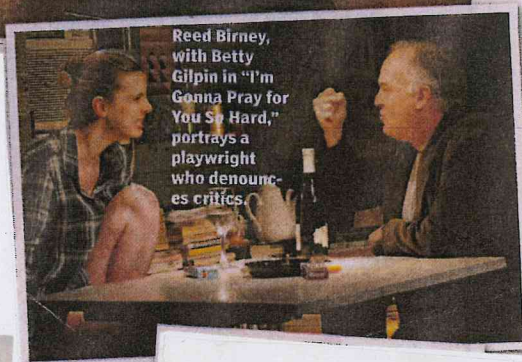
Critics could take it all personally, but why bother. You

dish it out, so you've got to take it. Also, it's always good to be acknowledged and part of the conversation.

And it's good for a laugh or some drama. Plus, some portraits aren't to be taken seriously.

That includes a couple of higher-profile backstage stories in which critics don't come out looking so hot.

On Broadway, there's "It's Only a Play," a successful, albeit wobbly, comedy. On film, there's "Birdman," feathered now with nine Oscar nominations.



Reed Birney, with Betty Gilpin in "I'm Gonna Pray for You So Hard," portrays a playwright who denounces critics.

In "Birdman," Michael Keaton stars as a former superhero actor trying to revive his career and his life by mounting a Broadway play. Lindsay Duncan is the New York Times theater critic who threatens to close his play before even seeing it. Yeah, like that would happen.

And in "It's Only a Play," F. Murray Abraham plays a theater critic who crashes the opening-night party of the show he's reviewing in order to get his script into the hands of a producer. Yeah, like

Total Daily Circulation — 516,165
Total Sunday Circulation — 644,879
Monthly Online Readership — 16,793,000

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that would happen.

And in some cases, critic bashing is bait

and switch — a device to get at what's really on a writer's mind.

Like "I'm Gonna Pray for You So Hard." The Daddy Dearest-style story, which concerns a lowly actress Ella and her hideous hotshot playwright father David, is hair-curlingly blunt.

"See that's what I'm talking about — they're all f—ing idiots," sneers David. That's the play's opening line. David gets a lot more colorful about critics from there, likening them to a "snot-nosed kid" and "a pedophile."

And in a doozy of an aria, David spits: "They are a sick cadre of pathetic, sniveling, tiny men with micropenises and no imaginations who write out of their asses and who love to tear you down ..."

Ouch!

But David protests too much. In this play by actress and author Halley Feiffer, the daughter of famous cartoonist and playwright Jules Feiffer, the real creeps aren't critics. The real enemies are relatives who are supposed to love and support you through everything. But don't.

In the end, Feiffer's play is the deliciously dark critical pan — of a family.

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NEW YORK POST

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Sightings . . .

MICHAEL Strahan with a blond date, enjoying **Bradley Cooper** in "The Elephant Man" at the Booth Theatre. Eagle-eyed observers spotted "Hawaii Five-0" star **Scott Caan** sitting behind 6-foot-5 Strahan and asking the former NFL star to move his head so he could see . . .

Total Daily Circulation – 576,711
 Monthly Online Readership – 12,000,000

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Newsday

JANUARY 25, 2015

flash! »

Bradley Cooper heading to London

Bradley Cooper is swapping Broadway for London's West End, The Associated Press reports.

Producers announced Friday that a Cooper-led production of "The Elephant Man" will open in London in May.

The actor — a three-time Academy Award nominee, most recently for "American Sniper" — has won praise for his performance as John Merrick, an extremely disfigured but indomitable man who becomes a celebrity in Victorian London.

Bernard Pomerance's play, based on a true story, has been frequently revived since its 1979 New York debut. **John Hurt** starred in **David Lynch's** 1980 film adaptation.

The current production also features **Patricia Clarkson** and **Alessandro Nivola**. It closes at New York's Booth Theatre on Feb. 21, and runs at London's Theatre Royal Haymarket from May 19 to Aug. 8.



"The Elephant Man," with Cooper, will move from Broadway to London in May.

Total Daily Circulation — 437,000
 Total Sunday Circulation — 495,000
 Monthly Online Readership — 2,553,000

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NEW YORK POST

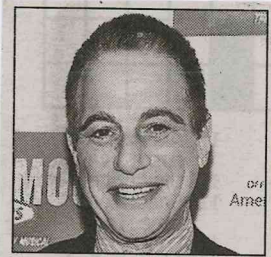
January 25, 2015

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

THIS WEEK'S GUESTS

MEREDITH VIEIRA

► 2 p.m., Ch. 4



Friday: Tony Danza (pictured)

Total Daily Circulation – 576,711
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