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THE MORNING LINE

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PAGES: 14, *including this page.*

The New York Times



May 12, 2015

Public Theater Season Will Feature New Musicals by LaChiusa and Stew

By Scott Heller

Familiar collaborators will be front and center next season at the Public Theater, which will offer two new musicals by composers who have been regular presences there: “First Daughter Suite,” Michael John LaChiusa’s sequel of sorts to his 1993 “First Lady Suite”; and “The Total Bent,” by Stew and Heidi Rodewald, whose “Passing Strange” went from the Public to Broadway in 2008.

The theater on Monday announced its 2015-16 season, which also features the return of the playwrights Robert O’Hara (“Insurrection: Holding History”) and Tarell Alvin McCraney (“The Brother/Sister Plays”), and another visit by the experimental theater troupe Gob Squad (“Super Night Shot”).

Mr. O’Hara’s “Barbecue,” about a family holding an intervention with an addicted sister, begins performances Sept. 22; Mr. McCraney’s “Head of Passes,” loosely based on the Book of Job and a coproduction with Berkeley Repertory Theater, starts on March 15.

For the third year running, the Public’s season will open with the musicalization of a classic, staged for free at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park. This year, the director Lear deBessonet and the composer Todd Almond will present their take on Homer’s “The Odyssey” in a Public Works production running Sept. 4 to 7.

This season’s big story at the Public was the acclaimed musical “Hamilton.” With that show set to move to Broadway later this summer, its director, Thomas Kail, will oversee the world premiere of what the Public describes as a “viciously, deliciously funny new drama” about the American economy: “Dry Powder,” by Sarah Burgess, which begins performances on March 1.

Like “First Lady Suite,” which explored the inner lives of Jacqueline Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt and others, “First Daughter Suite” will give musical form to the stories of Tricia and Julie Nixon, Amy Carter and Patti Davis — and their mothers — among others. Performances begin Oct. 6.

And “The Total Bent” — about a British record producer and a young black musical prodigy — starts on May 10. The show was postponed from this season’s Public schedule because its director, Joanna Settle, was ill.

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The New York Times

Arts & Leisure

TONYS ISSUE

MAY 10, 2015

An Everyman Taking On Everything

Brian d'Arcy James is ready for the Tony Awards and the future.

By LORNE MANLY

Three days after receiving a Tony nomination for his leading role in "Something Rotten!," the proudly puerile Broadway musical set in Elizabethan times, Brian d'Arcy James was enjoying a bit of preshow sustenance at an upscale Manhattan restaurant.

As he talked about his decades-long theatrical career that has led to him playing Nick Bottom, half of a brother playwright tandem outflanked at every turn by one William Shakespeare, a stylish older woman approached the table.

She was not there for an autograph. No, she preferred to ask about his sirloin sliders. "Look at those hamburgers," she said, a lilt to her voice. "Are they good?"

Mr. James may have an overstuffed résumé of plays, musicals and TV shows over the last two decades, including critically lauded turns in "Titanic," "Port Authority," "Next to Normal," "Time Stands Still," and most recently, "Hamilton." But the burger-coveting woman did not recognize the Broadway star in her midst. What drew her to his side was more likely Mr. James's approachable vibe, the sense that he wouldn't mind a stranger interrupting his snack in a ritzy restaurant.

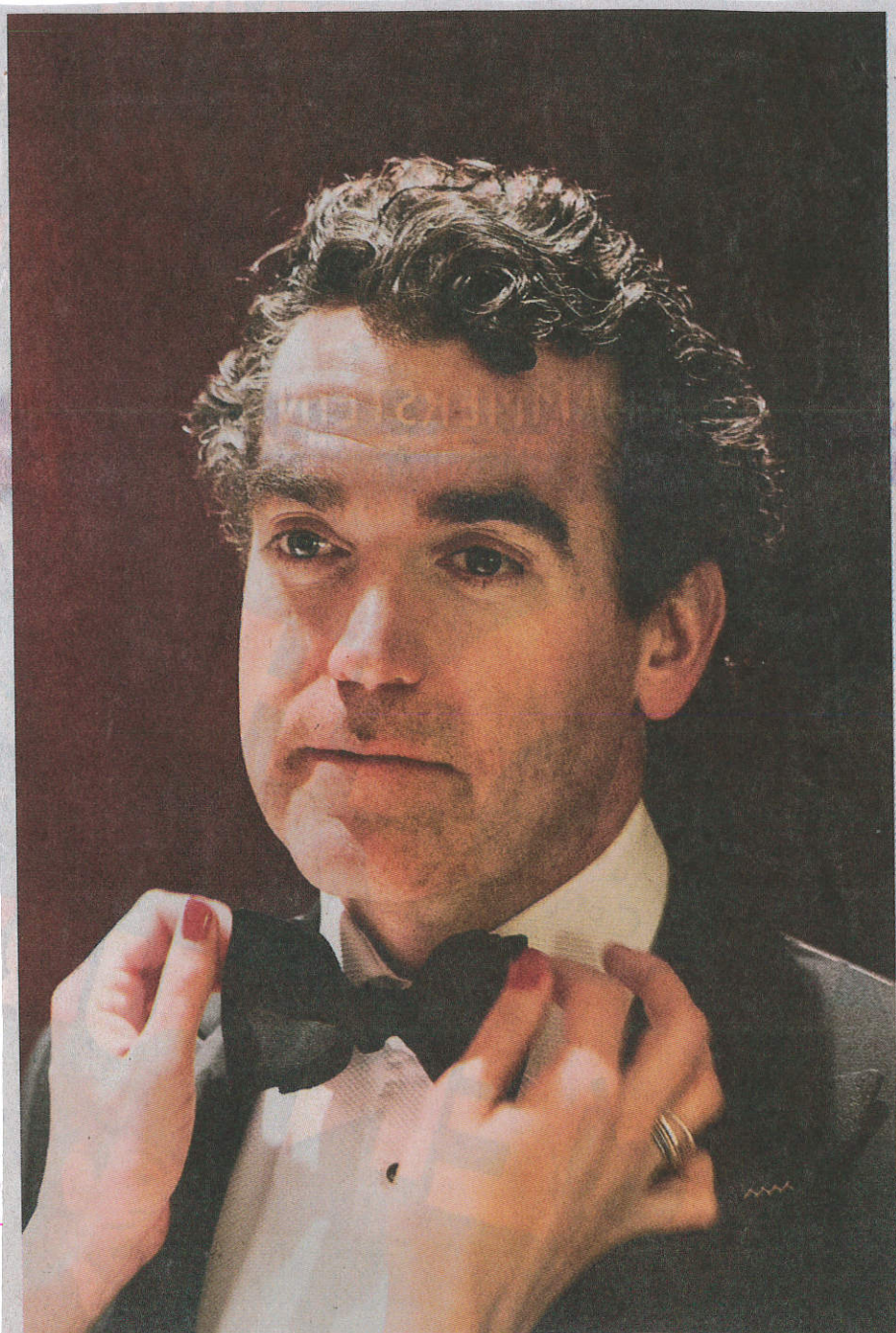
Mr. James lived up to her conceptual casting.

"Would you like one?" he asked. "They're very big."

When trying to explain just what makes Mr. James, 46, such a well-respected and in-demand actor (if not an autograph magnet), current and former colleagues again and again use the same word: "Everyman."

Such inherent likability informs whichever character he inhabits, allowing him to connect with audiences by finding that kernel of humanity in even unsavory types, like the cynical press agent in "Sweet Smell of Success" or the brutish clown in "The Wild Party."

Jeffrey Katzenberg, the chief executive of DreamWorks Animation who cast him as the flatulent ogre in "Shrek the Mu-



ALEX WELSH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

and getting
his tuxedo for the Tony
Awards.



SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Brian d'Arcy James,
second from left, in
"Something Rotten!"

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sical," referred to his "charm and vulnerability." Tom McCarthy, who hired Mr. James for the coming film "Spotlight," about The Boston Globe's investigation into the city's Roman Catholic Archdiocese, said "he's a guy you can sit around with and have a beer with and have a laugh." And Ethan Hawke, who played the title role to Mr. James's Banquo in Lincoln Center Theater's recent production of "Macbeth," referred to his "easy masculinity."

"The great thing about him as Banquo is he just seems like the last person in the world anybody should kill," Mr. Hawke said. "If Macbeth stoops so low as to kill Banquo — to kill Brian d'Arcy James — you've really lost your way."

It's no spoiler to say he survives in "Something Rotten!," an unabashedly silly, big-budget musical comedy in which Mr. James gets to sing about omelets, introduce an upbeat ditty about the Black Plague and engage in a tap dance showdown with a leather cod-piece-wearing Shakespeare. He's onstage for 100 of the show's 125 minutes, yet in many ways he's the straight man to scene stealers like Brad Oscar (a not particularly reliable soothsayer) and Christian Borle (a preening Bard), who get two of the production's biggest numbers.

Mr. James knows that feeling. In "Hamilton," Lin-Manuel Miranda's much-acclaimed musical mash-up about Alexander Hamilton and the founding fathers, his King George III pretty much stopped the show with an affected walk, a very large crown and three variations of a Beatles-inflected breakup ballad — all in only eight minutes of stage time.

Mr. James had originally hoped to stay

with "Hamilton" through its run at the Public Theater, which just concluded. But when the producers of "Something Rotten!" decided to skip a Seattle tryout run and move directly to Broadway a season earlier than anticipated, he faced a difficult choice.

"It was a bittersweet thing, for sure," Mr. James said of leaving the cast. (To welcome Jonathan Groff into the role, he concocted a sketch in which he handed off both his crown and garter to the new king.) But taking the lead in a big, zany musical comedy was too enticing to refuse.

"The tradition of that kind of role, it's alluring," he said. "It's something I've seen

'I've tried hard not to get stuck in the rut of one thing.'

and watched and dreamed about for many a year."

Mr. James figured out his career path early on.

He had an uncle in the entertainment business — Brian Kelly, who starred in the 1960s aquatic TV show "Flipper." And his parents often drove from their home in Saginaw, Mich., to Detroit and other cities



SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES



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from top: ; in "Port Authority," "Shrek the Musical" and "Hamilton";

on theater outings, where they saw shows like "Annie" and "On Your Toes."

But what cinched it came after his older sister returned from a trip to New York in the late 1970s, when she saw "The Pirates of Penzance" at Shakespeare in the Park. She was smitten and soon began perform-

ing in high school plays. Mr. James, who also loved singing — he had belted out Billy Joel's "Piano Man" for a school competition — decided, "I want to do that, too."

He was 13.

"In all the time I've known him, I've never heard him talk about doing something else with his life," said Gavin McDonald, his best friend since high school, who remembers Mr. James commenting on a character's motivation at the age of 14.

No great design has steered him on the occasionally bumpy acting road since he moved to New York in the early '90s, after graduating from the theater program at Northwestern University. It's been more instinctual.

He wiped away the green foam latex that turned him into "Shrek" to play the husband of a bipolar woman in "Next to Normal," and after that embodied a war reporter married to Laura Linney's photojournalist in Donald Margulies's drama "Time Stands Still."

"I've tried hard not to get stuck in the rut of one thing," he explained.

The desire to keep spinning what he calls the showbiz lazy Susan helps explain how he found himself anchoring "Something Rotten!," which earned him his third Tony nomination.

After playing put-upon husbands in "Next to Normal" and in the NBC series "Smash," Mr. James was searching for a character that drove the story — and showed off his comic chops.

As he dug into one of the oversize sliders — "They're like actual burgers. Geez, Louise" — he referred to himself as "a comedy

nerd," soaking up the absurdist work of Steve Martin, Monty Python and Mel Brooks as a teenager, captivated by the architecture of the bits and performances.

The sillier and stupider the better, much to his wife's consternation at times. "He and my daughter love the 'Mr. Bean' movies, and they don't make me laugh at all," said Jennifer Prescott, who met Mr. James while working on the Lincoln Center Theater production of "Carousel" in 1994 and married him four years later. (The couple, with their 13-year-old daughter, live on the Upper West Side and have a country house in Sherman, Conn.)

Yet it's his powerful voice that many fans of his musicals most remember. Mr. James has recorded a Christmas album and has performed a number of solo shows. His musical interests extend far beyond show tunes: Billy Joel is his lodestar, and some of his other favorites are Squeeze and XTC.

He and John Cariani, his onstage brother, play an ongoing name-that-obscure-1980s-pop-song contest during down time in the theater. (Mr. Cariani was stunned when Mr. James, who is an uni-

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ronic fan of pop music some may deem cheesy, immediately detected he was singing Olivia Newton-John's "Make a Move on Me.")

Three days after he was asked by a reporter to psychoanalyze himself about why he's drawn to the absurd, he sent along an email to elaborate. He chalks up much of it to the fact his father died when he was 22.

"Embracing the absurd is in a sense an attempt to make sense of the unexplainable," he wrote. "And if you're making it funny at the same time there's comfort in that attempt if you're laughing. If you're going to fall off a cliff, wouldn't it be more fun if you're doing it with a rhinoceros wearing a tutu (pretentious tip of the hat to Ionesco intended)."

Mr. James may not get to wear a tutu, or perform with a rhinoceros wearing one, but he does need a tuxedo for the Tony Awards, which will be held on June 7 at Radio City Music Hall.

That's why on the first Friday of May, he found himself getting fitted at the flagship Thomas Pink store on Madison Avenue. Mr. James, wearing gray-blue pants, a zip-up black sweater over a black T-shirt and nubuck shoes, joked that he has no style. (Comfort prevails in his choices.)

But he's an easy client for the store's manager, as he agrees to the first tux she drapes on him and his perfect 40 regular dimensions mean little alteration will be needed.

He opted for a bow tie. "I try to find a necktie as subtle as my eyebrows," he joked, referring to his prominently bushy tufts.

Mr. James is not accustomed to the perks of stardom. When informed he'd get to keep the spiffy duds the clothier was providing him for various award season shindigs, he was stunned. "Are you sure?" he asked.

Neither is he much for any actorly process with a capital A. Mr. Cariani said he remembered that during rehearsals he was having trouble hitting some high notes. After a number of misfires, "He just turned to me and said, 'John, just pretend. That's what I do. You just pretend you're the best singer in the world and it all works out.' So that's what I started doing."

Mr. James said the vicissitudes of the business — he's taken gigs from corporations to appear in morale-boosting skits and songs during some of the lean times — have taught him to keep an even keel.

"With age, with experience, you know that if you fall down, it doesn't mean the end," he said. "If you want to be there, and you want to continue doing what you're doing, chances are you're going to get another shot, in some way or another."

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May 12, 2015

‘The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek’ review: Athol Fugard apartheid drama



By Joe Dziemianowicz



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Leon Addison Brown in "The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek."

Being stuck between a rock and a hard place takes on new meaning in writer/director Athol Fugard’s stirring new drama, “The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek.” Per usual, his setting is South Africa, but the play makes a universal point about racial and class conflict.

In 1981, during apartheid, an elderly black laborer (Leon Addison Brown) who has spent years transforming stones into “flowers” with paint, tackles his final canvas: a massive boulder. On this one, he paints an abstract self-portrait, much to the delight of his impressionable 11-year-old helper Bokkie (Caleb McLaughlin).

First, two eyes. Then, a black handprint. Above, a rainbow. Below, roads he’s walked.

Total Daily Circulation – 516,165
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Then Elmarie (Bianca Amato), the wife of the Afrikaner land owner, arrives. At first friendly, she insists that the boulder be scrubbed and that Bokkie be whipped when he resists. This half of the play grabs as tight as a Vise-Grip.

The second act, set in 2003 after the collapse of apartheid, slackens slightly as conversations get mired in the past and in exposition. Jonathan (Sahr Ngaujah), who's shed the nickname Bokkie, has become a school principal. He's returned to the rock garden and confronts Elmarie, whose fortune has eroded. She carries a gun. They both harbor grudges. The odds of seeing eye to eye are slim.

Inspired by the life of Nukain Mabusa, an African farm laborer who painted stones in South Africa in the 1960s, Fugard's work is one of imagination. His play isn't ground-breaking, but his script has plainspoken eloquence and the cast is first-rate. You'd have to have a heart of granite not to be moved watching empathy tentatively bloom in a garden of rocks.

TITLE:

- 'The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek'

VENUE:

- Pershing Square Signature Center

LOCATION:

- 480 W. 42nd St.

PRICE:

- \$25-\$45

PHONE:

- (212) 244-7529

MAY 12, 2015

Finding humanity on 'Painted Rocks'

BY LINDA WINER
linda.winer@newsday.com

Stories seem to topple from the imagination and memory of Athol Fugard — simple stories that, before we know it, swell to become the rich, uneasy historical and personal journey of his country.

So it is again, this time with "The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek," which is having its world premiere at the Signature Theater, where the master South African playwright, 82, is part of an invaluable semi-permanent residency program.

Fugard, who also directs, introduces us to two characters — an old black man (Leon Addison Brown) and an eager young apprentice (Caleb McLaughlin). The boy pulls a wagon of paint cans through an expanse of dry, red dirt interrupted by small rocks painted with lively geometric patterns.

WHAT "The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek"
WHERE Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St.
INFO \$25; 212-244-7529; signaturetheatre.org
BOTTOM LINE More simplicity and great depth from Athol Fugard

In the center is a huge boulder, which the old man contemplates with weary wariness before attacking the thing with his brushes.

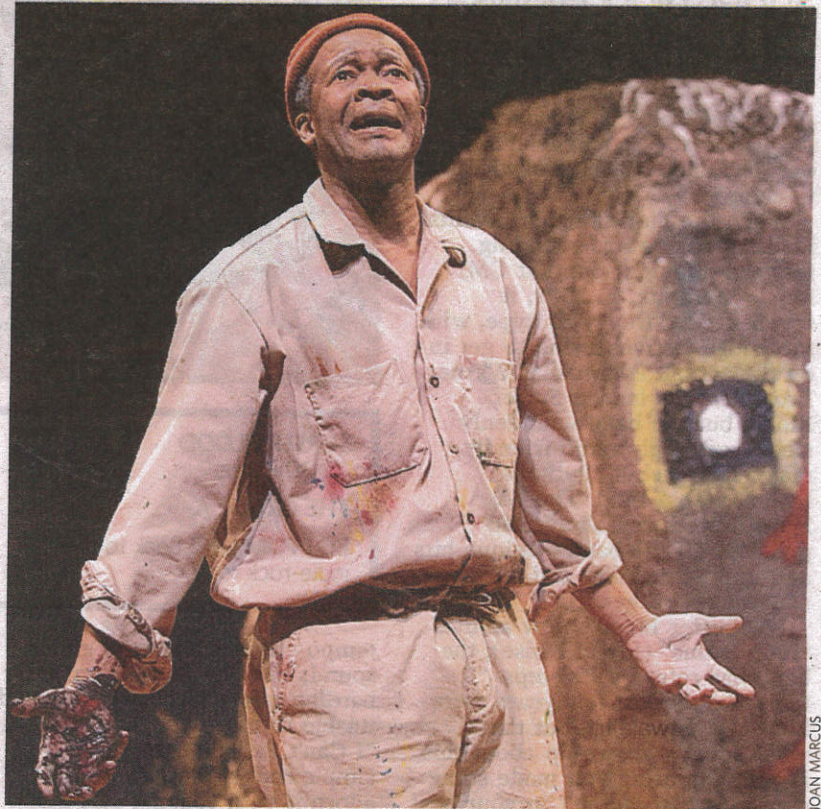
The old man, named Nukain, is Fugard's fictionalized idea of Nukain Mabusa, a poor laborer on a white farm, whose painted rocks, years later, have become an important example of Outsider Art. It is 1981 and Nukain is grappling with what he calls the Big One, the rock on which he will finally tell his own story before he dies.

He looks tall and strong as he finishes the monument to himself. But his

body stoops back into subservience as the Afrikaaner woman (Bianca Amato) who owns the farm demands he erase the disturbing painting and replace it with one of the cheerful rocks they refer to as "flowers." She also orders him to beat the boy for being outspoken.

The second act jumps to 2003. The rocks are faded. The boy has grown into an educated man in a suit (Sahr Ngaujah), who returns to restore his long-forgotten mentor's work. The owner, terrified by the seismic change in the country, greets him with a revolver in her trembling, weathered hand.

That's pretty much it, except for the beautiful acting, tales of horrible violence and contrasting emotions about the country's new constitution. And from such simplicity, Fugard, once again, stamps indelible human faces on faraway reports of the world's news.



Leon Addison Brown as Nukain in a scene from "The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek" at Manhattan's Signature Theatre.

JOAN MARCUS

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AP

May 11, 2015

Kevin McCollum, a Broadway producer who seeks the fresh idea



In this April 29, 2015, file photo, Kevin McCollum attends the 2015 Tony Awards Meet The Nominees Press Junket at The Paramount Hotel in New York. McCollum shepherded the dark, violent play "Hand to God," featuring a satanic hand puppet, and the sunny "Something Rotten!" a musical celebrating musicals. (Photo by Andy Kropa/Invision/AP, File)

By Mark Kennedy

NEW YORK (AP) — Broadway producer Kevin McCollum's company is named Alchemation. Don't bother looking it up. He coined the word. And it speaks volumes about how he thinks.

Alchemation is a mashup of "alchemy" and "creation." While it won't earn any points in Scrabble, the word is unique and fresh — just like his approach to producing.

"Make something new and define territory that's never been," he said recently in his Manhattan office. "I fall in love with shows because I've never see that before. I fall in love with new vocabularies."

McCollum's passion for fresh voices and new works has paid off this season with two very different shows that have earned 15 Tony Award nominations.

He's shepherded the dark, violent play "Hand to God" — featuring a satanic hand puppet — and the dance-heavy, sunny "Something Rotten!," a musical celebrating musicals.

They don't seem to have much in common, except they're typical McCollum shows — neither are based on previous material, both have writers making their Broadway debuts and neither have huge stars.

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"We all tell our own stories the way we live our lives. My story is: Life is too short to not believe in fresh voices," he said. "I don't have Hollywood stars. I have great American artists."

McCollum's instincts have made him one of the most successful commercial producers on Broadway. His shows — "Rent," "Avenue Q," "The Drowsy Chaperone," "(title of show)" and "In the Heights" — were risky and envelope-pushing when they were staged. Now they are simply seminal.

"In terms of his acumen as a producer, I'm pretty sure he can see the future, as he always seems to be two steps ahead. He seems to know what people want before they even do," said "Something Rotten!" leading man Brian d'Arcy James, who has worked with McCollum on six projects, including "The Wild Party" and "Irving Berlin's White Christmas."

While not always successful — he backed "High Fidelity" and "The Last Ship," both noble failures — his batting average is remarkably high considering he's competing against nonprofit theater companies and big British imports that often enjoy a subsidized birth.

Perhaps even more lasting is his backing of talent. He brought Lin-Manuel Miranda and Robert Lopez to Broadway. He championed playwright Rajiv Joseph and lyricist Amanda Green. He gave Casey Nicholaw and Thomas Kail their first directing breaks.

He kept the off-Broadway cast of Robert Askins' "Hand to God" when it transferred to Broadway, even though none of the actors are well-known. It paid off: Three of the play's five actors were nominated for Tonys, including Geneva Carr.

"He's given me a break because he thinks the play is so good and our commitment to it — giving our souls to this thing for several years — is worthy," Carr said. "I admire him so much for that."

McCollum, 53, who has a master's in film producing from the University of Southern California, is a stage producer who is active in all parts of a production's life, even the ads.

He dreamed up the "Hand to God" slogan: "No movie stars. No London transfer. No film adaptation. Pray for us." And it was he who set all ticket prices for the first few previews of "Something Rotten!" at \$15.95, the date the musical is set.

In 2013, McCollum entered a partnership with 20th Century Fox and he hopes to make musicals of two of their films — "Mrs. Doubtfire" and "The Devil Wears Prada." "Ever After," another Fox film, is slated to start performances later this month at the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey.

He's also backing "Diary of a Wimpy Kid the Musical" at the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis and "Ride the Cyclone" at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater in September.

McCollum points to two events to explain why he often champions new voices. One is the death of his single mother at age 40 when he was 14 and the other was the death of "Rent" writer and composer Jonathan Larson in 1996, just at the cusp of his fame.

"Those two things, for me, give me great drive. I love creating opportunities for people. I think it's my orphan mentality," said the four-time Tony-winner.

"My job is to give people an opportunity who never had an opportunity. How do you become great until someone takes a chance on you?"

Newsday

MAY 12, 2015

theaterbuzz

By Matt Windman
amNewYork

Tony simulcast

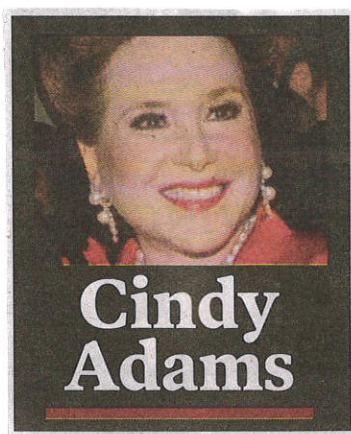
THE SHOW Tony Awards
THE DEAL Justin Guarini and Deborah Cox will host a live simulcast of the Tony Awards in Times Square on June 7. In other news about free outdoor events, Darren Criss (currently in "Hedwig and the Angry Inch") will host the "Stars in the Alley" outdoor concert May 27 at 10:30 a.m., in which Broadway cast members perform in Shubert Alley (between 44th and 45th streets, next to the Shubert Theatre).

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NEW YORK POST

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Odds & ends

... B'WAY'S
 "Something Rotten!"
 play is something writ-
 ten funny. See it.

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Newsday

MAY 12, 2015

tv**talk**
DAYTIME

THE TALK (2 p.m., CBS/2) — Vanessa Hudgens

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