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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

DATE: Tuesday, June 23, 2015

FROM: Michelle Farabaugh, Melissa Cohen, Jennie Mamary
Katie Aramento, Raychel Shipley

PAGES: 10, *including this page.*

The New York Times

June 23, 2015

Arts, Briefly

'Skylight' Closes Out Run With Healthy Box Office

The Broadway revival of "Skylight" closed out its Tony-winning run with one more bragging right: the most revenue grossed in a single week at the John Golden Theater. The play, starring **Carey Mulligan** and **Bill Nighy**, grossed \$927,539 for the week ending Sunday — a lot of money for a nonmusical, especially in a relatively small 805-seat theater.

The previous record at the Golden was set in October by the revival of Edward Albee's "A Delicate Balance," which grossed \$884,596. "Skylight," written by **David Hare** and first staged on Broadway in 1996, is about an evening that a couple spends together some years after their affair has ended. The revival was first staged in London and was transferred to Broadway by the producer **Scott Rudin**, who said it recouped its investment; it ran for 21 previews and 85 regular performances.

"The Audience," starring **Helena Mirren** in a Tony Award-winning performance as Queen Elizabeth, had its best week yet, pulling in \$1,206,318, and "An American in Paris" continued its rise into Broadway's top tier, bringing in \$1,440,627, behind only long-running hits like "The Lion King" and "Wicked." Things were not as celebratory at the wedding-themed musical "It Shoulda Been You," which earned \$344,196, just 35 percent of its potential gross.

MICHAEL PAULSON



The New York Times

June 23, 2015

Review: In ‘At the Table,’ a Menu of Identity-Based Arguments

By Laura Collins-Hughes

Chris (Claire Karpen) has only just met this group of friends, so she probably shouldn't make a scene. But dinner is over, the alcohol is flowing and Stuart (Craig Wesley Divino) — the smug one up there at the head of the table — is being obnoxious. When he tries to bait her into debating abortion rights, she tells him the issue is none of his business, because he is a man.

“The terms of a conversation are controlled by who is invited to the table,” Chris says. “And you're not invited to that particular table.”

Escaping for the weekend to a country house, where the laid-back Nate (Aaron Rossini) is their host, these privileged 30-somethings in Michael Perlman's “At the Table” have brought along a full complement of identity-related baggage to unpack in the common areas. Race, gender, sexual orientation, income level: Any of these might become contentious at any time.

That the friends frequently talk over one another, making it difficult to discern what anyone is saying, is part of the point in this overloaded ensemble piece, presented by [Fault Line](#) Theater at Here Arts Center. Seemingly so is the fact that we rarely have a clear view of everyone in this crowded house. [Mr. Perlman](#) has staged his play in the round, and his blocking is largely naturalistic.

That means our fitful luck in connecting with his characters is determined to a frustrating extent by where we sit. Depending on the location of a scene — the dining room on one side of Tristan Jeffers's comfortably upper-middle-class set, the living room on the other — we may be close to the action or far removed from it.

In either case, we are likely to be looking at the back of at least one actor's head, maybe while that person delivers an important chunk of dialogue. At comic moments, the audience's laughter — a measure of who's in on which joke — is balkanized by seating section.

That's unfortunate for the eight-person cast. From where I was sitting, Mr. Divino and Mr. Rossini — as it happens, [Fault Line's](#) artistic directors — gave the evening's strongest performances. But I was almost always able to see them, while my view of the other actors was more often impeded. The overall effect is less thought provoking than alienating. The audience isn't invited to the table, even as onlookers. But then what are we doing there?



The New York Times

June 23, 2015

Review: ‘Hand Foot Fizzle Face’ Explores Futility and Disconnection

By Alexis Soloski

If you have \$30,000 to spare, then you, too, can own a [first edition of “Foirades/Fizzles,”](#) an unlikely 1976 artist’s book by [Jasper Johns](#) and [Samuel Beckett](#). Etchings and aquatints — some playful, some troubling — accompany five gnomic prose works, or “Fizzles,” that Beckett translated from the French.

Those with less pocket money can content themselves with [“Hand Foot Fizzle Face,”](#) a theatrical adaptation by the young company [Piehole](#) at the arts center Jack, in Clinton Hill in Brooklyn. How do you represent an obscure tome composed of nonrepresentational, noncorresponding text and images? Yeah. That’s a tough one.

Piehole doesn’t [deny the difficulty](#). Most of the action is staged on and around a blue wrestling mat, and the five actors are dressed in workout sweats, the better to tangle with the material. The director, Tara Ahmadinejad, assisted by the composer, Lea Bertucci, stages five “Fizzles” while a laser printer vomits paper, and a computer-synthesized voice wonders about where to go for drinks after the show.

Ms. Ahmadinejad offers a few moments of unexpected beauty and others of gratifying weirdness. There’s a lot of running and jumping and stark lighting and odd videography, though the actual Beckett text is almost always a lull in the action. The actors speak the recursive, perplexing lines quickly, illuminating little. (A final “Fizzle,” the most intelligible, is performed by a veteran actress, Emily Jon Mitchell).

Admittedly, this is exceptionally tricky stuff: “All needed to be known for say is known. There is nothing but what is said. Beyond what is said there is nothing.” Sure thing, Samuel.

Futility and disconnection seem to be among the points of the piece, which acknowledges and invites the audience’s boredom. You can only watch performers struggle — however manfully or womanfully — for so long before the exercise exasperates, especially as Piehole hasn’t yet found that particular permutation of text, action and actorly presence that would make the work distinct and alive.

Still, Beckett explored and espoused the poetics of failure. Piehole has failed pretty well here. Maybe next time it will fail even better.



The New York Times

June 23, 2015

TV's 'Smash' Musical May Be Made Into a Real Stage Show

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The glitzy, fictional [Broadway musical](#) featured in the TV show "Smash" might actually find its way to a stage.

Universal Stage Productions said Monday it will develop "Bombshell," a musical about the life of Marilyn Monroe, into a live show. No casting was announced, and a book writer will be announced shortly.

The original songs on the TV show by Scott Wittman and Marc Shaiman, whose credits include the Tony-winning score for the 2007 musical "Hairspray," will continue on the stage adaptation, as will original choreographer Joshua Bergasse, who has gone on to choreograph "On The Town" and "Gigi."

"Smash" was a production of Universal Television. The series on NBC lasted two seasons and starred Megan Hilty, Jeremy Jordan, Katharine McPhee, Christian Borle and Debra Messing. The songs included "Let Me Be Your Star" and "Hang the Moon."

"There is still a lot of love for 'Smash' and a rabid fan base out there, and we're thrilled to be able to keep the dream alive as we work towards bringing 'Bombshell' to theatre audiences," Robert Greenblatt, chairman of NBC Entertainment, said in a statement.

In the show — created by playwright Theresa Rebeck, who left after the first season — viewers watched the long process of casting, composing, mounting and rehearsing a Broadway-bound musical. In the second season, a gritty, low-tech off-Broadway show called "Hit List" competed with "Bombshell" for the Tony Award.

Craig Zadan and Neil Meron, who produced "Smash," will lead the producing team of "Bombshell" and Steven Spielberg, the executive producer of the TV show, will also be involved in the stage version.

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BONEAU/BRYAN-BROWN

NEW YORK POST

June 23, 2015

Teller talks of stage magic



Cindy Adams

MAYBE you've heard from **Penn & Teller**. At least you've heard from Penn. Raymond Joseph Teller — now just Teller — is the nontelling one. Except he spoke to me.

"We open here officially July 7. The large Marquis theater will seem intimate because we'll have 40 audience members onstage. In '85, we played a small-size venue. Not for us. You can't make African spotted pygmy elephants vanish in small areas. We need bigness, glamoriness.

"We bring in airport-security metal detectors, walk-through archways, gigantic boxes, tractor-

trailer trucks. Huge two-handled saws that get used on a showgirl. Locally, we're sourcing a very dead tilapia, because nightly we produce a theatergoer's cellphone from inside the fish.

"And a nice big red ball, like from a schoolyard? I train it onstage like a dog. Put it through hoops, bend it to my will. To perfect this, I worked on it an hour every night for 18 months. Sometimes there's three ways to do something and we're always re-creating it better. After five years, I said it's still not right and I need a new ending. Now it's on all cylinders.

"Vegas is our laboratory. We have a 5,00-foot stage in a nearby building. Shortest feat we ever perfected was five months. The longest? Just to get the elephant on its feet took six years.

"We'll do only six weeks here. No extensions! We have a permanent Vegas gig and had to charm them to get out for this short time. Penn and I have done five shows a week for 14 years. You need two days a week to run

out for maybe Detroit or Baltimore."

Give me one secret. One. Just one.

"Magic's unforgiving. You can overlook a pianist's wrong note. If an illusion's not perfect, it's awful. We wear two gray suits. Penn, more of a talking narrative, takes his jacket off then puts it on. I'm more into the tricks."

So?

"So I wear three identical ones and change to whatever's needed for the effect."

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NEW YORK POST

June 23, 2015

Page Six®

**Ian
Mohr**
imohr@nypost.com

Stephanie Smith
ssmith@nypost.com
Mara Siegler
msiegler@nypost.com

Emily Smith is traveling.

Barry keeps it private

BARRY Manilow celebrated his 72nd birthday with an intimate celebration at Trattoria Dell'Arte. Guests included jazz musician **Dave Koz**, Manilow's husband, **Garry Kief**, and **Tom Postilio** and **Mickey Conlon** of HGTV's show "Selling New York." **Darren Criss** arrived after the curtain fell on his nearby musical, "Hedwig and the Angry Inch." Two rabid "fanilows" aggressively tried to crash the private bash, we hear, but the "Copacabana" singer and his pals avoided any interlopers and stayed for hours after closing.

JUNE 29, 2015

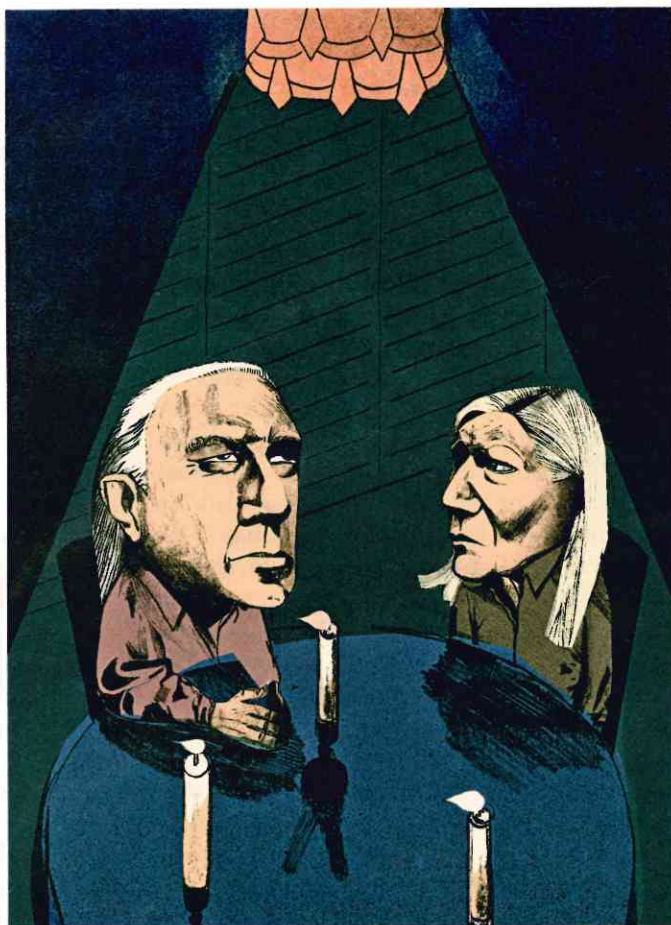
THE THEATRE

TRUE LIES

David Mamet and the art of the con.

BY HILTON ALS

ILLUSTRATION BY ELLIE FORMAN-PECK



Illusions generated a lot of talk in postwar American theatre. The truth is that no amount of reality could compete with the Holocaust. So there was a turning inward. In 1947, Tennessee Williams's Blanche DuBois told audiences that she wanted not realism but "magic," and that emotional honesty wasn't necessarily synonymous with the truth. Six years later, in Arthur Miller's "The Crucible," a play inspired by the hysteria of the McCarthy era, a young girl's fears and neuroses turned reality into fantasy, a weapon of suspicion and dread. When Mart Crowley's "The Boys in the Band" opened Off Broadway, in 1968, it raised the curtain on certain aspects of gay male life, but it

also showed that self-acceptance was still an illusion for gay people, who had spent too long struggling to breathe in the swamps of hatred and self-hatred.

Since the nineteen-seventies, David Mamet has been writing comedies and dramas in which illusion is less a subject than a quality of speech and character. Raised in Chicago during the Cold War, Mamet was still a young man when Saigon fell, in 1975. He grew up in a world defined by disassociation and violence, and many of his most interesting characters are con artists, who have no compunctions when it comes to doing what they have to do in order to survive and amass more—of anything, including

dreams. They live by one fierce rule: fuck the other guy before he fucks you. By the time the scam-thick "Glengarry Glen Ross" premièred, in 1983, he had become the bard of the American *get*. His small-time crooks, hucksters, and real-estate agents were extreme or broken manifestations of Aristotle's rule about what makes a play a play. In a 1997 interview in *The Paris Review*, Mamet said:

The main question in drama, the way I was taught, is always what does the protagonist want. . . . Do we see the protagonist's wishes fulfilled or absolutely frustrated? That's the structure of drama. . . . People only speak to get something. . . . They may use a language that *seems* revealing, but if so, it's just coincidence, because what they're trying to do is accomplish an objective.

Mamet's characters set up a con whenever there's something to be had, even if it's only a person's innocence—an innocence that the con artist rejects, because why should anyone get off the hook of existence without his fair share of existential disappointment? In "Edmond" (1982), the mild-mannered title character confronts and is beaten by a crooked card dealer and his skill. Being brutalized frees Edmond to pursue his own bloodlust; he comes to feel that politeness is for chumps and violence is justifiable—just as John, the professor accused of sexual harassment in Mamet's 1992 piece "Oleanna," learns that brute force might even be what his tormentor is looking for, in place of all that unmanly talking and thinking.

Like Saul Bellow's Augie March, Mamet's fast-talking guys are shysters in their own minds. They make conversations out of lists—of so-called facts or mundane details—and stories that never add up to anything, or come to an end, because liars and hysterics don't know who they are unless they've got an audience. Like writers, they want to convince you by telling you the only story they think needs telling. "Prairie du Chien," from 1979 (now in revival at the Atlantic Theatre Company, along with Mamet's 1985 short play "The Shawl," under the collective title "Ghost Stories"), stars a character who is called, simply, or not simply, Storyteller. The play opens in a train compartment. It's 1910. The lights are low, and the locomotive is chugging west through Wisconsin. Stage left, two men sit at a table playing cards: the Card Dealer (Nate Dendy) and the Gin Player (Jim Frangione). Upstage right,

Arliss Howard and Mary McCann as psychic and client in Mamet's "The Shawl."

the Storyteller (Jordan Lage) is talking to the Listener (Jason Ritter). The Listener has his back to us; his son (Henry Kelemen) isn't visible, either—for most of the thirty-minute piece, he's asleep on a bench beside the Listener. Originally written for the radio, "Prairie du Chien" is, first and foremost, a play about voices, but then what Mamet play isn't? Or isn't, ultimately, about Mamet's voice? Still, the look of the show is as important as what's being said, and the scenic designer, Lauren Helpert, and the lighting designer, Jeff Croiter, have built a world in which the physical limitations weigh on us as heavily as the words.

The Storyteller, who is thin-framed and handsome—he looks like an exhalation of mentholated cigarette smoke—is a monologist, more or less, and the tale he tells is strange, racial, and sexual. It involves a white couple who owned a farm and ran a store in Council Bluffs and had troubles. (The Storyteller never tells us what he does for a living, but it sounds like he is a travelling salesman.) One day in March, the wife—very pretty, kind-seeming—showed up in town with bruises on her hands. Her husband was jealous. The couple had words. Returning to the store in August, the Storyteller discovered the husband on his way to the farm to kill his wife, who he said was pregnant with someone else's child. The Storyteller tried to stop the guy, but he knocked the Storyteller down and ran off. The Storyteller found the sheriff and they raced out to the farm. Then things got really weird. Not only was the barn burning but the farmer was hanging from a porch crossbeam, dead. Inside the house, a woman was crying; she told them to go to the burning barn, where they found a black man with a pitchfork stuck in his heart. "It was sickening," the Storyteller says. "Five feet away there was the woman. In this lovely dress. This red dress. On her face. Her back was blown away. . . . And the barn's about to go." But that's not the end of the tale. Meeting the sheriff outside the barn, the Storyteller described what he'd seen. The sheriff argued that it wasn't possible: the woman in the red dress was in the house, alive.

The Storyteller doesn't impersonate the characters in his gothic tale. Instead, before each character speaks, he pauses for a moment, though not long enough to break the spell. But why is he weav-

ing a spell, and out of such unpleasant material? When the Gin Player discovers that the Card Dealer has been cheating, he pulls a gun, the eerie calm of the scene explodes, and so do we—with questions. Is the Storyteller part of the Dealer's con? Or is the Dealer working with the Listener? When the train stops in the prairie, the Dealer exits, and the Storyteller decides to stretch his legs. But first he asks, as he does at the beginning of the play, if the Listener's son is asleep, saying, "I'd give a lot to sleep like that." Perhaps the Storyteller, if he's complicit in the Dealer's con, feels guilt or remorse about how he makes a living. Or perhaps he just knows that the quickest way into any mark's heart is to express concern for his child. Or is the child, too, part of the con? Presumed innocents are anything but. It's all just another illusion.

Unlike Blanche DuBois, Mamet's characters aren't looking for magic. They're looking to disabuse others of the ridiculous desire to believe in a trusting, loving world. Miss A (the always compelling Mary McCann), in "The Shawl" (which, like "Prairie du Chien," is directed, with commitment, by Scott Zigler), is a lonely figure, who lives in her memories of childhood. To find out who she was—and what she might be—she visits a psychic named John (Arliss Howard) in his shuttered apartment. John sports a gray ponytail; his hands make little florid gestures whenever he gets excited about anything. He knows that Miss A is an unloved person; he can get to her—and to her money—by making her believe that he will be a kind of friend to her. (In order to get to her money herself, Miss A has to contest her mother's will.) John also longs for companionship. He expresses his love for Charles (Jason Ritter) by revealing his secrets to him. No one is "psychic," John explains. His insight into Miss A's past life has everything to do with guesswork. For instance, she's right-handed, right? When right-handed people fall, he says, they often break the fall with their left knee. So he guesses that Miss A has a scar on her left knee—and she does.

"The Shawl" is a portrait of exploitation and of how the con can become one's identity. Con artists feel lonely, or lonelier, without it. Will Charles love John if he lets him in on how he conducts his

business? Will Miss A trust John if he keeps getting her story right? (And will that trust lead to much-needed funds?) Eventually, Miss A confronts John with at least one truth: the photo she showed him on one visit wasn't actually of her mother; she cut it out of a book. How could he be fooled like that? John can't answer the question properly; in any case, he doesn't have to. He draws Miss A back in with a vision of her mother wrapping her in a shawl, a moment of maternal tenderness that Miss A never forgot and never mentioned to anyone. How did John know about it? He can't explain his insight, but it's enough for Miss A to believe that, because he knows her past, he knows her. Miss A needs to believe in John, just as John must believe in the con in order to keep her enthralled in his world of illusions. Toward the end of the play, there's this tense exchange:

MISS A: You *saw* her.
 JOHN: Did I see her? . . .
 MISS A: No. You must *tell* me. You *must* tell me. You *saw* her.
 JOHN: Yes.
 MISS A: You saw her wrap me in that shawl.
 JOHN: Yes.
 MISS A: And you say I *lost* it.
 JOHN: You, yes, that is what I said. But you did *not* lose it. You *burnt* it. In rage. Standing somewhere by water, five years ago.
 MISS A: Yes. And then I . . . ?
 JOHN: I do not know. That is all I saw.

Italics are used to emphasize a point, and one of the points Mamet is making here is, again, about storytelling: Miss A, a kind of storyteller herself, wants to know what happened next. Was it this or that? Miss A and John are a grift-driven Mike Nichols and Elaine May, improvising the truth in ways that suit their shared, false spiritual awareness. In the end, we don't know if Miss A stands to inherit any money, or if the lure of cash is just her way of keeping John interested. John and Miss A are victimized by their loneliness, and they want to victimize other people because of it.

These dense and elegant plays are exemplary not only of Mamet's protean talent but of what can happen to you if you expect some kind of Aristotelian payoff—the usual Western dramatic con—before you leave the theatre. Neither play ends with a catharsis, and, by refusing us a satisfying release, Mamet turns us sideways and inward to look at his savage world view, in which the hunter becomes the game. ♦

The Star-Ledger

June 23, 2015

**The best shows to see
in New Jersey (and New
York City) this week**



"Amazing Grace," with Josh Young and Erin Mackey, hits Broadway on Thursday. (JOAN MARCUS)

'Amazing Grace' on Broadway

A new musical about the genesis of the famous song, "Amazing Grace" begins Broadway performances on Thursday. The cast includes Josh Young of "Jesus Christ Superstar," Erin Mackey of the Paper Mill Playhouse's recent "South Pacific," Tom Hewitt and Chuck Cooper. Music and lyrics are by Christopher Smith, who has also co-written the book with Arthur Giron. Gabriel Barre directs. Tickets are \$65-\$139, at amazinggracemusical.com.