



# The Slotkin Letter

## Reviews for People Serious About Theatre

APRIL 2008

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### Dearest You Dears

All the shows in this issue and the next were seen on my annual week long trip to London with subscribers from Mirvish Productions. For these trips I'm their theatre critic. We see four shows together and I lead a discussion about each show the following morning. Great fun. The group is always sharp, inquisitive, informed, and I learn so much from them. I also saw five shows on my own. This year the mix of shows was particularly good.

Nobody does pantomime ('panto' for short) like the British. These shows are based on familiar fairy tales but with lots of twists. This year's London West End panto was *Cinderella*. The script was written by Stephen Fry whose middle name is 'irreverent'. It ran at the venerable Old Vic and promised to be an event.

The small but spunky Menier Chocolate Factory is a going concern in London theatre. Several shows have started there and transferred successfully to the West End. The latest Menier Chocolate Factory show is *La Cage Aux Folles*, a wonderful, bittersweet musical about love, understanding, pride and cross-dressing on the Riviera.

If you love Shakespeare and read that the National Theatre is doing *Much Ado About Nothing* with Simon Russell Beale as Benedick and Zoë Wanamaker as Beatrice and that Nicholas Hytner is directing, do you ignore it because you've seen a *lot* of productions of this play? I ask you? This production was selling out its run which only intensified my desire to see it.

*Othello* was given a starry production at the Donmar Warehouse. The wonderfully named Chiwetel Ejiofor played Othello, Ewan McGregor played Iago, and Kelly Reilly played the doomed Desdemona. Universal envy when news got out that the Mirvish group had landed tickets to this hot show.

The word of mouth on *War Horse* was deafening. The reviews were ecstatic. The sizeable Olivier Theatre sold out its entire run weeks before it was scheduled to close. Based on the Michael Morpurgo children's book about a boy and his horse. Sentimental or what? Not! What a theatrically packed issue. Shall we begin?





# Cinderella

At the Old Vic, London, Book and Lyrics by Stephen Fry  
 Directed by Fiona Laird, Designed by Stephen Brimson Lewis  
 Music by Anne Dudley, Choreography by Francesca Jaynes  
 Starring: Debbie Chazen, Oliver Chopping, Pauline Collins, Hal Fowler, Paul Keating,  
 Mark Lockyer, Joseph Millson, Sandi Toksvig, Madeleine Worrall

*Irreverent, sweet, rude, funny. Not only does Cinderella get her guy, but her friend Buttons gets his guy too. A progressive panto.*

**B**ackground. British pantos use fairy tales as the base for their shows. The tales are fractured, twists and turns are introduced, men may play women's parts or women play men's parts. Topical news is injected. There is music and singing, much irreverence. There is also cake.

*As Cinderella, Madeleine Worrall is cute rather than gorgeous.*

**The Story.** Well for heaven sake, you know it already: mean stepmother, two horrid stepsisters. Cinderella is treated like hired help and does the drudge work. There is a Prince named Charming. Cinderella wants to go to the ball the Prince's family is throwing in the hopes of finding the guy a bride. A fairy godmother appears with a magic wand, a fancy dress and a coach that used to be a pumpkin drawn by horses that used to be mice. Cinderella meets the Prince. They fall in love. She has to rush off to meet her curfew and drops one of her glass slippers (those things must pinch like hell) on the stairs. The Prince searches for her, glass slipper in hand. They find each other. And live happily ever after. The end.

In Stephen Fry's witty, wryly clever version, a narrator tells us much of the story. Buttons is a friend of Cinderella's and a servant in the house. His costume is nicely decorated with buttons (duh). He is wise, cheerful and always supportive of

Cinderella. Buttons tells us the rules of the game. We are to shout out ("he's behind you") when appropriate, and any time seems appropriate for a British Panto. When anyone mentions 'cake' in the story, the whole audience is to yell out **CAKE!** We practice doing that. I am pretty good. At the Mirvish discussions (I lead a

more to the hilarity of the evening, but miraculously not to the length of the show—I guess this bit is built into the proceedings. There is a sing-along. And there is **CAKE!!!!**

**The Production.** The Narrator is sitting in a large comfortable chair, suspended about 20 feet above the chair. The Narrator has short, slicked-back hair and a moustache, smokes a pipe, wears a fetching velvet smoking jacket, black pants and patent leather shoes. 'He' is played by Sandi Toksvig—a 'she'. Ms Toksvig plays the Narrator with a touch of sarcasm, the sharpest of wits, the deadliest of aim for each joke and the ability to adlib dexterously and hilariously.

As Buttons, Paul Keating has a charming, innocent sweetness, an easy laugh and plays everything dead serious. This of course makes him very funny. As Cinderella, Madeleine Worrall is cute rather than gorgeous. She is

discussion of each show the morning after we see it) people will bellow out 'cake' at will. Grand.

The Prince has an equerry named Dandini who is strapping, cheerful and supportive of the Prince. There is a shower scene (no this isn't *Psycho*). The two men muse on relationships while they strip down to tease the audience (are they *reaaaallllly* 'naked'???) They are certainly buff. Lots of squeals in the

*Prince Charming is played with charm and tight, flexing muscles by Joseph Millson.*

audience from both women and men.

When Cinderella meets her Prince, Dandini meets Buttons. They fall in love, profess their devotion and become a couple as well. High jinx aplenty. The mice pop up in the oddest places: in the stove, in the cupboards etc. There is audience participation. Two kids are hauled out of the audience to go on stage and answer some questions adding

also slightly resigned to kitchen work with no hope of a better life, not even after the ball. But when the Prince returns, slipper in hand, her prospects look up.

Prince Charming is played with charm and tight, flexing muscles by Joseph Millson. He's the type of person, as is Cinderella, who need good help to get them through the rough bits. Dandini is played by Oliver Chopping who brings his own kind of charm, flexing

pecc and efficiency to the dashing Dandini. The Fairy Godmother is played by the impish, matter of fact, Pauline

much funnier in drag. And he's absolutely fearless as well. Stephen Brimson Lewis has designed a garish,

***Candida wants so much and is pissed off when she doesn't get it. Of course she's saddled with two twits for daughters—Dolce and Gabbana.***

Collins. She would just as soon shove the wand as wave it, as long as she gets results. She is not above the good natured joke. The wicked stepmother, Candida, is played by the rotund and irritated Debbie Chazen. Candida wants so much and is pissed off when she doesn't get it. Of course she's saddled with two twits for daughters—Dolce and Gabbana. They are played respectively by Mark Lockyer

colourful, startlingly bright set. The costumes are either over the top, for the wicked stepmother and her two twit daughters, or fittingly appropriate for Cinderella and Buttons and the Prince etc.

Fiona Laird has directed this with such wit. The pumpkin inflates in a thrice to become the coach. The mice keep popping up in odd places and each time is funnier than the last. In the middle of the

kiss. I'm disappointed in that. Surely if you are brave enough to put two guys into your show who profess their love in front of the whole Old Vic audience who are rooting and cheering for them, then the least you can do is have them kiss. Don't wimp out in the end and not have them kiss! How can folks and especially Fiona Laird, the director, have missed that?

I complained at the highest level about this: to my friend David Grindrod who cast the show. He seemed surprised when I mentioned it in that he didn't notice they didn't kiss. He said he would pass on my concern to "Stephen and Kevin." (Pause while Slotkin computes this reference.... Ah, Stephen Fry the author and Kevin Spacey the Artistic Director of the Old Vic).

My small quibble aside, this was one riotous, irreverent, funny, sweet, very creative production. I want to see much more of this kind of theatre.

***Don't wimp out in the end and not have them kiss!***

and Hal Fowler. Both wear exaggerated wigs with hideously over done make-up, over-accentuated bosoms, which Mr. Lockyer keeps hoisting up with his hands as he flounces off with a decided waddle. He also spends a lot of time flicking his tongue out at the audience. I've seen this gentleman play Shakespeare with a swagger, attitude, and confidence. Mr. Lockyer is

proceedings we are asked to stand and sing a familiar song (I can't remember what it was at the moment) and at certain times we must sit down then stand up quickly. Silliness. We all do it gladly.

**Comment:** I have a complaint. Cinderella and the Prince kiss at the end when they find each other. Buttons and Dandini do not. They shyly profess their love and don't



**The Old Vic Presents:**

**Opened:** December 4, 2007  
**Closed:** January 20, 2008  
**Seats:** 1067  
**Cast:** 21; 10 men, 11 woman  
**Running Time:** 2 hours, 15 minutes.



## La Cage Aux Folles

At the Menier Chocolate Factory Theatre, London

Written by Harvey Fierstein, Based on the play *La Cage aux Folles* by Jean Poiret  
 Music and lyrics by Jerry Herman, Directed by Terry Johnson, Set by David Farley  
 Costumes by Matthew Wright, Lighting by David Howe, Choreography by Lynne Page.

***Pure delight. A show about unconditional love and knowing who you are and being proud of it.***

**T**he Story. Georges and Albin have been partners in life and

business for years. They own a successful cabaret club on the Riviera. Albin does a celebrated drag act under the name

Zaza. Georges' son Jean-Michel, from his first marriage, announces that he's getting married. That means that Jean-

Michel's 'parents' should meet his fiancé, Anne's parents. The problem is that her father is a local very conservative politician and moral marauder. For expediency's sake Jean-Michel carefully suggests that Albin not be presented as Georges' partner because it wouldn't look right, two men etc. living together as partners. This hurt's

***He will dress in drag as a respectable matron and pass himself off as Jean-Michel's mother.***

Albin because he has raised Jean-Michel as his own since childhood. Instead Albin will be presented as Jean-Michel's uncle. Georges reluctantly asks his wife to be there with him to meet the prospective in-laws. She agrees, but at the last minute can't do it. Enter Albin with a plan. He will dress in drag as a respectable matron and pass himself off as Jean-Michel's mother.

Of course there is the matter of Jacob, Georges and Albin's cross-dressing 'maid' who has been fitted out in men's garb for the occasion. Things go wrong, as they will do in such cases. It looks like the moral marauder will put a stop to the marriage until a local friend of Georges and Albin realizes she knows Anne's father, and it isn't in conservative circumstances. She has pictures to prove it. Things work out, as they usually do as well, and the marriage can go forward. Truths are told. Reality is faced. Jean-Michel realizes he's acted badly and apologizes to Albin and his father; since they are his real, true parents. Albin declares that "I Am What I Am" and doesn't need to apologize for it at all. A glitzy, bouncy musical with an important message, told in a sweet, bold way.

**The Production.** The Menier Chocolate Factory has a stage the size of a postage stamp. Onto this small stage, David Farley has designed a set

that puts us in the posh "La Cage aux Folles drag club, complete with shining streamers for a curtain; the expansive, well-appointed dressing room of Zaza; the cramped dressing-room of the other "La Cage aux Folles" dancers stage left; the elegant apartment of Georges and Albin; and the lovely outdoors of the Riviera.

Director Terry Johnson places 17 actors/actresses, some in full drag, and doesn't make any of it seem cramped, except for the appropriately cramped dressing room of the chorus. Scenes move swiftly and with fluid smoothness. The humour pops off the close walls, certainly with all the men in drag negotiating and taunting each other in their dressing-room.

I hear that among the men in drag in the chorus is a woman. It is interesting trying to figure out which one she is. They all wear Matthew Wright's skimpy, form-fitting costumes, hose and high heels. The make-up is garish. I look at their hands. They are all elegant and large. The arms are toned but not muscularly de-

***A glitzy, bouncy musical with an important message, told in a sweet, bold way.***

finied. The legs—well I wish I had any pair of them. Then I realize that most of the necklines are low except in one case. Ah hah, that's the woman. And it is.

Lynne Page's choreography is all hip thrusts, high kicks and seductive innuendo. The dancers flounce, prance and sashay like the best of them.

As Georges, Philips Quast is elegant in a beautifully made dark suit. He is the essence of elegant and sophisticated. He is also an exasperated partner,

enduring Albin's fits of unreasonable jealousy and prima donna behaviour regarding the show. And he's also hurt for Albin when he is treated badly by 'their' son. This is a man who has used psychology and flattery in getting through life successfully. He is a chameleon of sorts. The last time I saw him he was the bull-like, powerful Juan Peron in *Evita*. His hair was slicked back. He wore double-breasted suits and he looked at least 6'2". Here he is suave, gentle, sophisticated and looks ordinary height, but his elegance is what sets him apart here.

As Albin, Douglas Hodge underplays the effeminacy. There are slight side-long glances and the occasional cramped pucker of lips. His wrists are not overly limp. The clothes are not overly glitzy. They are a touch flamboyant. In sum he is a tasteful man who is a drag star.

As Jacob, Jason Penny-cooke makes every second of the limp-wristed, flouncy walking skimpy dressing 'butler' work a treat. As Jean-Michel, Neil McDermott plays him as a young man confident enough to tell Albin he should be in the background, so as not to spoil his chances with Anne. This is a man who has been unconditionally loved. One doubts he has ever been reprimanded for

bad behaviour. He is also well brought up. He realizes his behaviour is bad, all by himself.

**Comment.** I love the generosity of this show. I love that as any good parents, Georges and Albin have patience with their spoiled son. I can fully understand why Albin is hurt being passed over as being 'himself' in meeting the prospective in-laws. And can fully appreciate the sacrifices he made for Jean-Michel.

When Albin agrees to be

the 'uncle' he needs lessons in how to walk like a macho man. He gets them from a local couple, more precisely from the wife. Such a sweet switch-up. I love how the community of that club and the surrounding businesses pitch in to make sure the marriage happens. If they have to stoop to blackmail then so be it.

Jerry Herman's music and lyrics, and Harvey Fierstein's book are a call to 'arms' to be true to oneself and all those

with whom you come in contact. No mean spirit here.

Once again the spunky Menier Chocolate Factory produces a musical in an impossibly cramped space and does it with style.



**Presented by The Menier Chocolate Factory Theatre**

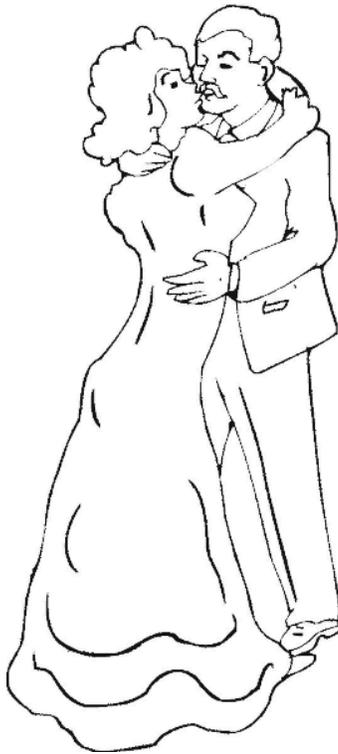
**Opened:** November 23, 2007

**Closed:** March 8, 2008

**Seats:** 150

**Cast:** 17; 13 men, 4 women

**Running Time:** 2 hours and 30 minutes



## Much Ado About Nothing

At the Olivier Theatre, London, England

Written by William Shakespeare, Directed by Nicholas Hytner

Set by Vicki Mortimer, Costumes by Dinah Collin, Lighting by Mark Henderson

Starring: Mark Addy, Oliver Ford Davies, Susannah Fielding,

Trevor Peacock, Simon Russell Beale, Julian Wadham, Zoë Wanamaker

*A beautiful production in which deep simmering emotion at past hurts bubbles up instantly, and just as quickly, changes to love.*

**T**he Story. I love the simple synopsis in the program so I'll copy it here:

"Don Pedro of Aragon, commander of the Spanish army in Sicily, returns to Messina after a victory against rebel forces which included his brother, Don John. Now reconciled with Don John, and in the company of his Italian comrades Claudio and Benedick, Don Pedro accepts the hospitality of Leonato, the Governor of Messina.

A marriage is quickly arranged between Hero, daughter of Leonato, and Claudio. Don Pedro resolves to fill the time before the wedding by tricking Benedick into marriage with his old sparring partner Beatrice, Leonato's niece.

Don John, still simmering with resentment, meanwhile plots to Destroy Claudio's faith in Hero."

Other details are that years before Benedick and Beatrice were a couple intending to marry. Something happened and Benedick backed out and

Beatrice has been hurting ever since. That would account for one reason why they are 'sparing partners'. Both are witty, smart, intellectually lively and perhaps wary of time passing them by.

While Don Pedro and company plan to trick Benedick into thinking Beatrice loves him, the ladies of the house-

Don John arranges to have Claudio witness this saying that the woman is Hero. This perception is terribly damaging.

It all ends happily with the truth being revealed. The rocky road of love leads to marriage for both Hero and Claudio and Beatrice and Benedick. I give better odds for the marriage lasting for Beatrice and Bene-

*I give better odds for the marriage lasting for Beatrice and Benedick. Claudio seems such a hot-headed twit.*

hold do the same 'gulling' of Beatrice into thinking Benedick loves her. This trickery reveals their true love for each other.

The dastardly Don John (Shakespeare sure made an art form of creating these 'dastards'), plans to compromise Hero's reputation, thus leading Claudio to cancel the wedding. Don John plots with one of his henchmen into talking to a woman of Leonato's household (Margaret) at her bedroom window late at night.

dick. Claudio seems such a hot-headed twit. He doesn't seem to learn from his past misconceptions.

**The Production.** Nicholas Hytner has created a beautiful, emotionally prickly, aching, tender production. Vicki Mortimer's set of moveable blonde wooded slated walls and rough hewn furniture suggests a warm climate. Mark Henderson's evocative lighting completes the feeling of warmth of this Sicilian city.

A long wooden table is centre stage right. Several chairs are around it. Centre stage left is a large rectangle in the floor with a little stone

***Nicholas Hytner has created a beautiful, emotionally prickly, aching, tender production.***

ledge around it. The slatted walls suggest the appropriate size of the house of the governor.

About 15 minutes to show time, characters wander out and sit at the table. A woman dressed in a long skirt and flowing top sits and eats grapes. Someone else comes out and sews. A male worker sits and talks to the others at the table. I notice Zoë Wanamaker (Beatrice) sits at the far end of the table, talking to the others. She eats a grape too. I love that sense of communal togetherness created in this household.

When Beatrice hears the name Benedick, her face creases ever so slightly at the painful memory he has caused her. When Leonato invites his regiment to visit *for a month* Beatrice bellows **NO!** This

***Shakespeare makes an art form of creating goofball fathers too.***

woman is still mighty angry.

In the gulling scene with Benedick, he hides behind a slatted wall or a small shrub. Nothing extraordinary here. But then in one sudden moment, when he's out in the open and realizes that Leonato and company are coming back, he is stunned. He doesn't know to go left or right. So he jumps into the middle of the low rectangle center stage left. From where I'm sitting it looks like a pit of sorts. Then we see the water splashing over the sides when Simon Russell Beale as Benedick jumps into it. It's a pool. Whodathought?? Nothing called attention to it in any

previous scene. I'm sure the people upstairs saw that it was a pool, but those of us downstairs did not. A wonderful surprise.

Later in Beatrice's gulling scene, she is caught in the same situation and she jumps into the pool. Both Simon Russell Beale and Zoë Wanamaker carry off this costume-dripping scene with aplomb, panache,

***I love that sense of communal togetherness created in this household.***

and hilarious self-consciousness.

In the wedding scene, only the immediate family and the regiment officers are there. The household staff is not. I thought that odd. After the plot to discredit Hero is revealed, a woman is alone on stage weeping. Benedick enters, sees her weeping and she knows it. He says nothing and she wipes

As Hero, Susannah Fielding is impassioned, shy and for the most part, beautifully poised. As Don Pedro, Julian Wadham is as dashing and debonair as Andrew Woodall (Don John, his brother) is dastardly and duplicitous. As Claudio, Daniel Hawkford is youthful, handsome, immature, and repentant.

**Comment.** Both Mr. Russell Beale and Ms Wanamaker are acting masters. He especially takes every word and realizes every emotion and thought and creates such rich, deep characterizations. She listens and reacts to every thing with honesty. To see her face

crease at the sad memory of being hurt by Benedick is to have your heart squeezed.

I wait for the scene when Benedick professes his love for her and she for him. It is done beautifully. It suggests that both of them are deeply in love and so surprised by it. Another tricky moment comes when Benedick asks her to bid him do anything for her. She says: "Kill Claudio." She's not kidding. But sometimes that gets a laugh because the actress plays it that way, or because the audience is just surprised. Here it gets a bit of a laugh—there are a lot of school kids in that audience and there is tittering, espe-

away her tears. The woman is Margaret. The implication is that she knows how she was involved in this upsetting situation. To deflect embarrassment Benedick asks her something innocuous. A lovely handling of the scene.

As Leonato, Oliver Ford Davies lends his usual dignity and elegance to the part. It is always baffling that such a loving father as Leonato could just as quickly believe his daughter Hero is wanton. Shakespeare makes an art form of creating goofball fathers too.



cially from one unruly group. For the most part the audience is quiet. I like that.

I have always loved the small part of Margaret because she is so important to the story. It is she who is at the window talking to a man below. This

ing at the table—then why weren't the servants invited to the wedding? It's such a perfect opportunity to show Margaret's dilemma. Claudio reveals at the

on stage. She knows it's her fault.

This is still a splendid, beautifully directed and acted production.

### *Both Mr. Russell Beale and Ms Wana-maker are acting masters.*

allows Don John to lie to Claudio who is also there, to say that the woman is Hero. On its own terms a woman talking to a man from her bedroom window at night would compromise her honour. Here's my little question with the production. Since the first scene so beautifully establishes the communality and equality of that household—servants (including Margaret), employers, governor etc. all talking and snack-

wedding that he saw Hero talking to a man at her bedroom window. Margaret would know it was she who was at the window and not Hero. But to admit that compromises her. To remain silent compromises Hero. To have Margaret and the other servants at the wedding would add another layer to this multi-layered play. Instead we assume that Margaret is told the reason the wedding is cancelled, hence her crying alone



#### The National Theatre Presents:

**Opened:** December 18, 2007  
**Closed:** March 29, 2008  
**Seats:** 1,160  
**Cast: 25:** 17 men, 8 women  
**Running Time:** 3 hours.

## Othello

At the Donmar Warehouse, London, England

Written by William Shakespeare, Directed by Michael Grandage

Designed by Christopher Oram, Lighting by Paule Constable

Starring: Edward Bennett, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Michelle Fairley, Ewan McGregor, Kelly Reilly

### *An excellent Othello in a sometimes good, sometimes odd production.*



**T**he Story. We know this one too, don't we? Othello the Moor has married the fair Desdemona. Her father, Brabantio, is none too happy. Othello had been invited to the house because he was a celebrated soldier. When he told stories from his life, Desdemona was entranced. She fell in love with him, and he with her. They secretly married. We can surmise why Brabantio objects. Othello is black. When Brabantio is informed of the marriage, he's told in the most objectionable racist terms.

Othello shows his diplomatic abilities by quelling a fight when Desdemona's father comes after him. Because of his impressive soldiering, Othello is sent to

Cyprus to put down an uprising. He asks that his wife join him. The action of the play unfolds in a tense 33 hours following their arrival in Cyprus.

Iago has been passed over for promotion he thinks he should have had. Othello gives the job to Michael Cassio, who has little experience. This sends Iago into destructive mode, trying to break up Othello's marriage and cause as much trouble as he can.

First he sets Roderigo into motion to make his moves on Desdemona. Apparently Roderigo had visited her at home before the marriage and obviously didn't impress her, and was intensely disliked by her father. That doesn't stop Iago from egging on Roderigo to court the married Desdemona.

Then Iago sows seeds of doubt in Othello by suggesting that Desdemona is unfaithful with Michael Cassio. Iago plays on Othello's insecurity. Othello, who is prone to crippling fits of rage succumbs to Iago's insinuations. Enraged, Othello suffocates the innocent Desdemona. Emilia reveals that Iago has engineered all the trouble; Iago kills Emilia. Consumed by guilt, Othello accepts his responsibility, stabs himself and dies near his dead wife.

**The Production.** Director Michael Grandage captures the darkness of the play and the flavour of Venice. I love the look of Christopher Oram's dark, spare set. When we file in, the irregular black stone 'floor' is glistening. It's been raining apparently, and the residual condensation glints on

the black stones. As the scene progresses, more and more of the moisture disappears. I love that touch. Paule Constable lights shadows and hidden

***Director Michael Grandage captures the darkness of the play and the flavour of Venice.***

spaces to create a sense of mystery, heighten suspense etc. In the last scene, Desdemona's bedroom is brightly lit. No hiding here. The truth is exposed.

The acting for the most part is impressive. As Othello, Chiwetel Ejiofor is the best I've seen. He is majestic, confident, princely, diplomatic, commanding, soldierly, and the slight accent that he affects, suggests he's from 'away'. Othello's inexplicable rages are handled well, with style, and eyebrow-raising surprise (on my part—he is so good). This is an actor who moves from strength to strength.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Ewan McGregor as Iago. He is not Machiavellian, or manipulative or slimy, shady or convincing when he says to Roderigo "I am not what I am." I take this to mean the always dependable, faithful friend. We need to see the wheels moving as Iago plots his next move. We just don't see that in McGregor's dull performance.

As Desdemona, Kelly Reilly falls between Ejiofor and McGregor. She is both

she doesn't know what and she's frantic to find out. There is all that, but there is also a sense of distance, that the actress is not fully in the

character. That's a bit unsettling. As Emilia Michelle Fairley is fiery when she realizes that Iago is responsible for all the trouble, tender with Desdemona, and fearless when she tells Othello he's wrong to have doubted Desdemona. Emilia is such a hard part. It can be all rant. But Fairley paces the performance and brings out all the nuance. As Roderigo, Edward Bennett is impressive in his petulance and

***I do knit my eyebrows a few times though, with Grandage's direction.***

frustration. As Cassio, Tom Hiddleston has charm and stature. I can see why Othello chose him over Iago for promotion. You can also see how distraught Cassio becomes when he is out of favour.

I do knit my eyebrows a few times though, with Grandage's direction. Initially he has Othello strangle Desdemona on the floor, rather than the bed as urged by Iago. Now that mystifies me. Makes no sense. Then Othello carries

**Comments.** Talk about a racist, xenophobic era. In Venice Othello is celebrated for his diplomacy and soldiering, but he's certainly not welcome to marry a highborn white woman. Venetians look down on Florentines. They probably all look down on Cypriots. God knows what they would make of Canadians, eh?

Comments from the Mirvish group were really lively and perceptive. How does one explain Iago's blinding rage at Othello for not promoting him; for Iago's then manipulating Roderigo to pursue the married Desdemona; and for bedeviling Othello with suggestions of doubt about Desdemona's faithfulness? How do you explain such anger? "Jealousy," suggested a

savvy member of our group. "Iago was in love with Othello. There are a lot of clues in the text." And when he wasn't promoted Iago went into jealous overdrive. Sounds good to me.

Iago is distant, at best, from his own wife, Emilia. He says nothing to her if he can't be blunt or insulting. Being the 'emotionally abused' wife, Emilia dotes on him, desperate to please him. She gives him Desdemona's handkerchief because he's always wanted it without asking why. She is not that damaged that she won't finally turn on her husband when she realizes how mendacious he's been, and the main cause of Desdemona's murder.

How stupid do you have to be (hello Roderigo!!) not to know that the woman (come on down, Desdemona) isn't interested, and that her father doesn't like you? What kind of moral bankrupt is Roderigo to pursue a newly married woman? You have to wonder about a guy like him. Or maybe

strikingly beautiful and compelling because her eyes seem just a touch crazed. I've thought that in the various shows I've seen her in (*After Miss Julie, The Graduate*). The body language suggests a woman in love with her husband. Ms Reilly conveys Desdemona's confidence with her husband as well as, suddenly, her fear of him. Something is happening and

her to the bed, where he finishes her off when she miraculously revives. And if one is sitting upstairs house right, then one is not able to see the first attempt at strangling because the scene is played so close to that side. Mr. Grandage is such a good director, I can't figure out why he does this. I'm sure there's a good reason: I just don't get it. Oy.

not.

I heard after the fact that one member of our group thought the marriage of Desdemona and Othello would

Christian, or at least gave the impression of trying to fit in. Also, Othello seems to have inherited his father's fits. Was it rage or epilepsy that Othello

privileged. A good production in many ways, but the weak performance in a key role and my quibbles with the direction left me less than euphoric.

***“Iago was in love with Othello. There are a lot of clues in the text.”***

be rocky on religious grounds. Venetian Desdemona would probably be Catholic and Othello is likely to be a Muslim. This person thought that Othello would be mistrustful of all women and eventually come to mistrust Desdemona.

I wish that interesting point had been brought up in discussion. In this production Othello wore a cross, which would suggest that while he might not be Catholic, he was

inherited? The famous handkerchief that caused so much trouble was given to Othello by his mother. His mother used it to soothe her husband when *he* was in his raging fits. Mom passed it on to her son so he could give it to his wife for the same reason. Smart woman. You have to think that valium would be more efficient.

This starry production sold out for its entire run. People with a ticket felt lucky and



**The Donmar Warehouse Presents:**

**Opened:** November 30, 2007  
**Closed:** February 23, 2008  
**Seats:** 299  
**Cast:** 12: 9 men, 3 women  
**Running Time:** 3 hours, 15 minutes.



## War Horse

At the Olivier Theatre, London

Adapted by Nick Stafford, from the novel by Michael Morpurgo  
 Directed by Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris, Designer/drawings by Rea Smith  
 Puppet design by Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler for Handspring Puppet Company  
 Lighting by Paule Constable, Director of movement, Toby Sedgwick  
 Music by Adrian Sutton, Songmaker, John Tams

Video design by Leo Warner and Mark Grimmer for Fifty-Nine Productions Ltd  
 Starring: Jamie Ballard, Finn Caldwell, Thomas Goodridge, Thusitha Jayasundera, Craig Leo, Rachel Leonard, Tim Lewis, Tommy Luther, Toby Sedgwick, Luke Treadaway, Angus Wright.

***A thrilling piece of theatre about loyalty and bravery in WWI and the love of a boy for his horse.***

**T**he Story. Based on *War Horse*, ‘kid’s’ book entitled by Michael Morpurgo, (the former children’s laureate in Britain). The love of a boy for his horse and the horse for the boy. And it’s a war story too. How much of a sentimental set up is that?

It’s 1912. We are in Devon, England. Albert Narracott, aged 15, lives on a farm with his mother and father. His parents work very hard but his father just doesn’t seem to have any luck, either as a farmer or the proud head of his family. He is always being shown up

by his more prosperous brother-in-law. Mr. Narracott is often reminded that his wife’s family thinks she married beneath her. Narracott drinks when he gets a few dollars, and after one of his drinking binges buys a horse he can ill afford and brings him home. Albert falls in love with the horse and spends his days riding and exploring. Albert names the horse Joey.

At first, the horse does no work on the farm. Narracott thinks he should sell the horse to make some money since the horse isn’t paying its way. Distraught, Albert assures his

father he can teach Joey how to plough within one week; otherwise his father will sell the horse. Albert succeeds. Joey is saved.

The war is raging in France. The army needs horses. Narracott needs money for the mortgage or he’ll lose his farm. Unbeknownst to his wife or Albert, he sells Joey to Major Nicholls for the cavalry. Joey is shipped off to France. Major Nicholls assures Narracott and the family that he will take good care of Joey.

Almost as soon as Joey and Major Nicholls arrive in France they are thrown into battle.

Joey is 'befriended' by another majestic horse name Tophorn. They bolster each other through battle after battle. Major is killed, as is the soldier riding Tophorn. Joey and Tophorn join the thousands of lost horses roaming the French

### *Unbeknownst to his wife or Albert, he sells Joey to Major Nicholls for the cavalry.*

countryside. They are found by German soldiers who use them to haul ambulance carts full of wounded German soldiers. Joey's expertise in ploughing saves him. Tophorn is not that fortunate, but Joey offers encouragement. The relationship is like men fighting side by side, friends, supports, mates. Eventually Tophorn's heart and spirit give way.

When Albert hears that Major Nicholls has been killed he secretly enlists (lying about his age), to go to France, find Joey and bring him home. Simple. Oy. Albert goes to France with a cavalry regiment. Because he knows horses so well, he's valuable. He sees the horrors of war and it affects him mightily. At one point he is gassed and it blinds him. At the same time Joey has found himself in no man's land, caught in barbed wire. Both the British on one side and the Germans on the other see that Joey is in terrible distress and *both* sides put up a white flag. A British sergeant and a German soldier slowly walk towards Joey, white flags in hand, and together they carefully untangle Joey from the wire. Who gets the horse? The German soldier suggests they flip for him. The British sergeant wins. They shake hands and wish each other well. The British sergeant wishes that all wars be fought in so civilized a manner.

The sergeant takes Joey back to his camp but he is so badly cut up from the wire that the only humane thing is to shoot him. A soldier approaches Joey to shoot him in

the head. He pulls the trigger and the gun clicks. He tries again. Again the gun clicks.

Albert, still blind, is in the same camp, lamenting his situation; that he can't find his horse; that it all seems hopeless. In total desperation he

yells out Joey's name. Joey recognizes Albert's voice and becomes agitated and re-energized. Another soldier suggests that Albert care for this wounded horse, in the hopes of saving him. Albert recognizes Joey. Boy and horse are reunited. Both recover from their wounds.

In the last scene, Albert rides Joey up the laneway to his parents' farm. He dismounts and hugs his mother while his father hangs back, hat in hand, head bowed, lamenting what he caused by selling the horse. The end.

**The Production.** Exquisite in every single way. The back wall of the set is a bleak black. Cutting through it from the top is a wide jagged wedge of white, which will act as a screen for projections of the date and animation. The stage floor is round (as is the revolve that will be well used) and streaked with grey.

To begin, downstage, a boy gives a long sketchbook to an officer, who takes it and begins sketching. The date and place appear on the white wedge on the back wall.

"Devon August 1912."

Actors play the roles of human beings, with animals and birds suggested by puppets. The puppets are brilliantly designed by Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler of Handspring

Puppet Company of South Africa. Joey as a little horse is frisky and almost glides over the ground. The shell of the horse is lifelike. Joey's head fits into a slinky, supple section that forms the body. Three people work the horse, standing beside it. The head is attached to a pole, operated by a bar that can be manipulated so that the head moves as a horse's head would. The front puppeteer also supplies the whinny, the snorts, the flips of the head. The second puppeteer handles the front legs, flipping, stamping, bending and even galloping. The third puppeteer, who stands at the back of the horse, works the tail and the back legs in unison with the puppeteer working the front legs. At one point Joey's legs are bent and he kneels on the ground. The three puppeteers are in full view so we see how they make this puppet horse seem lifelike. To give a sense of how small Joey is, the puppeteers at the front and the back operate their sections from their waists. The one in the middle has to bend



forward to move the front legs. The three are totally engrossed in operating the puppet, and show absolutely no expression. They wear farm clothes to fit into the setting.

There are puppet birds on a long pole, held by another man. As the pole is dragged through the air, the wings of the bird move. A goose is built on a wheel attached to a pole and wires. A man stands behind this contraption holding the

pole so that the wheel can be pushed forwards and backwards. As the man moves, so does the goose. The wires are attached to the head and wings

***The sergeant takes Joey back to his camp but he is so badly cut up from the wire that the only humane thing is to shoot him.***

so that the puppeteer can make the head bob up and down, peck at the ground, while he hisses at people and chases them. Often the goose follows either Albert or his parents right to the door of the farmhouse. The door closes just as the goose is about to wheel inside. As the door closes the goose raises his head. His neck goes right up the door and he stands there thwarted. This is a lovely joke that is repeated during the show, and is as funny after the umpteenth showing as it is after the first.

The transition from young Joey to grown Joey is magical. Joey the younger is upstage. At the very back, behind him, is a huge, hulking beast of a horse. At a certain point our attention is upstage and it is then that the three puppeteers working young Joey flip him up, over their heads and off, just as grown Joey gallops downstage.

This 'puppet' is sturdy and substantial. Grown Joey is as high as a man. The head, fash-

times holds the side of the head to move it sideways. He also supplies the snorting, whinnying, and other natural horse sounds.

The body is made of a sturdy opaque shell covered and crossed with strips of brown wood. The ribs are suggested by evenly spaced curved strips. Joey's midsection fits over two men, standing up, one at the front and one at the back. I'm not sure exactly how the shell fits over them—by a harness on their shoulders? But it does fit well. Both men hold

***The transition from young Joey to grown Joey is magical.***

poles attached to the legs and hooves. The legs move separately. The legs bend, flip forward and move in the natural gait of a horse. The man at the back of the 'shell' works the haunches and the horse's tail.

Joey gallops, frolics, prances and breathes. The last stuns me. I think, "I've blacked out momentarily and that 'puppet' has become *real*. *He's breathing.*" I cover my mouth with both hands. How is that done??? I look closer. The man standing at the front of the shell subtly, delicately bends and straightens his legs.

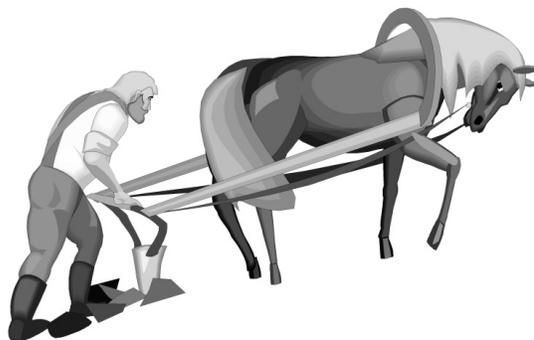
This gives the impression that Joey's lungs are inflating and deflating. Just the suggestion of movement at the front of the horse makes us imagine he is breathing. Works for me. The

movement and sounds of the horse are so convincing I am certain that all the puppeteers must have watched hours of horse videos.

The scene in which Albert teaches Joey how to plough is gripping. The wedge of the heavy plough is on the ground and the reins are attached to Joey standing in front of it. Albert tries to urge Joey to move forward. Joey strains. He screeches with exertion. His head flips from left to right in effort. Both pairs of his legs are locked as he leans forward on an angle. Just behind the horse's legs are those of the two men 'working' the legs. Their legs too are locked and are on the same angle tilted forward. You can imagine the grunting. Miraculously the plough moves a bit. Albert

urges Joey to try again. Joey snorts and puts in one last huge effort. Joey strains forward. The men working the horse strain forward. I sit forward in my seat gripping the arms rest, almost grunting in effort myself. (Get a grip, Slotkin). The plough moves further. A string is wrapped around the plough and behind it is bunched brown material. As the horse moves forward the string pulls the bunched material. The material slowly fans out behind the plough, suggesting the displaced earth from the furrow made by the plow. Brilliant.

Soon after making the rough crossing from England to France Major Nicholls mounts Joey (Yes, the 'puppet' is sturdy enough to support a man), ready for battle. Amidst the sounds of guns, bombs, music, and noise, Nicholls and Joey ride towards the enemy. Nicholls is shot off the horse. The scene is handled with almost balletic elegance. Four men holding long poles approach Nicholls and place the poles under his arms and legs



ioned from wire and strips of wood, is again attached to a pole. The horse has eyes, ears and brows. One man works the head by turning the pole in various directions. He some-

and lift him, in slow-motion off the horse, and set him extreme stage right, on a platform. He lies there illuminated in white light until the end of the scene.

In another scene Albert's mother reads a letter from her son aloud to her husband. She does not let him forget that he is partly responsible for their

ways here, as are the emotions. It does not take a genius to know that when you mix stirring music, sweeping movement and heightened emotions, then the audience will cry. I don't think that's sentimental *per se*, or a cheap use of manipulation. These are simply ways of getting us more deeply

Added to that is this incredible production directed by Elliott and Morris that bring Morpurgo's vision to life.

I don't think it necessary to have read the book beforehand, but it will give you an idea of the scope of the story. Because I had read the book I knew that in the first scene, when the boy gives the officer the sketchbook, the boy is Albert, and the officer is Major Nicholls. In the book Major Nicholls sketches Joey. Would anybody get that on their own? I don't think so. Is it confusing? I don't think so.

OKAY, OKAY. You have stirring music (recorded but no matter), you have people and horses in terrible situations, trying to survive and muddle through, sometime rising above the sheer horror. British, German, children, horses, no matter. It pulls at your heartstrings, your tear ducts, your emotions. No embarrassment. You are a wreck. You are elated. This is theatre that takes you to a different place and deep into your heart, soul and emotions. Fabulous.

### ***"I've blacked out momentarily and that 'puppet' has become real. He's breathing."***

son going off to war to find his horse. The father, dejected again, walks off. I assume he is going to do himself in. But no, there he is at the end of the play when Albert and Joey come home, although not included in the embrace with his wife and his son. There is a line in the play, "we are only remembered for what we have done." I feel terrible for that father.

This production is full of images that I will never forget for the rest of my life. The goose. The transition of young Joey to grown Joey. The plowing; Joey desperately picking at

involved in the story.

As Albert, Luke Treadaway is boyish and moving. The boy grows to manhood in such a short time. He is tender and loving with Joey. As Rose Narracott, Thusitha Jayasundera is a concerned, conflicted mother. She loves her son. She's both loving and furious with her husband. And she just rails at her husband when he sells Joey. As Ted Narracott, Toby Sedgwick is like a walking disappointment. The man tries to succeed for his family but is put down at every turn. He's not a cruel man. He's just totally frus-

### ***The scene in which Albert teaches Joey how to plough is gripping.***

the harness of the dying Tophorn, trying to get him to stand up; Albert's father standing alone behind his embracing wife and son. Stuff to take your breath away and start the tears streaming.

Marianne Elliott, who is one of my favourite directors, has directed with Tom Morris to create a vivid production of enduring imagery. The vision is huge yet intimate. The ensemble work of the actors is seamless and cohesive. All the puppets are manipulated *by actors* in this production. Whether they are interacting with their acting colleagues or working in tandem with others to manipulate a horse etc. the work is so fluid, it's a thing of beauty. The imagination is pricked in many

trated. Mr. Sedgwick is also the director of movement on this production, and 'worked' one of the horses.

The whole cast of 26 forms a semi-circle that curves up and around the stage, in order to get everybody on for the bow. The cast is brought back for bow after bow. I think, if they don't bring Joey and Tophorn on for their own bow, the place will mutiny. The stage clears. The two horses gallop on and bow, legs straight out as they bend down. This finishes me.

**Comment.** Oy. Oy. Ditto. I think Nick Stafford has done a splendid job of adapting Michael Morpurgo's novel for the stage. He has cut some characters and scenes, but the emotional wallop is still there.





**Presented by the National Theatre in association with Handspring Puppet Company**

**Opened:** October 17, 2007  
**Closed:** February 14, 2008  
**Seats:** 1,160  
**Cast:** 26: 22 men, 4 women.  
**Running Time:** 2 hours 25 minutes

# "What should I see when I go to..."

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## Toronto

### *Alias Godot*

**Box Office: 416-531-1827**

At the Tarragon Theatre. Written by Brendan Gall. Directed by Richard Rose. Two detectives, one corrupt named Vincent and the other a bumbler named Edward interrogate a strange foreigner named Godot. He talks about an important appointment he must keep and a mysterious package. Brendan Gall's take on *Waiting for Godot* from the point of view of Godot and why he was delayed. At the Tarragon until June 1.

## London

### *Harper Regan*

**Box Office: 020 7452 3000**

Cottesloe Theatre. Written by Simon Stephens. From the brochure: "Simon Stephens' new play navigates the UK, exploring family, love and delusion; and how to live in a godless world." Starring Lesley Sharp. Directed by Marianne Elliott. That was enough for me. I bought a ticket for this July.

## New York

### *South Pacific*

**Box Office: 212 239-6200**

At Lincoln Center Theater. Rogers and Hammerstein's lush, moving musical of love between men and women of different cultures, classes, attitudes and philosophies, about lessons learned the hard way. Directed by Bartlett Sher as a play with music, rather than as a musical first. Open ended because people are clamoring for tickets.

### *Sunday in the Park with George*

**Box Office: 212 719-1300**

At Studio 54. Book by James Lapine. Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Directed by Sam Buntrock. This is a transfer of the glorious production first from the spunky Menier Chocolate Factory, to the West End at the Wyndham's Theatre and now to New York. About the creation of Georges Seurat's painting, "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte." Plays until June 29.

# Other Stuff



## Art Overkill

Just as we rearrange our furniture every once in a while, art galleries do the same thing with their paintings. Or at least the National Gallery in London does.

For years I have been going to see my favourite painting there: "The Execution of Lady Jane Grey" by Paul Delaroche (1795-1856). As with almost all things in my life I first learned of this painting from the theatre. A section of this painting was used as the poster for the London production of *Death and the Maiden*, a chilling play by Ariel Dorfman that starred the wondrous Juliet Stevenson.

In the poster a young woman in a dazzling white dress with a fitted bodice, faces us, blindfolded. Her reddish-brown hair cascades down in front of her left shoulder. We see her from a little below her waist and up. Standing behind her is an imposing man (also from his waist up) in a huge robe with a rich fur collar and lapels. He is leaning down close to her ear, as if whispering something. One arm reaches behind her shoulders and holds her right arm at the elbow. The other hand reaches down and delicately touches her left arm. The blindfold unsettles me, but that man standing over her seems to be offering her comfort. As I love everything about the production of *Death and the Maiden*, I want to see the source painting on which this poster is

based. I learn it is hanging in the National Gallery.

I slowly walk into the section of the gallery that covers art from the 1700s and later. In this section several rooms are laid out in exactly the same way with each room having an arched 'doorway' in exactly the same place. That means that you can stand in the first room, look through each archway and see to the back wall of the last room.

When I round into the first room, I see a flash of white from the painting on the back wall of the last room. That stuns me. I turn back out of the room. I take a breath. I lean forward a bit to see through the archways. The white is a dress. As I lean further forward I see the woman wearing the dress and the huge man standing over her. That is my painting.

As has been my habit with art that I have learned about in the theatre and finally see in 'the flesh', I begin to lose it. Breathing hard. Blinking fast. Totally embarrassing myself. ("Oh for God's sake, Slotkin, get a grip!") I figure I better take my time getting to that last room; prepare myself properly. I'll just look at the art work before that to calm myself. In one room there are four versions of Van Gough's "Sunflowers". ("Oh God!"). In another there are sketches by Georges Seurat and his wonderful painting "Bathing at Asnieres." ("OH GOD!!!"). The bathers are what the lovely people in Seurat's "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte" are looking at across

the river. After this there are Renoirs, Monets, Manets and Turners. By the time I get to the last room with my painting, I am a blubbing wreck. ("Slotkin, you are a complete embarrassment to all things Canadian").

Finally, there is the whole painting. It's large. In the centre of it is the young blind-folded woman. She is wearing a beautiful satiny gown. She is kneeling on a large, blue cushion. Placed on the ground in front of her is a block of wood. Straw is spread around the block. The large man bending behind her, comforting her wears a full length black robe with a large ermine collar. To her right are two women. One is sitting on the ground, leaning against a wall, looking sorrowful. Behind her, the other woman has her head bent forward, touching the wall. Her arms are up and her hands touch the wall as well. To the left of the central figures is a man standing, relaxed, wearing scarlet tights and a fitted velvet jacket. In his left hand he gently steadies the long handle of an axe.

The young woman is Lady Jane Grey who was Queen of England for nine days until she was deposed and sent to the Tower of

London for her execution. She was 17 years old. The large man is Sir John Brydges, the Lieutenant of the Tower of London. While I think he is comforting her, he is fact he is guiding her to position herself on the cushion so that she can bend forward and place her head on the block. The two ladies are her grieving ladies in waiting. The man with the axe is the man who will do the deed. It's a powerful painting that never loses its grip over me.



Over the years the National Gallery has moved the painting from the back wall

of the last room to the side wall of the same room. I've gotten used to seeing it on that side wall. Until this year. It isn't where it should have been. It is on the opposite wall.

To the left of 'my' painting is another: "The Execution of Maximilian" by Edouard Manet (1832-1883). A man wearing black pants and a white shirt in the left side of the painting, is being shot at close range by a firing squad standing to the right of him.

He is Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria. He was installed by Napoleon III as a puppet emperor in Mexico. Then Napoleon

abandoned Maximilian and the Mexicans overthrew him and shot him (along with two of his generals.)

Part of the painting is missing. It's thought that Manet cut it off himself. After his death the painting was further cut into bits and sold. Edgar Degas bought the remaining pieces and reassembled them into one painting.

The thing that appealed to my warped sense of humour is that with the placement of "The Execution of Maximilian" to the left of "The Execution of Lady Jane Grey" it looks as if the firing squad in the former is shooting at the poor woman in the latter. A bit of overkill, that.

### ***Antony Gormley at the Hayward Gallery***

This is the exhibit I am told to see by Michael Therriault last summer. Also, when Penny Downie was set to play Penelope as in Odysseus's Penelope, in *The Penelopiad*, she went to the exhibit to see what it might be like to be dead.

To 'announce' the exhibit, the Hayward commissioned Gormley to create what is known as "Event Horizon," 27 fiberglass and 4 cast iron figures of his naked self on the roofs of many of the buildings to the North and South of the Hayward Gallery. The statues are positioned on these buildings so that they face the Hayward. There are some on the National Theatre, across Waterloo Bridge from the Hayward. There is

one on the Shell Building behind the National. Some on the Royal Festival Hall, and even a few on buildings on the north bank of the Thames. It is a huge accomplishment.

Gormley has sculpted bodies; created mobiles made of soldered fine metal spokes; created "Allotment II" a room full of concrete rectangles of many shapes representing the smallest space capable of sheltering a person. Small ones, large ones, medium ones, with holes in them. One room has cast iron figures crammed into corners, its legs and arms flat against the two walls forming a corner. Gormley created a whole wall of whitebread/toast meticulously placed equidistant apart. One slice of toast has a bite taken out of it. Gormley is creative *and* witty.

The centre piece of the exhibit is "Blind Light." A huge glass box fills one of the galleries. The box must be about 30' x 30' x 15 feet high. Inside the box is white light and thick mist. From the outside of the box we see people disappear into and come out of the mist. Suddenly a hand comes forward out of the mist, as it moves slowly to one of the walls. The hand traces its way along one of the walls until the one 'doorway' in the box is 'visible' and apparent. It's spooky to see a hand slowly appear in the white mist.

We are allowed to enter the glass box a few people at a time. There is a warning to people who are claustrophobic and pregnant women; children have to be held by the hand while in the box; we are urged *not* to run. The air is cold at the doorway. The floor is wet. All that mist condenses forming moisture on the floor.

It's cold when I enter the space. I can't

see more than six inches in front of me. The program note says the point is to make us feel disoriented. It's done that all right. I put my hand out to slowly 'feel' my way in the bright, misty void. I see a brown form moving in front of me. I back away. For some reason I think of a documentary I saw of the discovery of the Titanic 'buried' so deep in the ocean for so long. When the camera panned across the ship, it was eerie, chilling, and terribly moving. I felt like a slow-moving (lumbering?) ship sliding in this bright, misty, murkiness.

For some bizarre reason I felt safe in this unknown. I figured no one would let me be hurt. On the one hand I had a sense of confidence to move slowly in the 'room.' On the other hand, just as suddenly, I wasn't brave enough to wander about in the middle for long. I wanted to feel something solid so I crossed to the opposite wall and felt my way around. Confident though I was, I wanted to get out. Is this claustrophobia? I always thought that would be squeezed into some underground space, buried. This place let me wander freely, albeit slowly, in this weird void. And I wanted to *get out*.

As I approached the doorwell the air got noticeably colder until I walked out into regular, clear light and warmth. What an odd, interesting feeling to this fascinating piece of art.

Mistily yours,

Lynn

## What Subscribers Say About the Slotkin Letter

*"The easiest and most amusing way of keeping up with what is going on in the theatre in the Western World."*

Dame Eileen Atkins, actress

*"Fab. Please continue to use my favourite word: 'Feh'. Please continue to burst into tears at great words and performances. Please continue to wear wet towels in the Mediterranean sun."*

A gifted theatre creator who wishes to remain 'Anonymous.'

"Great!"

Astrid Janson, designer.

*"You are the best."*

James Karas, theatre reviewer for *The Greek Press*

*"So far, so wonderful."*

Marian Seldes, actress

*"The Letter is a great arm-chair tour of the theatre world."*

Barbara Gordon, actress

*"Great! Follow your passion and do it the way you want."*

Keith Thomas, composer, actor.

*"The envy I have in not being able to see all the show you do is surpassed by the thorough, enlightened and enthusiastic commentary you offer."*

Bob Baker, Artistic Director of the Citadel Theatre, Edmonton.

*"Thanks so much for the August piece about Chokydar. It's beautiful and elegant and does her proud."*

Rod Beattie, actor and the 'best friend' of the late Chokydar.

# The Slotkin Letter Previews

Show	Where	Preview
<i>Dealer's Choice</i>	London	At the Trafalgar Studios. Patrick Marber's play about poker; the need to play; the obsession with not being the mug; the swagger and the crushing humiliation of defeat. Samuel West directs a stunning cast.
<i>Democracy</i>	Toronto	At the Tarragon Theatre. Written by Michael Frayn. Frayn examines the rise of Willy Brandt as the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and his right hand man, Günter Guillaume who also happens to be spying on him for the East German Stasi. Richard Rose directs an accomplished cast.
<i>Metamorphosis</i>	London	At the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre. Described as "A six-legged nightmare by Franz Kafka." This is a stunning production of a man who wakes up to find that he's turned into a cockroach and his whole life turns upside down, literally. Adapted and directed by David Farr and Órn Gardarsson
<i>The Price</i>	Hamilton	At Theatre Aquarius. Arthur Miller's infrequently produced play about what some people sacrifice for family, the secrets they keep from each other, and the damage all this causes. Christopher Newton directs a cast that includes Peter Hutt, Dan Letts and Brigitte Robinson.
<i>Stuff Happens</i>	Toronto	At the Berkeley Theatre, Downstairs. David Hare uses news headlines, facts, imagination and liberty, to tell his story of how President Bush and his advisors created a story that justified invading Iraq. Fifteen gifted actors, 15 rolling chairs, one fearless director in Joel Greenberg created a gripping piece of theatre.

With profound thanks, as always, to Jen Glasser for the masterful layout, and Barbara Mains for the eagle eyes.

*Previews are subject to change...*

**The Slotkin Letter** is published monthly, with an annual subscription rate of \$100.00. To subscribe, comment, compliment or rant, please contact the author:

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