

ON THE TOWN

ENRON

Broadhurst Theater, New York
A successful play in England, still running in the West End, was a four million dollar disaster on Broadway, lasting only fifteen performances. On a high tech stage, filled with kinetic video, stock tickers and neon lights, the story of the collapse of a major American corporation was told as a wildly theatrical docudrama. Playwright Lucy Prebble and director Rupert Goold made the economic and financial complexities of the tale clear and entertaining—dinosaurs hatched in the company's basement to consume debt, while commodities brokers, wielding light sabers from *Star Wars*, battled on trading floors and offices above. Norbert Leo Butz and Stephen Kunken gave standout performances as greed-fueled executives, and the show received four Tony nominations. While aspects of the razzle dazzle production weren't up to slick Broadway standards, the play itself is worthwhile, and deserved a longer run. —Mike Cohen

LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES

Shakespeare & Company, Lenox MA
Neither hot nor cold enough, these *Liaisons* looks good, but both cruelty and sex are stated, not felt. Nothing startles. (The British production that came to Broadway years ago—in particular, the sight of Alan Rickman as Valmont, entering Juliet Stevenson as Mme. De Tourvel—was searing.) Tina Packer, Founding Director of S&Co, staged this production, and describes a milieu filled with of “hate, rage and revenge” in the utter absence of love. But actors slip too often into diction too contemporary and American for 18th century Paris, and, apart from the beautiful and sensuous dresses, beds, tables, sliding screens, creamy colors, courtly dances, small gestures, and big flourishes, all redolent of a superficially polite but deeply decadent society, there is revenge, but no palpable hate, rage or lust.

GOD OF CARNAGE

Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre, New York
Yazmina Reza, the French playwright whose work is always arresting, if sometimes superficial, has written a tour de force for four—two couples who come together to quietly and calmly address the fact that the toddler son of one couple has assaulted the toddler daughter of the other, at the playground. Sometimes hysterically funny, sometimes just hysterical, the actors are all better than good, and the pace never flags. Dylan Baker and Jeff Daniels are the husbands, one preoccupied, the other, prickly. Lucy Liu, whose voice and presence seem thin at first, next to the magnificent Janet McTeer, comes into her own as the evening evolves and devolves into near-violence and

slightly over-the-top lunacy. It all leads to the fairly obvious conclusion that the threat of violence lurks in everyone everywhere, not just four-year-olds on monkey bars. It's a good ride.

JAMES TAYLOR AND CAROLE KING

Tanglewood, Lenox MA
You don't have to be of a certain age to bop and weep your way through possibly the best pop concert in recent history, but it doesn't hurt. King's greatest hits are the greatest hits of an era—“Will You Love Me Tomorrow?”, “You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman,” “I Feel the Earth Move”, “Up on the Roof”. Her voice is thrilling and makes you even forget Aretha. And though Taylor's writing is less anthemic and more introspective, and his voice doesn't have King's power, his songs are just as singular; his voice, as distinctive. Maybe more so. Even the sound and lights are great.

KATE TAYLOR

Guthrie Center, Great Barrington
Let's not compare Kate to James; like his brothers, Livingston and Hugh, and his children, Ben and Sally, it can't be easy to be related to a folk hero. On its own terms, this is good modern folk music, Kate has a honey and whisky voice, and Billy Derby on guitar, and Sam Zucchini, who accompanied the beloved, late Mindy Jostyn, on drums, are good musicians. Taylor sings a set of plaintive, hopeful, and raucous songs she wrote alone or with Derby and others, some on her new CD *Fair Time*, and one, the title and signature song of her last CD, the beautiful *Beautiful Road*.

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM

Williamstown Theater Festival
The first all-male *Forum* is meant to shift the emphasis from sex to comedy, historically justified by all-male theater companies in ancient Rome and Greece, Shakespeare's London. But women weren't allowed on the wicked stage then; those theaters were just making do. For me, drag drags on the sex appeal without boosting the humor quotient. That said, it's a good show, charming and fun, and well staged. Christopher Fitzgerald is not inherently funny like Zero Mostel who originated the role, but his Pseudolus is endearing, not to mention adroit, and I found myself actually rooting for his freedom from slavery, which is saying a lot for low comedy. Josh Grisetti as Hysterium, is terrific; his cross-dressing scene works. And there is the early Sondheim score, starting with one of the best opening (and closing) numbers ever written, *Comedy Tonight*, staged and performed to the hilt.

TRISHA BROWN

Fisher Center, Annandale-on-Hudson
Movement that ought to be ungainly goes through Trisha Brown's filter and comes out looking beautiful and lyrical, a credit to both dance and dancers. I was especially taken with the opening dance, a pas de deux from *Twelve Ton Rose* for pajama-clad men dancing in perfect unison, but as distinct as man and woman. Everything Brown does is familiar and unfamiliar, angularity and fluidity, bodies right side up, upside down and inside out, silence and noise. Speaking of music, Brown is known for musicality, but the relationship between music and movement did not always seem harmonious.

PARADISE PAVED REDUX: JOHN KELLY

Spiegelent at the Fisher Center, Annandale-on-Hudson
I met Kelly briefly after the show, and wished I had thought to ask why he wanted to embody Joni Mitchell in the first place. But Kelly does embody Mitchell. In fact, there are times when he seems to merge with her, body and soul. At other times, particularly in the first set, when Kelly, at 50, meant to be the young Joni in a long white dress, seems tentative. It's obviously an impersonation, an actor portraying a character across gender and age—an *act*, albeit a very good one. But when a remarkable being takes the stage for the second set, in a different, darker dress singing in a different, darker voice, there are no more questions. Spiegelent, with its hundreds of mirrors, is a perfect venue. Who do we see in all those reflections? Kelly? Mitchell? Ourselves?

AUDRA MCDONALD

Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood
I first saw her in the brilliant Nicholas Hytner production of *Carousel* at Lincoln Center in 1994. In an inspired act of nontraditional casting, she played Carrie (Pipperidge, not Bradshaw), and never did I wonder what an African-American girl was doing in turn-of-the-century Maine with all those white people. Or even what an “upstanding” (read: uptight) fisherman like Enoch Snow was doing with her. McDonald won the first of her four Tony awards. Now on the concert circuit, I wish she would allow herself to become Eliza, swept up in the delirious joy of “I Could Have Danced All Night”, instead of undercutting it with mock disdain. But she nailed two songs from *110 in the Shade* (as Lizzie, a role she recently nailed in New York), some requisite, always welcome Sondheim (especially “Not a Day Goes By”), and Adam Guettel's beautiful “Migratory V” from *Myths and Hymns*, accompanying herself at the piano. (Otherwise,

there was her musical director Ted Sperling's impeccable playing.) McDonald's voice is peerless; she can sing anything and sound gorgeous, but at times I felt a distance between singer and song, which may have been the distance between McDonald and me, way up in the balcony of Ozawa Hall.

OUR TOWN

Walking the Dog Theater, PS21, Chatham
There is some of the lyrical quality of last season's lovely *Under Milk Wood* in this similar but quintessentially American play. The question of accents doesn't arise here, and yet it does. Some of these folk sound as if they might actually have inhabited Grovers Corners, New Hampshire, in 1901. And some don't. Two who do are Nancy Rothman's Mrs. Webb, and Bethany Caputo, who lives every second of Emily's short life with intensity, immediacy, and truth. Caputo is impossible not to watch, and care about. And while director David Anderson couldn't be more different from David Cromer, director of the current acclaimed New York production, Anderson plays the Stage Manager too. Where Cromer was terse, Anderson is tender. He doesn't have Cromer's authority, or Spalding Gray's or Paul Newman's, but he gives Thornton Wilder's words room to land on the heart. On a hill, near a small northeastern American town, early in a century, surrounded by familiar faces lit by the moon, this is the *Our Town* that made me cry.

JUDGMENT DAY

Fisher Center, Annandale-on-Hudson
The experience begins upon entering the theater, which has been completely transfigured. The seats are arranged in a few rows high above and on either side of the playing space. The lights come up on a railway platform—a couple of benches, ticket booth, signal tower. A few people wait for a train. A stationmaster climbs the tower to set the signal. A train approaches. Immediately, the time and place are revealed, in part because of the unerringly accurate costumes, hairstyles, and sounds, but there is also the formal (to us) behavior. A small town in Austria-Hungary. Late 1930s. And then the actors open their mouths to speak, and we're back in the Hudson Valley, circa 2010. The leads, Kevin O'Donnell as Herr Hudetz, and Hayley Treider as Anna, do better, speaking in neutral, unaccented English, the only good choice for a period piece in translation, and both are compelling in Horvath's parable for a terrible time. *Judgment Day* never really moved me, but it did fascinate. —Enid Futterman