

Wicked

learns from Elphaba that appearances are not as important as she first believed. At the end of the show, Elphaba completes her transformation into adulthood, as she leaves her childhood friend behind in order to enter a new land with her love Fiyero. She and Glinda both realize that in real life good and evil are not always easy to see or define, and consequently sing “I don’t know if I’ve been changed for the better; but I know that I’ve been changed for good.” Elphaba also learns that she is not as “unlimited” as she first believed; she and Fiyero, rather than making a grand exit by flying away, must leave Oz

Although some may consider the music in this play as a “Disney version” of

preconceived societal notions, it would ha

unfaithfulness, “thinking about it is just as bad as doing it.” Max is a man who hides his pain beneath his sarcastic quips and humor

Tony Kushner states that “There are places inside us only song can reach.” This statement is especially appropriate to this musical as soon as we realize that Caroline is in a place in which seemingly nothing can reach her. Physically she is in a hot basement “fifteen feet below sea level,” and mentally she has buried herself beneath depression and monotony. There is a place inside of all of us where we feel trapped, where we can submerge our needs and desires. Caroline physically works in this place every day. But Caroline finds outlets within the basement; she personifies the washer, drier, and radio, all of which sing to her. The radio especially symbolizes the importance of song. It is the radio which keeps Caroline going; at the end of her day, when she is sitting on her porch, she sings that if she were president she would make Nat King Cole come and sing her soul to sleep every night. She is soothed and sustained by music; music reaches a place within her that nothing else can. We see a parallel to this in the character of Noah’s father, who is a clarinet player. He expresses his grief for his dead wife through his clarinet playing. At the Hanukkah party he is overcome and changes from happy dance music to a sad ballad. He expresses himself through music in a way that he cannot through words. So although Caroline buries herself in a hot basement and beneath layers of hate, and although Noah’s father is buried beneath grief, music is still able to reach both of them and touch their souls.

Caroline and Noah have an interesting relationship. In the beginning of the show Noah sees Caroline as an almost indestructible being, as powerful as the President of the United States. Both Noah and we as an audience admire Caroline for her unstinting hatred and bitterness. She plainly tells Noah that they are not friends and never will be; at the same time, she lets him light her cigarette every day, an endearing privilege which indicates her true feelings for him. A rift grows between Caroline and Noah when Caroline starts taking the change Noah leaves in his pockets. Although Rose tells Caroline she should do this, at first Caroline resists because she has too much pride. But necessity soon overcomes her hesitation. When she takes Noah’s twenty dollar bill, the situation explodes and Noah proclaims, “President Johnson is building a bomb to kill negroes and I hope it lands on you.” Caroline, overcome by emotions that she can no longer suppress, tells Noah that “Hell’s like this basement only hotter...and that’s where Jews go when they die.” She then gives him the money and walks out.

Caroline has spent every day in a hot basement doing grueling work for minimum pay. She has three children that she must raise by herself and refuses to accept help from anyone. In the end she realizes that she cannot take the change and remain a hard, unfeeling wall of hatred and pride. She returns to her job after asking God to “murder her” so that she can go to work without thinking about how horrible it is. Caroline sacrifices herself in order to provide for her children, who will be the catalysts for change. So although Caroline herself does not affect change in her society, her actions are no less noble than her daughter Emmie’s. Emmie defiantly destroys a monument of a confederate soldier in the town. Caroline cleans and irons every day. While the two may seem like incredibly different people who do opposite things, Caroline’s actions are no less important than Emmie’s. It is her “costly, quiet victories” which pave the way for change, and which make Emmie’s actions and the change she instigates possible.

Coram Boy**Adapted by Helen Edmunson****Novel by Jamila Gavin****1/3/07**

This play is set “between heaven and hell,” i.e. right here on earth. Otis claims that he keeps his children slaves between “heaven and hell,” but ironically this is actually where every one in the play is kept. The human race is somewhere in the middle between heaven and hell, between good and evil. Human nature is portrayed as a mixture of good and bad rather than only one or the other, which makes the characters’ actions very believable. Past real life events combine with fantastical plot elements, intense stage effects, and historical musical selections to create a realistic but melodramatic show. Although at first we see a stark difference between the lives of the poor in London and the lives of the rich, we soon learn that death is the great equalizer of the social classes. Both rich and poor mothers are forced to give up their illegitimate children. Whether

dies it is not clear whether his death is a suicide or not, and this rattles all of the other characters. The use of tea and tea sets shows very clearly everyone's individual reaction and how they are all different from each other's.

Much Ado About Nothing

By William Shakespeare

1/4/07

Whenever I see this play, Beatrice's monologue which begins "Oh if I were a man" always moves me. And although I have some reservations about setting this production in 1950s Cuba, nevertheless the monologue had its usual effect. The frustration Beatrice expresses is still very understandable today. Much Ado About Nothing is a play which deals with gender roles and the restrictions associated with these roles. Beatrice is unable to defend Hero's honor because she is a woman, so she is forced to ask Benedick to defend it for her. Hero is unable to defend herself from Claudio's accusations not because she is too timid, but because women are not able to defend themselves in Shakespeare's society. The art of argument/rhetoric is considered a male art; therefore Claudio and the prince can accuse Hero and argue that she is guilty without any counterargument from her. If Claudio himself were unchaste he would not be punished as severely as Hero, because it was more socially acceptable for a man to have

ideas. At first Claudio does not know which of the masked women is the one he must marry. He is not allowed to see her face before their vows, and so has no idea who he is marrying; in fact in this production there were cloaks worn as well, so he does not know if he's even marrying a woman. When Hero lifts her mask we see that she has become equal to Claudio and has found a voice with which she can defend herself.

At the same time, each character ends up with their counterpart by the end of the play because of the gender roles play. Beatrice appears more outgoing and subsequently "male" because of her profuse and freely used words. Her maleness is accentuated further in this production through appearance. The actress who plays Beatrice is very tall and wears high heels with a black, no nonsense skirt and a crisp white blouse, which is in stark contrast to the other young ladies who wear flowing, flowery dresses. Beatrice and Benedick refuse to follow their gender roles, and so must be taught to accept them. Both

of death, just as the entire human race does. Leontes' son dies and his wife seemingly dies in the first half of the play; he also believes that his daughter has died too. The fear of becoming a cuckold is very strong for Leontes in the beginning of the play; his fear of replacement blinds him to the truth and he refuses to believe even the Oracle's words. By indulging in his fear of replacement Leontes destroys the one person whom he actually wanted to replace him—his only son.

Attolitus plays an important role in this story; in this production he appears to come out of the ground, symbolizing his close relationship with earth and with the sexualized, phallic nature of the earth which is portrayed in the shepherds' dance. He is almost completely naked, dirty, and unkempt but does not seem bothered by it. Attolitus is very much in touch with his earthly self. He is sexually portrayed and is not ashamed to lie, cheat, and steal in order to get what he wants. At the same time he is character who robs people of "unconsidered trifles." Although his name means "self-wolf," he unknowingly guides those that he unburdens by bringing them closer to self-knowledge. He acts as a kind of bridge between others, and unwittingly helps Perdita find her lost father and learn of her heritage.

The show begins with a New Year's Eve count down. Time is a crucial element in this play, one that helps to heal and transform. The gap of sixteen years allows Hermione to grieve for her lost children and for Leontes to truly repent his decisions. Sixteen years, four groups of four, has a symmetry which appeals to the Christian tradition of symbolic amounts of time and is just enough time for Leontes' daughter Perdita to come of age. In the end it is art that redeems life. After the sixteen years have passed and the lost daughter has been found, Paulina reveals to Leontes and Perdita the "statue" of Hermione. This incredibly life-like statue turns out to actually be Hermione, preserved for sixteen years so that she could reawaken when the time was right. This metamorphic reference to Ovid's Pygmalion story suggests that human folly and error can be redeemed.

Twelfth Night

By William Shakespeare

1/7/07

Appearances and mirrors come into play in this all-male production of *Twelfth Night*. I had mixed feelings about the all-male cast; while I appreciate the idea of being authentic to Shakespeare's time period, I also missed seeing female actresses playing the female roles. At times it appeared that the actors who played Olivia, Viola, and Maria played caricatures of women rather than three-dimensional female characters, although this may have been a conscious choice on the part of the actors or director. No wigs or stuffed bras were used to make the men more feminine looking, so as an audience member you never forget that these female characters are being played by men; this creates an alteration of perception on the audience's part rather than an alteration of physical appearance on the actor's part. The choice to have an all-male cast does not have to do with keeping the production "authentic" to the Elizabethan era, since the costumes and sets appeared to be circa 1940s.

In the beginning of the play, we see a fairly bare stage save for some covered

character of Feste yet. He seems to be remembering something that happened, and masked actors slowly appear upon the stage as he sings a slow, sad song. The covers are drawn off of the furniture and the lights come up quickly to begin the show, creating a stark contrast with the melancholy scene that came before. The audience quickly learns that when the actors are in masks they are not the characters they play in the show. The only person who never wears a mask is Feste, the wise fool who seems to be orchestrating or at least remembering the entire play. It seemed vaguely unsettling that such a seemingly light-hearted comedy should start with such an ominous beginning.

This beginning is just one aspect of the play's creative direction which seems to suggest something more sinister or disturbing beneath the play's surface. Here is where the ideas of mirrors and appearances come into play. There are several large mirrors on

lines of dancing partners today and then. The music serves as a welcome update to the play and adds to Shakespeare's words rather than distracting from them.

Rock-n-Roll

By Tom Stoppard

1/8/07

Throughout the course of this play we see the main characters Max and Jan struggling to answer hard questions: what is it that makes us human? Can we create a perfect society if we are inherently flawed? Ironically, it is through the women in their lives that they find answers. In my favorite scene, Max's wife Eleanor, who is dying from breast cancer, is helping a student translate a famous poem of Sappho that deals with the physical expression of emotions. In the poem Sappho (or Sappho's narrator) knows she is in love because of how she feels. Lenka, the student, and Eleanor essentially get into a debate about whether Sappho's feelings are inextricably tied up in her love for this woman or whether she simply observes the feelings as a biochemical reaction. Max supports some of Lenka's ideas, but once she starts talking about the Greek gods as the initiator of Sappho's love he loses interest. Afterwards Max relates the idea of humans joining together to society, extemporizing on the good and bad aspects of communism and whether it will work or not. Eleanor passionately interrupts him and tells him that she doesn't care about his theories, about his separation of mind and body. In one of the most powerful passages of the play she says:

“They've cut, cauterized and zapped away my breasts, my ovaries, my womb, half my bowel, and a nutmeg of my brain, and I am undiminished, I'm exactly who I've always been. *I am not my body*. My body is nothing without *me*, that's the truth of it.”

Max still does not understand what Eleanor is trying to tell him, which is that without the soul the self does not exist. Max, who does not really believe in spirituality, says that the brain, the scientific mind is all that there is. Eleanor rejects Max's word “mind,” as if it were disgusting. She does not want a mach. am .031 Tf70Ed1768T0)50TDD6c7 am d12ves)9(tr)TJ190on7nti

time spent in England and about the freedom he had there. Max thinks sacrifices must be made for the good of everyone, but Jan only sees how these sacrifices hurt individual people. This is most clearly demonstrated in the destruction of Jan's records. Rock and roll obviously is used throughout the play to create an atmosphere of rebellion and political unrest that was felt in the sixties. Jan's collection is destroyed by government officials who think the music is subversive or dangerous to the communist state. The

We soon learn that these men are not your typical, “good” men. Each of them has his imperfections and downright sins. Ivan, Sharky and Richard’s good friend, may be at least partly responsible for a fire that killed several people. Neither Ivan nor Nicky have good relationships with their wives; both refuse to go home on Christmas Eve even when asked. When he was drunk Sharky may have beaten an old man to death outside a bar; he met Mr. Lockhart while in prison for this.

Appropriately it is the blind man, Richard who, although the most alcoholic of the group, is the one with the most faith. Like many blind seers in mythology, Richard is able to see inwardly because his outward sight has been taken away. It is his hand of cards that he shares with Ivan that saves Sharky’s soul, when it looks as if all hope has been lost. This brings us to one of the most important ideas within the play. There is an incredible beauty in a race of “insects” that can triumph over an eternal, all-powerful being. In the end it seems as if these men’s flaws help to save them. They basically out-drink the devil. Mr. Lockhart says, “I don’t think I’ve ever drunk this much before,” and Sharky replies “Welcome to our house.” Like so many folk tales before it, *The Seafarer* describes the triumph of human ingenuity and faith over evil. Although the men do not exactly trick the devil with their cleverness as Daniel Webster does in his story, they still are able to beat him because they are human and are therefore redeemable. They may not be great people; they may not even be good people. But as Richard says, people have the ability to change, an ability which Mr. Lockhart does not possess but one that Sharky does.

Mr. Lockhart cannot stand the sound of music because it is a human art form which changes with human emotions and perceptions. You almost feel sorry for Mr. Lockhart because he is locked out of Heaven; he is unredeemable and doesn’t seem to understand why. He describes Hell as cold rather than hot, an internal torment rather than an outward physical torment. There in Hell is basically where Sharky already lives; there is a never-ending internal torment with no hope of forgiveness or redemption. In Heaven there is a “peace of mind” with no sense of time, whereas in Hell time goes on forever and you are aware of it going by slowly. This sense of time going by slowly is one that the characters already seem to have; it is not until Mr. Lockhart leaves and Sharky seems to have been redeemed that time speeds up again. Christmas Eve lasts for most of the play, and then Christmas morning comes and the men start moving and getting ready for church and time stops standing still.

Themes of Christianity and Catholicism are very important to this play. Richard wants everyone to go to mass together on Christmas morning even though they’re all hung over. He claims it’s for the beer that the monks make, but we suspect that he has other, more noble motives. Richard and Sharky reconnect by the end of the play, and Sharky is accepted back into the group which he scorned. They all go together to take communion in church, symbolizing their brotherhood as fellow humans. Richard also gives them all cell phones for Christmas so that they can stay in touch. Richard, with his canny inner sight, tells Sharky that Mr. Lockhart was a “maudlin fucker” and that he had a “funny smell.” Although he didn’t know exactly how serious the situation was, he definitely sensed that Sharky was in danger, and stalled him leaving long enough for Ivan to realize their cards were winners. When Mr. Lockhart leaves, stars can be seen on the stairs, reminiscent of Dante’s journey out of Hell. As the brothers and friends move out of danger and into a new tomorrow, they are able to see the stars.

The Enchanted Pig
Music by Jonathan Dove
Words by Alasdair Middleton
1/9/07

This whimsical fairy tale opera incorporates some traditional fairy tale devices with some more modern ideas. In the beginning we see a traditional trio of princesses who are awaiting marriage. When their father goes off to war they are instructed not to open the secret room but like all curious prin

eyes and sees that they are beautiful and sad. She sees through his hairy, dirty, smelly exterior. Like all good fairy tales this show teaches an important lesson—real love may appear less beautiful or may be harder work, but in the end it is more rewarding than the stereotypical, modern idea of “fairy tale” love.

Thérèse Raquin

By Emile Zola

1/9/07

In this naturalist play about the psychology of guilt, it is hard to tell if Therese herself or Laurent is more to blame for the murder of Thérèse’s husband Camille. When the play opens, we quickly learn that Thérèse is an outcast and has been her whole life. She is an orphan who imagines that her real mother was an African princess, and that she was conceived out of wedlock as a result of passionate love. Zola is experimenting with the idea of genetics, with nature vs. nurture. Perhaps Thérèse is not altogether responsible for her actions because the inclination was already built into her nature. This makes the issue of Camille’s murder even more complicated, and explains why the novel was so shocking to readers of its time. Zola saw this work as a “scientific anatomy of murder,” or a “naturalistic manifesto” based on precise observation and analysis. This idea is hinted at in the conversation between Laurent and Michaut, the police inspector. Michaut is an observer just like Zola, and so Laurent and Thérèse fear his discovery of the murder they commit. Before he and Thérèse decide to kill Camille, Laurent asks Michaut if many murders go unpunished, to which Michaut replies “Oh many do.” This cryptic statement foreshadows the eventual punishment of Laurent and Thérèse, a kind of self-punishment inflicted upon themselves by their own guilt and shame. Although they are not punished by society or the police, they are punished by their own inner demons.

Thérèse has a seemingly dual nature; at times she is introspective and sullen and at other times extroverted and extremely sexual. She can be quiet and shy or loud and assertive. We can certainly sympathize with Thérèse’s circumstances; she is an orphan who is completely dependent on Mrs. Raquin, Camille’s mother, and so has to marry Camille out of a sense of gratitude to his mother, even though Camille was raised with her as a kind of brother. Thérèse is forced into an incestuous marriage with a man she

In the end we must decide if we feel bad for Thérèse or if we see her as a villain. She is after all the eponymous character of the play, so she must be held more responsible for the murder than Laurent even though she may not have physically pushed Camille into the water. Laurent and Thérèse are able to embrace only as they die, because they have finally found peace from their torment. Mrs. Raquin acts as a kind of priest in this moment, and Thérèse seems to think that she has granted her death as a kind of forgiveness for her sins. This eventual gory ending is foreshadowed in the marriage of Thérèse and Laurent; a funeral procession is occurring while their marriage ceremony is going on. The setting stays the same throughout the play, acting as a kind of visual trap for the two main characters. It is as if they are trapped by their criminal action and they have no choice but to spiral towards their inevitable, melodramatic end. The montage of poses cleverly demonstrates this incredibly frustrating feeling of being trapped; each time the lights come up it is as if Thérèse and Laurent are frozen positions they have been forced into. We learn from this play that murder is a complicated thing, something which often has a complex web of motives and blame attached to it. Society is often partly responsible and all people, including seemingly normal, everyday people, have the capacity to commit a murder.

Amy's View
By David Hare
1/9/07

Amy's view is that "love conquers all." It is relatively simple and easy to explain, but not so easy to follow as we see in this mother-daughter play. Amy and her mother Esme both change as the play progresses until the power dynamic has become completely reversed. At the beginning of the play Esme is in control and is more powerful than her daughter Amy; when Amy tells her not to tell her boyfriend Dominic of her pregnancy, her mother blithely ignores her request because she knows better and tells him anyway. She then exits the room and lets them talk it out. Towards the end of the play, after Esme has lost all of her money and is about to lose her house, she seems to rely on Amy for support and comfort. Esme is constantly remembering how things used to be, while Amy seems to focus on the present and future. Evelyn, Esme's mother-in-law, loses her memory and cannot remember her son, Esme's dead husband Bernard. Evelyn acts a

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with the young, inexperienced actor who is in the play with her at the end. He is really interested in learning from Esme, and seems to have become a kind of son-like figure. But Hare doesn't try to offer us any easy, feel-good answers from the end of this play. If any large lesson can be gleaned, it is simply that life goes on and we continue to learn.

This play can at times feel a little contrived. Dominic and Esme especially get into debates about the theater as "elitist," and argue about what the true purpose of theater is. Commercials in TV programs have shortened the modern attention span, so modern audiences have a hard time sitting through a two to three hour play. The difference that Dominic does not see is that audiences have to engage for live theater in a way that they don't for movies or TV. Movies and TV programs entertain or thrill rather than engage. The young actor working with Esme asks her how she always gets the audience to engage with her, and she tells him that one day he will be able to do it too. This play is a play about the sustainability of live theater, so while at times it makes very valid points about theater as an art form, it also comes off as a little preachy.

Bash

Neil La Bute

1/10/07

Although this play dealt with a several ancient Greek myths, it was incredibly relevant and heart-wrenching for modern audiences. The first act, entitled "Iphigenia in Orem," is a monologue performed by a character that at first seems like a rather boring but basically nice business man. All of the characters in the play are Mormon. His manner is ingratiating and almost apologetic. He solicits the audience's attention and sympathy from the very start, so when his comments start to change in tone we don't realize it right away. A few mildly sexist comments slip past before we realize that this man has an incredibly strong inferiority complex concerning women. In fact he seems to have a very strong absence of self; he only strives to be average and wants to present himself in a certain way. He is more intent on appearing a certain way than on being a certain way, a theme that runs through many of the plays we watched. His comments start out as defensive about his gender consciousness; he says "you guys" and quickly explains that he means that in a general way; he is not assuming that we're all guys. We slowly realize that he seems to have a different sense of ethics than you might think. He recognizes language is dangerous but also as a means to an end. He went to college in order to get a job, according to him for all the "right reasons." His reasons are not necessarily what we would consider right, but they are to him. He has a sense of "pop culture" ethics, ethics he has picked up from movies or the business world. He uses fate as an excuse for his actions, claiming that in order to follow his system of ethics he had to do certain things.

In the end the truth comes out: he murdered his baby daughter in order to get ahead at his job. Of course he doesn't just come out and say this; there are layers of truth which become closer and closer to the actual truth. His jacket comes off and beneath we see a short-sleeved shirt, making him look about ten years younger. Again he uses fate as a kind of excuse; it is very appropriate that he's watching "Wheel of Fortune" before he decides to do it. His reasons are complex, more complex than he seems to realize, and it is clear that he is trying to get the truth out of himself, to try and understand his action

cannot help but sympathize with her circumstances and in some way admire her convictions. She emerges from a kind of submerged, adolescent/passive state with an action that shocks and horrifies but nonetheless proves her point.

Billy Elliot (The Musical)

Lyrics by Lee Hall

Music by Elton John

1/10/07

Dance enters into this idea not only as a personal expression, but as a social and political statement as well. Billy's form of dance, ballet, is a traditional form but he uses it in new ways. He also uses tap quite a bit in order to express more passionate emotions such as anger or resentment. Billy offers hope to those back in his home town as a boy who can make a better life for himself doing something he loves. He can protest and tell their story through his dancing.

There Came A Gypsy Riding
Frank McGuinness
1/11/07

The setting of this play is in Western Ireland, in a rural vacation spot outside of Dublin. There by the sea is a house used as a vacation cottage by the McKenna family. This house has been a place of celebration for the family, a place where they can get away from their work and stress and relax. But now it has become a place of mourning and anger because Eugene, one of the children, committed suicide a little ways down the beach from the cottage. He was found by Bridget, a distant cousin who plays an important role in this play. Bridget, like Feste in *Twelfth Night*, is a kind of wise fool, an old seemingly crazy woman who either is putting on a show of being crazy or has insightful moments. She can be seen as a witch or maybe a slightly confused fairy; in any case she may be in keeping with the Irish folklore tradition of a slightly questionable magical figure who helps others. At first she seems downright spiteful; she withholds Eugene's suicide not from the family for a few years, claiming that she wanted to wait until they were ready to handle it. The family is gathered for Eugene's 21st birthday and the night quics

positive ways. Just because he is dead doesn't mean that he became a better person; she knows that he stole money from his own mother and lied and drank too much and did drugs. She sees him as a quitter, as someone who did something spiteful because he didn't want to keep going. At the same time she is grateful that he committed suicide so that she didn't have to attempt it herself because she is not brave enough to do it.

Don Juan in Soho

By Patrick Marber

1/12/07

This modern retelling of Molière's story relates to the Faust story and to *The Seafarer*.

is perhaps worse than Don Juan simply because he does not stick by his beliefs as Don Juan does. And he does Don Juan's dirty work even though he claims to hate it.

The statue which informs Don Juan of his impending doom is not actually death; Don Juan brings himself to his own death, indicative of his over-all self-destructive behavior throughout the play. In the end it is Don Juan who damns himself; he wants to live very badly but will not refute any of his beliefs or actions.

Spamalot

Book by Eric Idle

Music by John Du Prez

1/13/07

“We found the grail! It's beyond the fourth wall!” This line sums up the clever humor that characterizes Monty Python. This musical was amazingly funny and actually