

The following is a composite journal compiled from select journal entries written by students in the 2011-2012 session of Russell Peck's *Theatre in England* course. The names, year of graduation, and majors of the authors follow each entry. In some cases, multiple entries for a single play are provided to allow the reader multiple perspectives to the same performance.

***Little Women* (2005)**

Wednesday, December 28

**Book by Peter Layton; Music and Lyrics by Lionel Siegal**

**Based on the book by Louisa May Alcott**

**Dir. Nicola Samer**

**The Lost Theatre**

In this musical retelling of Louisa May Alcott's loosely autobiographical narrative, *Little Women*, the production follows the lives of the four March sisters — Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy — growing up in the climate of the American Civil War. Their father has left to fight for the union, leaving the women to care for themselves and manage their household independently. Together they adopt an independent spirit, which is perhaps best embodied by Jo (Charlotte Newton John), the second eldest sister. Jo's character is a direct reflection of Alcott's childhood, and the story is framed from her perspective. Like the authoress, Jo is a tomboy at heart — in this time period, independence was a *de facto* synonym with masculinity. Both Alcott and her character adopted a masculine persona in their quests to become renowned writers in a male-dominated society.

The actresses convincingly portrayed the sisters' development throughout the play, as they blossomed from young girls to women. Despite the theme of independence, growing up was strongly associated with settling down and finding a man. Meg and Amy are the most feminine of the sisters and they are each eager to use those charms to find a husband. On the other hand, Jo fiercely resists the idea of becoming a housewife or mother: she rejects male attention, gets a "boyish" haircut, and shortens her name from Josephine. However — in order to truly develop — even Jo needs to find the professor, who inspires her both intellectually and romantically. The

need for male companionship is further emphasized by the introduction of Seamus, who doesn't appear in the books. He exists as an almost too perfect counterpart for Beth — the only sister who remained unpaired. She has a truly charitable heart and, when he first shows up desperate for money, it is love at first sight. From then on, he seeks to pay her back with gifts and affection; their quiet and honest relationship continues as he cares for her on her death bed.

Beth's death scene was portrayed as a poignant musical sequence as her illness slowly progressed. One by one, each of her loved ones stopped by the coach to offer their love and assistance. Beth was finally given the opportunity to express how much she cared for Seamus. As the professor notes in the play, Beth is given special treatment in the text, which seems condescending. However, she is not immune to sickness, and the montage proved a very effective and poignant scene, partially because of Beth's endless devotion to others. Unfortunately, the abrupt two-year jump immediately following her death seemed very out of place — after the scene change everyone seemed bizarrely chipper with no proper resolution for the loss of a sister.

That transition was the exception and not the rule, however, because the production's unique approach to scene changes generally seemed very smooth while simultaneously reflecting the women's independent spirit. Between scenes, the actresses themselves tidied up and rearranged the furniture. For instance, they swept and folded up the rug as if they were in a real household. Distinct stage hands would have been out of place in the March household: the women sought to take care of their home with minimal outside assistance. However, by the end of the musical, as men became increasingly important to the lives of the women, they began to help out more and more with the transitions. Throughout these segues, the women stayed in character and continued to ad lib dialogue — in one such transition Amy proposed baking a pie.

Along with maintaining the play's momentum, the smooth scene changes also squeezed in details from the book that would have otherwise been overlooked. In this manner, the natural scene changes gave the impression that the characters' lives never stop, continuing even between the snapshots we see.

The set itself was decorated simply with only the necessary furnishings — a table, a rug, some chairs — reflecting the hardship of the March family. Some comforts of home emerged, such as a small Christmas tree that the sisters decorated together while singing about the importance of family. Additionally, the upstairs nook was covered in blankets and quilts; a comfortable retreat for Jo's writing which also helped create a separate stage area. From this attic, characters were able to call down, unseen by the others. The mostly plain, plank-wall backdrop gave the set a quaint, log cabin appearance. Part of the wall was painted with a scene of grain being picked up and scattered by the wind, in reference to "Transcendental Wild Oats," the name Alcott gave for a collection of newspaper publications.

At the end of the night, after each sister had found her match, the musical closed with a classical comedic ending: multiple weddings. While the sisters danced with their husbands, Seamus smiled alone, looking unfortunately out of place. The production incongruously resolved this bizarre sequence as a spectral Beth walked on stage to comfort him before drifting off into the afterlife.

– Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

***Death and the Maiden* (1990)**  
**Written by Ariel Dorfman**  
**Dir. Peter McKintosh**  
**Harold Pinter Theatre**

Thursday, December 29

Overall, the set and lighting design of *Death and the Maiden* had a nice aesthetic feel. My favorite parts of the technical aspects of the production were the simultaneous lights and sound of a car pulling into and out of a driveway on multiple occasions during the performance. The sound was very realistic and the movement of the lights almost perfectly presented itself as what it would look like from the perspective of the audience if a car were in fact pulling out of or into a driveway of a house. The lighting design required a nice mix of shadows, placement, angles, and cues executed from one light to the next to make this all work out as well as it did.

When it comes to other aspects of the production, such as the acting, I cannot say that I was impressed. Throughout most of the show, I felt the acting was forced and not believable. The actors seemed to be exaggerating their feelings and emotions and they did not evoke any feeling or emotion within me because of how unconvincing their emotions were, especially anger, grief, and a sense of revenge, which when performed well, can invigorate me.

The themes addressed in *Death and the Maiden* were certainly strong. It was clear how the oppression of women in the Chilean setting affected Paulina. She wanted her voice to be heard, to make a statement about the oppression of women in the sense that the laws of the nation are interpreted by males and, therefore, the country is run by men. Paulina wanted the suspected rapist to confess to what he had done and repent, even if he was innocent. For me, this actually speaks to the criminal justice system, not only in other countries, but in our country as well. I have recently taken a class where we learned about false confessions and reasons why people submit them. Some may feel coerced into doing so, that there is no other way out, and even in extreme cases, which are called coerced-internalized false confessions, individuals are

actually convinced that they committed a crime which they did not actually commit. In the case of *Death and the Maiden*, however, the confession is more of something that the Doctor has to do, presumably to save his own life, as the woman threatens his life if he does not admit to what he did and repent. The fundamental question of whether or not he is innocent remains, and is important because we are also confronted with the fundamental question of how much the woman actually remembers about the rape and if specific details presented to us are what actually occurred, or if she is just delusional, due to the trauma of the event.

None of these questions are answered and the play does have a strong ending, which leaves us with another question of whether or not she killed the Doctor at the end. A scene toward the end concluded with her holding a gun to his head, but then it went into blackout, without any indication of a gunshot. I interpreted it as her killing him for two reasons. The first being the grimace or smirk in the final scene that she exhibited and the second being that the doctor appeared as kind of an apparition or ghost-like figure, one like that of a dead man. Again, this is just my interpretation, and the Doctor's apparition can be seen as a fragment of the woman's imagination instead, to indicate that she was slightly delusional and the fact that the doctor may not have been guilty of the rape in the first place.

Despite some flaws, I did like the production. Even though the acting did not impress me, many elements of the production captured my attention and my interest. The themes relevant to the story, the ambiguous ending, and the solid technical aspects of the production were enough to keep me thinking about the experience for a bit afterwards. As a result, I felt engaged with the discussion of it in class.

– William Hogan (Class of 2012; Psychology)

No matter what everyone says, I really like this production and the fact that it's closing early upsets me. During the performance, there were several occasions where I was close to tears. The acting of Paulina, played by Thandie Newton, brought me into a state of mind where I could feel her pain and understood her need for the truth. I have to agree with others in our group that at first her acting felt a little forced. But later on in the play, I think the intensity that she brought into the production was crucial to its success.

Throughout the play, Paulina repeatedly emphasized the fact that she was raped multiple times. Yet even at the end of the play we still do not know how many times this happened. The play is centered on Paulina trying to get a confession from the doctor who, she believed, had held her as prisoner, raped her repeatedly, and tortured her. However, the "rape" discussed was more than physical. It's the type of pain that men find difficult to understand, the oppression of women in the society, being sexually repressed, expectations placed upon them and, lastly, the inability of getting their voices heard.

This obstacle for Paulina was so high. It was not just about whether Dr. Miranda was responsible or not; it was about her sanity and whether her husband believed in her. Gerardo was the one caught in the middle of the situation. As part of the audience, I could feel his hesitation and his back-and-forth indecision between the two sides. Gerardo seems to be a good character out front; however, he did not remember any details about the incidents that impacted his wife the most. Gerardo's ambivalence was just another pain that Paulina had to deal with. I thought that the fact that Gerardo does not believe in Paulina was the saddest part of this play. Paulina's sanity and the truth would always be an unknown, but Gerardo chose not to believe in his wife.

The idea that the damage of rape is irreparable was emphasized repeatedly in the play; the pain can be seen as from so many different aspects. I think this play would be a perfect fit for

an advocate of women rights or violence against women. I was very touched by the production and I believe others would be too.

Regarding the set, their use of lights coming into the house as though it was coming from real car driving by was a brilliant way to instill a horror and intense atmosphere on stage. I really liked the set design of the two bedrooms on each side of the stage. Whenever there was action within the room, we could always see the action through the shadow projected onto the “wall” and this was a great artistic choice. The set overall was pretty impressive with the high ceiling and elegant interior designs demonstrating the wealth of the couple.

– Li-Ya Sun (Class of 2012; Psychology)

As the first play I saw on this London trip, *Death & the Maiden* brought to light concepts that would remain on my mind during each subsequent production. For example, *Jerusalem* and *The Kreutzer Sonata* brought back memories of *Death & the Maiden* not just because their titles, but because of the way doubt edged its way into the minds of the audience throughout each drama. In *Death & the Maiden*, the most obvious doubt is whether or not the doctor, Roberto Miranda, is the man who had raped Paulina fifteen years ago. In *Jerusalem*, this doubt applies to whether the Byron boys of the past exist in the present and will physically come to John “Rooster” Byron’s rescue. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the doubt concerns whether or not Pozdynyshev was correct in his assumption that his wife had been unfaithful, and whether she had been emotionally - if at least not physically - unfaithful to him through the music she played with Trukhachevski.

*Death & the Maiden* also brought to mind the concept of irreversibility. Paulina tells her husband that she can “[f]orgive, yes. Forget, no.” One should consider this quote a reference to the work’s title - Paulina’s rape had brought about her (metaphorical) death fifteen years ago,

causing an irreversible change in her life. However, the play suggests that the idea of avenging the past can be seen as healing by the victim. For example, Paulina regains her voice as the play progresses, standing up to her past, confronting her perceived tormentor, and challenging the authority of her husband.

While many of our plays dealt with gender issues, *Death & the Maiden* did so in an obvious fashion. Even the names of the three characters betray a focus on gender. “Paulina” is the female version of the masculine name “Paul,” and the “-ina” can be considered by some to be a diminution of the name to transform it to the feminine. Gerardo and Roberto are both masculine names. Neither of them has a unisex name (such as Quinn or Jordan, for instance) that could possibly be construed as female. Furthermore, the dynamics between Paulina and her husband (with regard to household chores or guests, for example) portray domestic boundary issues. Paulina cannot accept Gerardo’s wishes concerning Roberto’s safety, and Gerardo will not contend with Paulina’s reaction to Roberto’s presence. Audiences are left wondering which of the two - Paulina or Gerardo - has the crazy or the valid perception of reality.

*Death & the Maiden* also brings into question the effectiveness of the law. The ethics surrounding Paulina’s intent to seek justice outside the law are relevant whether or not audiences personally believe Roberto Miranda is the man guilty of raping Paulina in the past.

As a side note, *Death & the Maiden*, *The Kreutzer Sonata* (Tolstoy), and *A Doll’s House* (Henrik Ibsen) all involve the playing of a tarantella. Traditionally, the tarantella is a dance in 6/8 time performed by those bitten by a tarantula; the victim would dance in an uncontrollably wild manner in order to avoid death. To me, this signifies a loss of control with the hope of surviving. In *A Doll’s House* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the tarantella is played at the moment

when the main character loses control - Nora (*A Doll's House*) dancing wildly, and Pozdynyshev (*The Kreutzer Sonata*) describing in vivid detail the way in which he brought about his wife's death. In *Death & the Maiden*, the tarantella dance can be seen as a metaphor for Roberto's and Miranda's flailing attempts to survive Paulina's form of justice and also for her onstage madness that causes even her husband to doubt her sanity. Please see attached for copies of the first page of the tarantellas from Schubert's *Death & the Maiden* Quartet and Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* (both from [www.imslp.org](http://www.imslp.org)).

- Lauren Haley (Class of 2013; Music: Violin Performance)

### *Cinderella*

**Book by Trish Book; Music and Lyrics by Robert Hyman**

**Dir. Kerry Michael and Matthew Xia**

**Theatre Royal Stratford East**

As soon as I arrived in London, I went to Theatre Royal Stratford East to watch a pantomime of Cinderella. For people who have never even heard of pantomimes, I would advise looking up the definition beforehand. I was completely thrown off guard by the cross-dressing, active audience response, and humor referring to popular culture.

In the beginning, a character named Buttons, who resembles Pinocchio, came on stage with his guitar and sang a cheerful song. I thought he was just an entertainer who kept the audience occupied while the stage crew was prepping the show. However, Cinderella soon came on stage and started dancing with Buttons, so I realized that he was an additional character to the original story. What really threw me off guard were the stepsisters and the stepmother. They were muscular and tall men cross-dressed in over-the-top women's apparel. I looked around the

audience and thought, "Is this normal?", but people seemed to enjoy the show by shouting and laughing at the ridiculousness.

Even though I was shocked at first, I enjoyed the pantomime overall because the humor was witty and up-to-date. For example, many of the musical scores were remakes of popular songs by Rihanna, LMFAO, and other recording artists. Moreover, people of any age were able to enjoy the show. For instance, children sang along with the fairy godmother and tossed around huge balloons. At one point, the stepmother bribed the audience by giving away tiaras to the children. Apparently, pantomimes are popular during the winter holidays in the UK because parents often take their children to go see them (almost exclusively at Christmas). I would love to see other pantomimes in the near future. I especially liked the dynamic interactions between the actors and the audience. It was something I have never seen before. I'm used to watching plays in silence, especially since even the smallest noises can distract the actors.

I was most surprised by the casting of different ethnicities in the play. I imagined Cinderella to have an all-white cast but Cinderella and the Prince were black, Cinderella's father was Indian and the Prince's best friend was Asian. One of the stepsisters was black while the other was white and the stepmother was white as well. I've had casting experience when I was at film school in New York City, and one of the biggest considerations for casting was the actor's ethnicity. I feel like for this particular production, the casting was race-blind. Or perhaps the multi-ethnic casting was an intentional strategy to get more audiences (and indeed, I later discovered from Professor Peck that the East Stratford area has a prominent Jamaican population, which has become a factor in its plays). I'm looking forward to seeing more plays and how the casting is done.

– Jungyeon “Deb” Youn (Class of 2012; International Relations and English)

Perhaps the most memorable aspect of this well-spun fairy tale was that it is *not* like any other play I've seen. In itself, it is classified under the category of pantomime – a musical comedy. The high degree of song and dance, in addition to the copious amounts of cross-dressing and audience participation, made it quite unique, and a cursory glance at its wiki explains a lot of the little details that confused me initially.

Some things I've noticed is that the characters frequently break the fourth wall, and make *numerous* references to pop culture (that I, unfortunately, being ignorant of most contemporary things), which were very positively received by the audience. *Cinderella* itself is a story that many of us knew well, though I feel that the modernization of the tale inevitably meant that the gory and NC-17+ details that appeared in the original stories were left at home. The wicked stepsisters end up staying with Cinderella – a critical difference. I suppose in order to make it palatable to kids (and by extension, the moms and dads, aunts and uncles), some changes were in order. Having both the wicked stepmother and the stepsisters in drag was entertaining, and I think the explicitly “sexualized” details (seriously, were they stuffing cantaloupes in there or something?) served as a great contrast to the heroine’s more wholesome image.

While the performance of the actors was excellent, I was personally more drawn to some of the supporting cast. The queen (Prince Leo’s mother), for example, was absolutely electrifying. The audience cheered the loudest for her requests (even more so than the climax), and even I felt compelled to participate, despite my usual aversion to what I jokingly call “childish behavior.” Buttons was also excellent, and I can see why characters like him are a vital part to panto performances – he reminds me of Pierre from *The Heart of Robin Hood* (perhaps the two share similar functions in their respective works?).

Of the stage effects, the most memorable one is Cinderella's transformation by her fairy godmother. Amidst a glitter of lights and confetti, she suddenly – and I mean suddenly! – appeared in a brand new dress, to the delight of many children watching. Even an untrained eye such as mine noticed the effects of lighting. One particularly memorable scene involved Don Dini, the prince's best friend. We learn that his motive for siding with the wicked stepmother was that he feared the prince would cast him away when he gets married. He was afraid that the prince would no longer love him, and that their "Batman and Robin" relationship would no longer continue. In the scene in which the prince is singing about Cinderella and how lovely she was on top of a series of stairs, Don Dini was right there atop the platform with him, but – and this is the kicker - he was veiled entirely in the prince's shadow even though the lights rotated around the prince and he was constantly moving. I am positive that it was intentional. In that moment, I *did* feel sympathetic for him – despite the fact that he was pegged as (more or less) an antagonist from the start.

In hindsight, starting with something outrageous as this was a great way to introduce me to theatre.

– Dongdong Han (Class of 2012; Biology: Molecular Genetics)

### ***War Horse (2008)***

**Adapted by Nick Stafford from the novel by Michael Morpurgo**

**Dir. Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris**

**New London Theatre**

Friday, December 30

In *War Horse*, the audience sees war from all sides. We see war from the perspective of those left behind, from those on the front line, and from the people who aren't soldiers but have to live in the war zone. A commonality between all three is that they all want home; whether that is to

go home, have their loved ones return home or have their home returned to the way it used to be. The music of the play tied all three of these groups together. The folk music was a remnant of home, and it made how far from home the soldiers were apparent. As a representation of home, music was something that they all had in common. Even though the play focused on war, the main character was a horse. The horse was the connection point between all of the characters. The play focused on the reuniting of Joey and Albert but stayed with Joey through most of the action. My favorite productions are the ones that tell a story, and I have a particular fascination with anything having to do with World War I, so it struck me as especially poignant that the play had a happy ending. So much of the literature that has to do with World War I seems to focus on how it broke people, so it was almost refreshing.

I was amazed by the puppets. As I'd guessed the horse was made out of bamboo, wood, leather and nylon. As I watched the play I tried to figure out how the horses worked and what they were made out of because they seemed simple enough. What I didn't know was that the controls for the horse in the head and rear position of the puppeteer were controlled by bicycle cables. I also didn't notice but learned later that the horses' breathing was entirely controlled by the rear puppeteer bending his legs. After watching a TED talk, I learned that the original design had come from a hyena puppet made by the Handspring Puppet Company in South Africa some years earlier. Handspring went on to explain something I didn't think about – that using nylon allowed the puppets to look more lifelike while allowing the puppeteers to see out and interact with the other actors. I'm always impressed with the physical aspects of acting but I was especially impressed with the vocal effects of all of the puppeteers and learned later that they were all miked. What an exercise in sensitivity to your fellow actors to have to sound all at once like that without eye contact or verbal confirmation beforehand! I was also impressed when a

puppeteer performed the horse's slow death. Handspring talked about how puppets have to struggle to be alive onstage, and it was as if these puppets were so lifelike that they then had to struggle to die realistically. During the performance, I was surprised that puppets could hold riders. I'm amazed at the physical demands on the puppeteers. The puppeteers working the colt had to bend over at the waist and I could only imagine how much that would hurt your back, and the other puppeteers left the stage sweat soaked. Despite all of the amazing puppetry, the tank disappointed me.

I often wonder what it's like to be in a production. For this play, I imagined that I would have a very sore back had I been one of the puppeteers of the colt or that the rotating stage would have disoriented me. I'm also often fascinated with the ensembles because I think they are the lynch pin for a truly engrossing and realistic production. *War Horse*'s ensemble had wonderful physicality and attention to detail, especially. I loved how when they were holding up the beams of the corral they also appeared to be leaning on them and how one of the women in the town was holding her stomach, like she was pregnant. I thought those details added more life to the townspeople and tragedy to all of the men going off to the war than what was wrapped up in the main characters. Something that always strikes me, because I don't really feel like I've figured it out, was that the ensemble would talk to each other when they weren't scripted. Those soft conversational noises really added to the realism. As a vocal student, I spend much of my time trying to learn other languages and perform in them with accurate diction so I was impressed by how many languages were in the show. I can't imagine performing in a production trilingually.

I was awestruck by how detailed the production was. I found myself thinking, do they have multiple sketchbooks? Does that one detached page get reattached somehow? Were the projections above the stage taken from the sketchbook? What was the production process like if

that was the case? From where I was sitting, right next to Captain Nichols, the artistic cavalry officer, the sketches in his book mirrored the ones above the stage exactly. I liked how the projections above the stage showed time passing, the characters' location, and where the characters' minds were. The scenes above seemed better to reflect the skyline of home rather than where they were in continental Europe. Sometimes it seemed like there was so much happening on stage that the staging was unclear, especially the scene where the mother receives the letter informing her that Albert had gone missing in battle. It seemed to have been lost in the scenes surrounding it and I almost felt like I wouldn't have noticed it had she been not sitting right next to me. I did like the choice to put the horse fight back in. Because Professor Peck told us it had been taken out, I wondered if Topthorn died because he won the fight for dominance and was overworked by it?

– Katie Lewis (Class of 2012; Music)

*War Horse*'s biggest strength lay in the masterful way in which the set and the tech used throughout the play expanded on the themes introduced in the action and dialogue of the actors. Perhaps the first thing one noticed when seeing the stage was the giant screen spanning the back wall of the stage. Over the course of the play we learned that this screen is in fact meant to duplicate the sheet of paper Albert tears out of the general's sketchbook, and it effectively provided a larger context for the story as dates, images, and drawings were displayed on its face as action unfolded on the stage below. These images were usually in black and gray, giving the audience a sense of the world beyond the action on the stage as well as adding to the "days-gone-by" feel of the events pre-war.

The idea of war and its consequences were addressed within *War Horse* as the story

unfolded over the course of World War I. In class, we discussed the “Dionysian madness” of what the war really was, compared to what the English anticipated it to be at its onset. As the English mounted their horses and prepared the cavalry, the opposing side was manning machine guns, bringing the war to a technologically unprecedented level. This startling contrast between the use of horses and the use of guns showed the progression of the technology of war and can be interpreted as a warning against civilization destroying itself through technology.

Instead of technology, the virtues of a simple, rustic life were extolled. The relationship between Albert and his horse, Joey, is true and pure, and we instantly see they were meant for each other. Many other characters show a similar kinship with horses, particularly with Joey. Although these characters came from different countries and spoke different languages, they shared this love of horses and could connect through that universal “language.”

Music is also often considered a kind of universal language and functioned much in this way in *War Horse*. The single male balladeer led many of the songs, adding depth and intimacy to the accompanying scenes. When more singers joined the balladeer, the sound was distinctly deep and resonant, consisting mostly of male voices. I found this very appropriate since *War Horse* deals with the story of a boy and his horse and their journey through childhood and into adulthood.

The songs evoked a rural, pastoral feeling which was paralleled in the set design. The scenes in Albert's hometown were sparsely decorated, an indication of the simplicity of the community. The fact that actors held up the fence posts and doors showed how the people were the building blocks of this community. The use of the accordion also added to the community's rural essence.

Finally, the majesty of the horse puppets and the skill required to bring them to life

cannot be overlooked. Since it was a story with a horse as a main character, the execution of the puppetry was essential for the believability of the production. In my opinion, these puppets looked and felt as lifelike as if real horses were being directed around onstage. Whereas the set design for the town was sparse and nondescript, the attention to detail concerning the puppets was astonishing. Not one, not two, but three actors worked together to move each horse puppet, giving a performance such that everyone could believe that real horses stood just twenty feet away. The combined efforts of the puppeteers made the horses appear to breathe, run, eat, and play. For me, the movements of the horses' ears sold the performance, giving each animal expression and attitude that the audience could feel. Additionally, the actors not only made the movements of the horses possible, but they themselves also moved in a way which mirrored the horses' own. When Joey strained against the plow to make it move, the actors also strained their bodies, heightening the frustrated tension Joey must have been feeling. Perhaps what was most impressive was the fact that the actors responsible for moving the horses' heads were intently focused on the puppet throughout the entire play, never once looking at other actors. This truly made the actors fade away from the audience's eye so that all we saw was a living, breathing animal. Just as Albert found it so easy to use his imagination to dream up a life with Joey, we as the audience could imagine the horses with ease.

*War Horse* presented us with a touching story of a boy and his horse and accomplished so much through the use of its design. The spectacle of the puppets did not overpower the sparsely decorated set. Rather, the two complemented each other to bring out the vivacity of the horses and the simple, rustic appeal of the times before war and struggle.

– Nika Tamashiro (Class of 2012; Japanese and Brain & Cognitive Science)

**PUPPETS:** *War Horse* is a show well known for its use of puppetry. After seeing it, it is quite clear why; the mechanical structure of those puppets are absolutely spectacular. At first glance, they appear to be made of a light, bamboo-like material. The thin mesh-like fabric wrapping around the skeleton adds to the fragile appearance of the horses and also serves to visually solidify them from wireframe to a frail but lifelike appearance. This delicate-looking frame made the first time that Albert, the main human character of the play, jumps on the Joey, the main horse puppet, even more spectacular, as we do not expect the horses to be able to hold the weight of a human. I would love to get a closer look at the mechanics behind them. From a distance, you can see that the front two legs have levers which serve as connections to bend the front two hooves and the back two legs have levers that swish the tail back and forth. The pole controlling the head seems to have levers to control ear movement and is connected to the top of the head by a swivel allowing easy and natural movement of the entire head and neck.

One of the most surprising things about the puppets is how invisible the operators become. They are dressed in costume like the rest of the cast, but in action seem barely noticeable under the massive frames of the horses. When adult Joey first appears, the natural movements and sheer size of the puppet itself hides the puppeteers. When I first heard the concept of the horses and after working with a small puppet during the U of R's interpretation of Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*, I expected that the operators would be distracting and in the way. Their clever costuming and skillful operation in *War Horse*, however, made it so that the audience scarcely notices that they are there.

Besides horses, there were also a few other animal puppets from flying birds to geese, and I have to say that the goose puppet was a brilliant comedic aspect for the play. Though simple, with legs painted onto a spinning wheel and haphazard feathers glued on what appeared

to be a wooden frame, the goose was more realistic than some of the human characters and even had more personality. The goose's character seemed to want to be a human, as it tried repeatedly to enter the house, seemed to talk back to the adults, and to boldly defend Albert against his bullying, aggressive cousin.

**TECHNICAL ASPECTS:** When you first enter the New London theater you are immediately immersed in the tense mood of the show. Haze machines pumped a thick fog into the theater, obscuring the entire upstage area and making the giant projection screen, shaped like a torn piece of paper, appear to float in a black mist. As someone who does technical work in theater, I spent my pre-show time trying to identify lighting instruments, specials, and speaker setup. (I apologize early on, because I will likely do this with all of the plays for the duration of the trip and in these journal entries.) Amazingly, the fog even obscured much of the tech, making it hard for me to see exactly what was being used. This was the first show I have seen in a while where I could not see exactly what was being used to light the stage, and it was an awesome feeling. It has been a while since I was able to feel the "magic" of theater. That sense of awe one gets from not knowing how something is done, like watching a magician do a card trick, is what an audience member feels when watching a very well done show and *War Horse* managed to do that for me.

The color of the light upon entering the theater was hard to describe, but certainly it was eerie. The majority of the stage was lit with cool light, usually identifying negative feelings of fear, sadness, etc. However, there were one or two warm lights meant to light the fog, giving it a warm glow. Warm light tends to mean happiness, comfort, relief, etc. These conflicting lighting patterns made it hard to pick a mood for the beginning of the play.

The sound design for the show was spectacular. They had speakers not only in front facing the audience, but also above, behind, and to the sides. There were even some subwoofers under the stage and possibly even in the audience, judging from the feeling of the seats subtly shaking when heavy bass was played. The quality of the microphones used on the actors was top-of-the-line. There were times when their voices were being amplified to the point to where an audience member could not even tell microphones were being used. Normally, mics distort the voice slightly and you can hear certain frequencies more than normal, making the voice sound slightly unnatural. These mics made the amplification crystal clear without distortion. I wondered at first why the designer would bother micing the actors. My question was soon answered when, during tense moments, effects were applied to the mics causing the actors voices to echo slightly, giving them an abnormal quality that defined the mood of the scene. They were used essentially to convey messages without specifically stating them. All in all, this was a really great first show.

- Cassandra Donatelli (Class of 2013; Archeology, Technology & Historical Structures; Minor: Theater and Biology)

### ***Hamlet* (1601)**

**Written by William Shakespeare**

**Dir. Ian Rickson**

**Young Vic Theatre**

Prior to the beginning of this trip, this was one of the plays which I was most excited to see. As is the case with many people in my culture, *Hamlet* is the Shakespeare play with which I am most familiar. I studied the play extensively in high school, and I have memorized a number of random passages from the play out of my own interest. I am also extremely fond of Kenneth

Branagh's film adaptation of *Hamlet*, a movie which I own and have watched many times.

Given all of this, I was greatly looking forward to see a professional theatre production of the play for the first time. Now that I have seen it, I can definitively say that although it was very different from what I was expecting, I was not disappointed.

For the production at the Young Vic Theatre, we did not enter the theatre in a normal way. Instead, there was a special experience known as the “pre-show journey” which was open to all audience members who arrived at least 30 minutes before the performance was scheduled to begin. In this experience we took a long path to reach the theatre. We first went outside and circled around to the back of the building, where we entered through a back door. We then moved through the backstage area, where many scenes had been set up for us to observe. There were stage hands dressed as orderlies who would take notes on the audience members as they walked past. There were many other details which served to make the audience members slowly feel as if they were in some sort of asylum, such as cell doors with logs of doctor visits and a window through which an extensive pharmacy could be seen. Another memorable area was the gymnasium in which two individuals were playing handball. The schedule which was visible in the gymnasium contained slots for fencing practice, which provided a nice sense of anticipation for those familiar with the play’s conclusion. Overall, the pre-show journey seemed to serve two purposes. First, it set the mood and established the setting for this particular interpretation of *Hamlet*. I think the main purpose, however, was to force the audience to feel that they were not viewing a play. Usually when one sees a play, you feel as if you are being transported in your mind to another world through the skill of the players. However, by denying the audience the ability to enter through the normal theatre doors and instead forcing them to go on an extended trek to reach the play, it makes the audience feel as if they are *physically* entering this other

world. It creates the impression that you have left behind the theatre where you came to see a play, and have arrived at an entirely new location where you are simply watching events unfold. This was an extremely effective technique in creating an immersive feel to the play.

The attempt to make *Hamlet* not feel like a play was continued by the set. Once we finally reached our seats, the space in which we found ourselves did not in any way resemble a theatre. Instead, it seemed like some sort of dilapidated old auditorium in an aging public institution. Everything, from the way the seats were set up to the piles of junk by the upper levels of seating, was carefully calculated to enhance this impression.

The play itself was sensational. The cast was extremely strong, with many standout performances. The only actor who I felt was below the level of the rest of the cast was Hayley Carmichael who played Horatio, and even she was not terrible. Michael Sheen, however, gave one of the strongest performances I have ever witnessed in the role of Hamlet. I felt that he was especially impressive in his skilled use of Shakespeare's language, which is always one of the biggest challenges which an actor in a Shakespearean play faces. The scene in which this was most evident, which was also my favorite scene of the play, was the scene in which Hamlet speaks to his father's ghost. In this production, a choice was made to have the same actor play the old king's ghost as Hamlet, almost as if Hamlet is becoming possessed. This choice completely changes the way in which we interpret the events of the remainder of the play. It was, in my opinion, brilliant, and this scene remains perhaps the finest fifteen minutes of acting I have ever seen.

After the play, Jess, Katie and I waited outside what seemed to be the stage door in an attempt to get Michael Sheen's autograph. In this, we were not successful. However, we did

later find Benedict Wong, the actor who played Laertes at the bar, so I consider the mission to have been a partial success.

- Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

After *Cinderella* and *War Horse*, I thought to myself: “All right. It’s *Hamlet*. I know *Hamlet*. Even my friends who are completely disinterested in the arts read *Hamlet* in high school.”

Boy, was I completely wrong. I’m not even sure where to begin with this particular journal. Yes, it’s *Hamlet*, but no, it wasn’t familiar at all. In hindsight, this particular production (as another curious aside, I seem to be picking up more and more theatre terminology as the days go by. Not enough to be fluent, but it definitely felt as if I understood more and more) was brilliant because of its unique twist. I asked around the class afterwards, and all agreed on one thing: this was the first *Hamlet* set in an insane asylum of some sort.

To begin, the “pre-show” journey wasn’t a journey at all, but rather, it was a part of the set. That in itself is brilliant because it draws the audience in and allows the audience to connect with the setting – an important element of story telling – before the play even begins. The hallway had this really beaten-up feel to it. It felt as if we were entering an old gymnasium or hospital. At first, I thought it was just a backstage tour. Jay even commented that they had real pieces of ham out for the actors (apparently they tasted good). I don’t think any of us suspected anything – I mean, there were real people playing handball in the gym! One of them even looked at me, made eye contact, and gave me a stern nod. How could it be anything else other than the “real” backstage?

An interesting thing I’ve noticed, however, is that the hallway’s paint becomes more discolored and faded as we approach where we’re supposed to be. There is an overall feel of

decay – you may have noticed, Professor, that parts of the paint towards the end (chapel and infirmary) started to fade, and only when we approached the “security” checkpoint was there a fresh layer of white paint applied. That’s really where I figured out something else must be up. Suspicious, I knocked on the set, and the illusion immediately broke. It wasn’t a real wall – it was far too hollow to be a real wall. And then things clicked for me. The way in which we were ferried out of the theatre and taken all the way to the backside; the “journey”; the theatre itself with faded paint and mildew and half-broken basketball hoops, which again, reminded me of an old gym. This was all a part of their plan.

And then the PA announcement called. The red buzzer on top of the doorframe lit up, and we were shut in. I saw Sara and Caitlin’s faces. For a moment, they looked terrified. And why shouldn’t we? We are now shut in this … whatever this is, along with the players on stage. I don’t think any other play we’ve watched managed to produce the same type of effect. For all intent and purposes, we are trapped inside with Hamlet.

Michael Sheen’s (who played Hamlet) acting was nothing short of breathtaking, too. I had always thought one of the critical points of the play was that the characters were never quite sure if Hamlet was insane, or he was just going along with it. Here, however, given the setting, I think that question is addressed for us. Hamlet’s insanity, then, isn’t something that’s questioned here. That question becomes quantitative rather than qualitative, and insanity cannot truly be measured.

From what I can piece together, it appears as if Hamlet went in for grief counseling (my memory is hazy, but one of the doors included a checklist about “therapy sessions” and their respective timeframes). Claudius appears to be a doctor or a manager of sorts, Polonius a therapist, and the rest of the cast staff or family members. I found the gender-bending of Horatio

to be especially interesting, because it brings in an additional connection (that of man and woman, and all the awkward tensions that may possibly bring) that made the relationship richer. Unlike many members of the class, I secretly enjoyed Horatio's acting even though she sounded really hoarse. I never figured out what she was supposed to be in the play, but seeing the conflicted Hamlet confide in *someone* felt appropriate, especially because I was basically confused for the whole time.

What's going on? Why was Hamlet's father also played by Hamlet? What does it mean? Does this mean Hamlet basically imagined the whole thing? Why was Fortinbras also played by the same actor? What exactly was going on at the end, with Ophelia and Polonius "crawling" out from the grave? These are but some of the issues we touched on in class, and to keep this journal at a reasonable length I'll be glossing over the questions I've raised above (it seems hardly responsible of me if I just ask a question without trying to give an answer, isn't it?)

For starters, I agree with the overall assessment of the class. Hamlet's father is cast in the same way as Hamlet on purpose, but I do not think its explanation is schizophrenia or an actual psychological disorder. That would defeat the purpose of most of the second half of the play, which is basically, *Hamlet* without any additional twists. One of the possible intents behind casting in such a way is likely to make the audience ponder questions we'd rather not think about, such as our own sanity or our own perceptions. This may also serve to explain the director's choice to cast Fortinbras as Hamlet. If we interpret the act of revenge as something circular, then everything's basically came back around full-circle.

On another note, I have no idea whatsoever what the scene involving characters crawling out of the grave was supposed to represent. Actually, as I write this, I realized how much of it I couldn't even guess, despite the fact that I *knew* the play.

I will freely admit that this play left me with a lot more questions than I had thought possible. Compared to some of the other Shakespearean plays we've seen, this wasn't anywhere close to being a personal favorite (*Richard II* was probably my favorite out of the Shakespearean plays). It wasn't because the production wasn't good. Everything was excellent. Rather, I think it was because I had hoped to see one of the greatest Shakespearean in its "Shakespearean" setting, rather than in a "modernized" interpretation. Nonetheless, objectively, this was definitely one of the best plays on this trip.

– Dongdong Han (Class of 2012; Biology: Molecular Genetics)

I wonder how Ian Rickson came up with the idea of placing *Hamlet* in a psychiatric institution, because it reminded me of Dennis Lehane's psychological thriller novel, *Shutter Island*. The novel was made into a film directed by Martin Scorsese in 2010. *Shutter Island* is about a U.S. Marshal named Ted who visits an institution for the criminally insane on an island which gives the novel its title. He investigates a case about a missing patient named Rachel. However, Ted becomes suspicious of the activities of the facility and believes that Dr. John Cawley is conducting unethical procedures on sane people. Ted tries to reveal the corruption of the institution, but he himself becomes the victim of Dr. Cawley's experiments. There is an unexpected twist in the plot towards, where everything Ted has experienced is revealed to be just his own dream and insanity. In the end, Ted has to get lobotomized and the last words he says are, "Live as a monster, or die as a good man." The audience has to judge for themselves whether or not Ted has been mad all along.

Ted is similar to Rickson's Hamlet in several ways. They are both acerbic and cynical towards other people, and they don't trust anyone but themselves. They are both extremely

philosophical and rather smart, even though no one tends to agree with them. Moreover, they both have hallucinations about talking to the dead. I couldn't help but notice how sweaty Hamlet was in the play and in the film version of *Shutter Island*, Leonardo DiCaprio who played Ted was always sweaty and nervous as well. Dr. Cawley and Claudius have obvious parallels because they are both psychiatrists and control the entire psychiatric facility.

I think any other Shakespearean tragedy can take place in a psychiatric institute and the production will be insane but extraordinary at the same time. For example, I think *Richard II* could take place in a hospital instead of a holy setting and the story would make perfect sense. Richard II would be a mad patient under the illusion that he is the king and at the end, would finally come to his senses and face a tragic death.

The setting of Rickson's play was relatively bare, but the props that the director used were brilliant. For example, using pills instead of flowers for Ophelia was disturbing, but it depicted how seriously traumatized she was after her father's death. Also, the pre-show journey into the Young Vic theater symbolized a journey into madness. Lastly, the coffin of Hamlet's father in the beginning of the play foreshadowed the fate of Hamlet and his family.

– Jungyeon “Deb” Youn (Class of 2012; International Relations and English)

**Dublin Carol (2000)**  
**Written by Conor McPherson**  
**Dir. Abbey Wright**  
**Trafalgar Studios 2**

Saturday, December 31

After our first day of play-going, on which we saw *War Horse* and *Hamlet*, *Dublin Carol* provided a nice change of pace. The two shows on the first day both featured large casts and impressive technical feats. It was refreshing, therefore, to see a show which was so small,

simple, and honest. Overall, although this play was not as spectacular as the two which we saw on the previous day, I found it to be satisfying in its own way.

The venue in which we saw *Dublin Carol*, the secondary stage at Trafalgar Studios, was extremely intimate. The seats were not more than three rows deep at any point, and as a result, every person in the audience was very close to the action. The set was simple and realistic which, together with the small space, made it seem feasible that one was sitting in the room with the actors and watching their lives unfold.

The plot of the play centers around a funeral home employee named John, who has been estranged from his family for many years due to his problems with alcoholism. The action of the play takes place on Christmas Eve. The title of the play is a clear allusion to *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, probably the most famous Christmas story of all time. And although the main character encounters no ghosts beyond his own tortured memories, there are other parallels between McPherson's play and Dickens' novella. In *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge is famously visited by three ghosts, the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and yet to come. The organization of *Dublin Carol* into three scenes provides a clue that this structure is being emulated. The first scene between John and Mark seems to represent the present. It allows us to see what John's life is like now, setting us up to later see how he has arrived here. We see that on Christmas Eve John is not with family or friends, but rather with a young man who he seems to have met only recently. Although some mention of John's past is made in this scene, little detail is given. Instead, it is the next scene, in which John's daughter Mary unexpectedly appears, in which John's past is considered. Past events are the almost exclusive focus of this scene, in which we hear of the disastrous way in which John has lead his life, which has led him to the lonely state in which we now find him. The last scene, in which Mark returns, represents

the future. In writing *Dublin Carol*, McPherson chose to change the order from the way it appeared in Dickens' original story, placing the present before the past. This choice worked well for the play because by delaying the revelation of John's tragic past until we have had time to come to terms with the reality of his present situation; it makes the stories we hear about his past much more powerful.

The final scene, which deals with the possibility of hope for John's future, was the most emotionally affecting to me. For this scene, Mary has departed and John speaks again to Mark. I felt that, after all I had learned about John's past in scene two, I looked on him with different eyes in the final scene. Despite all his flaws, I still found myself wishing that he could find happiness. I thought that the final moment, in which John begins to put up the Christmas decorations which he had taken down only a few minutes before, was a truly beautiful ending. Any real happy ending would have seemed terribly out of place in this play and ruined what I viewed as the honesty of the piece. Instead, this ending contained just enough of a hint that perhaps John could change his ways to be uplifting without breaking the realism of the rest of the play.

– Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

### ***The Ladykillers* (2011)**

**Adapted by Graham Lineham from the play by William Rose**

**Dir. Sean Foley**

**Gielgud Theatre**

Based on the 1955 British black comedy film of the same name, *The Ladykillers* proceeds much like a cartoon. Many aspects of the play enhanced this animated feel. As I waited for the play to begin, a Ladykillers logo was projected onto the curtain, resembling the introduction to old

*Looney Tunes* shows. The image was well complemented by the cliché mystery-movie music, which reminded me of the *Pink Panther* series. When the curtain opened, it revealed a fanciful house with sloping architecture that intersected at impossible angles. When the nearby train passes and shakes the house, objects rattled around with unphysical movement and travelled in bizarre circular patterns. Together, these choices set the play in a fanciful world, where the audience needn't worry about consequences or plot holes.

This context was important, as the plot itself relies on many cartoonishly absurd yet simple premises. The sinister Professor Marcus – disguised as a musician – rents a room from the eccentric Mrs. Wilberforce, in order to plan the details of a bank robbery. To assist in the heist, Marcus invites a gang of cohorts, each with their own unique brand of personality disorder. Major Courtney is a cowardly figure, who harbors a secret desire to cross-dress. Although remarkably slow-witted, One Round shows a heart of gold and hopes to protect Mrs. Wilberforce from his thuggish companions. The con man Harry Robinson is addicted to a cocktail of medications. Finally the vicious gangster Louis Harvey is deathly afraid of little old ladies. Together, this band of thieves impersonates a string quintet in order to avoid suspicion.

Throughout, the story's madcap violence seemed ridiculously over-the-top and implausible unless considered in the context of a cartoon. For instance, Harry was routinely battered by the edge of a chalkboard, as Marcus swung it around to hide the burglary plans. On top of this, characters were stabbed, impaled, shot, garroted, and bludgeoned. The lumbering One Round is killed when Louis throws a dart into his head. While in another play this violence could have been horrifying, the rapid-fire pace and carefree manner maintained a mood of morbid slapstick comedy.

The story as whole wraps up neatly, and, like an episode of *Scooby Doo*, nothing really changes. The play ends exactly as it began, as Mrs. Wilberforce discusses her story with a skeptical policeman, and the main characters are set up again for the next episodic installment. The audience is left wondering: what other zany adventures are in store for Mrs. Wilberforce?

The elaborate set was a highlight of the production. Mrs. Wilberforce's stylized and lopsided home was cluttered with antiques and knick-knacks typical of a lonely widow. A number of trapdoors allowed for interesting staging maneuvers – for instance, when the burglars piled into the cellar to evade the police. Dual rotating platforms allowed scenes to transition smoothly from the home's interior to the rooftops. Characters could leap out the window, and appear on the other side clinging to the gutter.

The bank heist scene seemed particularly innovative. Model cars and trains rolled onto the stage and up the set wall, giving a bird's-eye view of the crime. However, the designers may have bitten off more than they could chew, as the elaborate mechanism malfunctioned slightly, and the getaway car was prevented from reaching the train. The errors confused me at first, and I was initially unsure whether the robbery had been successfully.

Despite these minor technical foibles, *The Ladykillers* was a wonderfully comic show, which perfectly prepared us for a night of New Year's Eve festivities.

- Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

**Eucharist Mass  
Westminster Abbey**

Sunday, January 1, 2012

Starting the year of 2012, as a group, we went to Westminster Abbey for the New Year Mass. As a non-religious person, this was my first time to go into any service by the church and it was a very interesting experience. The inside of Westminster Abbey was mind-blowing. The amount of details on the walls, chairs and doors and the masterpieces of stained glass made me realize once again how powerful religion can be to produce a building like this. Remembering watching the royal wedding of William and Kate on television last year, it was difficult to believe that I was at the exact church where the wedding took place, even in the very stalls where the choir sat.

– Li-Ya Sun (Class of 2012; Psychology)

***Juno and the Paycock* (1923)**

**Written by Sean O' Casey**

**Dir. Howard Davies**

**Lyttleton Theatre**

The first thing one notices about *Juno and the Paycock* is the beauty of the set design. The details of tenement life which Sean O'Casey sought to portray in his play are magnified by the set and sound effects. The room where the play takes place is visibly ragged and worn down, with paint and wallpaper peeling off of the walls and the furniture looking old and tired. The attention to detail, especially in the rooms off the main room, made the set feel entirely believable, like you were there sitting in the room as the events unfolded. You got a feel for the thin walls in the tenement building as you heard voices and footsteps coming from outside the room, and other sound effects like rainfall and car tires pulling up to the door allowed you to imagine the world outside the set. These factors made it all the more evident that these people were living in poverty and were struggling with the scars carried by the people as war ripped the community

apart.

When Juno's family learns of the inheritance left to Jack, they are overjoyed at the prospect of escaping that life of poverty. Jack outfits himself in a ship captain's garb, whereas before he preferred to lounge about the house or the bar in his comfortable moleskin trousers. Since Jack has never really been a captain, but likes to refer to himself as one, this wardrobe change can be taken to be a transformation in Jack from leisure to fantasy facilitated by the power of money. The fact that Jack refuses to find a job to support his family is no longer an issue and instead he surrounds himself with new and expensive items. The fact that he insists on putting on these airs highlights the hypocritical nature of Jack's behavior. Before gaining the inheritance Jack insists that he dislikes "dignified" people, and yet as soon as he finds out about the money coming his way, he begins to emulate those same people in his dress, possessions, and manner. Interestingly, although the family buys new furniture to replace the old, these changes to the room are only superficial while the thin worn out walls remain. Especially when the money fails to come through and all of the new furniture is taken back, the underlying poverty is laid bare, never having left. In this sense, Jack is definitely the peacock out of the title, as he tries to puff himself up and show off his feathers.

Upon hearing the title, I wondered if there was some significance to the main female character being named Juno. After researching the name, I found it to be particularly fitting in the context of the play. Juno was a Roman goddess known as a protector and special counselor of the state. In the play, Juno's character is clearly the one who takes responsibility for running the family and keeping it afloat since Jack refuses to get or even look for a job. Juno the goddess is often depicted sitting with a peacock, a direct comparison to Juno in the play and her show-off of a husband. Additionally, Juno looked after the women of Rome which is another key

characteristic of the Juno in the play. This is most evident in her loyalty to her daughter, even after they find out that Mary is pregnant out of wedlock. Jack and the family's son, Johnny, both reject Mary when they find out about the pregnancy, but Juno remains by her daughter's side and the two of them eventually find the strength to let go of Jack and his bad habits and set off on their own following Johnny's death.

In class, we talked about how this play is one of comic mockery, with the beginning containing funny, entertaining parts and the end spiraling into tragedy. I found the term “comic mockery” to be an excellent description of Jack's character because although we are laughing as Jack preens and prances around stage, the things we are laughing about are actually due to Jack's flaws and hypocrisy. In the end, we are no longer laughing, however, as Jack sits propped up on the floor of his home, utterly alone after having driven his family away from him and drinking himself into oblivion.

– Nika Tamashiro (Class of 2012; Japanese and Brain & Cognitive Science)

***Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1864)**

**Written by Richard Wagner**

**Dir. Graham Vick**

**Covent Garden Royal House**

*Die Meistersinger* is interesting in that it is the only “unclassifiable” Wagner opera. Wagner himself re-categorized his opera many times during the twenty some years it took him to write it. Writing the opera over such a long period also allowed other operas that he wrote during this time to color *Die Meistersinger*. One could say that he corrected the mistakes of his other operas, *Tannhäuser* and *Tristan und Isolde*, in *Die Meistersinger*. Unlike King Mark in *Tristan und Isolde*, Hans Sachs gives up on his pursuit of Eva in favor of the younger suitor. Both *Tannhäuser* and

*Die Meistersinger* have a singing competition for the hand of the ingénue, but unlike in *Tanhaiiser*, the singing competition at the end of *Die Meistersinger* ends in rejoicing, not turmoil.

If I were to classify *Die Meistersinger*, I would say it's a historical comedy. Wagner mentions historical figures and even bases the central figure on a historical figure. In fact, Wagner extensively researched the very guild and musical tradition that the entire opera is centered on. “*Die Meistersinger*” in German can be not only singular, “The Mastersinger,” but plural referring to the guild and the tradition of the Meistersingers. Wagner conceived of the idea for the opera after reading a history of German literature and taking a special interest in the tradition of the Meistersinger and the marker figure that would mark how many mistakes a singer made in their performance. Wagner’s research of the historical small community, the tradition of Meistersong, reworking Luther chorals into the opera itself, and the integration of German ideals lends a great deal of realism to this story that takes place hundreds of years before Wagner wrote it. Wagner’s opera fleshes out so many details of life at that time that we studied the opera in my musical history class this past semester when we were going over the Minnesinger and Meistersinger traditions.

I read many opera blogs to learn more about the opera world as it's happening today. After seeing pictures of Graham Vick’s productions and reading that his reputation was to “fuck up your opera house,”<sup>1</sup> I was over the moon to finally see a production. The set was a huge, brightly colored, minimalist, multifunctional, two-part monstrosity! Just like in *I3*’s set, it was deceptively simple but was broken apart and revealed surprises over and over again. There were large and small doors that would open out of what seemed to be a solid wall. There were even

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<sup>1</sup> [http://operachic.typepad.com/opera\\_chic/2011/08/graham-vick-will-fk-up-your-opera-house-hes-like-the-terminator.html](http://operachic.typepad.com/opera_chic/2011/08/graham-vick-will-fk-up-your-opera-house-hes-like-the-terminator.html)

doors that opened up in the ceiling, from which acrobats hung during the second act's finale! You didn't just see these brightly colored solid walls either; they rolled out on stage to reveal the interior of these houses. I thought that having the multifunctional minimalism was brilliant because it was very versatile; it was easy to imagine that you were in a different place with every new scene. Another part of the set that I loved and that added to the feeling of being out in the town square was a giant dollhouse recreation of various town buildings, like the chapel. Children brought the dollhouses out at the beginning of the opera and again at the end of the second act when we see the night watchmen patrolling the town. I think the best scene change was between the scene in Hans Sachs house to the scene in the park next to the river. The walls of his house rolled away, leaving a long bench of shoes (Hans Sachs was a cobbler) and you wondered, 'How are they going to get these off stage?' Then, the entire ensemble of the town came out in stocking feet, put on their shoes, and finished the scene change! What I didn't know was that this was a revival and I don't know how much of production has to do with the director. So I'm curious as to how this revival was different from the original in 1993.

I love modern opera's focus on the drama, the theatre of the production. I probably prefer it because it is what I grew up with, rather than the stand and deliver style of opera, but I was very impressed with the quality of the acting both from the main characters and from the ensemble. Especially from the ensemble! I felt like I could go to the opera over and over again just to catch all of the different things that were happening onstage. Many of the ensemble members were such great physical comedians! I was talking to one of the ushers and he said that he saw something or appreciated something new about the opera every time he saw it. Some musicologists have said that this opera is Grand Opera and with the larger-than-life finales and acrobats and what seemed like hundred of people on stage. I agree with them. Of the named

characters, I was especially impressed with David's performance (Hans Sachs' apprentice). While watching the opera I was thinking, wow what a great comedian, what a voice, and he's so young. Afterwards when I met Toby Spence I was surprised to see laugh lines around his eyes and mouth because his physicality was so true to his character's age onstage that I thought he was that young in actuality!

There were many comedic moments in the opera where the singers would hear the music of the opera. Combined with the over-the-top finales and lots of physical comedy, I was struck by the playfulness of the opera. Both the written opera, which is a big change from any of the Wagnerian operas that I'm familiar with, and the staging was playful. I think that having the bright colors and dollhouses was a very honest way to stage the opera.

Simon O'Neill, the actor who sang Walter von Stolzing was sick the night of the performance. I wonder how much this affected his performance. I hope it affected it greatly. I say that because he seemed almost pale and flat compared to the other characters of the opera who seemed so complete I almost couldn't believe they didn't have the whole story line to themselves. He also didn't seem to be a good match for Eva. When the stage manager came out at the beginning to tell us that he was sick I thought she was going to tell us that his understudy was to sing but she said that, he was on "all of the antibiotics in London" and would sing but to be understanding of any mishaps. Talk about 'the show must go on'! He was still fantastic. I met him afterwards and he was so nice and funny! He joked with me when I told him that I was an aspiring opera singer that he was too.

Hans Sachs seemed to me to be the central figure of the opera. Sachs seems a strange choice for a central figure of a comedy because the singing contest at the end was not a fulcrum towards his happiness. The town loves Sachs but in the end, he is a widower who is quite apart

from all of the other characters, almost because of their reverence for him. Wagner is always brilliant at crafting music to tell the audience what the characters are thinking or feeling, and in this opera, it seems that that function of the music especially focuses on Sachs.

– Katie Lewis (Class of 2012; Music)

### ***Pippin* (1972)**

**Music and Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz; Book by Roger O. Hirson**

**Dir. Mitch Sebastian**

**Menier Chocolate Factory Theatre**

As far as I understand it (see *Broadway Musicals: The 101 Greatest Shows of All Time*, written by Ken Bloom and Frank Vlastnik), *Pippin* and *Cats* occupy a particularly bizarre place in the Broadway canon as shows that are incredibly popular with fans and entirely unpopular with theatre scholars who write them off as shallow creations. *Cats* has endured the test of time, but *Pippin* has largely fallen off the map of professional musical theatre.

This tainted past makes the Menier Chocolate Factory's new adaptation of the show, conceived, directed, and choreographed by Mitch Sebastian, so exciting. As soon as we saw the set (with pseudo-laser lights tracing out doorways and windows, and Pippin himself, played by Harry Hepple, sitting at a computer positioned outside the theatre), I worried aloud that the music would feel too dated for a technology-themed production, unless they created new orchestrations. There was some of this, which gave the opening number more of a rock-and-roll feeling. But director Mitch Sebastian is also a genius at integrating new modern elements with musical theatre clichés—so much so that Pippin's evil stepbrother, played by David Page, can perform a dance solo complete with a cane and sparkly hat, in the midst of a number about warfare, which still feels *entirely* in character.

Dance is high-priority in Sebastian's work—not in the quantity of dance but in the way it colors the production. The aforementioned number about war featured an extensive fight sequence that included dance; Catherine (Carly Bawden) performs “Kind of Woman” in pointe shoes. This emphasis on choreography is one way Sebastian honors the original production; he studied under Bob Fosse, who choreographed the original production of *Pippin*. Much of Fosse’s original choreography seems to be adapted to fit this production. Unlike Stephen Schwartz’s score, the choreography feels as modern as if it was invented today.

If I had to pick a single word to describe the production, I would probably say “modern.” It shocked me, again and again, how well the framework of the story fits today’s culture. The structure of the original production feels episodic and distracted (evidenced by listening to the cast album, or even attempting to describe in which time period the original production is meant to take place). At first glance, the “musical in a video game” seems gimmicky, but in truth it solved more problems than it created. The video game setup explains away the episodic nature of the production. In addition, this rushed aesthetic—especially present in act one—seems to match the internet subculture, where you can become “famous” (or at least notorious) for a single video on Youtube, and where cultural trends seem to change in the blink of an eye, rather perfectly. The scene in which Pippin raised support to overthrow his father through a series of tweets felt unnervingly recognizable from everyday life. It’s interesting to consider, however, that these concepts cannot be nearly as modern as I’m inclined to believe. *Pippin*’s original text discussed the search for instant fame and recognition forty years ago.

Reception for the Menier production has been mixed.<sup>2</sup> The general consensus seems to be that it’s incredibly clever, but reviewers are hesitant to link this cleverness to effective storytelling. There are rumors of a Broadway or West End transfer for the production, and I think

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<sup>2</sup> <http://broadwayworld.com/article/Review-Roundup-PIPPIN-at-Menier-Chocolate-Factory-20111208>

it will be very interesting to track its reception on a larger, multi-national scale. After all, *Pippin* was a huge original success (it is the 31<sup>st</sup> longest running show on Broadway—longer than *South Pacific* and *Crazy For You*<sup>3</sup>) despite critical confusion. It will be fascinating to see if this proves yet another case of history repeating itself.

– Sara Cohen (Class of 2012; English)

***Jerusalem* (2008)**

**Written by Jez Butterworth  
Dir. Ian Rickson  
Apollo Shaftesbury Theatre**

Monday, January 2

Just like in the production of *Juno and the Paycock*, the set of *Jerusalem* was magnificent. It was set in a thick forest with the details of the set down to the very brim. The trees were quite impressive, naturally dense, and beautifully green. Also, upstage there was grass that was nice and green as well, and had such a natural look to it, just like the dense forest and dirt that stood behind it. I was impressed by the sheer height of the trees in the forest, especially because when I think of England, I do not think of trees with the immense height and size which were displayed on stage in *Jerusalem*, nor do I even think of dense forests at all. Also a part of the set, which I found amusing, was a live chicken house in a coop that was living under the caravan on the stage left side. The live chicken was really of no importance to the play, but it was funny to see it there, especially since I didn't notice it until after the first intermission.

There were times when the lighting faded to a greenish color, which gave the forest an even more artistic and beautiful feel. The gradual transition towards greener lighting made the forests appear even denser and forest-like, while giving more character to the beautifully designed set as a whole. While on the topic of lighting, I would like to make special note of the

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<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_the\\_100\\_Longest-Running\\_Broadway\\_shows](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_100_Longest-Running_Broadway_shows)

very beginning of the play, where we see a girl singing poetically, but then a sudden transition to an extremely loud, dark, but flashing red rave party in the woods with flashing lights and sound of loud music (which I later found out was a song called “Invaders Must Die” by The Prodigy). This music was bound to wake up anyone in the theater that had even the slightest inclination towards falling asleep. I was one of those people after a long day, but this loud rave scene woke me up and caused me to stay awake for the remainder of the performance. Technically, I wasn’t really following what the lights were doing because I was so shocked by the sudden transition to the rave party in the woods that I didn’t care. I was too busy laughing about it and enjoying it to actually take note of what was going on with the lighting, even though I know it must have been something complicated and amazing. An even funnier moment was the abrupt ending to all of this, where we are brought to a silence of the morning after, and back to natural daytime lighting in a forest, only to be greeted by drunk and/or hung-over characters who reminded me of an American stoner-guy type of comedy.

The acting in *Jerusalem* was brilliant and convincing throughout. Mark Rylance as Johnny “Rooster” Byron was magnificent. What struck me the most was his brilliant physical acting where he had to feign a limp as a result of a hip fracture that was never properly set after his daredevil ambitions of leaping cars with his bike. He managed to keep this up for three hours. It was executed so perfectly that for a while I was debating whether or not he was actually handicapped. Not only was his physical acting excellent, his emotional acting was spectacular as well. He was adept at being a drunken man who lives in a caravan in the woods, but he also shines his talent brightly when he rejects Ginger’s friendship. Later on, towards the end, he plays on the drums and names his cursed ancestors in a powerful moment leading up to the conclusion of the play. I was also impressed with his handling of his son on stage; specifically when he was

all beaten and bloody, his son appears. Rylance quickly turned away in shame, as he did not want his son to see how badly he had been beaten. The moment was powerful because of the child's silence and little use of words when he did speak, while Rylance brilliantly handled the scene in the way in which a father who rarely sees his son would handle the situation in real life.

In class discussion before this performance, we touched on a theme of this production. The demise of British culture was meaningful in the play because it made allusions to a short poem by William Blake that said, "And did those feats in ancient time." The main theme here is that England was no longer a place like Jerusalem (a place of love and peace). It was a challenge in British society to restore England to the days where it was more like a "heaven" in a healthy relationship with its past.

– William Hogan (Class of 2012; Psychology)

What in the world?

I'm not sure how to react to this play, really. It was funny and sad and shocking and crude and refined and all of these things at the same time. Even now, as I think back, the first thing that pops to mind is Rooster Byron's grinning visage. While I wouldn't quite call him a *bon vivant*, he lived freely in his woods – "Rooster's woods," as he proudly tells the others. I initially was wholly put off by how crude the play was. Thinking about it a second time, however, I think the play is a lot deeper than it let on. While the obvious conflict it presents is the issue between order and chaos, I somehow also got a feeling of culture clash. Perhaps it is due to my Arthurian fervor that I immediately jumped to paganism and Christianity, which can often be a central conflict between more modern depictions of the Arthurian legends. I know the play is

rife with mythological motifs and imagery, and I only wished that I took better notes during the play itself.

Still, let me attempt to tackle what I'd like to address. The protagonist is very satyr-like – it is clear that he's a drug dealer, an alcoholic, and overall not what anyone would call a productive member of society. However, he is undeniably charismatic, and this is why he reminds me so much of the Arthurian legends that I love. Johnny Rooster Byron is very Arthurian. He holds to his own ideals, he leads by example, and his tale ends in much the same depressing way as Arthur's. Whereas Arthur took upon the burdens of kingship for a grander purpose, however, Byron's is ...

Actually, I do not think I could accuse Byron's motives of being impure or selfish. He does not seem to derive any particular benefits from having all of these juvenile miscreants around. I cannot argue that his motives are less noble than Arthur's because there are many things we do not know. The telltale hints in which we see – the scene involving the May Queen girl, for instance – suggests that he knows more than he lets on. Indeed, I recall that one of his contentions was that he's keeping these kids here and off the streets. While clearly not the optimal scenario, I would in a heartbeat pick Johnny Rooster over the abusive father if I was determining what was best for these people.

Furthermore, Johnny Rooster himself is a rather sympathetic character. For starters, he is only where he is because of an accident. He clearly loves his son, Marky, though his son has trouble interacting with him because they are of different worlds. While they're tied by blood – a point that is repeatedly emphasized in the play – I do not think they truly managed to communicate. To Johnny, blood is everything. It is not only his livelihood, but also symbolic of

everything else that he stood for. He is the Dragon<sup>4</sup> as the city council is the St. George of our tale. Because of their diametrically opposed “positions,” his son will never be able to understand him in the same way as he would have liked – they’re raised in different worlds, and I really think that the son belongs in the same world as us – we who are ordinary.

That raises another interesting question, too. What is best for young people? Young people like to think that they know, and not-young people like to tell young people that they’re wrong. In that sense, I see the protagonist as a mentor figure. In his realm – a mystical, magical wood – they can have their hedonistic revelries without the bindings of civilization and the trappings of rules. From his conversation with his friend, however, we get the idea that many of the kids he interacted with move on to other things in life. While I do not adhere to this particular school of thought, I am aware that some folks advocate experience as the ultimate way to learn. After all, how would one know a hangover is painful if one has never experienced one?

The play also communicated a great sense of loss. I think this is most relevant to me, and it’s really a great testament to the timelessness of theatre that the same production could affect people so differently. I came to England seeking England’s rich myth and legends. Arthur. Robin Hood. St. George. Yes. As childish as it sounds, I came here to England looking for King Arthur. I found nothing. Apart from *Jerusalem*, I couldn’t find even a reference. Other than the Robin Hood play on our schedule, there’s not a shred of the mythological tradition anywhere in London. It’s almost as if the tales have been stamped out. Heck, I’ve seen more advertisements for *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars: The Old Republic* than I could count!

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<sup>4</sup> To respond to Professor Peck’s query on my journal: I think this analogy can indeed be reversed. Just as the city council see him as a threat, so does Johnny Rooster see the city, with all of their money wheedling and “urbanization” plans, as his personal dragon to slay. It makes sense that our “unorthodox” St. George would be trying to remove what he perceives to be the negative - the bureaucracy, in particular – from the population.

To me, what made England England was the fact that these myths existed. Perhaps my overly romanticized view is wholly inaccurate and not at all suitable for the modern day, but I felt that this sensation of loss warranted some commentary. I think this must be similar to what Johnny Rooster was feeling at the end. At the end, in which he invoked a host of names familiar to avid readers – Gog and Magog, Yggdrasil, Wodan, – I thought to myself: is this all that is left? Has England become so modernized that this is, in essence, the last “champion” of the old ways?

I come from China. We have a proud five-thousand-year history with more legends than many would believe to be possible. Within the last five years or so, there have been large public outcries at what many perceived as cultural invasion, and interest in what is perceived to be “Chinese” has been rekindled like wildfire. More and more young people are reading into the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* or *Shiji* or what we would consider to be obscure philosophical works. Rising artists have painted with their keyboards and paintbrushes images of the far distance, where the world of *Wuxia* – martial chivalry – thrived in our imaginations.

Where did your heroes go, England? *Jerusalem*, I think, answered that for us. Like the Seelie, they’re around. Invisible. Waiting. Sleeping. Waiting for someone to call upon them once more.

– Dongdong Han (Class of 2012; Biology: Molecular Genetics)

***The Animals and Children Took to the Streets (1927)***  
**Written and directed by Suzanne Andrade**  
**Cottesloe Theatre**

Tuesday, January 3

I found *The Animals and Children Took to the Streets* to be a highly entertaining performance. If nothing else, it was very enjoyable to see something which was so thoroughly different from everything else we have seen so far on this trip. Although the other plays we have seen have

dealt with extremely diverse subjects, they have all been fairly conventional theatre. This, on the other hand, was much more experimental.

When we entered the theatre for *The Animals and Children Took to the Streets*, the only things visible on stage were three screens. The ushers were all in costume and distributing a mysterious confectionary known as “Granny’s Gumdrops” while providing no explanation for this action. Devin, who was sitting next to me, was the recipient of a pack of gumdrops. After handing him the candy, the usher, with a deadpan expression and a voice full of world-weary indifference, advised him, “Don’t eat them all at once.” This created an extremely immersive feel to the play and immediately set the audience to wondering what role the candies would play in the show. When it was later revealed, after the audience had already eaten them, that the candies were a plot device used to deliver mind-altering drugs to children, it provided the audience with a delightfully stomach-turning moment. Overall, I thought that this was a clever gimmick which was a unique way to make the audience feel involved in the performance.

Once the show began, it became apparent that it was a very different type of play than anything we had seen thus far. There were only three actors in the production, each of whom played multiple roles throughout the course of the play. The set consisted only of the three screens we had noticed when we entered the theatre. Onto these screens, animation was projected to create the play’s various locations. The projections were far more than mere set dressing, however. They were dynamic and bursting with life, and there were even several characters, such as Evie Eaves, who existed only as cartoons. By using cartoons to create the world of the play, the animators were able to create a magnificently surreal and nightmarish cityscape in which nothing seemed too terrible to be outside of the realm of possibility. The decision to use animation so heavily opened up a plethora of possibilities which would not have

been feasible if the creators of the play had tried to create them in physical reality. For example, the way in which the hordes of wild children were depicted, as a roiling, soulless black mass, created a striking effect. It brilliantly illustrated the way the children of the bayou were viewed by the adults – both their parents and the officials of the city – as mobs of indistinguishable hellions with no individual personalities. This depiction served to highlight the plight of the children, who are caught between various factions and ultimately wind up suffering for it. And this effect was only possible because it was executed through animation. It was also interesting that there were no conventional theatre lights used in this performance. Instead, the actors were lit solely by the projectors. This created an interesting effect, as the diffuse front lighting made the actors appear very flat, making them seem to blend seamlessly into the cartoons.

And then, as if all of these other things were not enough, this play was also a musical. Music is the most direct method for eliciting an emotional reaction from an audience. This music was extremely atmospheric and very effective at heightening the emotional tone of each scene. Overall, I felt that this play was most effective at evoking a particular mood, which I find difficult to put into words, and the music was a huge element contributing to this tone. Most of the energy of the play was put into creating this mood, to the point that the actual story became almost a secondary concern.

– Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

*The Animals and Children Take to the Streets* took a truly innovative and enthralling approach to musical theater. By combining projected animations with live actors and dialogue, the production literally brought a flat, movie world to life. The play was staged by the 1927 Theater Company, whose stated mission is to capture the spirit of the silent film era.

The play featured an all-female cast of just three actresses. The first kept the entire choreography on tempo throughout the production by playing the piano. The other two actresses did an impressive job portraying a litany of characters, with rapid-fire costume changes. To portray the male undertaker, one actress donned a turban-like wig of outrageous hair while the character's deep voice was provided by the voiceover of a male narrator. The precision required for the entire show was admirable, as any mistiming would have been disastrous. No matter what the actresses did, the cartoon kept ticking along. The Caretaker repetitively swept his broom in time with the background animations and the narrator's voiceover.

Although the set consisted of only three blank white boards with several windows, the production produced vivid settings, and I quickly forgot about the sparse design. Because scenes were projected onto these screens, we could instantly teleport from the Bayou Mansion tenement block to the mayor's office and then to the city gardens. Meanwhile, in the background of all these scenes, cartoon cockroaches and lizards darted across the set, making the Bayou seem dingy and unclean. The animations produced a bewitching aesthetic, which perfectly captured the dismal, Dickensian setting and style. To this effect, the play only incorporated three colors: black, white, and red, staying mostly true to its black-and-white film heritage. The actresses wore thick stage make-up, turning their faces into pasty characters of this colorless world. Meanwhile, they were only illuminated from the front, giving them the appearance of flat, paper cut-outs.

Props were very sparse but versatile, as plain white paper could take the form of whatever images were projected onto it. In one scene, a bed was transformed into a running body as the sleeping character entered his dream. Often, these objects were labeled in bold jumbled font, as the caretaker wrote in his “DIARY” with an enormous (and hilarious) “PEN.”

Approaching the final scene, the play arrived at a crossroads; the audience could choose

between idealistic and realistic endings. The audience exuberantly rooted for the idealistic ending, which offered a glimmer of hope in a hopeless world. Meanwhile, I swam against the stream and cynically cheered for a crushing reality. In spite of its best efforts, the crowd discovered it was impotent in its attempt to alter fate as the Caretaker grimly headed down the path of realism. Although we were offered the promise of choice, I suspect that the realistic ending was the only possible path. Sugarcoated idealism had no place in the Bayou.

Regardless, I couldn't help but feel partially complicit in the events that followed. Grandma's gumdrops were successfully distributed throughout the Bayou, pacifying the children and quelling their rebellious spirit. The Caretaker, having spent his savings rescuing poor little Evie Eaves, was unable to escape the Bayou Mansions in a repetition of the neighborhood's sad refrain: born in the Bayou die in the Bayou. This message is depressingly relevant in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions and the ongoing Occupy Wall Street protests across America. The masses are powerless to effect change as long as the powerful continue to suppress them.

– Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

***Reasons to be Pretty* (2008)**

**Written by Neil LaBute**

**Dir. Michael Attenborough**

**Almeida Theatre**

I was extremely excited for this play going into the trip for multiple reasons. It's no secret that I love Neil LaBute, and I also happen to be a big *Doctor Who* fan. This production starred Billie Piper, who was the tenth Doctor's companion for two seasons. I also thought that LaBute was directing this production because of the syllabus, so I was disappointed that it wasn't the case, but it was well done so it didn't really matter. Also, the actor who played Kent talked with us for

a while after the show and told us that LaBute actually came to a few rehearsals and was involved in the process.

This show is a great example of how to use technical design to enhance the themes of a script. The set was a storage container, which emphasizes the theme that our bodies are our containers and that they are important to us. The main conflict between Steph and Greg is all about her container and what Greg said about it. It was tragic to me that Greg never actually told Steph that she was pretty until after she got dressed up. I do not think this was intentional on Greg's part; I think he just couldn't get his words together until then, but it is tragic for Steph because it reinforced her insecurities. The "container" theme also shows through with the character of Crystal. Kent constantly talks about her and how beautiful she is, but the character is never brought onstage. This allows each audience member to picture his or her own standard of beauty and therefore make Crystal the most beautiful woman in the world. But if the idea of Crystal had been put into the container of an actress's body then the illusion would have been shattered because no one is universally perfect in everyone's eyes. This idea is further exemplified in the play with the discussion of the painting.

The sound design also emphasized themes of the script. All of the songs were by Queen, who is possibly the most iconic rock band of all time. They are known for the high energy of Freddie Mercury and their upbeat, catchy songs. The explosion of sound and energy that comes as soon as Queen is turned on starkly contrasts with the very quiet, drab, routine feeling at the beginning of each scene. The only scene that started with a bang was the first one where we join in mid-argument. The initial music fueled the intense opening of the show and established a link to the action. After that the energetic songs juxtapose against the monotony of life that the characters feel throughout the show. The songs even cut off very abruptly in the middle of lyrics

and measures to enhance the sheer silence and boredom that the characters are experiencing at the top of the scenes. The sound design also enhances themes of physicality through the lyrics of Queen. The song “Fat Bottomed Girls” challenges the current modern standard of female beauty having to be skinny with no curves. It also brings to mind another LaBute play from this series, *Fat Pig*. There were lots of little “bread crumbs” peppering this production that lead to other LaBute plays. For example, in the coffee shop scene with Greg and Steph there is a moment of silence and Greg says, “so...so, so, so.” Those exact words with that exact rhythm of punctuation appear in *iphigenia in orem* from *bash*.

The character of Greg is definitely the protagonist, though this is a pretty even cast with only four roles. I think that Greg is the protagonist because we see things from his point of view and follow his journey. He connects all of the other characters. Steph and Carly are supposed to be friends but we never actually see them onstage together; they are only linked by scenes with Greg. Kent and Carly are onstage together a few times, but only with Greg there to interpret what is going on. We also see Greg go through a journey, whereas Kent never changes. In the opening scene Greg is blatantly lying to his girlfriend and acting childish. Granted, Steph is also acting childish but she is not lying. By the end of the show, Greg is going back to college and has stood up to Kent both through physical (container) injury and telling Carly to “go home now.” In classic LaBute style, we see a brilliantly devised and subtly changing metamorphosis of a character.

What is unlike Labute, however, is the fairly happy and optimistic ending. This was one of those shows where it was ending and I thought: *is it over? Oh, yes... it is.* Unlike other play endings which diverged from their original texts that we saw on this trip, I think that this one worked. The monologue cut from the end was extremely tidy and beat the audience over the

head with the delicately woven themes. It also would have been a very surreal moment in an otherwise realistic play. I think this choice also worked because LaBute was involved with the rehearsal process. He must have had some input on it and agreed to cut the end, perhaps because the directing and design of this production already enhance all of the themes that are brought to a close with the final monologue. Even without the final piece, though, the ending of this play is still more upbeat than most LaBute plays. Personally, that's what I like so much about it. It's not a "happily ever after" ending, but it is also not a bleak, cynical, heart-wrenching one either. I thought it had a nice balance of reality and hope, much like how I felt at the end of *Dublin Carol*.

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

This was another play which I was looking forward to immensely since I first saw it on the syllabus for the course. Among living playwrights, Neil LaBute is one of those I hold in highest esteem. Additionally, Billie Piper is an actor whose work I am very familiar with and one who I was very excited to see perform. After seeing the play, I feel that this was a complex and well-rounded production, and one which I found deeply satisfying.

There were many fascinating aspects which contributed to this balanced production. Upon entering the theatre, the audience was greeted with what appeared to be an enormous shipping container. Then, at the beginning of the show, one side of the container unfolds, revealing an intricate set contained within. As the play continued, the entire container rotated 180° and the other side opened, revealing a completely different set. This was an impressive technical feat which was truly spectacular to watch. Additionally, the decision to place the entire set within a shipping container was inspired and worked on a number of levels. At a literal level, the shipping container referenced the characters' jobs at a shipping plant. However, the meaning

of the container set runs much deeper than this. By placing the four characters' entire lives in a box, the set becomes symbolic of all the things which contain and trap them: their insecurities, their prejudices, and their inability to communicate with each other. In both the technical proficiency of its construction and its poignant relation to the story, I thought that this was one of the most innovative and impressive sets I have ever seen.

I felt that the cast for this production was also very strong. Billie Piper, who as I have already mentioned I was very excited to see, did not disappoint me, and the actors who portrayed Greg and Kent approached their characters with an easy naturalism which fit LaBute's script well. For an actor, often the most difficult thing to do is not to play a strong character, but simply to portray a normal person believably. This is exactly what we saw in this production. In almost every scene, the acting could honestly have been mistaken for an overheard conversation, with very little to give away the fact that you were watching a play. Several of my fellow students have objected to the accents which the actors used, saying that they were not believable as American accents. However, I did not feel this was a problem, especially for the actors playing Greg and Kent. Additionally, there are many American dialects which members of our group are not familiar with, and the actors may have been employing one of these. (I remember someone telling me claiming that this production was supposed to be set in Montana, although I cannot recall who told me this. If this was the case, however, then I certainly could not say whether the accents were accurate or not).

In class the next day, we were told that our production had cut off LaBute's script early at the end. The director of this production had chosen to leave out the final scene, which consisted of Greg delivering a monologue which took place some time after the action of the play. After hearing the written ending read aloud in class, I agree with the decision to end the play where the

director did. Greg's speech seems to me to make many of the implied messages and themes of the play explicit for the audience, giving them a "take home message." By including this speech, I feel that the play would lose much of its subtlety and become only about the message, instead of the journey which takes us there. It was interesting to notice, however, how many of the students on our trip were able to tell that the ending had been changed. After the play, many expressed that they had been surprised when the play ended, saying that what we saw did not "feel" like an ending. This shows that audiences will often be able to sense if an ending has been altered, even if they do not know exactly what they are sensing.

After the play ended, a number of us remained in the theatre to try to get autographs from the cast. Not only were we successful in this, getting autographs from all four cast members, but Kieran Bew who played Kent stayed and talked to us for a long time. He seemed very interested in the Theatre in England trip, and told us some interesting stories about his experiences in theatre. When it came up that we would be seeing *Measure for Measure* in Stratford the following day, he told us that he knew the actor (Raymond Coulthard) who was playing Duke Vincentio and asked us to say hi for him. This was a very nice experience, and continues a trend which several members of our group pointed out – that often, the meaner a character is, the nicer the actor playing that character will be.

- Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

**Measure for Measure (1604)**  
**Written by William Shakespeare**  
**Dir. Roxana Silbert**  
**Swan Theatre**

Wednesday, January 4

I find it very telling to compare the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2011 production of *Measure for Measure*, directed by Roxana Silbert, with Ian Rickson's *Hamlet*. The latter production seemed to impose a new context on a Shakespeare text in order to turn it into something entirely new. In my *Hamlet* journal entry I argued that Rickson's differed enough from the intent of the original text that it required a reworking of the text to fit the new concept. By contrast, the S&M aesthetic employed in Silbert's *Measure for Measure* seemed to expand upon already existing themes within the play without rendering any of the original text inappropriate or difficult to interpret within the new context. If anything, the aesthetic of Silbert's production offered the audience a new way of accessing the original Elizabethan-era messages of the play.

Bondage and ownership form an important motif throughout *Measure for Measure*. Like S&M, Shakespeare's problem play connects ideas of discipline and passion in a sometimes-uncomfortable mix. Angelo (Jamie Ballard) appears most likable and human as he recognizes his passion for the novice Isabella. In other productions Angelo's self-proclaimed "love" might stand as a code word for lust, but in this production his infatuation seems to be one of the heart as much as one of the blood. However, this new passion comes into conflict with Angelo's strict and literal interpretation of the law; he demands Isabella sleep with him in exchange for her jailed brother's freedom. Angelo does not know how to reconcile his need for strict discipline with his new passion for Isabella, and his own solution is to force Isabella into a form of bondage, a secret sexual tryst that will ruin her forever. In both the whorehouse scenes and the scene with Mariana at St. Luke's, Silbert's set included women positioned as totally stationary

props—human lamps in the former and a fountain in the latter. These women are literally turned into property, and they reflect the problematic nature of Angelo’s desire to possess Isabella.

There’s a sense of social discomfort with S&M in modern-day society, but the fact of the matter is that the sexual practice is traditionally consensual. At its best, S&M effectively fulfills both parties’ sexual passion through the application of discipline. It’s an extreme sort of contract, but in a way it parallels the marriage contract that was seen as an effective way to couch sexual passion through socially acceptable discipline. Even the ideas of dominant and subordinate roles applied as married women had significantly fewer rights in society than men. I don’t think Silbert’s production necessarily draws this direct parallel, but I think the idea of a successful combination of discipline and passion is presented by Duke Vincentio (Raymond Coulthard), who proposes marriage to Isabella at the end. The Duke is the first person who appears onstage, attired in a costume that includes discreet bondage elements—a thick leather belt, for example. This contrasts with the studded leather jacket worn by Pompey (Joseph Kloska) or the sheer undershirt worn by Lucio (Paul Chahidi)—by contrast, the Duke presents an effective study in moderation even as he insists upon endearingly showy magic tricks throughout the play.

The Duke’s use of magic (which is not part of the original Shakespeare script) is only one of the ways in which the RSC’s production moves beyond the moral-focused context of the problem play to provide great amounts of humor. While on some level S&M is about discipline, it also has heavy associations with sexual liberation in modern society. This is reflected best in the play during the rowdy, and hilarious curtain call—the actors dance around one another, faux-slapping and kissing each other in turn (or doing even sillier things—I noticed a girl pretending to pinch Barnardine’s nipples, to his great amusement, and Lucio waving the hand of the babydoll that represented his illegitimate son at the end of the play!). They all appear amused

and excited to be joking around after the performance, and it's incredibly fun to watch as an audience. There is an overwhelming enthusiasm that pervades the comic moments of the play—the Duke, Pompey, Lucio and Barnardine especially endeared themselves to the audience through the energy they brought to creating humorous moments, especially in the latter half of the play.

With the exception of the utterly Dionysian curtain call, the body of the production doesn't advocate for sexually liberal behavior (as proven though the extreme trials of Claudio and his very pregnant, semi-spouse Juliet), but it does accept that passion is natural and healthy for human beings. After all, as Pompey half-jokingly asks the government officials who plan to close all the whore houses, "Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?" In short, the aesthetic and setting of the RSC production of *Measure for Measure* rather consistently help audiences focus on and understand key aspects of one of Shakespeare's lesser-known plays.

— Sara Cohen (Class of 2012; English)

The second Shakespeare play which we saw on this trip, *Measure for Measure*, was extremely different from the first. Unlike *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure* is a comedy. However, it is not a typical Shakespearean comedy, but is considered one of Shakespeare's "problem plays." However, this production did not have any problems with the comedic aspects of *Measure for Measure*, since this was easily the funniest production of a Shakespeare play I have ever seen.

There were many things to love about this production. I will talk first about the acting. There were no weak links in this enormous cast, and we were privileged to see many varied and entertaining performances. However, Raymond Coulthard who played Duke Vincentio, rose

above the rest and joins Michael Sheen and Mark Rylance (from *Jerusalem*) as one of the finest actors I have seen on this trip. The Duke is a difficult role to shine in, as he never has any intense dramatic or emotional moments and much of his role is to deliver exposition and move the plot forward. Coulthard, however, found infinite variation and nuance in this role, knowing exactly when to be subtle and when to be comically over-the-top. For example, at the end of the play when Duke Vincentio proposes marriage to Isabella, it always seems to be one of those last minute Shakespeare comedy marriages that comes out of nowhere (something I have personal experience with after being suddenly paired with Paulina during the final speech of *The Winter's Tale*). However, looking back on Coulthard's performance, there were hints throughout the play that the Duke, while disguised as a friar, was slowly falling in love with Isabella. This made the Duke's sudden marriage proposal make sense in the context of a real human character, and not just a traditional romance's need to pair up every character in the play for the happy ending. Coulthard managed to find the right balance between overtess and subtlety, making his character's attraction to Isabella clear enough so that the proposal did not seem out of character, but avoiding telegraphing too obviously that it was going to happen. By adding details like this, Coulthard made the character of the Duke far more accessible and palatable to a modern audience.

The direction and design of *Measure for Measure* worked together to bring this play to life beautifully, and a number of inspired choices were made. The overall S&M aesthetic used to portray the houses of sin which Angelo sought to shut down was an extremely effective way to convey the spirit of these places to the audience. The props and paraphernalia associated with S&M are instantly recognizable in our society and form an effective cultural shorthand for the debauchery represented by the brothels. Having the Duke participate in this aesthetic effectively

differentiated his moderation from Angelo's moral rigidity. The jungle of ropes which hung from the ceiling at the rear of the stage, in addition to simply providing a memorable visual, effectively symbolized what Angelo saw as the tangled quagmire of moral degeneracy which had overtaken the city. The decision to portray the Duke literally as a magician was a brilliant way to highlight how he must appear to the other characters in the play. Given the way in which he is able to appear suddenly in the final act and solve all of the city's problems, it must seem to the other characters like the Duke is able to fix everything by magic. The Duke's magic tricks were a fun and effective way to highlight this aspect of his character.

– Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

***The Heart of Robin Hood* (2011)**

**Written by David Farr**

**Dir. Gisli Orn Gardarsson**

**Royal Shakespeare Theatre**

This twist on the Robin Hood legend was both entertaining and very creative in the way it presented its story. The overhanging tree branches from which actors could hang and climb on coupled with the ceiling-high slide of the back wall gave the action a whole new dimension of height and acrobatics. These set components also served to magnify the playfulness of Robin Hood, Marion, and the other members of their gang and provided the spectacle which was so enthralling.

This production was similar to the *Cinderella* pantomime in that there were many aspects of the play clearly designed for a child audience. In *The Heart of Robin Hood*, Pierre served as the jokester and storyteller much like *Cinderella*'s Buttons, and both characters interacted with and spoke directly to the audience. One of *The Heart of Robin Hood*'s most endearing characters

was the dog, who was acted by a person who played the clarinet to create the dog's voice. This appealed greatly to the children in the audience because of how well the actor conveyed dog-like qualities through body posture and the clarinet noises. Other animals in the play were also acted by people and represented with various instruments, such as the horses as trombones and the swan as a trumpet with a mute. Although this aspect was very child-friendly, it also seemed geared for adults in the sense that it was reminiscent of the animals-as-instruments concept in "Peter and the Wolf."

Even though this production was geared quite a bit for a child audience, there were many instances which were more adult in theme and sometimes very violent. The death of the Sheriff of Nottingham was particularly macabre in that Robin Hood and his gang decide to use his body as a puppet to gain entry to the castle and save Martin of Sherwood (who is really Marion). The depiction of Little John playing puppet master and pulling the Sheriff's strings was made comical with jokes and the interactions with the castle guards, but the idea of making a puppet out of a human body is really quite disturbing. This imagery is actually very symbolic of the Sheriff's position of power. He was essentially a puppet of Prince John's in life, so it is almost fitting that he would continue to be some kind of puppet even in death.

At the core of this play is the concept of doing what is right and getting justice for wrongs committed. When Marion learns that she was wrong in thinking that Robin Hood was a champion of the people, she does not give up; rather she takes on that role herself and becomes Martin of Sherwood. By doing this, she eventually gets Robin Hood to follow in that path and in that way find his true, good heart. Robin Hood is convinced to help others rather than steal from them when it becomes a matter of saving children from execution. Many of the heroes' actions are driven by this desire to protect the children of the story, an acknowledgment of the innocence

of the children and the duty to protect them from the harms and evils of the world.

– Nika Tamashiro (Class of 2012; Japanese and Brain & Cognitive Science)

This show was quite a treat in many ways. Although it was definitely children's theatre filled with silly jokes and the "bad guy" was 100% evil with no redeeming qualities, I still enjoyed it thoroughly. Because it was children's theatre, this show was filled with playfulness and imagination. This production was also pretty high on the spectacle scale, so it was very easy to sit back (or forward, in our seats) and be entertained.

I'm going to start with the set because it not only made the show logically possible, but it created a world in which this show could exist. This set was every bit as whimsical and playful as the action on the stage. The hanging tree was larger than life, immediately putting the audience in unfamiliar territory. The ground sloped into a giant hill that went three or four stories up, which allowed for actors to make their entrances down a giant slide. In the "hill," there were three planks that could come down, creating openings for more entrances off sections reminiscent of diving boards or pirate ships. There were also multiple little openings for faces and arms that were revealed for gags throughout the performance. The paint treatment for the "grass" was brilliant because it appeared green under mostly white lighting, but when special colors were used you could see that there were actually many different greens, purples, blues, and even reds on the floor, which again made it seem fanciful and fun. I also quite enjoyed the pond. I thought it brought another level of playfulness to the set since it was actually used a lot. It wasn't terribly large, but it was just big enough for a person to fit into. Characters made surprising entrances and exits through the pond, used it as a disguise, or hid in it to eavesdrop.

This entire set was brilliant because every detail on it brought out the whimsy of the script and made adults watch in child-like awe of its technical mastery.

I could talk forever about the tech, but I'm going to switch gears to actually talk about the show because there is a lot to explore on that avenue as well. This script is particularly interesting because unlike all of the Robin Hood stories I have seen, Maid Marian is the protagonist. Not only that, but she is the one who dresses up in the traditional "Robin Hood" garb and steals from the rich to give to the poor. Meanwhile Robin Hood is a macho, selfish, gorgeous, "emotionally unavailable" scoundrel who is only transformed through the love of Maid Marian and her actions as Martin of Sherwood. I thought it was an imaginative revitalization of an old story, and also great for young children to see a female protagonist kicking ass and taking names instead of playing the damsel in distress, as is often the case. The level of violence in the show struck me as a bit intense for children at times, such as the cutting out and waving around of a tongue, or Prince John's telling Robin that he will lock him in a dungeon and cut off one body part every year on his anniversary. There were some conceits, however, such as the bright red harness on the shoulders of the father when he is hanged, that helped lessen the darker elements of the show. They could have easily disguised the harness, but instead they made it very noticeable so as not to scare the children too much. What fun would it be if they weren't a little frightened?

Other characters geared towards children (but still fun for me) include Pierre, who serves as a sort of "Buttons" character, and the animals played by instrumentalists. There were percussionist horses, a cello wild boar, a trumpet goose, and of course a clarinet dog. This style seemed to be a live-action *Peter and the Wolf* with the way that the sound of the instrument often matched the movement of the animals. What I thought was particularly clever was that they did

not costume the actors in animal furs or any literal animal outfits. The dog's hair was styled in a fluffy manner, and his clothes were in shades of brown with a little bit of short faux fur on the back of his vest, which is no more than an actual person would wear. The goose, who reminded me of the one from *War Horse*, was a woman with white, spiky hair in an all-white spandex suit and a white tutu. Beyond the styling, though, the acting was phenomenal. As someone who studies body movement, I was watching closely to see what exactly the actors were doing to portray their animals. The goose was most impressive because she was in a full squat while walking, which created the waddling effect and gave her body the shape and height of a goose, and it's really not easy to do that. She even jumped down into a recessed hole in the floor without straightening her legs a little bit. The dog was fun to watch, but in a different way. His character came from quick movements in the body but mostly it came from his breath. He used jaunty breathing with his mouth open and tongue out to mimic panting, which is what gave him the most dog-like qualities.

I also thought this show had impressive child actors. I remember thinking that they must have so much fun doing that show and getting to slide down the huge set for entrances. I found the brother and the sister to be very believable and also easy to hear, which can sometimes be an issue with young actors. The scene where the boy kills the wild boar by slitting its throat with the bow of the cello was kind of chilling. It reminded me of Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and a descent into barbarism, which may have been a more prevalent theme if the show had not been for ages seven and up.

Overall I would say that there were not as many acrobatics as I had hoped going into the show, but it was made up for in many other ways. The lighting and sound was spectacular, the set was whimsical and the acting was light-hearted and all in the spirit of the script. In hindsight I

would say it was definitely worth missing dinner for, although later that evening I might not have said so.

- Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

***Written on the Heart* (2011)**

**Written by David Edgar**

**Dir. Gregory Doran**

**Swan Theatre**

In an intriguing dramatization, *Written on the Heart* chronicles the trials surrounding the translation of the Hebrew Bible into English. The attempts by various scholarly groups over the years were ultimately superseded by the royal commission of the King James Version led by Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (Oliver Ford Davies). Published in 1611, the text was supposedly a comprehensive and final rendition of God's Word. However, as a work crafted by man, the draft was inherently fraught with human bias. Every minor ambiguity in the original Hebrew became a controversy to be tweaked and analyzed thoroughly.

From the onset, translating the Bible into English was a controversial undertaking. On one hand, the Word of God was corrupted in the conversion to another language. On the other hand, an English Bible was more accessible and helped common people better understand their faith. As this controversy faded, still more sprung up. By jumping around in time, the play reveals how perceptions of these issues evolved over time. By his contemporaries, William Tyndale was viewed as a radical blasphemer and was exiled for his translations. Less than 100 years later, however, his surviving manuscripts became the basis for future versions.

The play illustrates this through the emergence of a spectral Tyndale, who arrives as a source of inspiration for Andrewes. However, the appearance of Tyndale does not indicate a

divine intervention and his opinions still reflect a personal Puritanical bias. In the play's final line, Tyndale stares directly into Andrewes' eyes and quotes that when reading the translation Andrewes will see his face reflecting back. No matter how deeply you look, you'll see the human face of Tyndale, not God.

The Bible is a fractal of controversy: no matter how deeply you focus, a new layer of ambiguity emerges. Even seemingly minor quibbles could result in conflict. However, when dealing with a text as influential as the Word of God the distinction between "love" and "charity" can have profound implications. Although they appear closely synonymous, charity denotes love for the sake of God. The difference between "church" and "congregation" similarly appears superficial, but ultimately led to the breakaway of the Congregationalist sect.

In one scene, a clerk proposes to Andrewes his idea for a brotherhood dedicated to Puritan ideals. The young Andrewes scoffed, asking, "And what if there is a disagreement of interpretation?" Even among a small fraternity of like-minded scholars, there is bound to be some difference of opinion.

There is an unspoken tragedy in each of these seemingly petty disagreements; every argument becomes a literal battleground with lives at stake. When taken as absolute, doctrine of any variety can become problematic. History proves that either side can lead down a dangerous path. An ascetic interpretation leads to Puritanism and witch burnings. Meanwhile, the Roman interpretation rationalizes worldly rulers. It demonstrated its worst colors during the reign of the infamous bloody Mary.

The play featured an amazing set that glowed with the sanctity of a real cathedral. Intricate woodwork separated the stage into the pews and a secluded chapel. The lighting projected the image of colorful stained glass onto the floor. The beautiful setting made me

sympathize when characters resisted Puritanical orders to destroy all religious imagery; I did not want to see the stained glass destroyed.

– Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

I was really impressed by both of the sets at the Swan theatre. As I was looking at the ornate and jaw-droppingly gorgeous set I thought to myself, do they build the set for each show every time? Or are there parts that they reuse and repurpose? Despite the opulent set, the play was aurally focused. *Dublin Carol* was also aurally focused, but the staging of *Written on the Heart* didn't add much. I felt that I could have gotten just as much out of the play if I only listened to it. The staging didn't seem to be planned for that type of stage so I saw the actors' backs and set. Since I didn't see much of the action, I was tuned into the sounds of the play, and I noticed and loved that they incorporated the Anglican music tradition into the performance. It was a perfect choice because it allowed us as an audience to see the beauty of the ceremonies that the characters were fighting for and to allow us to understand a fraction of that reverence for the rituals of the church.

I thought it was a really touching and humanizing moment when the Bishop took the chalice from the chaplain. The way he looked at it just revealed how much both of them loved these rituals of the church. I thought it was an interesting way to continue the line of similarities between the two characters. To me the only difference was that Lancelot had grown old and no longer had the same, almost radical, views that he did in his youth.

Oddly enough, I was reminded of constitutional law in the U.S. while watching the play. There is this issue of youth fighting for change and the elderly fighting to keep the traditions. The play and constitutional law have the idea of preservation in common. There was a great line

in the play that said that translating the Bible shouldn't be what one wants it to say but what it actually says. That reminded me of constitutional law because there are two schools of thought in the interpretation of our Constitution: verbatim vs. in the spirit that it was written. In *Written on the Heart*, it seemed to me that this was also the key point of contention between the different Bishops. After watching the play, I want to look at the different Bibles they were talking about so that I can see how the translations differ.

— Katie Lewis (Class of 2012; Music)

***Richard II* (1594)**

**Written by William Shakespeare**  
**Dir. Michael Grandage**  
**Donmar Warehouse**

Thursday, January 5

Granted a divine right to rule, British monarchs played an important role in England's religious body as well as its state. King Richard II, who had been born on Epiphany and had shown promise as a young ruler, was particularly believed to have been handpicked by God. Shakespeare, under Queen Elizabeth, would have also been keen on the relationship between church and state. This production of *Richard II* was acutely aware of this context, and, even before the play began, actor Eddie Redmayne portrayed a Richard II firmly convinced of his own divinity. As we walked in, a thick blanket of incense filled the theater, suggesting both luxury and serenity. In center stage, Richard sat alone on his throne wearing his crown and gripping a scepter. With closed eyes, he exuded a regal confidence and imposing presence that set the tone for the rest of the play. Richard carried himself with majesty, pointing his nose slightly into the air. Meanwhile, much of the play's dialogue was in verse, setting it apart from the common tongue.

Although he walked and spoke with a kingly air, many of Richard's impetuous actions foreshadowed his inevitable downfall. This is most evident in his judgment of Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray, who are both suspected in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. Richard arranges a duel between the two but cancels it shortly after they put on their armor. As an audience member hoping to see a fight, I could empathize with the characters' frustration when Richard called them from the fight on a whim. The entire duel was built up as a show, and he had already made the arbitrary decision to exile both offenders. When he then goes on to frivolously shorten the sentence of his cousin Henry, Richard appears even more impulsive. These decisions reflect an immaturity in the young leader that contradicts his previous image as a wise ruler.

By the end of the act, Henry had returned to England to claim his father's estate and seize the throne from Richard. However, by this point the young king is still unfazed. As the act came to a close, Richard again stood alone on stage, looming from the balcony. He outstretched his arms as if to bestow a divine gift upon the theater below while an ethereal spotlight gave him a divine glow. Far from being confined to the stage, his presence stretched over all England, encompassing the hearts and minds of his subjects. With this action, he seemed to be playing a god more than a king.

When Richard was called to pass his crown onto Henry, Redmayne expressed a palpable doubt in depicting Richard's reluctance to cede the throne. Even when the entirety of the court and the state stood against him, he held on to the conviction that he had a right to rule England. If, as Richard was taught from a young age, God had chosen him to rule England, why would He now suddenly change his mind? When Henry reached for the crown, Richard continued to clutch it tightly with both hands and chastised him for accepting it eagerly. Meanwhile the other

characters were acting very carefully in order to appease Richard, as they were wary of being considered usurpers.

Richard is then imprisoned in the Tower of London, a shadow of his former self. There, Richard sorrowfully lamented his past life — how quickly things had fallen apart. Physically representing the passage of time, Redmayne ticked his arms like a clock counting down the hours. This context gave Richard a believable desperation, suitable for his reckless attack against the guards who had been sent to poison him.

The play's final scene paralleled the introduction. Richard again takes center stage, but now his body is concealed within a plain, wooden coffin. Henry kneels above the box in prayer, symbolically embracing his newfound role as religious leader.

— Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

I was surprised by the simplicity of this production's unchanging set, but after seeing the entire production and its religious overtones, the church-like appearance of the stage and its connection to Richard's "divine" position as ruler, I realize it would have been somewhat less effective to attempt to portray settings realistically. What the production lacked in visual cues, it more than made up for in lighting, sound and costumes. Because the set was so unadorned, the changes in lighting and sound were much more noticeable, and the background noises of horses, seagulls, or birds in a garden really allowed us in the audience to use our imaginations. For a script as rich in imagery as this one, the choice to focus on certain technical aspects over realism in the environment was a crucial one, but it worked because of the religious imagery that found more than its share of representation in the visual set. Certain directorial choices (such as Richard's pre-show position in his throne, and his almost crucified gesture just before intermission) made

Richard's religious authority a highlight of this production. These moments were also noticeably the only times when the audience saw Richard alone, during his time as King. This is significant in that the play focuses to a certain extent on Richard's identity crisis, and also the idea of loyalty: loyalty to kin, to the ruling monarch, and to God. In some cases there is no conflict (since the monarch is supposedly divinely appointed), but the play also shows the difficulty of choosing between king and kin, as in the case of the Duke of York. Bolingbroke's conflict was not so explicit, as he was not technically committing treachery by returning to England, but he clearly still opposed the King in Richard's justification for seizing Bolingbroke's inheritance. The separation between them was nicely seen in the use of the two levels of the set, which could portray separate scenes or merge them together, as in the scene when Richard comes "down court" to give his crown to Bolingbroke. That scene alone was exquisitely done, not only in staging Richard's conflict with Bolingbroke by showing them both with a hand on the crown, but also in Eddie Redmayne's portrayal of Richard's insecurity and uncertainty about his position and identity without the royal authority.

This goes back to the primary way in which Richard's moments alone on stage were important; that is, his journey through the play is one in which he repeatedly questions his identity. During his last monologue in prison, he compares his cell to the world, finding the only real difference in the fact that he is not surrounded by people in prison. Instead, he is accompanied by his thoughts, which he compares to people (the children of his brain and soul) and, through this, makes himself into many people ("Thus play I in one person many people / and none contented"). Along the theme of loyalty again, the person who intrudes on Richard's solitude is, notably, one of the few friends who have remained loyal to him. His insecurity is apparent before prison, however, as when he responds, "I have forgot myself" to Aumerle's

“Remember who you are.” The idea of flattery, as well, which is continually mentioned by others in their criticism of Richard, is clearly seen in his speech about the Earth after returning from Ireland, and the great pride that he takes in his position as King. One of the moments during which the contrast between this pride and insecurity was most clear was in the scene with the mirror, as Richard looks at his reflection and is no longer sure who he is before becoming so enraged that he throws the mirror down. The character of Richard is written as a complex web of these insecurities about his identity and difficulty making decisions, as well as a childish attachment to his authority and to the world of ideas he lives in. But he also has a certain sensitivity that makes him a compassionate and sympathetic ruler, even in his imperfections. The emphasis placed on his development by accenting the King’s religious position through his appearances at the beginning and end of the first act, and the church-like music, all alongside a spectacular performance by Redmayne, gave the play a very unique and three-dimensional central character inside a wonderfully flexible, though static, set.

– Meridel Phillips (Class of 2012; Physics and English: Theater)

### ***No Way Out (Huis Clos) (1943)***

**Written by Jean Paul Sartre; Translated from French by Stuart Gilbert**

**Dir. Paul Hart**

**Trafalgar Studios 1**

Last year in AP English Literature, one of the main concepts that we covered was existentialism in *The Stranger*, *Grendel*, and Sisyphean myths. When I heard that we’d be seeing a Sartre play (no doubt full of bleak, hopeless, pessimistic, anti-humanism existentialism), I couldn’t help but get a little bit excited. Even so, I was blown away by the quality of *Huis Clos*.

Let me just begin by quickly discussing existentialism here. As far as I understand – and, let's be honest, no one completely understands existentialism, not even Sartre – existentialism is the idea that no human can understand the machinations of the universe, so life is essentially meaningless. However, existentialism also states that your life is ultimately what you imagine it to be. For example, the three tortured souls in *Huis Clos* all enter the “hotel room” expecting to find some sort of torture. They already expect that they are entering Hell, so that is what it becomes for them. It is impossible to determine whether or not the situation could have turned out better had they approached the room as if it were Heaven. But the connection is still there; they expected to end up in Hell, and that is exactly where they are by the conclusion.

Next, let me gush about the quality of the one hour and fifty minute performance given by all three actors. No breaks. No scene changes. No intermissions. That takes enormous dedication to character. And each of the three characters was unbelievably well defined. I found myself way beyond the edge of my seat as they continued to reveal information about their troubled pasts. Estelle’s final earthly monologue stands out in my mind as being particularly brilliant. It must have lasted for well over six or seven minutes, but you really felt as if you were on Earth watching some frivolous ball with her, listening to the same gossip that made her cringe. It was truly shocking to me that we saw the opening night of this show. It just goes to show the level of polish and professional level of commitment that these actors have to rehearsal and their characters.

Yet I think the most impressive aspect of the play was the environment that it created. *Richard II* was oppressive? HA! If the atmosphere in *Richard II* is oppressive, then *Huis Clos* could best be categorized as Stalinist Russia! Throughout the entire one hour and fifty minutes, you are trapped in this room with these people: there is *No Way Out* for the audience either. As

the three actors complain about the heat in the room, you feel the burning stage lights on your face as well. It is an incredibly powerful message that I think couldn't have been brought across with a larger theatre. Hats off to Trafalgar Studios 2 for providing a venue for two fabulous plays so far.

My favorite part of Sartre's writing is that there are countless smaller plot points that have such a large effect on the meaning of the work as a whole. What is the point of the letter knife? Why is the unliftable bronze statue in the room? How many ways have these people really invented to torture one another? *Huis Clos* truly is a play that requires a second read. Even then, I don't think I'll catch everything that you need for a complete understanding.

– Devin Goodman (Class of 2015; Physics; Minor: English)

**Cinderella (2011)**  
**Written by Eric Potts**  
**Dir. Christopher Dunham**  
**Richmond Theatre**

Friday, January 6

The *Cinderella* Pantomime was a great way to break up all of the more “heavy” shows we had been seeing. It was light, it was tons of fun, and it did not require all that much thinking. I knew I was going to enjoy it as soon as I walked in and saw that the curtain had at least ten gallons of glitter on it. I was also very excited to be taking part in the British tradition, after hearing about pantomimes in class. I love the fact that British children are introduced to theater at young age and that it is something that everyone would have experienced. It is great fun for all ages, and I think it would be an amazing tradition to take part in every year near Christmas.

The thing I loved the most about the pantomime was that it was great for all ages. Little children enjoy the audience participation and the funny things Buttons did. Teenagers enjoy the

modern music that was playing before the show started and other references to pop culture. Adults enjoy a lot of the references made throughout the show and just having a show to sit back and enjoy with their children. It's very hard to have a show that appeals to all ages and I think that the pantomime tradition is a great way to bring the family together.

One aspect I personally enjoyed was the music, especially the songs. I love musical theater, so it was fun to have the songs in the show since we didn't end up seeing an exorbitant amount of musicals on the trip. The best part was that there were actually many musical theater references in the songs and throughout the show. A couple songs were parodies of well-known musical theater songs (like "I Just Can't Wait To Be King" from *The Lion King*) and others were just small references. I noticed references to at least six references to different musicals: *The Lion King*, *Gypsy*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Annie*. The songs were all very fun and upbeat; they definitely served to keep the audience entertained.

The show was definitely meant to be laid-back and fun. There were times where you could see Buttons and Cinderella breaking character to laugh at themselves. I thought that this fit the show and kept in the spirit of lightheartedness and fun. However, I think that the show could have been even better with some more concentration on acting. The show was naturally a lot of fun, which the actors were great at keeping up with. However, I felt like some of the acting could have been better, specifically from the Fairy Godmother and Cinderella. A little more thought put into their lines would have helped their comedic timing, which would have made the shower even better and funnier.

One thing I was very impressed with were the kids in the show. They were great dancers and very disciplined. It was obvious they were having a lot of fun but they also seemed really focused on their performance. I enjoyed paying particular attention to their choreography and

how they were all very precise even though they were so young. I remember thinking, “if only I could get the members of Off Broadway On Campus (OBOC) to do their choreography this well.” They were obviously very well trained which made me think about how disciplined they must be to be that young and get that far.

Although this pantomime seemed more subdued than ones we had talked about in class, I definitely enjoyed it very much. It was a really great experience and I am so grateful we had the opportunity to go to a pantomime. I hope to be able to go to one that is more outrageous and isn’t quite as subdued some day, but this *Cinderella* pantomime was a great introduction in to the British tradition.

– Caitlin Lischer (Class of 2013; Brain & Cognitive Science)

This production was clearly most interested in the “spectacle” aspect of theater. The reliance on exuberant dance numbers and gaudy outfits made it much more a form of entertainment than regular theater, but considering the expected age range of the audience, this made a lot of sense. The hugely exaggerated set pieces and costumes of the evil step-sisters also played into this childish need to be kept engaged by surprise. Considering how short the attention spans were of most children in the audience, however, I thought this production did an incredible job of keeping them interested in the storyline. The character of the Fairy Godmother served as a narrator to keep the plot very simple and coherent even to very young ages, as shown by her short introduction and various rhymed “storyline” updates throughout the show. Buttons, meanwhile, acted as the “insider” for the audience, allowing us to participate in the action and also often to be able to predict what would happen because of the nature of his tricks. He also simplified the idea of dramatic irony down to a children’s-book level; that is, he was able to keep

children engaged in the story by letting them be the only ones who knew the answers to questions like where the spider was or where the key was hidden. Buttons' various games, as well, were clearly meant as a distraction from the story purely to keep youngsters entertained.

Despite its obvious pandering to a very young audience, however, the tale of Cinderella and the Prince is a nice case illustrating the idea of mistaken identity. While the Prince purposefully conceals his identity in the hope of finding true love, and then reveals himself to find Cinderella, Cinderella is forced to disguise herself in order to lose her true self and find the mistaken Prince, or "Dandini," and she also only reveals herself because she is forced to by Fate. The suspension of disbelief required by the story is rather extreme (how would the Prince not recognize Cinderella even though he had danced with her for hours?) but for a fairy tale, this is only to be expected. The importance of costume, not only in the matter of their disguises (the Prince's sash and Cinderella's dress), but for all characters, was overwhelming. Beatrice's and Eugenia's range of costumes contributed to their positions as mutual villains, but two who couldn't stand each other. Although they were often themed to match each other (lemons and oranges, Christmas tree and ornament) they were often visually contrasting in the same way that their characters were conflicting. And of course the role played by Cinderella's slipper is crucial to the resolution of the entire plot.

This particular adaptation, although somewhat superficial since it consisted mostly of bright costumes, exaggerated scenery, dancing and mediocre acting, was well suited to its audience. The songs chosen were usually from recognizable children's movies or pop culture, such as the *Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and the well-known Christmas song "Sleigh Bells." The occasional references to cultural icons like Kate Middleton and adult subjects like bank processes, meanwhile, were clearly beyond the children's range of understanding. While these

occasional socio-cultural references kept adults paying attention, the show engaged its younger viewers through a combination of audience participation in games, in helping answer questions to advance the storyline, and of course with rewards for randomly selected children at the end.

- Meridel Phillips (Class of 2012; Physics and English: Theater)

***The Charity that Began at Home (1906)***

**Written by St. John Hankin**

**Dir. Auriol Smith**

**The Orange Tree Theatre**

After seeing fifteen plays, I'm beginning to get a little bit tired of a lot of patterns that we've seen so far. I'm tired of modern adaptations. I'm tired of social introspection (though I'm sure there will be no end to those). And most of all, I'm tired of plays without a happy ending. Don't get me wrong; I'm still perfectly open to seeing all of these sorts of plays again, as long as they are done well. But so many have just rehashed a lot of the same themes without adding much of their own. There was something about *The Charity That Began at Home* that struck me as remarkably refreshing. There were no extravagant spectacles, no gimmicky adaptations, no high-budget technical miracles, just strong performances and a very traditional script.

The play is about the Denisens, who have taken to a Mr. Hylton's philosophy about associating with those less fortunate: you should invite people you dislike to your house for brief stays because no one else will. This goodwill should spread through them and the community, thus making the world a better place. The setup allows for some wacky and brilliant character interactions – such as those between the beautifully played Miss Triggs (a German governess)

and General Bosnor (a rambling war hero) – without any need for sexual innuendos or pop culture in-jokes.

The play reminded me a great deal of the Kaufman and Hart classic *You Can't Take It With You*. Both that play and *The Charity That Began at Home* house similarities not only in the length of their titles, but also in their style of humor. Each play features one or two “sensible” characters, while the remaining cast is – to put it frankly – completely bonkers. The audience draws their laughter from the “sensible” characters attempting to deal with (or mitigate the damage caused by) the wackier characters. Both plays also deal heavily with the idea of living life in the moment and using your own fortune to help those less fortunate.

As heartwarming as it is, I want to briefly discuss how I found Mr. Hylton’s philosophies incredibly hypocritical. As I have frequently stated throughout this journal, I am a sad, jaded little man who takes people’s words at face value the same way someone would take a venom milkshake from a rattlesnake. His entire “Church of Humanity” is founded on faulty principles. As can be seen in the events of the play, his “charity” towards the less socially fortunate will always be seen as condescension. He urges people to invite those they find distasteful into their homes. Does he do the same? Absolutely not. It seems more likely that he is enacting a social experiment on the Denisens more than any other.

I’m going to add a quick note on the end here about how everything in this play was used for a purpose. Take a look at the long set change before the final dinner scene of the play, after all the guests have stormed out of the Denisen household. The set change was done to music, with characters who had previously been houseguests dressing as the servants. Not only that, but what might have been a quick and insignificant scene change was given another layer of realism as we witnessed real tea being brewed and poured, real grapes being cut and placed onto fine

china, and real silverware being placed properly. I just thought that moment exemplified how this play took small moments and made them seem important to the audience.

- Devin Goodman (Class of 2015; Physics; Minor: English)

This play was a wonderful satire on Edwardian society and cultural mores. However, the most interesting parts of the play were when it explored the limits of charity and the selfish aspects of such an act. For example, the idea that rang most strongly with me was Verreker's idea that people have ideals for others but not for themselves. For him, charity exists as a way for uppity people to force others to adhere to their ideas of what people should be like. That comes to fruition when it is revealed to all of the guests why they have been invited to the house party. The Denison women thought they were being kind by inviting dis-likable people to their party, but the guests are – unsurprisingly – insulted when they discover that they have been invited because people do not like them. That is how comedy is turned into a social commentary, because idealism does not work in the real world.

In *The Charity That Began at Home*, St. John Hankin was trying to move beyond simple melodrama, because that often became a joke, and he wanted to create something with deeper social implications. Influenced by George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, he created a ‘new drama’ that treated serious themes in a comic manner, which explains the tensions between charity and selfishness in the play. One of the limits of charity is towards the lower classes, where selfish social structures won out over charitable intentions. That was most evident in Mrs. Denison’s dealings with Ansen, one of the maids employed in the household. Instead of taking pity on her situation (the butler has taken advantage of her), Mrs. Denison ignores her presence in the room and discusses her fate as if she were a piece of furniture. A person trying to be truly

charitable towards Ansen would send her to live with her mother (probably with a small sum of money) and would fire Soames (the butler). However, Mrs. Denison is too kind and wants to take pity on Soames as well. That is where her charity goes too far and she fails to see the humanity necessary in this situation, instead of naïve idealism.

I was also very impressed by the character who played Verreker, because of his ability to remain outside of the action and appreciate the irony, which made his facial expressions priceless.

– Rebecca Kennedy (Class of 2012; English)

***Billy Elliot: The Musical* (2005)**  
**Book and Lyrics by Lee Hall**  
**Dir. Stephen Daldry**  
**Victoria Palace Theatre**

Saturday, January 7

This production and all aspects of it amazed me. Not only was the story moving, but the technical aspects of the show: the acting, the singing, the dancing, together with the energetic audience all made it one the best experiences in a theater that I had on the trip. Seeing this play made me appreciate theater even more, especially musicals, which I usually am not as fond of as other types of shows. I had no idea how incredible *Billy Elliot* was going to be, and I wished I would have gotten the chance to see it again in New York too, before its closing on Jan 8<sup>th</sup> 2012 there.

First of all, the set alone was magnificent. It was a very mobile set where parts of it appeared from below the stage. Billy's room was one part that would rise up higher than everything else on stage, right in the center of everything. The height of his room, along with the staircase that led to it, seemed like a representation of Billy's adolescence and individuality that

his character exhibited in the play. The show had wonderful technical elements overall. It used lighting to highlight the police and union solidarity during the miner's strike. In one moment during the solidarity song, the lighting got dark, except for the light that was focused on Billy Elliot's dancing. The backdrop of the police and union in the darkness with Billy's highlighted dancing in front of them was a spectacular moment in the performance. I believe it was during this moment in this production where Billy first discovered his true passion for ballet dancing.

Watching *Billy Elliot* also evoked some nostalgia in me as it reminded me of my own assistant stage managing experiences back in Todd Theater. I saw automatic snowmakers in this production, and it reminded me of when I got to make the snowfall (manually at the beginning of every performance) during Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* in the Todd production. I also saw an ASM come out on the side of the stage and hold a platform upright, which allowed Billy to do a flip on it during one of his dancing scenes. I thought about how much fun it would be to work on a show like *Billy Elliot*, especially doing run crew for it, where I would get to hold up a platform that a talented young dancer would do a flip from.

The acting and singing brought me to tears, which has never happened to me in theater before. This has only happened to me in movies (rarely) during very powerful scenes or endings. In *Billy Elliot*, I remember especially any scene where Billy sings about his mother, who is deceased. The idea that Billy had a handwritten letter from his mother was moving. In the show, his mother was actually played by an actress, but these moments were supposed to be Billy's visions/memories.

Perhaps it was something about sitting in the front row on the ground floor, right next to the pit, and close up to the talented young star actors that made the experience more meaningful for me. The moment when Billy was all packed and ready for a train to London is when he

walked off the stage, right in front of my seat, and then made his way into the aisle to walk down it, indicating that he was on his way to London for auditions at the prestigious ballet school. In terms of plot, it was nice to see his dad finally supporting his aspirations, and he genuinely expressed being proud of Billy when Billy sang the “Electricity” song, which took place at the end of his audition in response to a question along the lines of “How does ballet dancing make you feel?” It was hilarious to see his father point to himself afterwards while saying unDiehis breath, “That’s my son!” And after that, he did a little twist dance thing that caused the audience, including myself, to break into laughter. This was a terrific and comical expression of his father’s support for his son’s passion for the ballet.

– William Hogan (Class of 2012; Psychology)

I was very, very excited to get to see *Billy Elliot* in London. It was probably the single show I was most excited to see. For one, I love musicals so this was automatically a cause for excitement. Secondly, it changes it a bit to see it in England rather than in the United States. Like *War Horse*, I felt that it was more meaningful to see *Billy Elliot* in London, where the history of the show is rooted. I felt more connected to the show personally and also more connected with the audience in general who had probably talked about more of the historical significance and background in school than we would have in the United States.

One theme that I really took away from this show was the idea of solidarity and sticking together. At the very beginning of the show, a projector is playing that gives background and history on what is going on during this time period with the strikes and Maggie Thatcher. This puts the audience on the same page--even if some people have more historical knowledge of the era than other audience members, everyone now has the same basic background to put

themselves into the show. The very first song then continues bringing the audience (and the rest of the cast) together. The first song talks about standing together. Some example lyrics that highlight this are:

- “we will always stand together / in the dark, right through the storm / we will stand, should to shoulder / to keep us warm”
- “when the stars look down upon our past / and the stars look down and see a future / bright at last / when we’ll stand as one, beneath the sun”
- “all out together / all out as one / all out for victory / til we’ve won”

All of these lyrics show how important it is to stand together for these people. They’ve gone through hardships together, and they will keep fighting together. I think it is a very powerful beginning to the show.

Another very powerful song that exemplifies the theme of sticking together during the show is “Solidarity”. Obviously, the name of the song itself strongly showcases this idea. In this song, everyone sort of comes together – the dancers, the police officers, and the miners. The miners and police are facing off with the young dancers in the middle. One thing that particularly struck me in this song was when the miners and police officers had exchanged hats. Their outfits weren’t too different besides the hats and because both the fighting groups were intermingled, you could not really tell when they had exchanged groups. I think that it made a very powerful statement. Both groups, while one could be seen as ‘good’ and one could be seen as ‘evil’, had identified values that they had to fight for. The miners were on strike for better conditions and better wages. The police were working because they needed to and they reference sending their children to private school. The two groups also dance with the children, which adds another group into the song. All the children are with the miners and the police, combining into a huge group number with nearly everyone on stage. It leaves a strong impression, especially with the words “Solidarity, solidarity. Solidarity forever!” repeated many

times throughout the song. “Solidarity” is obviously a very important number in the show, especially when it is such a major theme in the show.

Another way this theme is shown is really through the relationship dynamics within Billy’s family and the other miners. For one, there’s the conflict between Billy’s father and brother. When Billy’s father realizes that it is going to cost a lot of money to pay not only for Billy to go to dance school, but just to get him to an audition, he knows that he has to go back to work and betray the rest of the workers on strike. Billy’s brother is a huge proponent of the strike, so this leads to a lot of family strife. It says a lot that Billy’s father is willing to give up some of his beliefs to help Billy. But more importantly, it says a lot about what happens with the others. The mining community is so strong that rather than let Billy’s father go back to work and give up the strike, the whole community gathers to help Billy and to raise money for him. It is a really touching moment in the scene when they are all gathered together to help Billy. Not a single person there really has any money they can afford to give away but all of them help Billy as much as they can. There is truly an overwhelming feeling of support and solidarity within the community and within the show itself.

Sometimes it is hard to come out of a show knowing that it had a solid theme and ‘take home’ message. This was not true for *Billy Elliot*. Throughout the entire show, not only did I hear and see themes relating to solidarity, but I *felt* it. *Billy Elliot* truly plays on the audience’s emotions, and I think it is a great example of a musical that brings the audience together in “solidarity” throughout the entire show.

– Caitlin Lischer (Class of 2013; Brain & Cognitive Science)

***The Collaborators (2011)***

**Written by John Hodges**

**Dir. Nicholas Hytner**

**Cottesloe Theatre**

Responsible for the deaths of 23 million of his own citizens, Joseph Stalin was arguably the most ruthless despot in human history. In depicting the struggle of playwright Mikhail Bulgakov under the oppressive Soviet regime, *The Collaborators* accomplished the impossible: it made Stalin funny. When Bulgakov is commissioned (at gunpoint) to compose a play about Stalin's youth, he finds a helping hand from the dictator himself. A hilarious role reversal emerges as Stalin drafts a script about his own heroic exploits while Bulgakov manages the affairs of the Soviet empire.

When Bulgakov is first presented the commission, he flat-out refuses to write a play on behalf of the Soviet regime. Even when dragged before a typewriter, a bout of writer's block grips him. However, when the secret police threaten his wife, he is forced to start working — rationalizing to himself that he can draft a play that simultaneously pleases his captors while condemning Stalin. In these scenes, the tyrant crawls out of the cupboard to assist him. More enamored with the art of playwriting than the minutiae of running a nation, Stalin eventually seizes creative control over the dramatization of his own life.

Life becomes easier when Bulgakov collaborates with the Soviet Bloc. Amidst poverty and grain shortages, Mikhail manages to live a comfortable life with hot water, fresh fruit, and lavish clothing. A car with a driver even shows up at his front door ready to take him wherever he wishes. Even his incurable and deadly nephrosclerosis is miraculously healed. By now he has given up any hope of drafting a masterpiece, and he is taking the path of least resistance.

For those around Bulgakov, however, life continues to turn sour. He cannot help but feel guilty as he continues to contribute his own artistic talents. This metaphor is made real, as

Bulgakov himself is forced to make the decisions to seize grain from farmers and execute conspirators. Stalin frequently misinterprets his words.

As the play continued, it gradually dawned on me that all of the encounters with Stalin are figments of Bulgakov's imagination. They parallel the opening dream sequence—a recurring nightmare, in which Stalin leaps out of the cupboard to smash Bulgakov's head in with a typewriter. While the dreams have changed, Stalin continues to assault him and pin him into unfortunate situations. As one character remarks, "Stalin always catches you." The literal collaboration with Stalin proved a brilliant metaphor for the implications of working with a totalitarian government. It also worked marvelously as comedic theater, as the casual banter with a dictator became increasingly absurd. The moment of realization, when I finally understood what was happening provided an "Aha!" moment well worth waking up at 6 a.m. to wait for tickets.

— Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

***The Kreutzer Sonata* (2009)**

**Adapted by Nancy Harris from the novella by Leo Tolstoy**

**Dir. Natalie Abraham**

**Gate Theatre**

*The Kreutzer Sonata* was written entirely as a monologue of a man who was telling his story about the events leading up to his wife's infidelity and, eventually, to his murdering of her. Since it was all from his point of view, we never get another side of the story, and the idea that his wife was being unfaithful could have all been in his head. We never see any clear-cut evidence from his recollections that she was in fact having an affair with the violinist. Hilton McRae did a nice job of acting for the show. He presented himself at first as kind a sex-addicted, male chauvinist.

He told us about his experiences in brothels, made a parallel between music and sex in a brothel, and even implied at one point that women will never be equal to men. We learn later that he stabbed his wife in an intense moment where he entered his home while she was having dinner with the man with whom he thought she was having an affair. There was no evidence of this other than the man telling us it is what he thought was happening. The only physical contact he could describe was his wife rubbing the leg of the violinist. The man recalls this stroking occurring in the moments right before an altercation that led to his murdering her. We also learn later that he was acquitted of the crime and part of the significance of the title is that the Kreutzer Sonata is the musical piece that reminds him of his wife, and his miserable life with her.

The emotions expressed by Hilton McRae (Posdnyshev) felt so real. He presented himself as the perfect mix between the sane and insane. At times it was hard to detect if he was in fact insane. It is possible that he just *perceived* his wife as cheating on him, even so much so that he *thought* he saw her rubbing the leg of the violinist in the scene he described that eventually led to the tragic outcome. Additionally, even though he was giving a monologue, and that was the entire show, he was not the only actor in the show. We also had his wife and the violinist, who were acting behind a screen. They would appear only when lights would shine on them, and it would show them dancing together, or playing a duet. At other times we would see Posdnyshev's wife sitting on a couch, as he was describing her features, especially her wide eyes, which he emphasized repeatedly in the monologue.

The lighting was beautiful. It was so well done that at first it was hard to tell if what I was seeing were just images projected on a screen three dimensionally, or if there were actors behind the screen. The screen was for the most part translucent, but it could be made transparent with the proper lighting. For sound, there was not much to it, but we could hear the faint sound of a

train running, since the show took place entirely on a train. Also, we heard beautiful classical music, which was played live by the other two actors behind the screen. There was a real grand piano used, which gave us a sense of just how much space was back there. An important thing to mention is that this man who was recalling the events of his life did not have much of a taste for music, especially after his wife consulted with a doctor who suggested she remain abstinent. This led to her playing the piano and mastering it, only to the distress and frustration of her husband. Despite this, I thought the music in the show was nice, even though it is possible that the violin music may have been sub-par either because the actor who played it was not proficient in it or because it was an intentional directorial choice to have a sub-par violinist because of the fact that the man did not have much of a taste for music. Either way, I felt the show worked out nicely. The production team made nice use of the limited space that was available in the theater and onstage.

– William Hogan (Class of 2012; Psychology)

With all the issues packed into *The Kreutzer Sonata*, I could write a dissertation on this production longer than the original novella itself. The premise brings to mind issues of historical context, the position of the artist in society, shock, fidelity, the emotional as an expression of the physical (and vice versa), parallels to other stage-works (mainly *A Doll's House* and *Death & the Maiden*), the senses (seeing vs. hearing), sexism, virtue, ideals, innocence, character, paternal and maternal influences, appearance, intimacy (in marriage and chamber-music), music history, and the idea of concerts as a musical equivalent to brothels.

Firstly, consider why Leo Tolstoy named his novella after Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* (for violin and piano) when so many other works of Beethoven have been given programmatic

names by publishers.<sup>5</sup> Naming the novella after Beethoven's "The Ghost" Trio would have been equally as appropriate, since the alleged affair between Pozdnyshev's wife and the violinist (Trukhachevski) is an apparition in Pozdnyshev's mind alone.

My theory concerning the naming of the novella is that Tolstoy knew of the *Kreutzer Sonata*'s history. Ludvig van Beethoven gave the premiere performance of the sonata with violinist George Bridgetower, to whom the sonata was dedicated. After the sonata's debut, however, Bridgetower made disparaging remarks about a woman whom Beethoven fancied. In return, Beethoven removed the dedication to Bridgetower and instead dedicated it to Kreutzer, another popular violinist of the time. (Note: Kreutzer never publicly performed the sonata.) I believe this relates to the novella in that both "Kreuzter Sonatas" concern the alleged moral status of a woman.

*The Kreutzer Sonata* seemed like a difficult script to perform. In the production we saw, only one character - Pozdynyshev - is given spoken dialogue. The other two (the pianist and the violinist) only play sonata excerpts from behind a screen that became transparent in certain lights. Considering that there was absolutely no spoken dialogue for the violinist or the pianist, one would think that professional musicians would have been hired for the production. However, while the two actors did play piano and violin, they were most definitely actors, not musicians, and between the two of them missed more notes than could be counted in the 75-minute play. To me, this was distracting and detracted highly from the production. I would have preferred to hear actual musicians or, in the worst case, excerpts from a recording. In the context of a novella and play that emphasize the extreme power of music, having an unmusical and

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<sup>5</sup> Examples include the *Tempest*, *Appassionata*, *Moonlight*, *Spring*, and *Pathetique* Sonatas, "Fur Elise" (which was actually meant for "Terese") *Eroica* Symphony, *Ghost* Trio, etc.

painful rendition of the title work showed a lack of integrity and understanding. Further, it showed a lack of respect for the audience - that is to say - the directors either could not hear themselves how badly the music was being played or they assumed that the audience would neither notice nor care.

A tarantella is featured in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Death & the Maiden*, and *A Doll's House*. In each, the tarantella is played while the protagonist loses control, surrendering and giving power to their most terrifying fears. Legend has it that dancing the tarantella was a spider-bite victim's last chance for survival, and that the dance itself resembles the movement of a tarantula, limbs whirling everywhere. Pozdynyshev's tarantella, at the play's climax, is his surrender to murderous rage, all based on the primal suspicion of her infidelity, for which logic is lost.

- Lauren Haley (Class of 2013; Music: Violin Performance)

***Twelfth Night* (1601)**  
**Written by William Shakespeare**  
**Dir. Mark Leipacher**  
**New Diorama Theatre**

The most interesting aspect of this production of *Twelfth Night* was the unique staging. Because it was done in a black box theater, there was no set and very few props. There weren't even any projections onto the walls to help the audience imagine the setting. This resulted in a very 'artsy' feel to the play. What I mean by this is that the audience and actors were not helped by fancy stage lighting and background sets, but theater was stripped to its most raw elements: actors, stage, and audience. It was a very intimate setting and would probably put off many less avid theater-goers who are used to a more 'traditional' setting with a large stage and more of a set.

The lack of a set also required the actors to be very physically fit, because they often had to act out the set, to make up for its lack. For instance, they acted out the ship-wreck scene by swinging Viola around as the actors pretended to be waves.

The most interestingly staged scene, in my opinion, was the scene where Malvolio is reading a letter he believes has been written by Olivia, his mistress, with whom he is in love. Because the scene is supposed to take place in a garden, the other actors, who were not speaking in the scene, posed in the shape of a tree in the background. It must have taken great physical strength to keep their arms up in those poses for the entire scene and it took even greater control to do the gentle waving of the tree by slowly moving their arms up and down as they re-created “wind” on stage. Also, the three characters who were watching Malvolio read had very physically demanding acting as well. They ran around and hid behind the tree when Malvolio looked around and almost saw them. And at one point, they couldn’t get behind the tree in time and had to take up a tree pose of their own (which got a lot of laughs out of the audience). Finally, a few of Malvolio’s actions especially highlighted the intimate nature of the small, black box theater as well as the physicality of his role; at one point in the letter, it asks him to “revolve” as he reads it and the actor actually turned in a circle on stage; at another point, he stood very close to the first row of the audience and stared directly at the audience members while continuing his monologue. Because the audience was so close to him, we could see the wildness and crazed look in his face. That intimacy would not be possible in a larger theater.

– Rebecca Kennedy (Class of 2012; English)

***Stones in His Pockets (1996)***

**Written by Marie Jones**

**Dir. Indhu Rubasingham**

**Tricycle Theatre**

I think that this play is a perfect example that of the fact that, however incredible it may be, a fancy set does not make a performance. These two actors on a bare set put on a performance that was more intense and funny than some of the shows with million dollar budgets. This performance was an incredible tale and so well put on that when I think back to it, I remember several times as many actors onstage than there actually were. There were at least twelve roles that I can remember, and only two moments of confusion where I couldn't tell who the character was supposed to be, but both of these were due to them being bit parts that only appeared once. The tapestry that these men wove was astounding. In any and all previous occasions that I had seen a production where many parts were being played by a few actors, there were always costume pieces that would differentiate the different characters. However, that would be too easy for this performance. Instead, the actors differentiated each character purely through physical and verbal differences, which is a challenge even with one or two characters. To keep each character straight in their minds while acting each of them out must have been an ordeal that I would never want to experience.

There were only two things that were portrayed using anything other than the actors' abilities: the location and whether or not the movie's cameras were rolling. This was instead portrayed entirely through lighting and sound changes. The design for these changes was incredible, with each feeling like an entirely separate environment. By letting the audience fill in the gaps with their imagination, the entire play had a much richer experience. I would really like to see more of this sort thing, since I enjoy letting my imagination fill in a scene and I really enjoy complex and interesting sound and light designs. All the directors for the shows I've

designed only use lights to complement the set and sound as literal effects or as a background soundtrack. Obviously, this is a perfectly normal and adequate directorial choice, but it would be difficult and fulfilling and extremely fun to do something like *Stones in His Pockets*. It would require a lot of experience and skill to paint such an incredible picture and there would be overwhelming pressure, since you need to take into account the usual lighting difficulties as well as scene setting. It would also be extremely difficult to do this for a play with this many different settings with anything besides a professional theater's budget and equipment. You would probably need at least a few color changers or a huge number of normal lights to get the variety of settings that *Stones in His Pockets* has. However, it would be even more expensive and much less cost effective to do the scenery with actual sets rather than lights, especially since you really can't re-use sets. A theater can try to reuse certain set pieces, or materials, but mostly everything gets trashed. That is what separates a set like the one in *Jerusalem* and *13*. Since *Jerusalem*'s set was made from a collection of eclectic pieces, most of them can be reused by the theater in other shows or sold to different theaters that need a similar piece, with the notable exception of the trailer. On the other side of the spectrum, *13*'s set is now defunct. Unless a different theater is putting on the exact same production, that cube will be dismantled and thrown out or sold for scrap, which is honestly a little depressing, and is impossible for a really small theater to do. For instance, in TOOP (The Opposite of People, a student-run theater company) we limit ourselves to one or two built-for-show set pieces per performance, like the bassinet in *Baby with the Bathwater* or the desk area in *Hot L Baltimore*. The incredible thing about *Stones in His Pockets* is that they held to this rule. The only non-reusable piece of equipment in the show is the backdrop. To see this kind of thriftiness in a professional theater is astounding, even though it may just be an unintentional side effect of the direction.

Seeing this thriftiness next to the descriptions of the extravagance of the film is another aspect that I enjoyed. The two actors onstage juxtaposed against the film hiring almost every man in the village as an extra, the trunk onstage against the thousands of dollars in flowers that the film bought, the realistic and rustic sounds on stage against the dramatic orchestra of the film. All of it sets up an incredible dichotomy between the realities of the play and the imagined world of the film. I think that this austere and imaginative attitude is what really makes the audience, or at least me, believe that Mickey and Jake are the playwrights, actors, and directors of the show. Even when I learned that this was not the case, I still really wanted it to be true, because rags to riches stories are what modern audiences really eat up, even more so than explosions and love interests.

– Michael Mayor (Class of 2014; Biomedical Engineering)

What I found to be most interesting in *Stones in His Pockets* were the levels of imagination portrayed within the play. The most obvious sense of imagination was required of the audience, since the entire production was performed by only two actors. Between the two male actors, fifteen characters were brought to life, both male and female. This character switch was accomplished using various subtle techniques so that it was very clear when the switch was made. The actors employed different accents, speech patterns, and body posture to convey different characters, and lighting changes also helped to communicate the difference between different conversations. Imagination was also involved in the set design because, apart from a large trunk, a couple chairs, and a small stool, there were no props and the backdrop simply displayed a scene of rolling hills and a winding river. This lack of prop variety highlighted the actors' skills as they had to rely solely on themselves to pull off the fifteen-character cast. Just

like with the characters, the audience was asked to use its imagination to paint the scenery and color the action. Finally, the act of imagination was put on display within the action of the play. In one scene, the two main characters who were extras in a movie, were instructed to react to imaginary actors as they rode by on horseback. The real actors were not participating in the scene so in their place, the assistant director moved his hand around to give a reference point and the two extras found the situation so hilarious that they couldn't help but laugh each time the camera started to roll. Here, imagination breaks down when asked to do too much under the pressure of ridiculousness. This also shows that the extras did not fully believe in the film or what it was trying to accomplish and therefore could not get their imaginations to play along.

A comparison of two other scenes showed the effect that belief in a project can have. After a local boy, Sean, drowned himself in the river, the extras wanted to take the day off to go to his funeral. The assistant director, however, did not allow it and Jake and Charlie were forced to continue working. The scene they were working on required them to cheer for the main actors as they emerged as heroes from a building, but neither extra can muster the enthusiasm that the director called for. The bottom line was that they did not believe in what was happening within the scene, stemming from the lack of authenticity of the film and culminating in feelings engendered by the death of Sean. And so, even after repeated attempts and coaching, their performance fell short. In the ending scene, these same extras had decided to create their own film about Ireland in tribute to Sean and were in the process of creating a segment about cows. In the exact manner that was encouraged by the assistant director in the cheering scene of the first film, the two extras practiced their scene in which they cheer for the cows. The difference in performance was easy to see and a reflection of Jack and Charlie's belief in their own project.

The play presented many interesting dualities, the first and foremost being the skills of

the two actors as they jumped between characters. The dynamics between in-group and out-group were also shown to be important. Charlie was a character who was not from the particular village where the play takes place, but he was still from Ireland which placed him more in the in-group versus the actors and film crew which arrived from America to shoot the film. These characters were held with a little more disdain by the local characters. They were seen as an imposing force since they were creating a movie about Ireland with the only authentically Irish participants playing extras. Finally, there was the comparison between film and theater, with film depicted as a shallower, more superficial medium of storytelling. Film always has a happy ending whereas theater oftentimes shows the more realistic side of tragedy. This is shown within this play by the film crew's dismissal of Sean's tragic drowning so that they can pursue the happy ending that they have created for their own film.

– Nika Tamashiro (Class of 2012; Japanese and Brain & Cognitive Science)

***I3* (2011)**  
**Written by Mike Bartlett**  
**Dir. Thea Sharrock**  
**Olivier Theatre**

Sunday, January 8

I think I liked *I3* so much because it seemed very science fiction-y, and I don't know if I've even seen a science fiction play. I loved that the play wasn't clear. I know that was a lot of the other students' biggest complaint, but I think that everyone kept coming back to the unsolved puzzle trying to figure out the play. I think that because we keep coming back to it, trying to find satisfaction, the play is a success. To me the play had a goal of inciting us to think about how the action onstage relates to the world we're living in. Bartlett wrote the play to dramatize the times we are living in now, to comment on our interrupted attention spans. With every pop culture

reference and scene that rings true, the line between current events and stage events blurs. I think the current references add to our tendency to keep coming back to the play and each time you come back trying to work it out, it will be relevant to a different position or part of life. It would be interesting to see if the play would still seem relevant many years from now when all of the things we saw as pop culture references were long gone.

I liked how, along with the science fiction theme, one scene showed simultaneous action by having two other scenes going on in the same space with the actors crossing in between each other. I think that, yes, the play was not a simple go and see a story. Normally I am a fan of simple story telling, but I loved the necessity of staying on your toes mentally in *13*. I think it played to our ‘have a billion different things going on, on our computers at once’ generation very well. Another aspect of the play that seemed very science fiction-y to me was that the entire play seemed to be in the mind of some omniscient being. From the opening where we saw the play’s whole world in miniature, to the stream of consciousness staging, to the disembodied voice that kept talking, I wanted to know more. Who was this disembodied voice? Was it God? We never found out. I loved the quote in the program notes, saying that “Someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream.” I thought that was a great way to think of the play and the communal dreams of the thirteen.

I liked the play but even I wondered if it lost something in the non-traditional, non-simplistic story. It seemed more like someone tried to stage a movie script on a stage rather than actually writing for the theatre. I liked how the stories merged and simplified as the play progressed. You start off with thirteen people having a nightmare simultaneously and end with a monologue from a single character onstage. I liked how the beginning and end were mirrors of each other in a way, nightmares at the beginning and at the end, and real experiences that haunt

the soldier. As the storytelling simplified, the play became less movie-like and more linear, which is what I expect from a play.

The set was impressive. It reminded me of the set for *Die Meistersinger*; seeming largely minimalist but really versatile and advanced. I kept being surprised by how the set could be moved about and morph into a new location. I wonder if all of the sets in that theatre tend to look that way because of its size (and budget). Each character seemed like he or she could have so much to them, but there were so many that no one character stood out to me, except for Ruby. She reminded me of a friend back home. It was frightening to write in a parallel between what the doctor said, thinking our society is better because we don't cover up our women, and how the girl's mother saw Ruby as evil because she had different views.

In the program notes, the essay about social network revolutions said, "social networks [have] mainly been used to react to the riots, rather than to incite them." Bartlett writes this into the play. We see the action happening between John and the Prime Minister before everyone else finds out via their social networking devices. Furthermore, John starts collecting followers even before he becomes an Internet sensation.

– Katie Lewis (Class of 2012; Music)

Say what you will about Mike Bartlett's play *I3* (directed by Thea Sharrock), but it's the kind of play that gets people talking. Discussing *I3* with classmates helped me understand certain aspects of the play better—for example, why Bartlett opted to introduce the modern world through a kind of sci-fi concept. This baffled me for a long time, because the story that the play tells has nothing to do with science fiction. Nearly all of my favorite moments in the play, the moments that surprised me (such as the ambiguous way Sharrock dramatizes Ruby's death, that

first moment when the cube grows translucent and you can see all of the characters are inside, the club sequence, the moment when John knows in advance that it's going to rain, etc.) are moments that suggest there might be something otherworldly about the plot. This surreal imagery is sustained through the very end of the production—the sequence where the characters all watch Youtube videos on their glowing iPads has a kind of surrealism to it, even though it's a completely realistic moment. Or perhaps by this point, the moment isn't sci-fi so much as high-tech.

But as far as the more extreme science fiction elements go, nearly all the effects created by the technological capabilities of the stage rather than moments deep in the script itself, seem totally bizarre. The effect it creates is similar to what would happen if Obama wore a Superman costume to deliver his State of the Union address. It would be interesting, eye-catching, and totally random. But it would generate attention, and a media field-day. It might even distract from his meaning long enough that we're shocked when he reaches his conclusion. Most importantly, if the President never explained his actions, the people would come up with a variety of possible meanings and maybe spend more time analyzing the outfit than the speech. The tech in *13* is similarly distracting—my favorite moments in the production all seemed to detract from, rather than contribute to the central political and social message of the piece. I still maintain that they could have been lifted from *13* and used (more effectively!) in an entirely different play. But then, would *13* have been nearly as interesting without such moments?

After our discussion in class, I'm beginning to realize that that might have been the point. It could be that Sharrock uses technologically-generated spectacle to parallel the discussion of a single, apocalyptic dream in the play. It's a dream that the media has created, a dream that comes specifically from a world that is full of technology that amazes and terrifies, that saves and kills

on a daily basis, only it's too integrated into our daily lives for us to understand how deeply it affects us. So if it, combined with media fear-mongering, manifests as bad dreams, it shouldn't be surprising—the modern world has a lot of qualities that also correspond to bad dreams. And if *13* just uses the superimposed sci-fi genre to catch our attention, is that any worse—or even any different—from the extreme ways the media spins social and political events?

However, I wonder if this analysis is trying too hard to connect the pieces. Was the nightmare was specific enough to prove that they actually had the same dream? From the ambiguous way the dream was described, it is possible the characters in the play dream about different terrifying things but never share enough information with each other to realize the truth. I would also be more convinced if more than twelve people had the nightmares. Our class came up with explanations for these as well, but again, it seems like Bartlett's play left enough unsolved that the audience has to struggle to guess at the play's message and motives. The best explanation I heard about what audiences can learn from the play came from Michael, when he said that the play suggests to audience members that "you have to make the choice that you think is right at the time and take responsibility for it if it turns out wrong later." This makes sense with the storyline in the play (even if it problematically justifies Sarah killing Ruby), but I'm not sure it's *enough* for audiences. What kind of a message is that? From a play about religion, it's an oddly existentialist message, that your choices might be wrong because you might use evidence around you to make the wrong conclusion. Moreover, I'm not sure what I, as an audience member, am supposed to *do* with this information. Own up to my mistakes as I keep making them? Resign myself to chaos in an unpredictable world?

I think the genius in *13* is that, like the characters' parallel dreams, the themes within the play are kept so nonspecific that you can connect and justify them nearly any way you like. This

non-specificity is a motif throughout the production; at one point, someone blames Ruby's murder on John's failure to use specificity in his speeches. The lack of specificity in the plot isn't entirely clear at first because the technological aspects of the production are so stunning, the play's genre is ambiguous, and the storyline is so fractured. These elements of the production can absolutely be read as a metaphor for media spin...and yet, they can be read as almost any kind of statement about modern society. That's the beauty, and problem, of ambiguity. In this, one can justify *I3*'s fractured, ambiguous nature—but is that Bartlett's message, is it one of his many messages, or are we just yet again attempting to justify artistic choices that, due to their ambiguity, allow us to project our own ideas into the kind of murky ether that is *I3*, an ether that fails to divulge Bartlett's message at all?

— Sara Cohen (Class of 2012; English)

***The Pitmen Painters* (2007)**

**Written by Lee Hall**

**Dir. Max Roberts**

**Duchess Theatre**

Monday, January 9

Pride can be either a destructive or a creative force, and *The Pitmen Painters* by Lee Hall shows both sides of this coin. The Ashington pitmen are a tightly knit community who share a deep sense of accomplishment for the work they do each day in the mines. The danger of working deep underground produces simultaneous feelings of brotherly solidarity and personal pride. Outside of the mine, the miners continue their efforts toward self-improvement by enrolling in classes through the Workers' Educational Association. Their classes were intended wholly for personal enrichment, as — according to the Workers' Educational Association constitution — classroom programs could offer no marketable skills. As in the mine, community plays a central

role in the classroom, and a large number of miners enroll. (Although only four are shown in the play, upwards of thirty participated in real Ashington group.) The pitmen are very defensive of this class and act with hostility toward the young lad, who tries to join despite being unemployed.

After a series of scientific and economic courses, the Ashington miners start a class on art appreciation. Uninterested in analyzing paintings so detached from their everyday experience or developing a pretentious vocabulary, the miners evolve the lectures into a hands-on painting course. Initially, the pitmen are ashamed of their work and are unwilling to share their etchings with the class. They do not see art as a legitimate exercise; carving lines into a block of linoleum seems insubstantial compared to carving a shaft into the heart of a mine. Over time they begin to receive validation from an increasingly wide audience. Initial praise by their instructor, Richard Lyon (Ian Kelly), is disregarded as being naively kind. However, an eventual visit by the wealthy heiress and art patron Mrs. Sutherland (Joy Brook) proves that the paintings have real monetary value — often greater than working in the mine. Eventually their paintings are even exhibited in an art show in London.

Now proud of their work, the pitmen almost trip over each other in their excitement to get the next sale. They eagerly show their work to Mrs. Sutherland and are disappointed to learn that her whims have shifted toward pottery. This pride develops into an intense flurry of creative expression and Lyon remarks they have remarkable oeuvre in terms of both “quality and quantity.” However, as the miners listen to Lyon’s speech, they notice that he qualifies his praise with references to their working-class background. It’s not the work itself that patrons appreciate, but that it was produced in spite of their blue-collar roots. This is naturally viewed as condescending by the pitmen; why should they settle at being the best painters in rural England

when, in terms of mining coal, they are the best in the world? Here their pride is destructive, tearing at their sense of self-worth.

Meanwhile, Oliver Kilbourn (Trevor Fox), a senior pitman, is singled out by Mrs. Sutherland as having exceptional potential. She offers him a salary to continue painting full time in her studio. However, just before meeting with her, Oliver talks with artist Ben Nicholson, a personal idol of his. Nicholson carries himself with an obscenely posh and grandiose demeanor, which sickens Oliver. Although painting offers more money and is an easier career than working in a mine, he refuses to compromise his self-respect by working under a patron. Indeed, having a patron is inherently patronizing to him. Furthermore, Oliver is reluctant to abandon his fellow pitmen, the only family he has ever known. Nevertheless, by making this choice Oliver realizes that he loses any opportunity to expand his horizons as an artist, and he later admits a tearful regret to Mrs. Sutherland.

With his decision, Oliver demonstrates that there is more to greatness than producing great works. Sacrificing his artistic potential is nothing compared to the loss from sacrificing his pride.

– Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

*Noises Off* (1982)  
Written by Michael Frayn  
Dir. Lindsay Posner  
Old Vic Theatre

Tuesday, January 10

This was by far the funniest play I saw in England. I remember not being able to breathe at times, due to my own laughter. I recall my laughter lingering even in times when the moment had moved on. The audience was mostly silent, waiting for the next joke during these times. At

these times, I had to do my best to suppress my laughter, which is a difficult process that seems to only cause me to laugh harder sometimes.

The theater that this show took place in was beautiful. There was a bright red curtain separating the audience from the stage and a magnificent chandelier used for house lights. The show itself had a very interesting plot, especially for me, because I have worked backstage in theater. Once I realized what the play was about, I developed a strong interest in this production. At first, I wasn't sure what was going on. It just seemed like a normal play set in any typical home...nothing out of the ordinary. However, I noticed a man approach the stage from behind and, by this time, I realized that a play within a play was being performed. I was intrigued by this new idea, which I had never seen performed before. It was definitely a plus that I did not have any prior knowledge of the play *Noises Off*, even though I'm positive I've heard of it before seeing it in England. Even though I've heard of it and knew it was a comedy of some sort, I had no idea that this was the premise of the play.

In my opinion, the entire production was a masterpiece. It caught my attention the entire time and I'm pretty sure I had a grin on my face for the entire second act, where we got a view of backstage during a disastrous performance. Here, we could only imagine how much the actors were panicking and improvising while onstage in front of a perceived, imaginary audience. The division of the performance into three acts was brilliant. First we got to see the show "Nothing On" in the rehearsal process, literally just hours before their opening. Then, from behind the scenes we saw how much chaos was occurring during one of their performances. Finally, for the third act, we got to see their disastrous performance from the perspective of their audience. Basically, we were an audience watching the play *Noises Off* but were given the perspective of

an audience watching their play within a play, “Nothing On” for the entire third act. The entire thing was a comedic masterpiece.

It was certainly funny to think about the real staff of *Noises Off* and how they were working with the actors of it, who were acting as the production staff of “Nothing On.” I was thinking about a *real* director directing the director of “Nothing On” and real stage managers working with the actors who were playing stage managers for “Nothing On.” Also, while thinking about these levels, I was thinking about actors acting as actors within a show, and how well the *Noises Off* cast were at executing this. In order to do this, the actors have to stop being “believable” to an extent such that we as the audience can distinguish the moments when the characters are in the play within the play and when they are not. Also, there is somewhat of a comic element to seeing actors being actors in “Nothing On”. Later, it becomes possible to determine from dialogue alone when the characters are being actors in “Nothing On” and when they are not, bringing them back to being actors in *Noises Off*. When the actors were playing actors in “Nothing On,” they used voicing that felt forced, and less sincere. They had to speak in a way where they sounded like actors trying to be actors. There was certainly a comic element to this because they were playing actors that kept messing up as a result of extreme disorganization.

The funniest character in this play for me was Selsdon, who was an old man attempting to rob the house in “Nothing On.” The entire second and third acts as a whole were also funny and brilliant. In the third act, the funniest moment for me was when we see the stage manager Tim first entering the house through the window as the robber. A few moments later, we see Selsdon, the character who was supposed to be playing the robber in “Nothing On,” enter the house in the exact same way and recite the same lines. This moment was hilarious because all I could do was think about the reactions of the perceived audience in the play, which I became a

part of in this third act. Finally, the moment gets even funnier when the director of “Nothing On” enters the home as a third robber (when there is only supposed to be one), thinking that it was necessary to do so, when we can clearly see it wasn’t necessary. He recites the same lines as the first two, and then all three of the robbers end up saying their lines simultaneously and making the same movements on stage. I will never forget this moment of hilarity and not sure if I will ever laugh as hard as I did when I saw this. I could say a lot more, especially about the second act, which was mostly silent. There were just so many funny moments going on at once. I feel like if I were to see this production a few more times, I would eventually notice new things that I hadn’t noticed in the previous times seeing it.

The cues were executed so perfectly because we had to understand that the mistakes that were intentionally being made had to occur at the right times in order for the disastrous “Nothing On” performance to make sense, while the cues in *Noises Off* were in fact timed perfectly. This play is one of a kind, one of the most original things I have ever seen. If I could see it a few more times, I would, but I would want to see this same cast, because they were amazingly talented and perfect for this show.

– William Hogan (Class of 2012; Psychology)

In this play, the idea of the beginning, middle and end of a story was clearer than in any other production we watched. While following the Aristotelian idea of “plot” very well, however, this show portrayed each of the three parts very separately, building on the last in order to make the audience feel more intimately part of the play-within-a-play. This was also done through the use of the entire theater space, such as when the director Lloyd appeared from the back of the audience as if the rehearsal were really happening in the Old Vic. While integrating the audience

into the backstage feel of the show, the three separate “acts” also allowed us to change positions with each transition. In the first act, we were a part of the rehearsal; in the second, we moved between being completely isolated from the other “audience” to becoming that audience ourselves. Taking us through these different perspectives really made the inner play’s title, *Nothing On*, much more meaningful, in that there really was nothing playing for us as the audience: we were insiders on the whole scheme and so *Nothing On* meant nothing to us. The three levels of audience perspective were also nicely reflected in the detail about one of the main characters of *Nothing On*, in that we were watching a play about a play about a playwright.

The stereotypical characterization in the show also pandered to the audience’s illusions about not only theater but also the people that participate in it. Lloyd’s self-centered attitude and relationships with multiple women (Brooke’s dim-witted nature, Garry’s incapacity to finish a sentence, Belinda’s gossip, Selsdon’s forgetfulness and Tim’s lack of sleep) all play into our typical views of actors, stage managers, or directors. The passive-aggressive use of terms of affection for one another even in very stressful situations was wonderfully acted and consistent throughout the show, and played into these stereotypes as well, since they were used only by Lloyd and the actors. Other minor details, such as the company’s lack of money and use of stage managers as understudies, furthered the exaggeration just enough to make us fully aware of the nature of the show as a farce.

These stereotypes also made the characters predictable in some ways, which added even more to the show’s comedy as it gave the audience a whole new kind of anticipation about what would happen next. For example, we got the impression right away that Brooke is no genius, and as we saw the “third act” from the audience’s point of view, the anticipation of her complete inability to improvise made her delivery of those moments all the funnier. The characters’

various predictable qualities also made the second act much more comprehensible. Even the foundations laid by the first act were enough to let us understand each character's motivations and intentions as the silent drama unfolded backstage. It is a credit to all of the actors that they were able to portray such a wonderfully complex and hilarious inner story with very little dialogue as their “real” production was being simultaneously acted on the other side of the set.

Of course, just as great farce has been compared to great tragedy, the irony of shows like *Noises Off* is that they must be a perfectly executed mess in order to succeed. This production not only contained some of the very ideas of tragedy in disguise, as we spoke about in class, but also did an excellent job keeping order in a very disorderly play.

– Meridel Phillips (Class of 2012; Physics and English: Theater)

### ***Grief* (2011)**

**Written and directed by Mike Leigh  
Cottesloe Theatre**

I had high expectations going into this show for many reasons. In my directing career, I want to focus on producing new works so I was very excited to see a premiere of a new piece at the National Theatre. I was a bit disappointed with the product that we saw for a variety of reasons that all point to one probable cause, which is that there seemed to be no clear message or direction to the piece. The first indication of this was that my ticket was titled “A New Play,” which means that there wasn’t a title for the show when our tickets were printed. I also remember the program saying that there was a premiere or reading of the play in November which didn’t happen, so perhaps the programs were printed before changes were made.

The play is titled *Grief*, but really it should have been called *Depression*. Grief implies an action in dealing with emotions, whereas dictionary.com defines depression as “discouragement”

or “despondency,” which is a more accurate title for the final product. This play is mislabeled because of the lack of specificity in the goal of the production. The story centers around a widow/mother figure who is very clearly depressed from the beginning of the show, but we never hear her talk about it. The stagnation of her character makes the audience feel trapped, as does the two-hour performance with no interval. Although it was set in a larger space, I dare say the lack of action in *Grief* made it feel more claustrophobic than watching *Huis Clos*. Dorothy’s character is defined by two major relationships. She is identified as a war widow in the late 1950s, which means her husband died at least ten years ago. She is also defined by her role as mother through the obvious and serious depression that her daughter exhibits. Dorothy has never actually grieved the death of her husband and dealt with her feelings, rendering her emotionally unavailable to help her daughter. These relationships are established as the driving forces of the plot, so the audience expects the issues raised to be addressed. Instead we watched opportunity after opportunity for discussion of the problems go to waste in a stifling silence. If there had been a scene where Dorothy broke down and talked about her husband, we would’ve seen her dealing with her pain and therefore grieving, but she never does.

I thought that it was very one-sided in character development for both Dorothy and her daughter, Victoria. It was painfully obvious that Victoria was going to kill herself before the play was over, so I was neither surprised nor impacted by the action because it had already played out in my head. A common convention of playwriting that adds depth to a character is to have a moment where the person plays the opposite of what has been established. A good example of this is in *Jerusalem*, when Dawn snorts cocaine and makes out with Rooster. Having a scene with either Dorothy or Victoria that shows them enjoying something, hell, *anything*, would have given so much more texture to the story. The lack in a clear vision for the piece may be a cause

of this, since it is hard to play the opposite of something if you have not identified what it is. Although I think the characters could have been written as more strong, I don't think that they could have been cast any better. Everyone was very committed to their role and brought something different to the table. Lesley Manville, who played Dorothy, was able to convey such a broad range of raw emotions with just a look on her face. Sam Kelly, cast as her brother Edwin, had such a soft voice and benevolent demeanor that he couldn't help but bring a certain delicacy to his role. Even Victoria (Ruby Bentall) was very strong in characterization. I felt like the cast made up individually unique and interesting components that never quite added up to a larger idea.

I felt that the design of the production also lacked cohesion and a common goal. The story is set in realism and at first glance and the set seems to support this reading, but the scene changes were counter-productive. During the scenes Dorothy would manually open or close the curtains, indicating that they are not automated. During the scene changes, however, the curtains would mechanically open and close which completely broke the illusion previously established. It would have been very simple to have Dorothy walk onstage and open the curtains at the top of the scene, and it would have been much less distracting. The scene changes as a whole were distracting and seemed a bit unnecessary at points. For most of the changes, only small props were moved, such as a sherry glass or the newspaper – all of which could be easily taken on or off by an actor or would be inconsequential if left on the stage. Professor Peck had mentioned before that according to union laws for stage management, actors are not allowed to move things in a scene change. If that is the case, then either have the actor move the prop during the scene, or just leave it there. I find it much more distracting to watch a stage manager move the newspaper from the couch to the end table than to have the next actor who sits on the couch

move it. Even the lighting design was contrary to the realism of the script. There were three lamps, or practicals, on the stage. If you want to control whether or not the light is on from the board, you need to plug them into dimmers. I completely understand that the board-operator wants control over this in case an actor leaves the light on and there is supposed to be a blackout. What I don't understand is why Dorothy clearly pretended to turn off the lamps (it was the only action onstage, mind you) when she could have turned them off for real and still have them go to the dimmer rack. There was no "clicking" sound and no motion in the actress's arm; she simply stuck her hand under the lampshade and waited for the light board-op to turn it off. These examples may sound nitpicky, but I argue that since there are so many of them they add up to a large distraction. I was constantly fighting through the technical design to get back into the world of the play, and this is especially detrimental to a show that focuses on the emotional investment of the audience.

Overall I think that this entire production, from script to tech, was haphazardly thrown together. If there was a clear vision that playwright, director, actors, and designers were all working towards, the audience should have been able to see it all come together. It's almost as if they were each trying to tell slightly different stories all at the same time and none of them came to fruition. Well, reliving this play has really made me need a glass of sherry, so I'm going to go get one now. Chinchin...

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

***One Man, Two Guvnors* (2010)**  
**Written by Richard Bean**  
**Adapted from the play by Carlo Goldoni**  
**Dir. Nicholas Hytner**  
**Adelphi Theatre**

Wednesday, January 11

Boy, was this a fun one! I most certainly needed a show like this after *Grief*, and it really delivered. I have never seen a professional theatre show with so much improvisation and freedom, pantomime included. The level of improv allowed for a very fun atmosphere and an “anything can happen” attitude.

One thing I found particularly interesting about this show was the juxtaposition of the caricature acting style set up through the archetypes in the script with the naturalness of the actors’ “breaking” of character and talking to the audience. I put “breaking” in quotes because they weren’t actually improvising but instead were acting like they were improvising. I was 100% duped on multiple occasions into thinking that certain things were unscripted. In this regard, I think *One Man, Two Guvnors* had the most convincing acting of any show we saw. The actress who played the woman from the audience was incredible. I think that acting the way a non-actor on a stage with hundreds of people watching would naturally react is probably one of the most challenging roles to play convincingly. I felt so bad for her when they sprayed her dress because it didn’t even occur to me that it was a set up. I was also fooled by James Corden’s amazingly convincing reaction to the sandwich man in the audience. I really thought that it had never happened before, even though it happens eight times a week. These tricks brought a feeling of spontaneity and specialness to the show, which can be easily lost after the 200<sup>th</sup> performance. Sometimes I forget that each show is different from all of the others and that’s what makes theatre so great. *Death and the Maiden* also reminded me of this because it seemed that the people who went on different nights had opposing viewpoints. This show, however,

managed to remind me of the uniqueness that theatre provides to each performance through an atmosphere of excitement and freshness.

I thought that the design of the production fit in beautifully with the surreal and colorful humor of the script. The script has a self-awareness in that it recognizes and references the interval, acts, lines, and of course, the audience. I thought that the use of flats to create the set accentuated the script very nicely. This show takes place in the 1960s and has a retro feel to it, so the set is made in a way that was common to the design of sets in the 1960s. In that way, the set becomes aware that it is modeled after sets of the 1960s instead of actual places in the 1960s. The atmosphere of the script allows for a more playful design. The flats and cardboard cut-out style was also highly prevalent in the production of *Cinderella* that we saw in Richmond.

*One Man, Two Guvnors* uses many of the same conventions as a pantomime. It is filled with raunchy humor, conversations with the audience, improvisation, and larger-than-life characters, all of which define the genre of pantomime. I would go so far to say that *One Man, Two Guvnors* is a pantomime for adults. It was definitely the most fun I had during a show on the trip, since I couldn't stop laughing. The playful and seemingly spontaneous attitude made me feel like a little kid again, and I was bouncing and laughing in my seat just like the tikes at *Cinderella*.

The band was also a wild card in this hodge-podge mix of script, improv, scripted "improv," and stand-up comedy. The band itself goes along with the self-awareness theme because they sit with the audience and watch the show when they are not playing onstage. I really enjoyed the musical interludes that featured the different characters in the play. It was both hysterical and appropriate because it also supports a world where the characters know they are on stage. I thought it was very creative in the use of different instruments that represented each

character well. Alan's, who fancies himself an "actor," slapping his chest was perfect because he is so narcissistic that he plays the instrument of himself. I am curious to know if those interludes are written into the script or if they were purely a directorial choice. It's so hard to tell in this show. I really wanted to buy the script just to see how much we saw was planned, since I still cannot tell, but unfortunately I didn't have the money. I have a hunch that Professor Peck has all of the scripts from the trip, so perhaps I will borrow his copy and finally find out how badly I was tricked during the performance.

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

After having seen the funniest play ever written on the previous evening, *One Man, Two Guvnors* continues a remarkable streak of hilarity by delivering another first rate comedy. The play was refreshingly unique and consistently hilarious throughout its two-and-a-half-hour running time. It suffered only for its placement on our class schedule, since seeing it the day after *Noises Off* brings about inevitable comparisons, and although the play was a remarkable triumph, it still comes in second in that particular contest.

Quite apart from the relative merits of each production, *One Man, Two Guvnors* was a very different style of comedy from *Noises Off*, and one which I have scarcely encountered before. The performance incorporated a large degree of audience participation, both genuine and simulated. At first it was thought that something unusual had occurred during the performance we saw, and many of the members of our group were disappointed to learn days later that the audience member had been a plant and the same thing happened in every performance. Although everything seemed to unfold naturally while I was watching the play, in retrospect I am able to see how events were carefully constructed to trick us into believing this. First, two

genuine audience members were invited on stage unexpectedly, establishing that audience participation would be a part of this show. There was some legitimate irregularity in the performance we viewed at this juncture, when a particularly muscular young man succeeded in lifting James Corden, who played the protagonist. This was actually the only real audience participation in the entire show, but at the time we were expecting for there to be more. Next, a man we all believed to be a true audience member offered James Corden a sandwich during a monologue, and we were led to believe that by interrupting the scene he had significantly interfered with the performance. The main reason that this worked, however, was that James Corden really sold this moment. He appeared genuinely shocked at what had happened, and was very convincing in giving an unrehearsed air to his performance. Finally, a woman – who we also believed to be an audience member – was called onstage. However, by the end of the act, the trick was intentionally made clear when the cast sprayed the woman with a fire extinguisher and smashed her head into a doorframe, things they would never do with a mere audience member. Furthermore, upon closer inspection we found that the woman was credited in the program. This made us feel that we had seen through the trickery of the play, and consequently we did not question the legitimacy of the man with the sandwich. It was only when we were informed of the truth by someone who had seen a different performance that we learned we had been deceived.

*One Man, Two Guvnors* was a showcase for some extraordinarily impressive comedic acting. James Corden is a strong comedian in his own right, but his character Francis was also an ideal role for him as an actor. Due to this, Corden was able to have enormous fun with the role and explore a number of interesting avenues for his character. As in *Noises Off* last night, *One Man, Two Guvnors* featured some incredible physical acting. One obvious instance was

when Francis attempted to lift his guvnor's luggage before recruiting two men from the audience. Despite the fact that the box obviously weighed practically nothing, James Corden was able to sell struggling to lift it for a solid minute and a half. Because of how completely Corden committed to the gag, it continued to become more hilarious the more it was prolonged, rather than becoming tedious as easily could have been the case. The real standout in terms of physical comedy, however, was Tom Edden in the role of Alfie. I cannot remember anytime I have seen an actor so completely in control of every part of his body as a tool for performance. Such was his mastery that, even though his character existed essentially for one joke throughout the entire play, he gave one of the most impressive performances in the entire production.

*One Man, Two Guvnors* had another extremely unique element, which was the inclusion of a four-man band in the cast. Dubbed "The Craze," the group was a recreation of a 1960s era band. As the audience was finding their seats before the performance began, the band began to play a short set before retreating to the pit so the story could begin. "The Craze" themselves formed an extremely effective image which immediately evoked in our minds the era in which the play was set. During each scene change thereafter, the audience was provided with musical entertainment by the band. At first the band simply played more of their songs, but as the play continued, actors from the play began to be incorporated into the band's scene change performances. Some of these consisted of short comedic songs, but they grew in complexity until they seemed more like a full-on musical by the final song. This essentially created an olio for the show, something which one rarely encounters in modern theatre. Overall I felt that this aspect only enhanced the performance, and was part of the remarkable sense of freshness which was characteristic of the entire piece.

- Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

***Matilda: The Musical (2010)***

**Music by Tim Minchin; Book by Dennis Kelly**

**Adapted from the book by Roald Dahl**

**Dir. Matthew Warchus**

**Cambridge Theatre**

Yes. Yes. Yes. Oh God, yes.

You know what? There is a God. Matilda has shown me the light and proven to me that a higher power exists. Why? Because such good can exist in this world without divine intervention.

Over the past several months, I've been getting more and more excited for the trip to London. I've been getting excited for every single play that we'll be seeing. But I've really been getting excited for just one play in particular, and that play is *Matilda*.

When I try to think about why *Matilda* makes me so happy, the 1996 movie immediately comes to mind. Even though I wasn't able to get through the entire movie until I was about twelve (Pam Ferris as the Trunchbull is pant-wettingly terrifying), I've always loved stories about exceptionally bright children who are able to outsmart the surrounding adults.

I like *Matilda* for the same reason that I like *Book of Mormon* and *Up* and *Metroid Prime*; everything just works. The set, special effects, lighting, sound, performances, songs, book, costumes, and anything else that slips my mind all appear on stage as if emerging from the imagination of a small, innocent child. Just take a look at these lyrics from the swing number “When I Grow Up”:

When I grow up,  
I will have treats everyday,  
And I'll play with things that Mum pretends  
That mums don't think are fun.

And I will wake up  
When the sun comes up and I  
Will spend all day just lying in the sun.  
And I won't burn cause I'll be all grown up.

Simply put, Tim Minchin (the man behind the music and lyrics) is a virtuoso. Everything from the rambling prose to the boundless optimism screams childhood glee. Of course, I went back to my room after *Matilda* and bought the soundtrack without a moment's hesitation (I'm listening to it as I'm writing this journal entry, if you'd like to know). One of the user reviews for the soundtrack made me worry about the state of humanity a little bit – not for the low score, but for its content. I'll reprint it below.

As amazing as this is, I found it extremely difficult to forget that this story is about child abuse, that children do not win, and there's no such thing as magic to scare scary grownups away. What next, a happy musical about rape?

As I've said earlier in this journal, I'm – to put it mildly – so jaded that I bleed green, but *Matilda* is meant to melt even my cynical heart. Approaching *Matilda* like it exists even remotely in the real world is just about as wrong as looking at Pixar's *Cars* as if it were a documentary film about post-apocalyptic Earth. Every single moment of the play was about imagination and the creation of fantastical stories, so it makes perfect sense that the antagonistic adults are larger-than-life monstrosities. The “naughty adults,” including the Wormwood parents and the Trunchbull (brilliantly played by Bertie Carvel, by the way) were all so evil in the eyes of the children because of their failing imaginations. Ms. Honey and Mrs. Phelps, on the other hand, can almost be considered “honorary children” because of their expansive imaginations.

I could talk about *Matilda* for about a year and a half, but I'll just sum up my opinions by saying that that play took me to a place where I didn't think about anything negative or depressing for a good two and a half hours. That is a colossal feat in and of itself.

- Devin Goodman (Class of 2015; Physics; Minor: English)

This is my favorite musical, period. I hadn't heard any of the music prior to seeing the show, but ever since that night I have had the songs stuck in my head. I am actually listening to the soundtrack as I write this journal because it is so brilliant. *Matilda* combines catchy, complicated rhythmic structures with extremely witty and satirical lyrics. This musical prowess paired with a nostalgic and well-loved childhood story makes for a successful combination.

There's a song for everyone in this show. My personal favorite is "Naughty" because it has managed to put my life story into a catchy melody sung by a ten-year-old. Matilda sings, "just because you find that life's not fair / it doesn't mean that you just have to grin and bear it, / if you always take it on the chin and wear it, / nothing will change. / Even if you're little you can do a lot / you mustn't let a little thing like little stop you, / if you sit around and let them get on top / you won't change a thing." Tim Minchin wrote a song with a powerful, positive message and cleverly worded lyrics. The repetition of the word "little" and the play on its uses tickle my brain. "The Smell of Rebellion" is another song that is impressive lyrically. It takes an old saying and expands the metaphor into an entire song by exploring the idea of sweating out anarchy. The most impressive lyric writing would have to be in the "School Song," where the fifth graders are singing to the younger kids. It goes through the alphabet with words that sound like each letter at the end of each measure. For example, it starts with "So you think your Able/to survive this mess by BEing a prince or a princess/ you will soon See/there's no escaping trageDY." Minchin didn't simply go through the alphabet with words that start with the letters, but instead used words that mimic the letters themselves. Not only is this a clever concept, but it's extremely difficult to execute. This show has a wide variety of musical genres, including a beautifully written ballad called "Quiet," that Matilda sings near the climax of the show. The score also does a good job of combining themes and brings melodies from previous songs into sections of other songs. For

example, the theme from “Naughty” is repeated while Ms. Honey is singing during “When I grow up” so the message is applied to another character in addition to Matilda.

The script and score also do a great job of capturing the perspective of a child, which is a large part of Roald Dahl’s whimsy. In this production a fair amount of the cast was comprised of children who played the first graders, but the fifth graders were played by adults, rather than older children. It just seemed to fit so perfectly because when you are so young, you view older kids as infinitely older than you. Another great example of this is the song “Bruce,” in the scene where he eats the chocolate cake. The kids sing, “Come on Bruce be our hero, / cover yourself in chocolate glory!” They are all rooting for him because they don’t want Trunchbull to win, and the phrasing “chocolate glory” is just such a child-like concept. The design was also very whimsical and helped emphasize the point of view this play presents.

I have to say, I was skeptical of the choice to cast Trunchbull as a man because the whole point is that she’s a very manly woman and the casting had the potential to undercut that. After seeing the show, all of my doubts are gone. Bertie Carvel completely owned the role, and he did it without using falsetto or any gimmicks like that. He reminded me of Divine, an actor known for playing women in John Waters’ films. I really liked what they did with the character for this show because, in the book and movie of *Matilda*, Trunchbull is a figure that is 100% hated, much like Prince John in *The Heart of Robin Hood*. In this production, however, Trunchbull is so strange and charismatic that you really enjoy her/his time onstage. She is still despicable, but in a humorous way, which results in Trunchbull stealing the show, in my opinion.

I thought the role of Matilda is very demanding in terms of acting and singing for a child, but it was cast wonderfully. The actress we saw, Cleo Demetriou, had strong stage presence for such a little girl. Matilda has a lot of lines, most of which are very complicated because she is

supposed to be a genius, so Demetriou not only had to memorize them but also understand them. Also, let's not forget the monologue in Russian that she delivers near the end! She also has two solo songs and a duet, which are all rhythmically complicated and require a level of finessing and subtlety hard to find in a ten year old.

I guess I'll just say again how floored I was, and still am, by the talented writing, acting, designing, and directing that went into creating this production. I have read some articles online saying that there are talks of the RSC coming to Broadway with the production. If that happens I am going to go see it again with my friend Chandler, who has also avidly been listening to the soundtrack with me. Fingers crossed!

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

After seeing this play, I must say that I now have a new favorite musical. Roald Dahl's children's book *Matilda* is a story certainly worthy of our esteem, and one which has been near my heart since childhood. I approached this performance, therefore, with a certain amount of trepidation. I had previously been somewhat disappointed with the 1996 film adaptation, and a subpar musical incarnation of this wonderful story would have been extremely upsetting to me. However, *Matilda the Musical* confirmed none of my fears and exceeded anything I had dared hope for, both by remaining true to the spirit of the original and by daring to be its own story.

Unlike *Billy Elliot*, the other blockbuster musical I have seen on this trip, the score of *Matilda* was one of the production's greatest strengths. I have no familiarity with the work of Tim Minchin, but I honestly cannot remember the last time I heard a musical with such rewarding musical numbers, possibly because it has never happened. I believe that this may be the best musical to come along in decades. For quite some time I have been disappointed with

the direction of modern musicals, since many of the recent hits like *Rent* or *Wicked* which have supposedly “invigorated” the genre do very little to excite me. In *Matilda*, however, I feel I finally have heard something I can get behind. Virtually every day since I saw *Matilda*, a different song from the play has gotten stuck in my head, and essentially every single song comes into my mind at some time or another. They are all extremely catchy, but at the same time are not overly similar, instead spanning an enormous range of musical styles and moods. And perhaps even more memorable than the richness of the music are Minchin’s lyrics, which burst with such effortless wit and energy that one cannot help but be immediately charmed by them. I do not know when I have encountered such clever feats of lyrical construction, and once again I suspect this is because they are unprecedented. Probably the most impressive example of this is “School Song,” in which the words cause the singer to recite the alphabet phonetically, interwoven into the song lyrics. As the singers went through the lyrics the first time I did not perceive the clever mechanics at all. Then when they began the repeat and placed an enormous alphabet block into the fence every time another letter was spoken, I was left cursing myself for being so blind and not noticing immediately. In that moment, when I was abruptly forced to reevaluate everything I had initially heard, my mind was blown. However, after listening to the soundtrack, I must say that my favorite song from this play is “Quiet,” in which Matilda first discovers her miraculous powers. This song remains perhaps more capable of evoking an emotional reaction in me than anything else I have seen on this trip.

This play was practically a master class in how to adapt an already existing story well. Adaptations typically fail for one of two reasons. Either they ignore the source material and make something completely different, thereby alienating the core audience who were fans of the original, or they are too slavishly faithful to the original story and ignore the fact that some

amount of change is necessary to make the story work in its new medium. *Matilda the Musical* fortunately, was able to navigate safely between Scylla and Charybdis and arrive at a happy medium. It remained true to the fundamental heart of Dahl's story, faithfully recreating the spirit of the original and focusing heavily on its central theme of anti-intellectualism. However, the play is also not afraid to diverge widely from the novel when needed, and the additions it made did not seem at all out of place in the larger story. One of my favorite additions was the development of Miss Trunchbull's character. Dennis Kelly is able to make her a far less one-dimensional character without actually giving her any redeeming characteristics, which is a neat trick. Instead, she is revealed as a bizarre, neurotic woman, who is nonetheless intensely cruel and makes for a splendid villain. Another addition which worked on a number of levels was Matilda's story of the acrobat and the escapologist, which is eventually revealed to be the story of Miss Honey's past. On one level, Matilda's psychic knowledge of Miss Honey's life story adds another aspect to her mental powers which is particularly useful in the musical, since her telekinesis is downplayed more in the play than other versions of the story due to the great technical difficulty of creating these effects in a stage production. Beyond this, however, I especially like the element this introduces of Matilda as a storyteller, as this is a side to her character which is never explored in the other versions of this story but which makes perfect sense given the other things which we know about her.

*Matilda the Musical* was also an extremely impressive show technically. The set was interestingly executed, with the letter blocks remaining a strong, cohesive visual throughout the play. There were a number of impressive effects, such as the scene in which Miss Trunchbull grabs a girl by her pigtails and threw her up towards the ceiling. By far the most stunning effect, however, is when Matilda uses her telekinetic powers to write a message for Miss Trunchbull on

the chalkboard from her dead father. I still have no idea how they did this, and my classmate Cassie's report in class the next day (in which she said that even the technical employees at the university theatre did not know how such effects were accomplished) only makes it more impressive.

– Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

***The Lion in Winter* (1966)**  
**Written by James Goldman**  
**Dir. Trevor Nunn**  
**Haymarket Theatre**

Thursday, January 12

I really enjoyed this play, not necessarily because of its plot, exactly, but because of how humanly it portrays the royal family of the time. Rather than showing them as either aloof and untouchable, or perfect and infallible, it shows them as human beings with flaws just like everybody else. One reason it is able to do that, perhaps, is because the royals only interact with themselves, and not with their subjects. In that way, their royal status is less important – because they are all royal – and they can interact like any other family. Sort of.

The idea of three sons vying for their parents' attention is similar to an everyday family; it is just that the stakes that are higher than usual. Whichever son is deemed 'the favorite' will inherit the kingdom, not just his parents' love. However, their petty jealousies and interactions with each other are very human and the audience can easily relate to that. The idea of a husband locking up his wife in a far-off prison is also simply an exaggeration of couples that are separated or divorced in today's everyday families. In some sense, keeping the queen locked up in a castle is not dissimilar to having a wife who is dependent on her husband's child support or alimony checks. The wife is financially dependent on her husband, but her anger is festering and

she is constantly plotting against him to win back her family. Even the idea of a spoiled youngest son who simply sits and whines for attention (a character seen in many fairytales as well) is similar to the spoiled brat that can be found in many common families.

The fact that the play is scripted in fairly plain language also serves to highlight the everyday nature of the royal family. Rather than speaking in ‘thee’s’ and ‘thou’s,’ they speak in language that is recognizable to the common audience member, if slightly elevated above normal usage. The use of plain language is probably partially why the movie of Lion in Winter was so popular. The common consumer who wished to watch the movie could relate to the story on a more common level (and understand it better), rather than having to be used to the elevated language of high theater.

Finally, all of the acting was superb and there were no actors who stood out as being especially weaker than the others. That is uncommon in a theater production and gave this play much force behind it that weaker acting would have been missing. One way to highlight what I mean by ‘superb acting’ is that all of the actors had a strong stage presence. Whenever a group of actors was onstage, neither one would greatly outshine the others. The brothers’ jockeying for position as favorite especially fit into that idea, because even Richard the Lion-Hearted (who would become Richard I) did not have an especially kingly presence, when compared to his brothers. The power struggle between the king and queen was also highlighted in a similar sense, because they are constantly trying to undermine each other’s power and influence; thus their competing stage presence never completely outshines the other.

– Rebecca Kennedy (Class of 2012; English)

***Phantom of the Opera* (1986)**

**Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber; Lyrics by Charles Hart**

**Adapted from the novel by Gaston Leroux**

**Dir. Harold Prince**

**Her Majesty's Theatre**

A central theme in *The Phantom of the Opera* is the contrast between dark and light, and essentially between the Phantom and Raoul. The first time we see the Phantom, he is leading Christine down into the depths of the theater where there is no light other than candlelight. Here he sings “Music of the Night,” an entreaty to leave behind the world Christine knew and join him in his world of darkness and music. One line specifically asks Christine to “turn [her] face from the garish light of day” and instead succumb to the “caress” of his music. In many ways, and especially in this song, music is portrayed as a seductive force. The Phantom sings of letting “fantasies unwind” and allowing him to possess Christine. The people of the theater refer to him as the Angel of Music, but rather than being a benevolent, generous, light-filled creature, the Phantom is malevolent, controlling, and his soul is dark.

The Phantom is a character shrouded in mystery and when Christine tries to lift his mask and illuminate his identity, he reacts with rage and anger. He literally hides behind a mask and the face behind it is both literally and figuratively disfigured. The Phantom was a freak show attraction before haunting the theater, and it is that environment where he perhaps learned to hate himself and consider himself evil and irredeemable. This is an admonishment against a society which judges beauty only at the surface, for the Phantom is obviously capable of beauty through his music but his early experiences in the freak show led him down a more destructive path.

The darkness of the Phantom is opposed by the character Raoul. He is a childhood friend of Christine's and a source of fond memories, of light. As the Phantom tries to control and possess Christine, Raoul is a beacon of light and hope. In their song “All I Ask of You,” Christine

and Raoul stand on the roof under a star-filled sky where there is natural light and no sense of oppression or threatening darkness. Here, Raoul sings lines such as “No more talk of darkness” and “Let me be your light.” He embodies hope for the future and can provide Christine with love and a normal life. In comparison, the Phantom may love Christine, but he cannot show her that except through his music. The Phantom's approach to loving Christine is simply to possess her and essentially force her to love him in return. When the Phantom steals Christine after his opera in the second half, someone tells the Phantom, “You can't make her love you by imprisoning her,” but this is precisely his strategy.

Unexpectedly, I saw connections to *Matilda* in this production. In both, there is a father figure who dies too early, leaving his daughter behind in the hands of sinister forces. Christine's father promised to send her the Angel of Music before his death but this “Angel” ends up killing many people and almost kidnapping Christine forever. In *Matilda*, Miss Honey is left in the hands of Miss Trunchbull after her father dies and it takes years for her to get out from under her aunt's thumb. But more importantly, both musicals address adversity and characters' reaction to it. Life has been unfair to both Matilda and the Phantom but the way they respond to this is drastically different. Matilda is able to rise above the unfairness and take matters into her own hands to make things better. The Phantom, however, allows it to sink him into the darkness where his bitterness only grows and causes him to lash out against others. Whereas Matilda ends up happy, the Phantom continues to be alone in the dark. This comparison cautions us to strive for a glass-half-full approach to life.

– Nika Tamashiro (Class of 2012; Japanese and Brain & Cognitive Science)

Since I was a little kid, for some unexplainable reason, I was obsessed about *Phantom of the Opera* even though my English was not good enough to understand anything. Being able to have this opportunity to watch *Phantom of the Opera* in Her Majesty's Theatre was an honor. Upon arriving at Her Majesty's Theatre, I felt kind of lost. Unlike other theatres displaying the poster of current production; there was no large poster of *Phantom of the Opera* on the walls of the theatre. Entering the theatre thirty minutes before show time, we were hoping for any leftover seats and, fortunately, we ended up having two center seats in the Royal Circle. There were no words to describe how excited I was, knowing that I was about to see the production of my dreams. Truth be told, I was tearing up at the end of the show not just for the Phantom but because my childhood dream had came true.

Amongst all 25 plays we have seen, the costumes for *Phantom of the Opera* is no doubt my absolute favorite. Numerous costumes were involved in this play because of the two plays performed within *Phantom*. The scene with the best costumes was the festival where a grand staircase was introduced on stage with variety of costume of different styles, colors, and loads of accessories. Some colorfully dressed manikins were used on the stairs to create the crowded, festive feeling. Because of the interactions between the actual actors with the manikins and the complexity of the scene, it was actually difficult to notice that they were not actors! The twist of the Phantom showing up in the festival was surprising given the high action on stage. I was shocked when he showed up and did not notice how the theatre crew was able to make him appear.

Because of my biased experience with *Phantom*, I have to rate its set as number one out of all 25 plays. There were numerous set changes that were completed with multiple layers of curtain, large movable set pieces, and raisers concealed on stage. There were eight different sets

just in the first half of the production. Even with so many set changes, the play did not seem discontinuous in any way. Every transition was done in a quick and smooth fashion, especially the first transition from the old abandoned theatre to the glamorous luxurious theatre, revealing the golden framework. Another notable transition was the part where the Phantom took Christine into his dungeon. As the Phantom was dragging Christine by her hand onto a bridge, fog started to cover the stage and candles emerged. As soon as the Phantom and Christine disappeared at the end of the bridge, the boat came into sight through the foggy stage. Each shift between sets was handled in such a dedicated manner that it created the special relation of the two different sets.

The effect of the chandelier was slightly disappointing for me. The first part when the chandelier was pulled up to the ceiling added so much for the transition into the glorious theatre, yet the part where it fell was not so impressive. However, I attributed this disappointment to myself. Because of my high expectation in this production, I was hoping for something that was merely impossible for a theatre production to accomplish.

Overall, I finally understand why *Phantom of the Opera* is able to run for a full 25 years in Her Majesty's Theatre, and I am glad that our Theatre in England course gave me the opportunity to see this production.

– Li-Ya Sun (Class of 2012; Psychology)

***Comedy of Errors* (1589?)**  
**Written by William Shakespeare**  
**Dir. Dominic Cooke**  
**Olivier Theatre**

The National Theatre's lively production of *The Comedy of Errors* was another beautiful example of how to successfully stage a Shakespearean comedy for a modern audience. It was

also another Shakespearean play I was not overly familiar with, and although I did not adore this production quite as much as *Measure for Measure*, it was still a rewarding evening of theatre bursting with energy and creativity. This was a nice play on which to end our Shakespearean adventures, since to end on an inferior production would have been wholly depressing.

Although this play benefited from imaginative staging throughout its duration, perhaps the most memorable were the first five minutes in which the tenement-like set split violently down the middle to represent a shipwreck. This was a breathtaking effect and set a high watermark for the staging to come. Another highlight was during a chase scene in the middle of the play during which a car is driven on stage. This is something which everyone involved in theatre has contemplated doing at some point in their lives, and it was nice to see the dream fulfilled at the Olivier Theatre. But the car itself was only on stage for about twenty seconds and actually contributed nothing to the play. It was almost as if it had been included merely to show off the fact that it could be done. This sort of playfulness permeated the entire production. This was, after all, a production which felt entirely comfortable including the most gratuitous instance of onstage flatulence I have ever witnessed; it was certainly not a production which was concerned with remaining highbrow. Instead, the energy of the production was decidedly chaotic, seeming to take delight in constantly subverting our expectations for what a British production of a Shakespeare play in a prestigious theatre should be like, and this anti-order mentality turned out to be very effective in capturing the heart of this particular comedy.

*The Comedy of Errors*, as its name would suggest, is a play which thrives on chaos. The plot centers around two sets of identical twins, one of whom has traveled to a foreign land to find the other. As soon as the foreign twins arrive, however, it is left to the audience to watch as the entire city of Ephesus spirals into an escalating mess of disorder and confusion. This production

captured the vibrancy and variety of the script commendably. Much of this was down to the strength of the cast, which gave a remarkably energetic performance. A number of the actors in this production were able to achieve beautiful interpretations which exposed new sides to their characters not apparent in the text. One example was the way in which Adriana and Luciana were handled. They were depicted as bleached-blonde valley girls, an effective way to modernize these characters, and this resulted in some extremely funny scenes. Both sets of twins were also outstanding, bringing a marvelous sense for comedy to their performances which kept the laughs coming steadily as the production unfolded. Although the plot is somewhat superficial compared to Shakespeare's later works, occupied with the farcical mainstays of mistaken identity and slapstick rather than delving more deeply into the characters themselves, in the hands of such a beguiling performance it is very easy for us to ignore this fact and allow ourselves to be entertained simply for entertainment's sake. This, then, was the way in which the production was most successful. By accepting itself for what it was, a purely comedic diversion, *The Comedy of Errors* was freed from any pretensions of higher artistic purpose and hence one is able to simply enjoy what is possible with a script like this once one learns to embrace its very lack of sophistication.

– Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

I was very excited for this production ahead of time for a number of reasons. It was the first Shakespearean comedy I had the pleasure of seeing live, and I had the privilege to see it at the Olivier in the National Theatre. This particular production was geared towards a younger audience, which was achieved through a variety of techniques.

The play was set in a modern city. The script turns convention upside down by having the mischief happen in an urban setting instead of out in nature, where Shakespeare usually sets these stories. The design emphasized the difference with four-story-tall buildings that move and rotate through the stage. As I mentioned in my journal for *I3*, the Olivier Theatre was built to show off its technical prowess, and this production was no different. At one point, they brought an ambulance onstage for about ten seconds basically just because they could. This play could have, and has in the past, been done very well with minimal set. Basically, all you need are three doors. I thought that the bulging set worked, though, because it made the setting another character in the play. There were always a bunch of extras on the set to create the bustling, living environment that is a city.

This production was also surprising because of the type of casting involved. There were strong Latino and Caribbean cultural influences to the production which I thought infused the urban city setting with an exotic, nature-inspired energy. The use of a band helped reinforce this aura, and the song choices helped keep it accessible to a young audience. The band sang in Spanish, I think, but the songs being performed were recent pop songs that our generation would recognize by melody. The songs also tied in with the theme of insanity that Shakespeare loves to write about because they picked such pieces as “Crazy” and “Mad World.”

The technical design also helped to emphasize the main theme of the play which is, of course, errors. This play is all about mistaken identities and cleverly timed entrances, and the errors all seem less contrived when the stage is turning and there are a slew of extras providing distractions left and right. The two pairs of twins were costumed in the same outfits, which were purposefully confusing, but they also had indicators to differentiate between characters. For example, one brother was walking around with the gold chain about his neck while the other is

beating his servant for never delivering it. They did a very good job of finding two sets of actors who look very similar to each other; in fact I had trouble telling them apart at bows. The physical likeness of the actors helped the audience suspend their disbelief and go along with the farcical plot of errors confusing them. I thought that the difference in accents between the brothers helped give the audience a clue about who was who while maintaining the visual gag. You'd think that a wife would recognize that her husband has a different accent, but I thought that the choice gave more to the audience than it took away from the story. Since the play is about visual mistakes and doors opening and closing, I thought that an auditory difference in character was a clever way to help out the audience without impeding on the original story.

The interval scene was a great way to gear this production towards a younger audience. The Olivier was suddenly turned into the front corner of a dance club, blasting beats with hookers and a dancing man loitering about. There was a lot going on in this scene, so it becomes part of the story without adding new words to Shakespeare. It definitely pushed the urban feeling and the constant bustle that goes along with it. In one window there was a dominatrix whipping a man, and when she was finished she sat down and knitted. I keep mentioning all of these extras, but what I haven't said is how detailed they all were. Simply having bodies onstage does not give life to the story, and this director left no actor out of the detailing process. Overall I would say that the play was very well directed. The director had a clear vision to work towards and he followed through with it in every detail, giving it a breath of life and energy that is hard to attain, especially with Shakespeare.

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

**Haunted Child (2011)**  
**Written by Joe Penhall**  
**Dir. Jeremy Herrin**  
**Royal Court Theatre Downstairs**

Friday, January 13

The title gives a misleading impression of the play, as I entered imagining a horror story with possessed children or murderous fathers. While these tropes were not explored by the play, the title still proved to have a deeper relevance that quickly became clear. Each of the three characters could in turn be viewed as the eponymous child, searching for an absent father figure.

The play centers on Thomas, a young boy, and his mother Julie upon discovering the return of his father Douglas, who has camped out in the attic and is missing teeth after an unexplained month-long disappearance. Douglas reveals that during his absence he has experienced a spiritual awakening. After losing his teeth in a barroom brawl, he was taken into a cult. Once inside, alienation from the outside world and a series of philosophical lectures are used to indoctrinate Douglas, a former engineer, into the cult.

Douglas cannot accept that he has thrown months of his life away on a sham organization. He is a smart and educated man, so he would *never* have invested so much time into something so foolish. He rationalizes that the organization consists of other “like-minded people”: engineers, scientists, students. He promotes the group’s indoctrination lectures as inspiring classroom discussions and espouses pseudoscience as intellectual breakthroughs. (His ravings about bananas, neuronal stimulators, and special hats were particularly delusional.) Douglas even tries to bring his skeptical wife into the fold – if he can convince her, then *surely* the religion is legitimate. The mindset is a self-affirming form of Stockholm Syndrome that prevents him from escaping the cult. If he wavers from the ideology, then he proves that it was all a scam.

Furthermore, the group offers a pleasingly carefree existence, where he doesn't need to worry about the troubles of day-to-day life. Because the cult does all his thinking for him, he is free to live a serene existence reminiscent of early childhood. Even his father's death is undone, Douglas believes, his soul reincarnated in Thomas, Douglas's son.

Julie tries to convince her husband to rejoin his family and accept reality through a variety of methods. She asks him to be a good father to Thomas; she seduces him with sex, music, and old memories; she instructs him to act like a grown-up and accept responsibility. However, Douglas is able to resist her each time; he views all her attempts as unwanted temptations and purifies himself by chugging a vat of salt water. In the final scene when Douglas finally does escape from the cult, it is because he has reached a breaking point. His mind can no longer perform elastic feats of mental gymnastics. Shunned and beaten by the group he thought cared about him, he has nowhere to turn.

– Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

*Les Misérables* (1985)

Saturday, January 14

**Written by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg**

**Based on the novel by Victor Hugo**

**Adapted and directed by Trevor Nunn and John Caird**

**Queen's Theatre**

As a musical theatre enthusiast, it's a little bit embarrassing for me to confess that this was the first time I have ever seen (or even heard the full soundtrack for) *Les Misérables* (directed by Trevor Nunn). However, I am absolutely grateful Pam called the box office to pick up tickets, and I have a far better understanding of why the show is so popular.

For one thing, Claude-Michel Schönberg's score is riveting. I have no idea how well his music reflects early 19th-century France (the heavy use of synthesizers in songs like "Dog Eats

Dog” suggests a significantly more modern aesthetic, befitting a show first performed in 1980), but, when appropriate, the music effectively conveys sheer energy and revolutionary spirit (in “Red and Black” and in “Do You Hear the People Sing?”). The score creates and employs motifs to a fault, so that Fantine and Eponine both sing the melody from “On My Own” at various moments in the score, connecting the characters as two women who Die before their time (Fantine from consumption, Eponine from a gunshot fired around the time of the 1832 Paris Uprising). The “Master of the House” theme used in the first act characterizes the Thénardiers as persuasive, humorous, and cunning conmen, and it returns after the uprising ends in “Beggars at the Feast” to reassure the audience that life for the characters has resumed a kind of normality.

The show is based on Victor Hugo’s identically titled novel from 1862, and this helps explain why the musical’s story becomes (in my opinion) a little unwieldy. The show doesn’t have a “book” in the traditional sense, since everything is sung-through. It begins with two separate prologues in an attempt to explain the lives of the parent generation (including protagonist Jean Valjean and Fantine, Cosette’s mother) and Cosette’s childhood. Fifteen songs later, (out of a total twenty-six songs in Act One) the main story begins, though I’m not sure you can count it as the “main” story if it takes up fewer than half the songs in the first act. On the other hand, it’s the first time in the staging that we see a major set piece—two cleverly-constructed barricades, packed with all sorts of boxes and barrels, that move and rotate to imitate different parts of the city. Going back to the issue of pacing, the second act also features significant leaps through time, so that after fifteen songs sung in the “main” time period, there are another eight songs to go before the end of the musical. I think the prologues work a bit better than the epilogue—even though I enjoyed the music, characters, and plot, I was getting a bit restless by the end. It’s also very tempting to contrast the musical with the 1998 film

adaptation of the novel, directed by Billie August, which effectively condenses the novel's plot into a neat 134 minutes.

Despite my complaints about length, however, the musical is very well put-together, full of spectacle, rousing song, and a cleverly constructed set that conveyed the (many) changes in time and location fairly effectively. I should also add that I may have had far fewer complaints with the runtime if I had felt more engaged with the particular cast. In large part, I think that had to do with my seating—I had “partially restricted” seats in the circle, and the production included lots of “stand and sing” numbers where the characters faced front and emoted with the audience before them. The staging absolutely favored people in the stalls, and had I been sitting there I might have engaged more with the characters.

I had the good fortune to sit next to a British student who has seen the show five times before (!) and acted as our resident expert. He explained to me that our particular Eponine was played by Alexia Khadime, a mezzo-soprano who proved popular for playing Elphaba in *Wicked*. From what I'd previously heard of the play, Eponine (who dies in the arms of her unrequited love) often acts as the emotional center of the play. However Khadime's brassy voice made her Eponine a strong female figure with lots of agency (especially in her solo song “On My Own”). I think this made her death, where she depends on Marius' arms to hold her, a little less effective. Her portrayal created a wonderful character, but I'm not sure it was the right character for the show. On the other hand, our Jean Valjean (Ramin Karimloo) had incredibly strong vocals. However, the most moving member of the cast proved to be the child actor who played an adorably winning Gavroche,<sup>6</sup> a street urchin who dies collecting ammunition for the fighters

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to discover who played Gavroche in our production. I do know it was one of three young actors who rotate through the role: Rory McMenamin, Tommy Rodger, or Marc Wadhwani. I did find one online review that praised Marc Wadhwani; I wouldn't be surprised if he was in our production as well.

behind the barricades. I definitely cried at his death. That, in a way, proved the production successful—*Les Misérables* is a show written to engage audiences emotionally, to provide deep characterization for its large cast, and to convey the spirit of rebellion.

– Sara Cohen (Class of 2012; English)

This morning, after our final class, we presented Dr. Peck with a thank-you gift. It was a nineteenth-century book of essays discussing scientific concepts as if they were fairy tales. Jess found it in a local bookstore. Given its lovely appearance – a green hardback with a gold-embossed cover, gilded pages, and authentic dedication, it was a real bargain. All the students chipped in a couple pounds to pay for the book. I also wanted to get a card for everyone to sign, and when I proposed it, Sara responded with the great idea that we could make one ourselves. So, Laurel volunteered to do an amazing sketch of the famous London landmarks & mascots of various shows we'd seen, and everyone signed our homemade card. (It can be viewed on the online version of our syllabus.) Dr. Peck seemed surprised and delighted to receive it, and I commemorated the moment by covertly snapping a few photos.

Afterwards, Deb and I got lunch at a nearby fish-and-chips place. It was an authentically British experience. The portions were enormous; we each received an entire fillet of fried and breaded cod with a generous helping of chips, all served fresh and piping-hot, wrapped up in a paper cone. That evening, we were scheduled for the alumni reception, so everyone was excited to get dressed up. But I'd been lucky enough to snag a few matinee tickets for my all-time favorite musical, *Les Misérables*, playing at the Queen's Theater. So, after lunch, I slipped into my formal dress and took the tube up to the West End to meet Sara and Caitlin for our show. I am admittedly a *Les Misérables* fanatic and know every lyric by heart, so I had very high

expectations. Some aspects were disappointing, but others met and even exceeded my expectations. Ramin Karimloo, who played our Jean Valjean, boasted a voice that was more than sufficient to meet the challenging range demanded by the role. To me, he was clearly a cut above every other vocalist on the stage. His handling of Valjean's well-known solos, "Who Am I?" and "Bring Him Home" were a joy to hear. Karimloo's performance and the slightly altered lyrics and orchestrations (which stemmed from changes made for the 2010 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert) led me to think about the ways in which this sung-through show uses its music to convey its characters' personalities.

One of the ways in which the nine or ten main characters of *Les Misérables* are "miserable" is that many of them face identity crises. And in the volatile climate of post-revolutionary France, the ways in which people choose to identify themselves can mean the difference between life and death. As these characters struggle to form coherent self-conceptions, we can hear their anguish in both the lyrics and musical leitmotifs that come to define them. *Les Misérables* is at its most ingenious when it recycles its own music, resurrecting familiar leitmotifs in different contexts, different keys, or for different characters so that one iconic melody, through repetition, comes to have multiple significations. One of the effects of this same-but-different repetition is that we can see how one character's identity crisis becomes relevant, sometimes even mirrored, in other characters who are also struggling to define themselves.

I want to look, in particular, at the show's two main protagonists. In the beginning, Jean Valjean has just been released from a twenty-year prison sentence for stealing a loaf of bread, a crime he committed to feed his sister's starving children. Javert, the policeman who arrested him and his parole officer, fanatically enforces the letter of the law, believing in its divinity. To him,

Valjean is, always was, and continues to be a criminal; he habitually identifies Valjean not by name, but by his prisoner number: 24601. Javert's conception of identity – both his and everyone else's – is rigid, unchanging, and essential. He believes that everyone is good or evil in God's eyes, that this condition is fixed, and cannot be altered. At first, Valjean fulfills Javert's expectations because his yellow ticket-of-leave, which he is required to have on his person, identifies him as a criminal – and thus, unemployable. Driven to desperation, Valjean takes advantage of an old bishop who has kindly offered him a free meal, and steals his silver. When he is captured by the police and brought back for sentencing, the bishop unexpectedly corroborates Valjean's false story that the silver was a gift. Nonplussed, the policemen can do nothing but release Valjean. Afterwards, a stunned Valjean can only listen as the bishop expounds his motives: he "bought [Valjean's] soul for God" and makes him swear to use the silver "to become an honest man." This unasked-for act of kindness confounds Valjean; it provides such a sharp contrast to the hardscrabble, self-serving life he has become so inured to that it prompts him to make a deliberate and radical reformation of his life. In the show-stopping song "What Have I Done?" Valjean swears off his old criminal life, name and all, and vows to become a new man. He successfully emerges eight years later as Monsieur Madeleine, the mayor of a city and a wealthy factory owner.

The distinctive melodies associated with this song are later reproduced almost exactly in Javert's final solo, "Javert's Suicide." Javert, who has infiltrated the (June Rebellion's) rebels' camp as a government spy, has been caught and held prisoner. Valjean, who is also at the barricade in disguise, is given charge of Javert's fate. When the two recognize each other as old nemeses, Javert resigns himself to death, believing that Valjean will act according to the law (or the Old Law of revenge), and kill him for betraying the revolutionary cause. Instead, Valjean –

re-enacting the bishop's mercy – frees Javert. Shocked, Javert reconsiders the rules on which he has built his life; he has always acted according to the letter of the law, and never once considered sparing someone out of compassion. He was prepared to Die within this neat system he'd set up in his head. But Valjean, by acting against the law and, moreover, with no thought for his own benefit, befuddles Javert. Unlike Valjean, he cannot see an alternative way of living; his pride as a lawman will not allow him to exist in the “debt of the thief.” Thus, Valjean’s act causes such a rift in Javert’s self-conception that he annihilates himself, committing suicide, rather than sacrificing his integrity to re-conceptualize his identity and values. Boublil and Schönberg brought Valjean’s and Javert’s parallel moments of identity crisis into sharp focus by reprising the melody of Valjean’s iconic “What Have I Done?” into “Javert’s Suicide.” For ease of comparison, I reproduce the two songs side-by-side:

**Valjean:** What have I done?  
Sweet Jesus, what have I done?  
Become a thief in the night,  
Become a dog on the run  
And have I fallen so far,  
And is the hour so late  
That nothing remains but the cry of my hate,  
The cries in the dark that nobody hears,  
Here where I stand at the turning of the years?

If there's another way to go  
I missed it twenty long years ago.  
My life was a war that could never be won.  
They gave me a number and murdered Valjean  
When they chained me and left me for dead  
Just for stealing a mouthful of bread.

Yet why did I allow that man  
To touch my soul and teach me love?  
He treated me like any other;  
He gave me his trust.  
He called me brother.  
My life he claims for God above.  
Can such things be?  
For I had come to hate the world  
This world that always hated me.

**Javert:** Who is this man?  
What sort of devil is he  
To have me caught in a trap  
And choose to let me go free?  
It was his hour at last  
to put a seal on my fate,  
wipe out the past & wash me clean off the slate!  
All it would take was a flick of his knife.  
Vengeance was his yet he gave me back my life!

Damned if I'll live in the debt of a thief!  
Damned if I'll yield at the end of the chase.  
I am the Law and the Law is not mocked.  
I'll spit his pity right back in his face.  
There is nothing on earth that we share.  
It is either Valjean or Javert!

How can I now allow this man  
To hold dominion over me?  
This desperate man whom I have hunted?  
He gave me my life.  
He gave me freedom.  
I should have perished by his hand.  
It was his right.  
It was my right to Die as well.  
Instead I live...but live in hell.

Take an eye for an eye!  
Turn your heart into stone!  
This is all I have lived for!  
This is all I have known!

One word from him and I'd be back  
Beneath the lash, upon the rack.  
Instead he offers me my freedom  
I feel my shame inside me like a knife.  
He told me that I have a soul.  
How does he know?  
What spirit comes to move my life?  
Is there another way to go?

I am reaching, but I fall  
And the night is closing in  
And I stare into the void  
To the whirlpool of my sin  
I'll escape now from the world  
From the world of Jean Valjean  
Jean Valjean is nothing now  
Another story must begin!

[He tears up his yellow ticket-of-leave]

And my thoughts fly apart  
Can this man be believed?  
Shall his sins be forgiven?  
Shall his crimes be reprieved?

And must I now begin to doubt,  
Who never doubted all these years?  
My heart is stone and still it trembles  
The world I have known is lost in shadow.  
Is he from heaven or from hell?  
And does he know  
That granting me my life today  
This man has killed me even so?

I am reaching, but I fall  
And the stars are black and cold  
As I stare into the void  
Of a world that cannot hold  
I'll escape now from the world  
From the world of Jean Valjean.  
There is nowhere I can turn  
There is no way to go on....

[He throws himself into the swollen river]

One can see how closely the two songs echo each other; at times their lyrics are nearly identical. If one is familiar with “What Have I Done?,” one can easily chart Javert’s reasoning process and see how greatly it differs from Valjean’s. The first stanza is a sung as a rapid, rhythmical recitative in a minor key, emphasizing both men’s frantic confusion and indignation. Both men display shock, but where Valjean’s thoughts are reflective and turned inward, Javert’s are focused outward – completely on Valjean’s incomprehensible actions. Unlike Javert, Valjean is able to articulate how low he has fallen; he calls himself a “dog” and a “thief.” In the second stanza, Valjean conceives of an alternate path, “another way to go,” even if he feels as if it’s too late to change. He is even able to distance himself enough from his current idea to entertain the notion that Jean Valjean is dead. Javert, on the other hand, cannot find another way to define himself; he focuses on what he is (the Law) and what he is not (Valjean). He has built his entire

self around being the opposite of the criminal Valjean and now cannot conceive that they might both share desirable qualities.

The third stanza, for me, is the most telling. It shows both men reacting to an act of mercy. Musically, it demonstrates this shift in thought by slowing down from the frenzied recitative and its melody is softened with the addition of legato strings; we also hear a modulation into a major key, indicating a more contemplative and productive mode of thought. Valjean thinks in spiritual terms – seeing the bishop’s gift as a kindness, one that “teach[es] me love.” He sees the potential for brotherhood and equality in the bishop’s act. Javert, on the other hand, sees Valjean’s mercy as a chaotic inversion of the correct order. Valjean’s act is not a kindness that has the potential bring two men into brotherhood, but rather a power play, which puts Valjean into a position of “dominion.” Javert speaks in legalese, insisting on his “rights” and unable to conceive of a world in which an individual might act without recourse to the law. Javert understands how to treat upstanding citizens who follow the law and criminals who act against the law, but someone who acts without reference to any law at all absolutely baffles him. For him, a world that allows such a topsy-turvy hierarchy is a “hell” that is “lost in shadow.” The concurrent flood of tremolo strings and trilling woodwinds in the orchestration – with their rapid fluttering switching between pitches – echo Javert’s unease in a suddenly unstable world. Most tellingly, this unstable realm is described as “the world of Jean Valjean,” which Javert cannot imagine existing in. Where Valjean thought of the bishop as a guardian “spirit” who has come to “move his life,” Javert can only characterize Valjean as a “devil.” Javert’s mention in the last stanza of “black and cold” stars is an allusion to his earlier solo, entitled “Stars,” in which he praises the stars as symbols of “order and light” which always “hold [their] course and [their]

aim / And each in their season / returns and returns / and is always the same.” That these same stars are no longer visible to Javert is symbolic of his utter loss of faith.

Both men characterize the despair that accompanies the death of their respective identities with words about darkness and void. Musically, the final verse is set apart from the others with a substantial rest in which silence reigns; when the voices re-enter, they sound in a slow recitative and has reverted to the same minor key in which the song began. Ultimately, both men are reduced to “nothing” by these unexpected acts of mercy. Their uncertainty is illustrated by a background of delicate tremolo strings and punctuated with eerily-echoing cymbals. But while Valjean’s escape from this senseless new world consists only of a symbolic death, in which he annihilates his old identity to emerge as a reformed man, Javert’s inflexible convictions will allow his only escape to be literal self-annihilation, suicide.

It is worthwhile to say a word about the ways in which the two songs’ endings differ musically. Valjean’s announcement of his rebirth into a new identity is accompanied by his tearing up of his yellow ticket-of-leave which marks him as a paroled; simultaneously, horns blast in time with Valjean’s ripping movements and as the scraps of the scattered document flutter to the ground, the orchestra ends the song on an unresolved key, echoing Valjean’s transitional state. But Javert’s swan song ends quite differently. While it retains the dramatic minor key recitative, string tremolos, and horn blasts, it resolves quite decisively. Javert’s howling final note, as he throws himself off the bridge into the river, is sustained and only fades as he falls to his death; when his voice has been silenced, the orchestra – led by a thunderous brass section – launches into a majestic rendition of Javert’s anthem, “Stars,” as if gloriously reiterating the philosophy that this fallen hero refused to compromise.

The identical structure of these two songs highlights just how differently the two enemies' minds function, and illustrates *Les Misérables*'s brilliant use of musical leitmotifs. This is by no means the only instance in which a recognizable melody is reworked for different purposes, but it is one of the most effective examples. There are times in which *Les Misérables* feels like a musical montage, caught in a perpetual self-referential loop, constantly cannibalizing and citing its own music, but that is part of its beauty. There were many moments in watching this production when I felt myself wondering where I'd heard a particular tune before, and my later identification of its source song illuminated new ways in which the composers drew parallels between various characters. The wealth of musical play is at the show's heart, and goes a long way in explaining why *Les Misérables* is the West End's longest-running musical.

Afterwards, the three of us rushed to the Covent Garden Hotel for our alumni reception. We crowded into a cozy room to mingle with University of Rochester alumni, admire everyone's lovely outfits, and enjoy hors d'oeuvre and wine. Dr. Don Chew and Dr. Peck each spoke about how much this annual London trip meant to them. Both speakers had nothing but praise for our student group, and it was also a reminder to us about how incredibly privileged we are to have an opportunity to spend a winter in London, seeing shows and exploring the city.

– Pamela Yee (Graduate student; Class of 2015; English)

***Crazy For You* (1992)**  
**Book by Ken Ludwig**  
**Based on the musical *Girl Crazy* by George and Ira Gershwin**  
**Dir. Timothy Sheader**  
**Novello Theatre**

I think that *Crazy For You* was a great show to end our amazing trip. As a lover of musical theater, I have always been saddened by the fact that I have never seen a Gershwin show. Given

the fact that George and Ira Gershwin played a huge role in musical theater history (we have actually already started talking about them in my musical theater history class this semester), I was extremely excited to see *Crazy For You*. Even though the show was not actually put together by the Gershwins (since this version of the show itself is from 1992), it is heavily based off of their 1930s musical *Girl Crazy*, with other songs added from their different shows. *Crazy For You* is like a Gershwin jukebox musical.

I think *Crazy For You* is the perfect combination of many of our favorite aspects of musical theater. In the program Frank Rich, a *New York Times* critic says, "... a riotously entertaining show called *Crazy For You* uncorked the American musical's classic blend of music, laughter, dancing, sentiment and showmanship with a freshness and confidence rarely seen during the *Cats* decade". This show is meant to be a fun night for all. Both the music and dancing were spectacular. Every actor in this show truly had to be a 'triple threat': they had to be able to sing, dance, and act. This is something that has been lost lately in musical theater. Many productions only focus on two of the three. For example, *Next To Normal* is heavily reliant on acting and singing but there is very little dancing in the show. Similarly, *Come Fly Away* is a show that completely focuses on dancing. However, *Crazy For You* focuses on all three aspects making it very refreshing and enjoyable to watch.

In many musicals I tend to focus on the music and the singing but I found that the dancing in *Crazy For You* continuously kept stealing my attention. I appreciate the fact that dancing is very hard to get completely synchronized with everyone on stage, and the dance numbers in *Crazy For You* were incredibly well put together. Every person on stage was doing every dance moment at the exact same moment, and it was amazing to see. It is not an easy feat, especially with such a large cast. Even more impressive was the fact that many of the routines

were tap numbers where it is even more important that everyone is absolutely perfectly together; otherwise, the audience can hear the difference in the tapping noise that their shoes make. Even just by looking at some of the pictures in the program, you can tell that all the dancers are together. I am impressed with the amount of work must have gone into this production to keep all the choreography in perfect unison.

Another aspect of the performance in *Crazy For You* that I thought was smart was the way they set up the songs. In many modern musical theater shows, the big production numbers involve simultaneous singing and dancing together. As someone who has performed in musicals, I find this very tiring but it is usually all right since there are maybe only two huge production numbers per act. However, a much larger proportion of numbers in *Crazy For You* are large production numbers. Singing and dancing at the same time in all of those songs would have really taken a huge toll on the actors. Thankfully, they adapted things well. Most big production numbers started with singing a verse or two and the chorus before the company would break into a huge dance interlude. Then it would usually end with more singing. I thought it was an intelligent decision to do this. This way, the actors only had one thing to focus on at a time: when they were doing energy-draining choreography, they did not have to try to continue singing as well. Not only did this allow the actors to only have to focus on one thing at a time, but the audience could also focus on one or the other at a time. You could give your full attention to the music or to the dance rather than trying to divide your attention between both.

I am so glad that I got to end my trip on such a great note with *Crazy For You*. It was an amazing production and I am impressed with how talented all of the actors were in every aspect of their performance.

- Caitlin Lischer (Class of 2013; Brain & Cognitive Science)

I thought that this was the perfect way to end the trip. Well, aside from seeing *Jerusalem* again, ha ha. Seriously though, *Crazy for You* is just downright delightful, and who wouldn't want to end their vacation on that note? The fact that it is quintessentially American also seemed to tie up the trip nicely and prepare us to come back home to the States.

I had never seen this show performed before, but of course I knew a lot of the music. I always like when that happens because it means that the music has surpassed the confines of the show and permeated the rest of the world, which is what I want all theatre to do. It also makes sense for this show, since the music was originally written for another show and then adapted into a more accessible plotline. I didn't realize that about this show until I read Professor Peck's lecture before the performance, but it seems logical after thinking about it. Gershwin is at the heart of the great American tradition of musicals and has written some of its most beloved classics, but these songs were arranged in a play that no one wanted to put on. By revitalizing the script but keeping the nostalgic tunes, while also adding other Gershwin music, this play achieves a new level of awesomeness.

I thought that the technical design was done very well. There were two big pieces, with one side designed to look like the New York City Broadway marquees and the other, to look like a small town in the south. The rolling pieces made for seamless transitions between the two locations during the play. I thought it was clever how they made the side in the town with the "hotel" actually slant downward. It was much taller on the downstage side of the set, and the upper walkway and the top of the set were both at an angle. This literally added a lot of depth to the set, because it looked like the building was getting further away, while really it was almost straight on with the audience. It was a very clever way to deal with the immense sight-line issues that this venue, and many old theatres, raises.

I loved the dancing in this show; it was very impressive in execution. Although *Crazy for You* got a new plot it still wasn't that complicated, it leaves large blocks of time for extended dance numbers. I was so impressed by the stamina of the dancers because they would do elaborate numbers that sometimes lasted over ten minutes and, by the end, they weren't even out of breath. I thought that the choreography fit the story well, which is rather important in a piece where much of the story is told through dance. The choreography of the city people was much more crisp and sleek in design than the honky-tonk, large, sweeping movements of the folks from the small town. The big number with the dancing on the metal sheets wedded the two cultures very nicely because the metal was urban and the town was very rural, and it was performed by people from both locations. I thought that the tap choreography specifically was impressive. Oftentimes, even in professional theatre, tap numbers with a large ensemble are limited to fairly simple combinations and rhythms but they sound impressive because everyone is in unison and getting a good sound. This show had a large ensemble that was in perfect unison while doing much more complicated steps than normal. I can say definitively that the tap dancing in *Crazy for You* is far more difficult to execute than that in *Billy Elliot*, which is saying a lot since *Billy Elliot* is all about dancing.

This production was well acted in its genre. Some may argue that there isn't as much merit in classical musical theatre acting, but I think that it's a different style that is equally as difficult to master. Aside from a slightly bad accent from the lead actress, it was surprisingly good on the acting front. My favorite scene of the play included the song "What Causes That?" when Bobby is dressed as Zangler and the real Zangler is there as well. They were both playing a very caricatured version of a drunk, but the stylized interpretation is what made the scene so funny. It was supposed to be a comedic scene and sometimes the best way to tackle that is to

over-emphasize certain realistic characteristics of drunkenness, such as stumbling or double-vision.

I'm going to end this last journal by saying that this entire trip has been a life-changing experience. The knowledge I have gained and growth I have achieved as a person just from leaving Rochester is priceless. Every show we saw was a highly valuable experience, even if I bash it in the journals. Each production was an opportunity to train my critical lens and sharpen my directorial eye, and I would like to think that I took full advantage of all of them. I can't even fathom how many students that you, Professor Peck, have helped as you have helped me, but I also do not doubt that the volume makes it any less special for you, which is why you continue to be an inspiration to us all year after year. I hope you realize how personally responsible you are for cultivating the special and valuable theatre program that students like me get to experience at this university. It's been an honor to work with you, and I hope to stay in touch after graduation.

Thank you for everything you do,

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)