

## ***Billy Elliot***

*Billy Elliot* was the show that I entered with the largest expectations. I have long been a fan of the movie and find the story to be truly touching. My expectations for the show were met and exceeded. The story took on a whole new dimension set to music. The ensemble dance scenes also gave it that larger than life feel that one craves in a musical and added power to the story.

When asked how dancing makes him feel, Billy cannot explain it well with words. The closest he can come is “electricity”. One can safely assume that not many members of the audience are ballet dancers. One can even more safely assume that not many audience members are dancers with as much passion and talent as Billy. It might be difficult, then, for them to really understand his passion and voracious appetite for dancing. Music is a passion that is more universal. The music for this show, in particular, combines elements that many are sure to find close to their hearts. Because music is so essential to Billy’s love for ballet, those of us who have a passion for music can begin understand and appreciate where his passion comes from. It is, as they so beautifully lay out through song after song, an expression that comes from within. It is a part of your soul being shown to the world through creative expression. It is electricity. Even the most uncultured and unrefined audience member will find themselves moved by the rock songs that bring the ensemble to their feet with the emotion of the strike and the classical music that brings Billy to his toes. The music highlights the passion in dance.

Though in the story dance is drawn as a habit only for “poofs”, the ensemble has several large dance numbers. The ensemble is made up primarily of large, brutish men who are either on strike from the mine or attempting to keep the peace among the strikers. They are all, however, wonderful dancers. Their dance scenes convey as much passion and power as Billy’s. “Solidarity”, for example, pounds through the hearts of the ensemble and audience members alike. Though their dance is more violent and far less refined than Billy’s various dances, the best way for them to explain the anger and passion behind the strike is through dance. This again, helps the audience to understand just how powerful and important dance is. It conveys passion for miners, police men, little girls, and boys who just want to express themselves.

Self-expression would seem to be dampened easily in a mining village as traditional as that portrayed in the show. Every character, however, longs for self-expression and manages to find an outlet for it. Michael finds acceptance for his cross dressing through Billy. The grandmother finds it through story telling. The dance teacher finds it through helping Billy find inspiration. As Michael and Billy sing so gaily, “what the hell is wrong with expressing yourself??” They teach us that it is natural, important, and can be a wonderful part of life.

*Billy Elliot* is an absolutely inspirational musical. The little boy who wants to dance will remain in my heart forever and help remind me to search for passion.

## ***An Ideal Husband***

I came into *An Ideal Husband* with very little experience with Oscar Wilde. I had started to read *Dorian Grey* a few days before but other than that had never read or seen anything by Wilde. I was quickly drawn in by his wit and humor. I stayed for the depth of thought behind the wit. *An Ideal Husband* paints an interesting portrait of married life. So often marriage is swept behind issues of child rearing. It is rare to see a play that focuses so directly on the relationships between two individuals who have chosen to spend their lives together. We are shown this relationship through several different perspectives: that of an established couple, the Chiltons, and that of an emerging couple, Lord Goring and Mabel.

The Chiltons seem to be the picture of happily married life at the opening of the play. They happily entertain their friends; he supports her endeavors for women's liberation and she supports his ambitious career. It seems that they are a match made in heaven. This is all thrown into question when Mrs. Cheverly threatens to blackmail Lord Chilton for a previous indiscretion. He is not only worried about his career being hurt by the scandal, but also his marriage. We are told that his wife is a steadfastly moral person who cannot accept moral flaw in others. Will their marriage survive this? As it turns out, his indiscretion leads to a seeming indiscretion on her part with Lord Goring. When all is revealed, they come to love one another again. The curtain goes down on their embrace. Both look pensive, pondering the exact consequences of the events of the play.

Lord Goring and Mabel have a very different relationship. They seem to be constantly flirting with one another but never committed. Mabel is widely admired but chooses to spend her time with Goring and will only accept a proposal from him. He promises to be an ideal husband for her but she rejects this offer. They want a relationship of equals.

Other than the fascinating portrayal of marriage by Wilde, the production also has much to offer the avid audience member. The set, for example, is audaciously decorated with gold leaf. From some angles it managed to look cheap, a somewhat disappointing effect. It did, however, set up beautifully the world the audience enters. It is a world completely preoccupied with appearances. The dresses of the ladies also managed to set the scene well for their characters to shine. Mrs. Cheverly's dress in the opening scene and in later scenes featured elaborate fringe detailing. This created a curtain-like effect. It was interesting, then, to discover just how much she was hiding. The fringe was well suited to her character. Lady Chilton's dress, on the other hand, was quite plain though beautiful. It was simple and elegant, just like her manners.

## ***A Woman of No Importance***

After walking through what seems to be an average pub, popping into the loo, and going through a door marked “Theater and Hostel”, the last thing I expected to find was truly high quality theater. I thought perhaps a comedy troupe or drag queen show awaited me at the top of the small staircase winding up to the top floor of the pub. I was shocked by the quality of the acting, directing, and costumes that I found there. The production of *A Woman of No Importance* allowed for the necessity of strategizing and self-protection in society to be the highlight of the show.

It would have been easy for the smallest venue we saw a show in to give the show an air of informality. On the contrary, the venue gave the audience an opportunity to be flies on the wall of this quaint British country estate. We were privy to conversations that were otherwise private and got to see the action from unique angles. The space provided the perfect stage for this particular adaptation of Wilde’s play.

The director was successful not only in the fabulous usage of the stage, but also in the adapting of the original script. In the talkback after the show, the director shared that he cut out many of the moralizing aspects of the play, particularly in the character of Gerald. He felt that in being overly moral, Gerald became unlikable. He wanted to make Gerald accessible to a wide variety of audience members, particularly the younger ones. Our group, then, was the perfect audience to test this theory out on. None of us had read the original show but all reacted similarly to that character: we found his motives in wishing

his mother married to be a little fuzzy, but not abrasive. In cutting the moralizing, the show lost some of its original intent but gained ease of viewing.

In cutting the moralizing, strategy became the highlight of the show. The floor of the stage was a chessboard pattern. It was not immediately recognizable as a chessboard because of the colors used but when recognized, it set the stage nicely for the game of strategy that was to follow. Gerald's mother and Lord Illingsworth were the most obvious opponents. He knew of and was prepared for her arrival. He had already turned Gerald into his pawn by offering him a fabulous job. His mother must work to regain his trust and get him back under her control.

Secondary characters were also involved in their own games of strategy. There was a clear division between the American young woman and the British young woman. Each considered her opponent's faults and spoke of them at length during tea, under the guise of discussing cultural differences. To punish her for her superior oration, the British woman falls into league with Lord Illingsworth when he agrees to test her Puritan nature.

All of these battles are hoping to prove who is of the least importance. Any woman who has been touched by a scandal, like Gerald's mother, loses her importance. She regains it by strongly opposing Lord Illingsworth. As the play closes, she tells us that he is the man of no importance.