

At the Theatre & 'Round the Town with Gordin & Christiano

Moving into 2005 with the Fall Theatre season now behind us and a year of events to reflect on, we are struck not only by the highlights, but also by the trend for one person shows. Five have emerged this fall on Broadway. Eve Ensler, who gave us the extremely popular *The Vagina Monologues*, provoked gales of laughter at the Booth Theatre with *The Good Body* in which she tackled the female body and middle age bulge. Mario Cantone, the gifted mimic and self anointed queen of mean spirited humor, attacked a slew of celebrity icons as well as family in *Laugh Whore* at the Cort. Barry Humphries in the guise of Dame Edna is *Back with a Vengeance* at the Music Box amusing audiences with a high style of campy good fun until March 15, 2005, but the mega stars Whoopi Goldberg and Billy Crystal were clearly the most successful. Their shows *Whoopi*, The 20th Anniversary at the Lyceum until January 30, an updated reprisal of the Mike Nichols show that launched her, and Mr. Crystal's 700 Sundays, his personal and touching account of family and friends playing at the Broadhurst through March 6th, were riveting displays of the unique talents that shaped their careers and were at once humorously illuminating, as well as poignantly thought provoking reminders of what Theatre is all about.

Prior to opening his show, which is one of Broadway's hottest tickets, Mr. Crystal was on hand to co-host Bette Midler's annual *Hulaween*, a benefit for her New York Restoration Project this past October, and Ms. Goldberg was the surprise guest at the *Stella* By Starlight Gala. Whoopi shared her very funny remembrances of legendary actor Marlon Brando at the gala where he was honored along with the playwrights Arthur Miller and Tony Kushner, who's *Caroline or Change*, a people's opera, altered the state of the American Musical Theatre this past year and was nominated for a slew of awards before heading off to California.

There were more one person shows Off Broadway. The talented Sarah Jones gave us *Bridge & Tunnel*, a tour de force of New York's immigrants, and the Manhattan Ensemble Theatre is presenting until January 23 *Heather Raffo's* *Nine Parts of Desire*, in which Ms. Raffo portrays nine Iraqi women during these troubled times. At the Atlantic Theatre in Chelsea this summer Jay Johnson, a ventriloquist extraordinaire, astounded us with *The Two and Only*, a touching personal journey in which he gave life to eleven zany characters and objects with staggeringly funny results. There is talk of this show being remounted. Don't miss it! We loved it and would see it again and again..

Broadway's finest play this fall August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* starring Phylicia Rashad (2003 Tony Award Winning Best Actress for *Raisin in the Sun*), almost didn't make it to the stage due to a lack of financial backing. In this the ninth of Mr. Wilson's projected ten-play cycle chronicling the lives of African-Americans, he proves himself to be at the forefront of today's eminent playwrights along with Tony Kushner, who in addition to *Caroline* gave us the memorable *Hombodie/Kabul*, a depiction of the nightmare in Afghanistan. Other important playwrights to note this season were Lynn Nottage, who gave us not only *Intimate Apparel*; a period drama about a seamstress with Viola Davis in a beautifully nuanced performance, but also *Fabulation*, a social comedy with an unforgettable Charlyne Woodard. British playwright Caryl Churchill distinguished herself once again with *A Number* (a drama about cloning starring Sam Shepard) at the New York Theatre Workshop that proves hers is an engrossing

voice to be continually reckoned with. The buzz is that the play will be extended and is a must for fans of serious theatre. Of special note is John Patrick Shanley's thriller *Doubt* at the Manhattan Theatre Club through January 30 featuring critically lauded performances by Cherry Jones and Brian F. O'Byrne. Look for this one to be remounted soon after its initial run. Finally Tracy Letts dissected paranoia with his terrifying drama *Bug*, which closes January 30 after a long run at the Barrow Street Theatre.

Photography By Barry Gordin



Harvey Fierstein Actor/Playwright



Glenn Close & Cy Coleman at The Johnny Mercer Foundation Gala where Cy was Honored.



Patrick Christiano & Whoopi Goldberg backstage At The Stella By Starlight Gala



Melba Moore backstage after her concert at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall



Billy Crystal & Bette Midler at her annual "Hulaween" Benefit for The New York Restoration Project



Joel Vig & Patricia Neal at The National Arts Club in Gramercy Park where they performed Truman Capote's "A Christmas Memory" which benefited Patricia Neal's Star on The Hollywood Walk of Fame

The revival of Stephen Sondheim's *Assassins* earlier this year skewed the American dream and seemed timelier than ever in a limited run at Studio 54 taking home several awards including the Tony for best revival of a musical. The fall revival of Sondheim's *Pacific Overtures* at Studio 54 is not nearly as winning, but is still immensely likeable. Jerry Herman and Harvey Fierstein's *La Cage aux Folles* at the Marquis Theatre is absolutely fabulous and a clear standout amongst the musical revivals this fall. What it misses in heart it more than makes up for with double doses of show biz glitz and glamour...an old fashioned extravaganza featuring 12 stunning show girls, who dance their little tushies off, but are really men. They are jaw dropping unbelievable.

Forget the dreadful new musicals that opened on Broadway this fall, but we have high hopes for *Little Women: The Musical*, starring Sutton Foster, which opens at the Virginia Theatre on January 23. The advance hype has been terrific. Also look for Harvey Fierstein as Tevye to breathe new life into *Fiddler on the Roof* at the Minskoff much the same way Brooke Shields is doing with *Wonderful Town* at the Al Hirschfeld.

Just before Thanksgiving The National Arts Club in Gramercy Park saluted Oscar and Tony award winning actress Patricia Neal, who was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame earlier this year. The actress performed Truman Capote's *A Christmas Memory* with Joel Vig. The Arts Club is the site of Food For

Thought, the brainchild of Susan Charlotte. With lunch at the club New York's finest actors read renowned plays and new works in a casual environment.

Planned as an annual holiday celebration Melba Moore, the Tony Award winning musical sensation of *Purlie and Hair*, played her first NYC concert in 10 years at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall. The lady was absolutely captivating! She is an amazing talent that is better than ever. Be there next year. We wouldn't miss it.

In closing a moment of silence for theatre giants we lost this past year...Marlon Brando, Fred Ebb, Uta Hagen, Tony Randall, Cy Coleman and Jerry Orbach..

Until the next issue see you at the theatre. Gordin & Christiano **BT**