



## BOOKFILTER'S 2019 FALL PICKS FOR THEATER LOVERS

MICHAEL GILTZ | AUGUST 27, 2019

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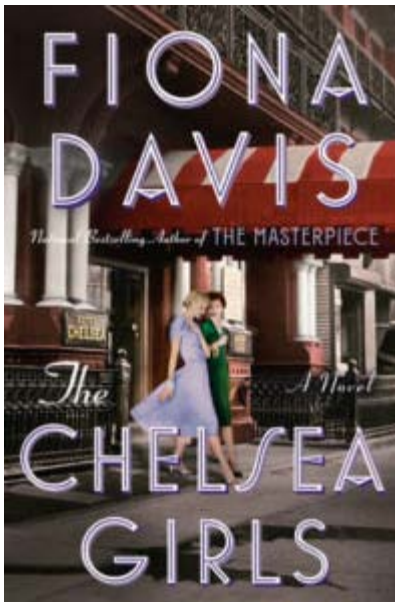


The savvy reader's favorite website [BookFilter.com](https://www.bookfilter.com) chooses the best theater books ready to take their bow, exclusively for Broadway Direct.

Kids are coming back from their summers at theater camp, high school students are eagerly auditioning for the part they've just got to get in the fall production, and actors are returning home after a season in the hectic but blissfully happy world of regional theater, where the quality is high, audiences are generous, and critics are mostly invisible. And as fall approaches, unexpected projects are being announced almost every day and new shows are in preview. But in between matinees and cabarets and cast album parties, we have a stack of theater-related books to catch up on! Here are the latest.

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[The Chelsea Girls](#)



By Fiona Davis

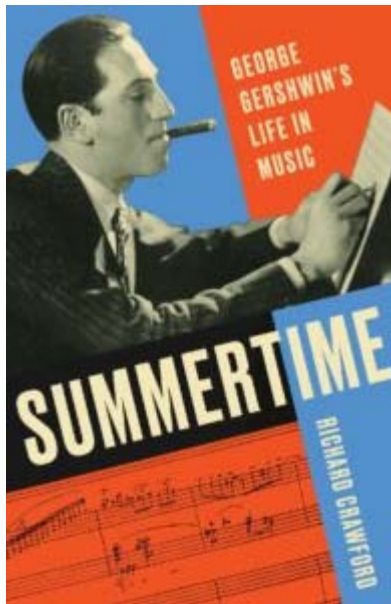
\$27, Dutton

Out now

Best-selling author Fiona Davis may have her biggest hit yet with this 1950s-set drama about the Chelsea Hotel, McCarthyism, and two women making their mark in the world of theater. A few years before the marvelous Mrs. Maisel took her first tentative step onto the stage of a comedy club, other women were paving the way. Maxine Mead is an actress. Hazel Riley is a playwright. Using the (in)famous Chelsea Hotel as their headquarters, these fast friends decide there's no reason they shouldn't produce the Broadway show they want to see. (And with women as lead producers of many of this year's Tony winners, obviously they were right.) Well, the Red Scare might have something to say about that, in this tale spanning from the 1940s to the 1960s with flair and fun. What should come first? The Netflix miniseries or the stage adaptation?

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***Summertime: George Gershwin's Life in Music***



By Richard Crawford

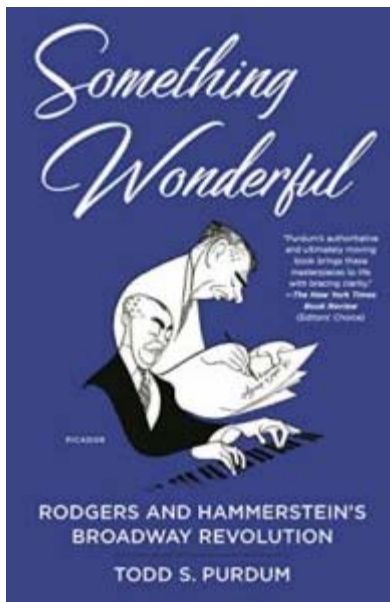
\$39.95, W.W. Norton and Company

Out September 3

Here's a great trend in biographies about the major talents of the theater: books that concentrate on their work rather than on the ins and outs of their love lives. Richard Crawford, who teaches at the University of Michigan, is just as excited by George Gershwin's classical composition "An Experiment in Modern Music" as he is by the musical *Girl Crazy*. Deftly mixing in Gershwin's own letters and notes along with stories from those who knew him well, Crawford illuminates Gershwin's remarkable musical legacy and shares enough anecdotes and fresh insights to keep everyone happy.

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***Something Wonderful: Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway Revolution***

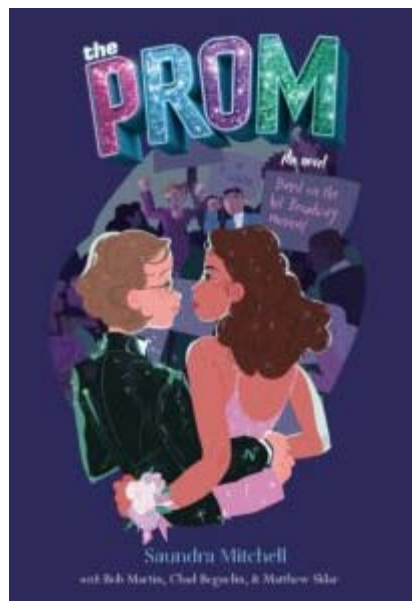


By Todd S. Purdum  
\$20, Picador  
Out now

Like the Gershwin bio above, Todd Purdum's look at the theatrical revolution led by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein remains happily focused on their groundbreaking shows. Their working relationship and private travails are appropriate background to the work they created, rather than the other way around. One of the best-selling theater books in recent years, it's out now in paperback.

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### ***The Prom: A Novel Based on the Hit Broadway Musical***



By Sandra Mitchell

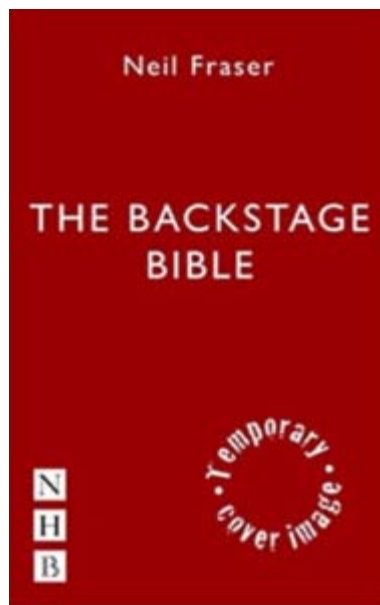
\$17.99, Viking for Younger Readers

Out September 10

We're glass-half-full people at Broadway Direct. So, instead of fretting that the theater-loving musical *The Prom* didn't run even longer on Broadway than it did, we want to celebrate that an original show made it to the Great White Way in the first place. Thanks to good reviews and the love of theater buffs, its story is just beginning. Producer Ryan Murphy is turning it into a film starring Meryl Streep, James Corden, Awkwafina, Andrew Rannells, Nicole Kidman, and Keegan-Michael Key. Just read those names again, please! It hits theaters in October 2020 and then heads to Netflix. A national tour starts in February 2021. And right now, we have a young-adult novelization by Sandra Mitchell, following in the wake of *Dear Evan Hansen's*. And then high schools will start to produce the musical and some parent somewhere will object and Broadway and movie stars will descend on the town and it will start all over again...

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### ***The Backstage Bible***



By Neil Fraser

\$30.95, Nick Hern Books

Out September 3

OK, you have a son or daughter who yearns for a life in the theater. But acting or directing? That's not their thing. If they're technically minded, one of the many creative jobs behind the

scenes may be just the ticket. Costuming, lighting, stage managing — it takes a village to put on a show. Happily, *The Backstage Bible* by Neil Fraser gives a glimpse into what goes on behind the velvet curtain. Fraser is a genius lighting designer and the head of technical training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, so he knows his stuff.

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### ***The Piano Recital***

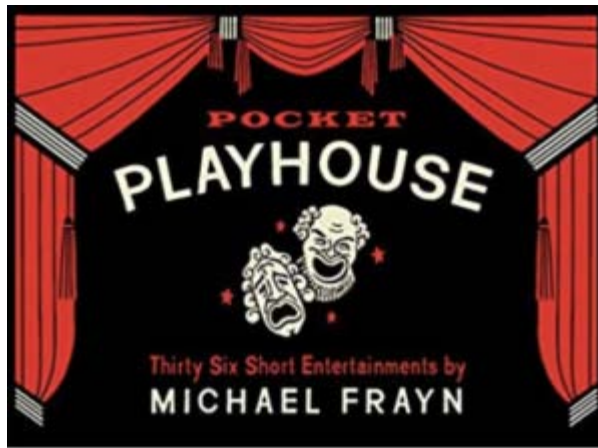


By Akiko Miyakoshi  
\$16.99, Kids Can Press  
Out September 3

Who doesn't get nervous when they have to appear in front of an audience? Certainly, Momo does as she gets ready for her very first piano recital. She stands backstage waiting her turn, quietly telling herself, "I'll be okay ... I'll be okay." And then she hears a little voice repeating the same mantra. It's a tiny mouse, who tells Momo that the mice are having a piano recital too! This gorgeous black-and-white picture book tells its sweet, encouraging story in a manner even the smallest child can follow via the images alone. But anyone needing to stand up and face a crowd will take comfort from it.

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### ***Pocket Playhouse***



By Michael Frayn  
\$16.95, Faber & Faber  
Out now

Few playwrights have succeeded so dramatically in both comedies and dramas like Michael Frayn has. *Noises Off* is one of the all-time great comedies, and *Copenhagen* is just the brainiest of his many successful dramas. Yet Frayn's talent doesn't stop there. He has also delivered terrific novels such as *Headlong*, screenplays such as *Clockwise*, nonfiction, journalism, witty newspaper columns, great Chekhov adaptations, and a memoir about his father. So you'd think more attention would be paid when Frayn delivers any work in any medium. Yet this beguiling collection of 36 sketches has slipped into stores virtually unheralded. Maybe he should have posted them individually first on Instagram with accompanying illustrations and been hailed a genius (again)? Don't let this slip away.

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**[Fleabag: The Special Edition \(The Original Play\)](#)**



By Phoebe Waller-Bridge

\$15, Nick Hern Books

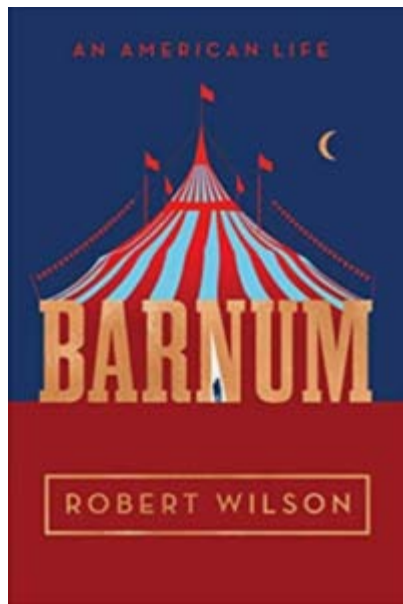
Out August 29

OK, it's only available on import. And it's only the original play and doesn't include the scripts for the two seasons of the TV series or a single picture of the Hot Priest. Heck, there's not even a sneak-preview zinger from her punch-up work on the next James Bond offering. But this is where the career of Phoebe Waller-Bridge caught fire, and it does include the brilliantly original play that launched her to fame. Plus, you get new color photos and new content from collaborators including director Vicky Jones and other members of the creative team, along with Waller-Bridge herself.

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***Barnum: An American Life***





By Robert Wilson  
\$28, Simon & Schuster  
Out now

He may not have looked exactly like Hugh Jackman, but P.T. Barnum was the showman of showmen who has influenced Broadway producers and hucksters and PR flacks and stars for more than a century. The first serious biography in decades, Robert Wilson's work has already been trumpeted on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*. Barnum surely would have expected no less. But he didn't just hype nonsense, like the discovery of a "mermaid." Barnum also delivered the goods in both entertainment and education, and according to all accounts, author Wilson (the editor of *The American Scholar*) does the same here.

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[Swan Lake](#)



By New York City Ballet and Valeria Docampo

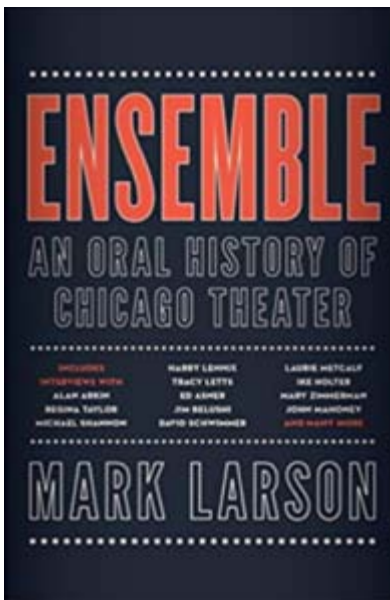
\$17.99, Little Simon

Out now

The third in an inspired series of picture books. Using an acclaimed production by the New York City Ballet as its inspiration, this brings to life the ballet *Swan Lake* in a way little children and dance aficionados can both delight in.

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### ***Ensemble: An Oral History of Chicago Theater***



By Mark Larson

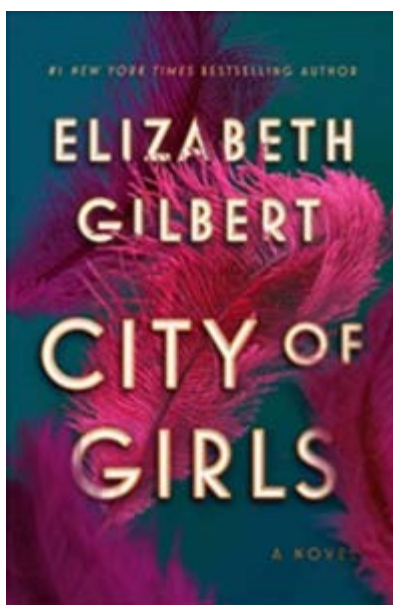
\$35, Agate Midway

Out now

It hardly needs saying that theater stretches across the United States and, indeed, the globe. From school productions to community theater and touring shows, theater comes in a wonderful array of shapes and sizes. Yet some cities thrive more than others when it comes to creating new works. Los Angeles is proving more and more vital, but it has a long way to go before it catches up with Chicago. One of the most exciting sources of talent, the city gets its due in this oral history of Chicago theater. It's a treat, whether you head to the Windy City for theatrical excursions or simply want to learn more about this crucible for so much great theater you've enjoyed over the years.

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### *City of Girls*



By Elizabeth Gilbert

\$28, Riverhead Books

Out now

Eat. Pray. Love. Go to the theatre. That's our motto, and memoirist and best-selling author Elizabeth Gilbert brings it to life in this acclaimed sexy work about life in the freewheeling world of the 1940s New York theater scene. Our heroine is 19-year-old Vivian, kicked out of Vassar College for doing better at extracurricular activities than she did at her studies. As punishment (or desperation), Vivian is sent to NYC to live with her bohemian aunt Peg, the owner of a wonderfully down-on-its-heels theatre called the Lily Playhouse. And since that sounds a lot like

dying and going to heaven, you know that whatever stumbling blocks appear (and there are many), Vivian's adventure is going to be great fun. Expect a lot of vivid theatrical sorts and a lot of carpe diem, including of the Sapphic variety. *Quel scandale!*

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### ***The Flower Whisperer***



By Joel Grey

\$65, Powerhouse Books

Out now

What a moment the legendary talent Joel Grey is having. He directed a hugely successful revival of *Fiddler on the Roof* that's being performed entirely in Yiddish, and it has brought that dependable war horse vividly back to life. (It's playing and playing for the foreseeable future in New York City with no end in sight.) His Emcee from *Cabaret* continues to inspire everyone (see the new *Moulin Rouge!* and Danny Burstein's loving spin on the character). And now one of his many other talents earns the spotlight in this art book of his sensual, dramatic photography that captures the flowers he loves so much in all their spectacular glory.

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### ***Midsummer's Mayhem***

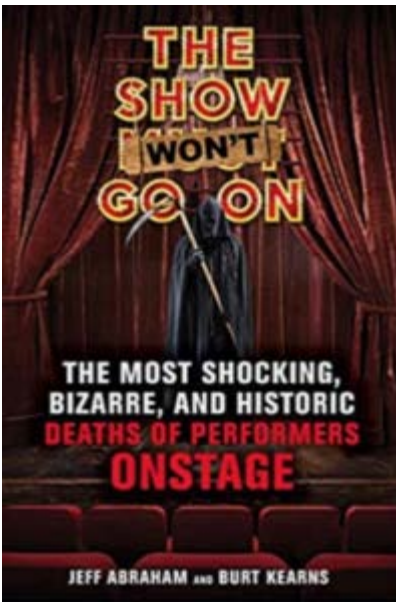


By Rajani LaRocca  
\$16.99, Yellow Jacket  
Out now

This sweet young-adult novel puts a very fresh spin on Shakespeare's romantic and magical play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Mimi is the youngest of her overachieving Indian American family and yearns to figure out how to make her mark. A love of cooking and a contest at the local bakery seem just the ticket. (It helps to watch *The Great British Bake Off* on a constant loop.) Mimi lives in Massachusetts, but somehow a mysterious boy named Vic leads her deeper and deeper into the forest behind her house and she discovers banyan trees, wild boars ... and flowers bursting with nectar along with other exotic, almost magical ingredients. Trying out her new skills on the family, Mimi watches as her dad eats and eats and eats, her brother falls in love with his own image (a future actor, surely), and her other siblings cause havoc with sudden romantic entanglements. Hm, it sounds a lot like ... Yes, but the fresh setting and delightful heroine make this more than just a variation on Will. It's its own fresh and delicious tale.

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**[The Show Won't Go On: The Most Shocking, Bizarre and Historic Deaths of Performers Onstage](#)**



By Jeff Abraham and Burt Kearns  
\$16.99, Chicago Review Press  
Out September 3

Stand-up comics love to kill on stage, but nobody wants to die on it. Sometimes it the former happens and you blame the writer (assuming it's not you). But sometimes the latter *really* happens and there is nobody to blame but fickle fate. The authors of this offbeat compendium pulled together every example they could find of people literally dying on stage, from magicians on TV to daredevils at the circus and an amateur actor who had the good (or bad) taste to die in a play called *The Art of Murder*. So take grim humor in knowing that however badly a show bombed, it could have been worse. Much worse.

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***Michael Giltz** is the creator of the website **BookFilter**, a book lover's best friend. He has written for Huffington Post, New York Post, New York Daily News, Los Angeles Times, The Advocate, and many other publications, profiling talent, covering the theater business, and reviewing shows in New York City and London. When he's not attending the theater, he's reading about it.*

**KEEP READING:**



**Bookfilter's July Pick of the Month**

# CATS

OFFICIAL TRAILER

*Cats* Official Trailer





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