



## BOOKFILTER'S BEST OF THE WINTER PICKS

MICHAEL GILTZ | FEBRUARY 23, 2016

SHARE



The savvy reader's favorite website, [BookFilter.com](http://BookFilter.com), chooses the best theater books of the winter just for Broadway Direct.

Sure, it's chilly in New York, but things are heating up on Broadway, thanks to record-setting hits and *Hamilton* just wowing the country with its Grammy-winning performance on national TV. Happily, community and regional theater are more vibrant than ever, and schools are remembering how powerful, life-changing, and educational theater programs can be. So whether you're in the Big Apple or Chicago or Miami or anywhere in between, great books about theater and great plays are always available to spark your imagination.

### MASTER OF CEREMONIES

By Joel Grey

\$27.99, Flatiron Books

Theater buffs always salivate when a legendary star like Joel Grey delivers a memoir. Great shows, great stories, great dish . . . what will he reveal? But that natural interest is superseded when an artist digs deeper to reveal their heart. Here, Grey tells it all, from his early years as a

child star in vaudeville to glamorous nightclubs and finally Broadway and the movies. His fateful casting in the legendary original *Cabaret*, the film set battles with director Bob Fosse, private struggles, and career cappers like *Chicago* and *Wicked* are present in vivid detail. But above all, Grey charts his personal journey, as complicated and fluid a voyage as one would expect from an artist of his quicksilver talent. [Learn more.](#)

---

## BEATRICE AND BENEDICK

By Marina Fiorato

\$27.95, St. Martin's Press

The plays of Shakespeare will be a source of inspiration forever — no surprise, since the Bard himself drew upon history and myth and the works of others to shape his own dramas. Here, author Marina Fiorato gives us the backstory to *Much Ado About Nothing*. We know how it ends (happily, for everyone not named Don John). But how did it begin? Building on clues in the text, Fiorato charts the first stormy romance between these two notable wits, future lovers who take as much pleasure in their battle of the minds as they do in their attraction to one another. The world conspires to keep them apart, but of course we know that all's well that ends well. The half-Venetian Fiorato takes pleasure in re-creating Renaissance Italy and leading us up to the beginning of one of Shakespeare's most memorable romances. [Learn more.](#)

---

## KING CHARLES III

By Mike Bartlett

\$14.95, Theatre Communications Group

Some plays demand to be read. If you're lucky enough to see Mike Bartlett's "future history play," you'll be besotted by the versifying in this tale of Prince Charles finally ascending to the throne, with disastrous results. It's (mostly) written in iambic pentameter, but that's only the start of the fun. Bartlett skewers our gossip-obsessed culture, paints convincing backstage portraits of the royals, and then turns this seemingly silly story into gripping political drama. It's worth savoring every word. And let's hope Bartlett's forays into television don't keep him away from the boards for too long. [Learn more.](#)

---

## PAL JOEY

By John O'Hara, Lorenz Hart, Richard Rodgers, Thomas Mallon

\$16, Penguin Classics

Has it been 75 years already? The heel Pal Joey was first introduced in the pages of *The New Yorker*, where author O'Hara had more published stories than any other writer, ever. That was turned into a book and the book became a cynical stage smash hit musical by Rodgers & Hart, and *that* became a movie starring Frank Sinatra, which would have been great if the tale's cold, cold heart hadn't freaked out Columbia Pictures. This anniversary edition includes the original collection plus the libretto and lyrics for the stage musical, making it a master class in seeing how to turn stories into a show, not to mention capturing characters in song. Now is it too late to have Hugh Jackman star in the revival everyone wants to see? [Learn more.](#)

---

## JACK & LOUISA ACT 2

By Andrew Keenan-Bolger and Kate Wetherhead

\$16.99, Grosset & Dunlap

The actors and friends Andrew Keenan-Bolger and Kate Wetherhead have it all: thriving careers as performers and the self-starting verve to launch a web series, their own varied projects, and this middle-grade series about two theater-crazy kids. They each narrate a chapter in turn, with Jack all nice-guy class and Louisa all sass. This time their school is doing *Guys & Dolls* and they're angling for plum parts until a hotshot director comes between them. A third book is already set for 2017, so this series is just getting started. It's no surprise they know their stuff: You can catch Wetherhead on stage right now in New York City in the comedy *Clever Little Lies*, and Keenan-Bolger hits Broadway in March with the new musical *Tuck Everlasting*. [Learn more.](#)

---

## THE SECRET LIFE OF THE AMERICAN MUSICAL

By Jack Viertel

\$28, Sarah Crichton Books

The subtitle says it all: *How Broadway Shows Are Built*. Author Jack Viertel is a key player — the senior vice president, to be exact — of Broadway powerhouse the Jujamcyn Theaters, which owns five Broadway houses, among other interests. He has decades of experience shepherding hit shows to the spotlight, from the musical *City of Angels* to the landmark *Angels in America* and the rich body of work by August Wilson. Here, he focuses on the musical, structuring his book like a show (complete with overture) to demonstrate step by step how a production is put

together, what works and what doesn't, and how you fix it. Going backstage is one thing; going inside the brain of a top theater impresario and getting his insight into the makings of a musical is even rarer and even more of a treat. [Learn more.](#)

---

## EXPERIMENTAL O'NEILL

By Eugene O'Neill

\$16, Rare Bird Books

If you ask us, playwright Eugene O'Neill was almost *always* experimental. This anthology focuses on key early works *The Emperor Jones* (notably providing a great role for black actors who sorely lacked them at the time), *The Hairy Ape*, and the one-acts set on board a ship, known collectively as *The S.S. Glencairn Plays*. It's a useful look at one facet of a prolific career best known for his lengthy tragedies. [Learn more.](#)

---

## FULL MOON STAGES

By Judith Malina

\$18.95, Three Rooms Press

For some, a life in the theater means Broadway or, for those who have other lives but never lost the bug, perhaps local community productions. But regional and experimental theater are often their own hardscrabble, thrilling existence. And no one typified that better than Judith Malina, the pioneering cofounder of the radical, politically fiery troupe The Living Theater. Malina has performed all over the world and even went to jail for her convictions. But come hell or high water, on every full moon she wrote a new entry in the diary of her life. This memoir collects those frank and funny observations, creating a biography of her career and a record of the movement she helped steer for decades. [Learn more.](#)

---

## BUT THE GIRAFFE AND BRUNDIBAR

By Tony Kushner & Maurice Sendak

\$15, Theatre Communications Group

Tony Kushner's collaboration with the late illustrator/artist Maurice Sendak was unique and celebrated, as one would expect of such a duo. The picture book *Brundibar* celebrates the

Czech opera about children facing down tyranny, for which Kushner wrote a new English-language libretto and Sendak did the design. *But the Giraffe* is a play Kushner wrote to give the historical context for *Brundibar*, an opera first performed in death camps during World War II. A sensitive introduction to a painful topic and a celebration of two giants, this paperback reissue collects both pieces in one package. [Learn more.](#)

---

## TROUPERS OF THE GOLD COAST

By Constance Mayfield Rourke

\$16.99, Skyhorse Publishing

Here's a gem of a story about a little-known corner of theater history. It was California that spawned the company Troupers of the Gold Coast in 1837. They lasted almost 170 years (!), giving their final performance as a company in 2005. This look at the troupe first came out in 1928. It tells their story while naturally focusing on the meteoric rise of its biggest star: Lotta Crabtree, the acting, singing, dancing, banjo-playing talent known as "The Nation's Darling." Mitzi Gaynor starred in a Hollywood version of her life called *Golden Girl*, but you can get a closer, better look here, from the early encouragement of Lola Montez to a mother who actually protected her child (no Mamma Rose here!) — and a retirement at 45, both wealthy and content. Hey, it happens. [Learn more.](#)

---

## THE NIGHT ALIVE & OTHER PLAYS

By Conor McPherson

\$18.95, Theatre Communications Group

Few playwrights have been as consistently lauded and commercially successful in the past 20 years as Irishman Conor McPherson. This anthology collects his three most recent dramas. "The Night Alive" is a seemingly conventional tale about several men getting by in Dublin when a prostitute comes crashing into their lives. But the sense of the off-kilter is never far when dealing with McPherson, who made his name worldwide with the ghost story "The Weir." That ominous undertone is more overt in "The Veil" (a story set in a haunted house) and "The Birds," a stage adaptation of the original short story by Daphne du Maurier that inspired Hitchcock's movie of the same name. Consider this a good chance for catching up on where this talented writer is at today. [Learn more.](#)

---

## TUCK EVERLASTING

By Natalie Babbitt

\$19.99, Farrar Straus and Giroux

A new musical based on this modern classic hits Broadway in March. What better way to prepare than to dive into the original? First published in 1975, it tells the story of a little girl named Winnie who develops a crush on a 17-year-old boy who is kind to her. His family is . . . unusual. She eventually discovers they are immortal, thanks to a mysterious, hidden spring. Does Winnie want to share in their secret? Hide it from the world? Profit from it by doing the bidding of the Man in the Yellow Suit who is stalking them? Or eventually turn her back on the lure of living forever in exchange for the joys and sorrows of a real life? Twice turned into a movie (the more recent, better version stars Alexis Bledel of *Gilmore Girls*), it's a seemingly simple story with dark undercurrents and the ideal introduction to the work of Babbitt. You'll sing its praises even before you see the musical. [Learn more.](#)

---

## THE JAVIER PLAYS

By Carlos Murillo

\$18, 53<sup>rd</sup> State Press

This anthology collects a trilogy of dramas dubbed “The Javier Plays” by Chicago fixture Carlos Murillo. “Diagram of a Paper Airplane,” “A Thick Description of Harry Smith (Volume 1),” and “Your Name Will Follow You Home” are all here. But they’re just the tip of the iceberg for Murillo, the head of playwriting at the Theatre School of DePaul University and the recipient of the Doris Duke Impact Award last year for his work in the theater. No one can see every show in New York City, much less all over the country. So thank goodness for books that can chart theater history, tell the story of the greats, and collect the plays of artists for us to read wherever they thrive. [Learn more.](#)

## KEEP READING:



**A Christmas Story and Rent to Receive Live TV Productions**



**Sneak Peek: *Sunday in the Park with George***





**Tony Winner Idina Menzel Set for Off-Broadway Premiere of Skintight**

[SEE ALL NEWS](#)

BROADWAY **DIRECT** 

[Join Our Newsletter](#)

[General Info](#)

[Find Shows](#)

[Broadway Venues](#)

