



2021 HOLIDAY BOOK GUIDE FOR THEATER LOVERS

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MICHAEL GILTZ | NOVEMBER 23, 2021

Finally, finally (!), we are getting back to the theatre. That's the best gift of all for fans of musicals, comedies, musical comedies, and all the other drama found on stage. But even if we want to see 24-hour marathons to catch up on all the theatergoing we missed over the past crazy two years, that's just not possible. So whether you're stuffing your own stocking or offering up treats to a friend or loved one, here are some great books for the theater lover in your life.

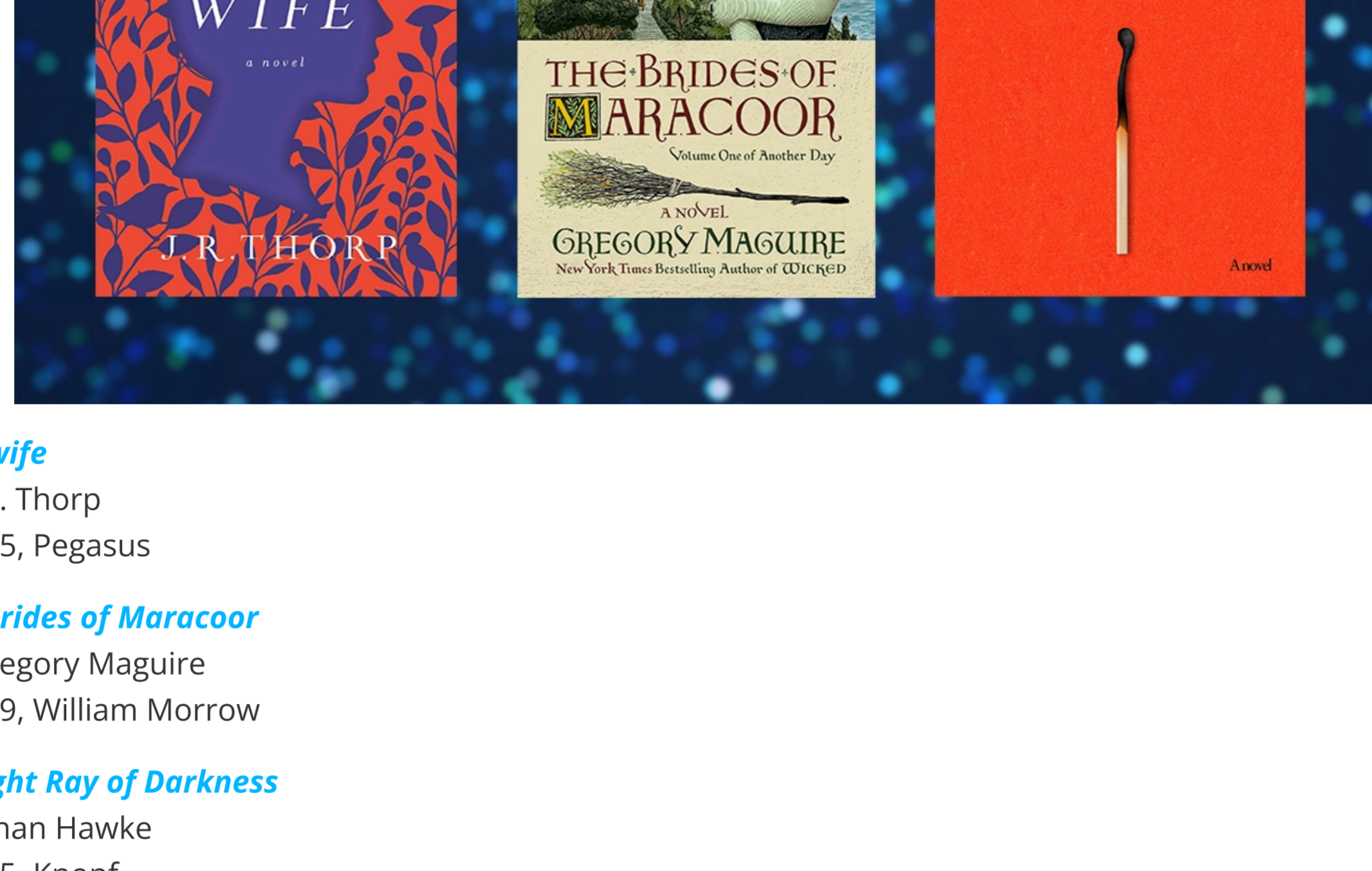


When the Lights Are Bright Again
Created by Andrew Norlen; photography by Matthew Murphy
\$40, Applause

The Art of Bob Mackie
By Frank Vlastnik and Laura Ross
\$50, Simon & Schuster

David Copperfield's History of Magic
By David Copperfield, Richard Wiseman, David Britland, and Homer Wilag
\$35, Simon & Schuster

These coffee-table-worthy books will wow as terrific stocking stuffers if your theater-loving friend has *really* big stockings. *When the Lights Are Bright Again* features great photos of everyone from actors to ushers all speaking of their desire to get back under the spotlight or backstage or just in a seat. A love letter to theater. The Bob Mackie book celebrates the lavish, over-the-top, only-Cher-could-pull-it-off style of the legendary costume designer. And David Copperfield's tome is a visually rich work celebrating the art he is a master of and the magic artifacts he's a collector of and displays in his own (secret) museum. The next best thing to going there.



Learwife
By J.R. Thorp
\$25.95, Pegasus

The Brides of Maracoor
By Gregory Maguire
\$28.99, William Morrow

A Bright Ray of Darkness
By Ethan Hawke
\$27.95, Knopf

Three literary novels steeped in theater (sort of). In *Learwife*, due out December 7, librettist J.R. Thorp promises to give a rich, angry, righteous voice to the wife Shakespeare's famous tragic figure King Lear tossed into a nunnery and promptly forgot about. *The Brides of Maracoor* is fantasy through and through, but any book with a connection to the smash musical *Wicked* is sure to be gobbled up by Gregory Maguire's many fans. And Ethan Hawke has delivered a range of books — from coming-of-age tales to graphic novels — but diving into the world of theater and revealing the workaday crises of an actor tackling the role of Hotspur opposite a train wreck of a Falstaff proved the perfect combination of artist and subject. It looks to be Hawke's most popular and acclaimed novel to date.

Smile: The True Story of a Face
By Sarah Ruhl
\$27, Simon & Schuster

Hooked: How Crafting Saved My Life
By Sutton Foster
\$28, Grand Central Publishing

Putting It Together: How Stephen Sondheim and I Created Sunday in the Park with George
By James Lapine
\$40, Farrar, Straus and Giroux

From heartbreaking to inspiring, here are three memoirs by theater pros. Playwright Sarah Ruhl documents the challenges she dealt with when the chronic illness Bell's palsy left her struggling to communicate and control her face. Sutton Foster probably did a *lot* of crafting during the final season of her hit TV show *Younger*, and during the sometimes rocky preparation for a revival of *The Music Man* she stars in opposite Hugh Jackman. Foster reveals that crafting has been the release and artistic safety blanket she swears by. And James Lapine candidly shows how he and Stephen Sondheim worked together to create the masterpiece *Sunday in the Park With George*. Essential reading for anyone looking to work in the theater and, indeed, any artist at all.

The Mystery of the Sorrowful Maiden
By Kate Saunders
\$26, Bloomsbury

The American Gun Mystery
By Ellery Queen
\$15.95, American Mystery Classics

The Midnight Hour
By Ely Griffiths
\$26, Mariner Books

Mystery buffs love theater. But give them theater *and* a good murder and they're in heaven. These three books should do the trick. *Sorrowful Maiden* is the third in the Victorian-set Laetitia Rodd series. Our detective is drawn into the world of the theater when a divorce proceeding turns into a murder investigation and she discovers how vicious backstage battlers can turn. In a classic from Ellery Queen, the intrepid sleuth is in the stands in New York City when a Hollywood star turned circus rodeo performer is gunned down in front of thousands. Even newsreel footage shot at the time can't turn up any clues, and that doesn't sit well with Ellery — he can hardly witness a murder and then let the perpetrator go scot-free! And the sixth book in Ely Griffiths's amusing series pits the local police force of Brighton, England, against an all-female private-eye firm led by the police chief's own wife. A music-hall star asks the women to discover who poisoned her husband; toss in a Hollywood star and a passel of music hall performers and the egos pile up as quickly as the bodies.

Black Ballerinas: My Journey to Our Legacy
By Misty Copeland
\$19.99, Aladdin

A Little Devil in America
By Hanif Abdurraqib
\$27, Random House

Dance Theatre of Harlem: A History, a Celebration
By Judy Tyrus and Paul Novosel
\$50, Dafina

Three principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre, shares with kids the inspiring story of the women of color who broke down barriers and helped make her career possible. With *A Little Devil in America*, critic and MacArthur genius Nord recipient Hanif Abdurraqib offers up "notes in praise of *Devil* performance" that bring in everyone from Josephine Baker to Beyoncé to illuminate and explain how Black artistry and American history and culture are inextricably intertwined. And a coffee-table-worthy celebration of Dance Theatre of Harlem is a joyous dive into that institution's past, present, and future.

Oscar Wilde
By Matthew Sturgis
\$40, Knopf

Noël Coward on (and in) Theatre
Edited and with commentary by Barry Day
\$39.88, Knopf

Mike Nichols: A Life
By Mark Harris
\$35, Penguin Press

Walking With Ghosts
By Gabriel Byrne
\$26, Grove Press

Four masterful works about major figures in theater history. Matthew Sturgis brings to life the inimitable playwright Oscar Wilde. But only Noël Coward himself can do justice to the equally quotable performer and writer. Barry Day pulls together some of Coward's best insights into his own work on the stage and his critiques of the work of others. Mark Harris examines the complicated and remarkable career of Mike Nichols, who conquered New York as a sketch-comedy artist alongside Elaine May, stormed Broadway ... and then turned around and proved himself an even more important director. And actor Gabriel Byrne opens a vein with this anguished memoir about the abuse and addiction he overcame amid a career of triumphs on stage and screen.

Jan Brett's The Nutcracker
By Jan Brett
\$18.99, G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers

My Mother's Delightful Deaths
By Carla Haslbauer
\$17.95, NorthSouth Books

The Chance to Fly
By Ali Stroker and Stacy Davidowitz
\$16.98, Amulet Books

Finally, for kids at heart, three charming books. Any fan of picture books know Jan Brett is a legendary talent. Surely it was only a matter of time before Brett delivered her own take on the classic holiday tale *The Nutcracker*. Whether you want to share it as a keepsake with a child about to experience their first ballet or simply as a thing of beauty they'll enjoy on their own, it's a keeper. Carla Haslbauer's amusing picture book imagines what it's like when your mom is an opera star. How will she die on stage tonight? Silly, charming, and with an infectious love for opera and performing in general. Finally, actor Ali Stroker made history winning a Tony Award for her sexy and funny turn in a revival of *OklaHoma!*. And she wants kids to know they can dream big too. Stoker's middle-grade novel is about a girl who uses a wheelchair for mobility and plans to wheel it right into the spotlight for a local kids' production of *Wicked*. And she gets a part! OK, not the lead, but the chorus is fun and the male lead, Malik, is really cute — and pretty quickly she learns that in the theater, anything is possible.

Michael Giltz is the co-host of the weekly entertainment podcast Showbiz Sandbox. He has covered all areas of entertainment as a journalist, critic, feature writer, and analyst, contributing to numerous outlets including the New York Daily News, the Los Angeles Times, Huffington Post, Entertainment Weekly, and The Advocate. When Michael's not attending the theater, he's reading about it.

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