

September 1, 2012

# HUFF POST ENTERTAINMENT

Edition: U.S. ▾



FRONT PAGE POLITICS BUSINESS MEDIA CELEBRITY TV COMEDY FOOD STYLE ARTS BOOKS LIVE | ALL SECTIONS

Entertainment | Celebrity TV Political Hollywood Features Hollywood Buzz Videos



Featuring fresh takes and real-time analysis from HuffPost's signature lineup of contributors

### HOT ON THE BLOG

Dr. Peggy Drexler  
Rep. Dennis Kucinich

Gary Hart  
Kevin Maurer

HuffPost Social Reading



**Michael Giltz**

GET UPDATES FROM MICHAEL GILTZ

Freelance writer

Like 107

## Theater: *Bring It On* Doesn't; *Into The Woods* Loses Its Way

Posted: 08/12/2012 2:42 pm

React > Inspiring Funny Hot Scary Outrageous Amazing Weird Crazy

Follow > Video, Bring It On, Donna Murphy, Public Theater, Bring It On The Musical, Broadway, Musicals, Entertainment News

SHARE THIS STORY

---

Submit this story

**BRING IT ON: THE MUSICAL** \*\* out of \*\*\*\*  
**INTO THE WOODS** \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*

**BRING IT ON: THE MUSICAL** \*\* out of \*\*\*\*  
**ST. JAMES THEATRE**

This is the show *Lysistrata Jones* hoped to be: a frothy high school musical that audiences embraced. Neither show is genuinely good, but at least *Bring It On* is painless in its anonymity. Plus, it can ignore brickbats since the show has just extended its "limited" run through January of 2013.

It's based on the 2000 hit film about high school cheerleaders that rather inexplicably spawned four direct to DVD sequels. This musical spin on the story is a mishmash of typical high school plots: our heroine Campbell (Taylor Louderman) yearns to lead her squad to another national championship. But redistricting forces her to switch schools in her senior year and head to the "scary" Jackson school filled with metal detectors and crews that dance at parties but think cheerleading is lame. Campbell must make new friends, whip stylish hip-hop dancers into savvy cheerleading professionals, win a national championship and oh my gosh, that Latino boy is really cute and I think he likes her!

Anyone who has ever watched the national cheerleading competitions on ESPN knows those kids can wow an audience with their high flying stunts. Director and choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler naturally draws upon those stunts to send dancers flying high into the air to juice up the audience and give a nice little spin to the typical Broadway moves. The all-star team behind the scenes includes Jeff Whitty of *Avenue Q* on the book, Tom Kitt of *Next To Normal* working on the music with Lin-Manuel Miranda of *In The Heights*, and Amanda Green working with Miranda on the lyrics. All pros, all with some great credits to their name and none of it remotely reflected in the by-the-numbers material here.

### FOLLOW US

### MOST POPULAR ON HUFFPOST

1 of 2

Mitt Romney To Flood Victim: 'Go Home And Call 211'  
Like 6k

Former 'SNL' Star Makes Shocking Comments About Rape And Gay Friends  
Like 1k

Paul Ryan Admits Marathon Lie  
Like 6k

What's Up With Those Circular Marks On Curiosity?  
Like 33

Celebs React To Eastwood's Wild Speech  
Like 220

Eastwood Misfires  
Like 4k

WATCH: Rachel Maddow At A Loss For Words After Clint Eastwood's RNC Speech  
Like 3k


Sarah Palin May Be Done At Fox News: Report  
Like 2k

35 Awesome 'Simpsons' GIFs  
Like 1k

### DON'T MISS HUFFPOST BLOGGERS

1 of 5

 **Dr. Peggy Drexler**  
[Why It's Important To Let Your Child Make Mistakes](#)

 **Gary Hart**  
[Welcome to the American Republic, Mr. Eastwood](#)

TOP VIDEO PICKS

1 of 8

**What Is Gene Simmons Doing With His Lips**

In the spirit of cheerleading and emphasizing the positive, I'll focus on moments and performances that worked. Miranda is probably responsible for the rare feat of bringing some modestly effective rap to Broadway -- two solos by Nicolas Womack as Twig actually have a little verve and snap. Gregory Haney may have the awfully cliched role of the strong, no-nonsense transvestite but that doesn't him from nailing his lines (and his dance moves) and actually delivering some genuine laughs thanks to his timing. (However, the final, lazy gay twist -- just to titillate audiences -- is tiresome even if it does give his character of La Cienega a kiss.) Similarly, Kate Rockwell makes the most of the one-note blonde Skylar, a self-absorbed competitor of Campbell's.

Neil Haskell is appropriately hunky as Campbell's first boyfriend, though he's given virtually nothing to do. Jason Gotay has a thin voice but a lot of presence that makes him appealing as Campbell's new flame. I really disliked the written character of Bridget, the chubby kid with low self-esteem who blossoms at the new school. But Ryann Redmond certainly tackled it unabashedly. I really can't praise Taylor Louderman, who left no impression as Campbell, but I certainly wouldn't criticize her either. The role is too bland and filled with mushy inspirational tunes like "What I Was Born To Do" and "One Perfect Moment" to give anyone much of a chance. She certainly worked hard and smiled throughout, just like a good cheerleader

But the real find is Adrienne Warren as Danielle, the leader of the dance crew at the new school who warily trusts Campbell. Warren has terrific presence and made her equally anonymous role a living, breathing character we immediately understood, believed in and cared about. All in all, the good casting of Rachel Hoffman and Telsey + Company are the main reason *Bring It On* isn't the train wreck it might have been.

I wasn't wowed by the dance routines at the finale but they certainly incorporated what you'd expect. I thought Blankenbuehler's most successful work was for "Friday Night Jackson." The hip hop moves were fun, a few nifty touches (like having Jason Gotay as Randall "swipe" aside dancers to get a better look at Campbell) were clever and the sight of our heroine dancing around in a leprechaun suit (a bit of hazing on the part of Danielle) was funny and offbeat. Seeing Gotay get all romantic while staring lovingly at the leprechaun mascot felt like a brief, weird moment from a very different, far more original show.

**INTO THE WOODS** \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*  
[DELACORTE THEATER IN CENTRAL PARK](#)

Let's not go overboard because of disappointment. The free plays that comprise Shakespeare in the Park are invariably worthwhile and this production of Stephen Sondheim's *Into The Woods* is no exception. Anyone lucky enough to wait in line or otherwise snag a ticket will get to see a fully realized production under the stars with top Broadway talent and some Hollywood actors enjoying a summer on-stage. A pleasant time will be had by all and you can bring the kids since it's not *Macbeth* we're talking about but a musical that subverts the fairy tales we all know with wit and emotion.

Still, it's hard not to be heartbroken since the Public Theater's announcement of an open-air production of *Into The Woods* had all the makings of a revelation a la *Hair*. That musical was an ideal combination of setting and show and the feeling that *Into The Woods* might be similarly ideal was tempting. It was overseen by director Timothy Sheader and co-director and movement director Liam Steel, who both did the same honors for a London open air production in Regent's Park that was critically acclaimed.

In the first act we see characters from all sorts of fairy tales -- Jack of Jack and the Beanstalk, Rapunzel, Cinderella and so on crossing paths while pursuing their fates. At the finale, they've all reached their dreams though we sense those dreams may prove unsatisfying. Act two shows what happens after the "happy ever after" as the real world intrudes on a prince and his bride, a boy and his harp and a witch who has regained her beauty and lost her power. The cast includes the great Donna Murphy as the Witch, the talented Denis O'Hare as the Baker and Hollywood's Amy Adams venturing onto the stage as his wife. What could go wrong?

 **Colin Ferguson Shows Up At LA Premiere**

 **Spencer Matthews Talks About The Bachelor Winner Khloe**

MOST DISCUSSED RIGHT NOW

1 of 2

 **PETA: Rihanna And Lady Gaga Are 'Freaks'**

 **Legendary Songwriter Dies At 91**

HOT ON FACEBOOK


1 of 3

 **Celebs React To Eastwood's Wild SPEech**

 **When Can You See The Final 'Hobbit' Film?**

 HOT ON TWITTER

1 of 2

 **aol**  
In honor of Labor Day, here are some of TV's hardest workers  
<http://t.co/XTJytfGy> via @HuffPostTV  
[Retweet](#)

 **aol**  
Staying in this Labor Day Weekend? Here's what to watch on TV  
<http://t.co/Ygqtb4U6> via @HuffPostTV  
[Retweet](#)



[MORE BIG NEWS PAGES »](#)

Quite a bit actually. The scenic design by John Lee Beatty and Soutra Gilmour is a busy, heavy-handed tree fort that looks like something out of *Swiss Family Robinson*. I eyed it warily and the cast must have done the same. Entering and exiting the stage proved a laborious affair, with actors winding their way in and out of the roots of the tree, often visible by the audience long after their characters were meant to be out of sight. Sheader seemed to have no idea what to do with it all, jamming the cast onto a narrow stairway at one point, lining them up on another and generally making us feel the set was in the way rather than an organic part of the world we were in.

I assume the costumes nod to the British production since the punky look of the evil stepmother and her daughter and numerous other touches (like the garb of Little Red) have what I can only describe as a very distinctive British take on those tropes, a sensibility I've often found rather narrow and uninteresting. The costumer is actually Emily Rebholz who has done acclaimed work on *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson* and other shows and for all I know she never saw a single photo of the UK production but there you are. Even when the designs worked (such as the Witch's costume that made her seem half-tree), it's spoiled by a wig of dreadlocks by Leah Loukas that was far too much of a punchline for me. Ditto the huge pile of hair on Adams as the Baker's wife which didn't quite hint at the heightened reality of fairy tales but merely looked jokey. The puppetry by Rachael Canning for the giant and other bits was quite clever and effective.

In a subtle way, the most harmful choice of all was to frame the show by having a little boy fight with his father and then run away and spend the night in the woods. The story we see is really the made-up tale of that boy (an affable Jack Broderick). It's a small but devastatingly wrong-minded change. The boy takes some dolls in hand and starts telling the tale. But as little boys will, he seems to randomly add in touches of mayhem and destruction. The brilliance of *Into The Woods* was how Sondheim injected genuine emotion and real consequences for what we blithely dismissed as fairy tales. People die in fairy tales all the time but Sondheim forces us to confront that reality. When the Giant describes what Jack did to her family, how he betrayed their trust, stole from them and killed her husband, you have to admit she's got an excellent reason to want revenge.

But the little boy Narrator undercuts all that. A kid telling a made-up story might suddenly say, "And then Godzilla showed up and trampled the village to pieces!" and gleefully smash the toys around. That's a very different sensibility from Sondheim's desire to show these people not as puppets reenacting a fable but flesh and blood characters who can love and die and kill and grieve over all those actions. This show's framing device allows us to disconnect from all that -- it's just a story and their actions don't have consequences, they're just the whims of a boy.

Amidst all this wrong-headedness, we still have talented actors and a glorious score. The first act usually hurtles along to its breathless conclusion, so perfectly constructed it's one of the glories of musical theater. This production may sort of trudge along but that can't completely undercut the beauty and hummability of the songs. (The idea that Sondheim's scores don't deliver catchy melodies is patently absurd and anyone who sees this show and hums "Into the woods! Into the woods! Into the woods! I wish!" for days after can attest to it.)

O'Hare and Adams have nice chemistry as the childless Baker and his wife. Her voice is untutored but pleasant and she acts her way nicely through the part. Adams has presence and charm to spare, scoring especially when she gets to romp with one of the Princes (an amusing Ivan Hernandez). O'Hare stumbles a bit on his big solo number but the decision to cast a non-singer really hurts on the tune "No One Is Alone" with Jessie Mueller as Cinderella. That song is one of the most aching, lovely tunes imaginable. It was a daunting prospect to begin with for O'Hare, but the disastrous staging has him high up in a tree with Jack, miles away from Cinderella and completely out of her sight line. O'Hare must awkwardly do the best he can while Mueller (who scores very nicely in her role) tries her best to ease him along. Standing side by side it would have been hard for O'Hare but Sheader really shouldn't have thrown more obstacles in his way. It turns the emotional high point of the show into a flop.

Murphy is a pro as the Witch, having fun with the comic moments, plumbing the depths of emotion for the heartrending scenes and of course singing beautifully. She turns the 11 o'clock number "Last Midnight" (which is the one tune in the show I've never quite taken to heart; it wants too much to be an 11 o'clock number) into a peak. Conversely, I remember Gideon Glick fondly from *Wild Animals You Should Know* but he doesn't strike the right note as Jack. In many ways, Jack can be the driving character among this large cast; here he seems just one of many.

If there's a triumph, it's Sarah Stiles as Little Red, who has a blast with that giggly girl on the verge of puberty. Her every appearance is a welcome reminder of what this show can be: not family friendly fare as such, but a sophisticated, witty, sexy and real re-imagining of these characters from cardboard cut-outs to flesh and blood people. I've seen the Broadway revival, this open air production, smaller takes on it and heard for years about a potential feature film. None truly did the work justice. As for that ideal performance of *Into The Woods*, I'll continue to hope and say, "I wish!"

#### THE THEATER SEASON 2012-2013 (on a four star scale)

[As You Like it](#) (Shakespeare In The Park w Lily Rabe) \*\*\*\*

[Chimichangas And Zolof](#) \*

[Closer Than Ever](#) \*\*\*

[Cock](#) \*\* 1/2

[Harvey](#) with Jim Parsons \*

[My Children! My Africa!](#) \*\*\*\*

[Once On This Island](#) \*\*\*

[Potted Potter](#) \*

[Storefront Church](#) \*\* 1/2

[Title And Deed](#) \*\*\*

[Picture Incomplete](#) (NYMF) \*\*

[Flambe Dreams](#) (NYMF) \*\*

[Rio](#) (NYMF) \*\*

[The Two Month Rule](#) (NYMF) \*

[Trouble](#) (NYMF) \*\* 1/2

[Stealing Time](#) (NYMF) \*\*

[Requiem For A Lost Girl](#) (NYMF) \*\* 1/2

[Re-Animator The Musical](#) (NYMF) \*\*\*

[Baby Case](#) (NYMF) \*\* 1/2

[How Deep Is The Ocean](#) (NYMF) \*\* 1/2

[Central Avenue Breakdown](#) (NYMF) \*\*\*

[Foreverman](#) (NYMF) \* 1/2

[Swing State](#) (NYMF) \* 1/2

[Stand Tall: A Rock Musical](#) (NYMF) \* 1/2

[Living With Henry](#) (NYMF) \*

[A Letter To Harvey Milk](#) (NYMF) \*\* 1/2

[The Last Smoker In America](#) \*\*

[Gore Vidal's The Best Man](#) (w new cast) \*\*\*

[Into The Woods at Delacorte](#) \*\* 1/2

[Bring It On: The Musical](#) \*\*

[Bullet For Adolf](#) \*

[Harrison, TX: Three Plays by Horton Foote](#) \*\*\*

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of [Showbiz Sandbox](#), a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his [website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called [Popsurfing](#) and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and [gain](#) access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

**Note:** Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review.

Follow Michael Giltz on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz](https://www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz)

#### FOLLOW ENTERTAINMENT

Like 75k

GET ALERTS

[More in Entertainment...](#)

---

[Kellan Lutz On  
'Twilight': 'I Didn't  
Like...](#)

[Guy Pearce  
'Prometheus'  
Deleted Scene:  
'They Could...](#)

['The Hobbit: There  
And Back Again'  
Trilogy...](#)

[Anti-Obama  
Documentary '2016'  
Doing Well In  
Ohio...](#)

**Comments** 0 Pending Comments 0

[View FAQ](#)

## HuffPost Social News

**To reply to a Comment:** Click "Reply" at the bottom of the comment; after being approved your comment will appear directly underneath the comment you replied to.

[Preview Comment](#)

[Post Comment](#)

**Share your Comment:**

Post to Facebook.

Post to Blogger.

Post to Twitter.

Post to WordPress.

Post to TypePad.

Post to Tumblr.

View All

Recency | Popularity

[Advertise](#) | [Make HuffPost your Home Page](#) | [RSS](#) | [Careers](#) | [FAQ](#)

[User Agreement](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Comment Policy](#) | [About Us](#) | [About Our Ads](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Copyright © 2012 TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. | "The Huffington Post" is a registered trademark of TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. All rights reserved.

Part of **AOL-HuffPost Entertainment**