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Theater: "Hair" Back On Broadway; Hannibal Lecter Sings!

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HAIR *** out of ****
SILENCE! THE MUSICAL * 1/2

HAIR ***
ST. JAMES THEATRE

As the ads say, *Hair* is back on Broadway for the summer of love in a limited engagement. A seminal counter-culture movement used as a marketing hook? Groovy! What's striking about *Hair* on a second viewing in its current incarnation is how a show that was probably shocking and envelope-pushing at every moment when it was born (interracial sex, homosexuality, casual drug use, cross-dressers, anti-war,

full frontal nudity and on and on) feels so innocent and wholesome now.

It is directed by Diane Paulus, who managed to turn a dusty relic with only two truly outstanding musical numbers ("Aquarius" and "Let The Sun Shine In") into a fresh production with some depth and emotional heft. It began more than two years ago in Central Park. So it's no surprise that the current version playing through September feels exactly like what it is: the latest road version of a hit revival. Anyone who saw the original electric cast will find it lacking a bit. Anyone coming to it fresh will be able to appreciate how the show was spruced up and an eager, generally solid cast. If nothing else, it joins *Catch Me If You Can* as one of the sexiest shows on Broadway right now.

I actually avoided the show when it transferred to Broadway. I couldn't imagine the performance I saw in the ideal setting -- the middle of New York City under the stars -- could be improved on. But all the

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reviews insisted the show remained effective and they're right. The cast bursts through the exits from the street to begin act two, they cavort about as much as ever and if you're in an aisle seat, you can expect your hair to get tousled and toyed with repeatedly by the hippies. Interactive theater gives me the heebie-jeebies and the flower power aura of the show is far from my comfort zone. But you'd have to be a real stick in the mud not to loosen up a little. And it was worth it to see the senior citizen in front of me get into the spirit of things and start tossing flowers he was handed across the aisle and up and down the row with abandon, startling other theatergoers and amusing himself (and me) to no end.

It's a shame they didn't take this opportunity to cast the show with age appropriate actors. I think seeing actual teenagers would give their eager embrace of platitudes a new poignance and the harsh finale even more punch. But if you missed it and want to see what the fuss was about, *Hair* is still solid enough in its concept and execution to satisfy. Here's the original cast performing on David Letterman.

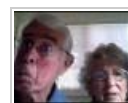
NOTE: *Hair* is staying true to its progressive spirit by working with **Broadway Impact**. The show spoke out in favor of basic rights for all Americans by championing marriage equality for gays and lesbians around the country. They'll demonstrate solidarity by hosting several gay marriages of members of the Broadway community onstage July 25 right after that night's performance. Cast members will also host a be-in to raise money for **Broadway Impact** (a group fighting for marriage equality for all citizens) at **Rockwood Music Hall on July 24**.

SILENCE! THE MUSICAL ** THEATRE 80

Context is everything. Stumbling upon a YouTube video that features a number from a proposed musical version of *The Silence Of The Lambs* was probably fresh and hysterical. Seeing the show mounted in an early form at the NYC Fringe Festival back in 2005 was worth a chuckle as well, making it a game showcase for some talented actors and the creative team.

But now *Silence! The Musical* has been around for six years, played in London and is mounted with a fine professional cast. Whatever modest possibilities the concept had have been thoroughly worked over; the joke has been done to death.

As in the movie, the man playing Hannibal steals the show. In this case, it's Broadway actor Brent Barrett who has delicious fun as the magnetic and ruthless killer. He delivers his numbers with aplomb and his lines with exceptional comedic flair. If there's any reason to seek this out, he's it. Jenn Harris is nearly his match as Clarice Starling, but her voice is far inferior, which may be the reason our heroine has so few songs to sing. A little less mugging would help, but she generally does a dead-on parody of Jodie Foster's Oscar-winning role. The other standout is Lucia Spina who plays both Buffalo Bill's latest victim and that woman's mother, a powerful Senator. If Jon and Al Kaplan (who did the music and lyrics) have a future in musicals, it's because of the number the Senator sings in her plea to Buffalo Bill, a song in which she repeats her daughter's name over and over to personalize his victim and make it harder for him to kill. The song is marvelously sung, very much in character, not "jokey" but very funny and also quite catchy. It



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moves the plot along as well, accomplishing everything a musical number should do.

That's about it. Most of the show is filled with songs that are unmemorable and poorly sung. (Though Deidre Goodwin has fun with her one brief moment in the spotlight and shows she indeed has some pipes too.) *The Book Of Mormon* and *Avenue Q* proved dirty songs can be funny and memorable. But being dirty isn't enough. Hearing Buffalo Bill sing "F--- me hard" isn't amusing in and of itself, unless you're 12 years old. Similarly, Clarice's father sings a pointless tune and it too has one joke about how boring it is to be dead. That joke is repeated again and again (and then *again* when it is reprised). Ditto for one of Hannibal Lecter's songs, which is amusing at first but leaned on once too often.

So *Silence! The Musical* has too many weak numbers with even good ones beaten to death in a show that wouldn't be better at 80 minutes but would at least provide a more pleasant evening rather than its current padded state of 2 hours. Sometimes a simple parody works just fine as that: a simple little parody done online via one or two songs. Very few skits on *Saturday Night Live* get turned into movies and most of the ones that do shouldn't have been. The same is true of musical parodies: a little goes a long way and a longer one ultimately offers very little. Here's the cast discussing what other movies they'd like to see turned into musicals.

The Theater Season 2011-2012 (on a four star scale)

All's Well That Ends Well/Shakespeare in the Park **

Broadway By The Year: 1997 ** 1/2

Hair ***

Master Class w Tyne Daly ** 1/2

Measure For Measure/Shakespeare in the Park ***

One Arm ***

Silence! The Musical * 1/2

Spiderman: Turn Off The Dark * 1/2

Unnatural Acts ***

Zarkana **

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 was provided with free tickets to these show with the understanding that he would be writing a review.

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