



T-Mobile myTouch. The T-Mobile myTouch® and myTouch® Q with a Genius Button® for easy-to-use voice commands. [LEARN MORE]

August 28, 2012

HUFF POST ENTERTAINMENT

Edition: U.S. ▾



Entertainment · Celebrity · TV · Political Hollywood · Features · Hollywood Buzz · Videos

THE BLOG

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

HOT ON THE BLOG

John Hillcoat
Harry Shearer

Sen. Ben Cardin
Jeffrey Sachs

HuffPost Social Reading



Michael Giltz

Freelance writer

GET UPDATES FROM MICHAEL GILTZ

Like 102

Theater: Hear This Loud and Clear -- Tribes One of Year's Best

Posted: 03/ 5/2012 4:48 pm

React > Inspiring Funny Hot Scary Outrageous Amazing Weird Crazy

Follow > Theater, Mare Winningham, Deaf, Deafness, Hearing Impaired, Mare-Winningham, Off-Broadway, Entertainment News

SHARE THIS STORY

4 22 0

0

Get Entertainment Alerts [Sign Up](#)

Submit this story

TRIBES *** 1/2 out of ****
BARROW STREET THEATRE

Nina Raine's new drama *Tribes* is unquestionably one of the best plays of the year. Even its flaws -- notably a second act overstuffed with some unnecessary plot twists -- feel like the flaws of an ambitious young playwright bursting with talent and something to say. It's the sort of talent that makes you listen very carefully.

"Listening" -- and the lack of it -- is exactly what *Tribes* is about. The show begins as a comic drama centering around a hyper-intellectual, Glass-like family. Dad Christopher (Jeff Perry) publishes dense literary criticism and is learning a Chinese language on the side. Son Daniel (Will Brill) is apparently recovering from some sort of mental breakdown and hears voices when

he isn't lambasting everyone else, including sister Ruth, who labors at an opera career by getting gigs in local pubs. Youngest brother Billy (Russell Harvard) is deaf and seemingly everyone's favorite even as he's off in a corner ignoring or oblivious to the torrent of words around him. Mom Beth (Mare Winningham) is the relatively sane center, yet even she is working on a detective novel without bothering to decide in advance whodunit.

But the least demonstrative family member takes center stage when Billy attends a party where he flirts with Sylvia (Susan Pourfar), a young woman who is going deaf. Billy has always resisted sign language, not to mention being drawn into the deaf community. With Sylvia as his entree, suddenly Billy feels at home like he never did before. His growing independence sends shock waves through the family. Billy plans to move out and then a new job as a lip reader for the court system gains him sudden attention in



T-Mobile myTouch. [LEARN MORE]

FOLLOW US

MOST POPULAR ON HUFFPOST 1 of 2

Isaac Balloons Into A Hurricane, New Orleans Threatened
Recommend 626

Limbaugh's Wild Isaac Conspiracy
Like 6k

GOP Candidate Compares Pregnancy From Rape To What?
Recommend 18k

MAP: Hurricane Isaac's Path Aims For Gulf Coast
Recommend 190

Sylvester Stallone's Half-Sister Dies At 48
Recommend 241

GOP Approves Abortion Ban
Recommend 7k

the media. Most dramatically of all, Billy decides he'll only communicate via sign, demanding the rest of his family finally learn the language if they want to speak with him.

This sends the fragile Daniel into a desperate spiral. Always wildly dependent on the younger Billy for solace, affection and attention, Daniel's childhood stutter returns, making it more and more difficult for him to communicate. The prickly father Christopher sees the demand to learn sign as an affront both to the family's upbringing of Billy and a dangerously isolating gesture. And Billy's girlfriend Sylvia finds herself placed in the awkward position of translator just as she's overwhelmed with the emotional fallout from a massive deterioration in hearing.

In other words, this is a rich work bursting with distinctive, funny and frustrating characters who surprise and move us repeatedly. The cast is marvelous throughout (despite modest British accents) and director David Cromer deserves to have as big a hit with this as he did with the landmark revival of *Our Town*.

He's staged the show in the round for this production. In the UK, Billy's isolation was highlighted by his literal isolation on the stage. Here, with the audience on all four sides, Billy seems more fully incorporated into the family. So it's only in retrospect we realize how much the conversation was bouncing over and around Billy; how often he had to say "What?" when some exchange slipped by him only to be told it didn't matter.

Staging the play in the round has other benefits because it heightens our awareness of listening. We're acutely reminded of this every time someone has their back to us but is speaking; with at least one character on stage who is deaf, it's a constant nudge to let us know we might be hearing what is being said but someone who needs to lip-read would be lost. The very detriment of staging in the round here becomes a positive; the usual frustration of knowing that we can't see an actor's face but that other members of the audience get a perfectly good view is an excellent subliminal underlining of the Billy's existence.

Judicious use of subtitles work well for some of the scenes heavy with signing -- especially when they're turned off. When Billy and Sylvia sign in front of his family and the dialogue isn't always flashed on the subtitle screen, we're shown what it's like for the family to suddenly feel cut off from what is being said. That of course is exactly what Billy experiences every day, a point driven home when a raging argument is suddenly depicted from his point of view and all we hear is a white noise buzz while Billy stands in a corner, the other actors mouthing bits of dialogue we'll never hear. This staging in the round is so successful, I'd almost never want to see it performed in a more traditional set-up, though that's how it debuted in the UK.

The especially important and effective sound design is by Daniel Kluger, who joins a great technical team, including Scott Pask's warm dining room set dominated by a table where the family gathers, spot-on costumes by Tristan Raines and lighting by Keith Parham that subtly echoes the isolation so many characters can feel.

The cast as mentioned is top-notch, taking parts that could easily go over-the-top and keeping them grounded. Will Brill has a tricky role as the flashy, unstable Daniel. If the play pounds home the message of communication too directly by having Daniel revert to stuttering, Brill keeps his fragility and neediness front and center. Russell Harvard is marvelous as Billy, reeling us in with his warmth and empathy and then throwing cold water on our perceptions with his righteous anger. Susan Pourfar has a marvelous turn as Sylvia -- her hearing degenerates throughout the show so Pourfar must subtly show that decline in her speaking voice without seeming too showy. Jeff Parry is always a marvelous presence on stage and delivers here as the aggressively intellectual father who pushes and pushes and pushes others and then is always surprised when they topple over or push back in anger. The other women have less interesting roles but make the most of them. Gayle Rankin scores amusing retorts as the middle sibling, often the one who gets lost in the shuffle. And Mare Winningham turns a secondary role into the stable heart of the family. Her warmth and conviction let you immediately understand why this rather dysfunctional family hasn't fallen apart already.

The script is loaded with such dramatic confrontations that the second act collapse of Daniel and Billy's subplot about problems with his new job feel quite unnecessary (and in the case of the job quite unmotivated). But those are modest reservations. This is a good play by Nina Raine given a great production that ends on a heartfelt, desperate note with two people trying to communicate even as the lights inexorably dim.

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

[The Agony And The Ecstasy Of Steve Jobs](#) ** 1/2

[All-American](#) **

[All's Well That Ends Well/Shakespeare in the Park](#) **

[Assistance](#) **



PHOTO: Christina Aguilera's 'Your Body' Dress Doesn't Leave Much To The Imagination

Like 175



PHOTOS: Katy Perry Tries Orange Hair

Like 84



The Most Awkward Wedding Photobombs

Like 617

DON'T MISS HUFFPOST BLOGGERS 1 of 8



John Hillcoat
[Lawless: Reinventing the Gangster](#)



Sen. Ben Cardin
[This Is No Way to Win an Election](#)

TOP VIDEO PICKS 1 of 8

Housewives' Clooney Connection



Christina Milian Is Excited For New Season Of American Idol and X Factor



Kelly Osbourne Tweets Rihanna In Defense Of Joan Rivers

MOST DISCUSSED RIGHT NOW 1 of 2



Samuel L. Jackson's Shocking Tweets About Isaac



Jon Voight Blasts Obama Administration, Mainstream Media

HOT ON FACEBOOK 1 of 3



Fact-Checking '2016 Obama's America'

WATCH: Raging Grannies Have Some Words For Todd Akin

[The Atmosphere Of Memory](#) 1/2 *
[Blood Knot](#) at Signature **
[Bob](#) *** 1/2
[Bonnie & Clyde](#) feature profile of [Jeremy Jordan](#)
[Broadway By The Year: 1997](#) ** 1/2
[Carrie](#) ** 1/2
[The Cherry Orchard](#) with [Dianne Wiest](#) **
[Chinglish](#) * 1/2
[Close Up Space](#) *
[Crane Story](#) **
[Cymbeline](#) at [Barrow Street Theatre](#) ***
[Dedalus Lounge](#) * 1/2
[Early Plays](#) (Eugene O'Neill at St. Ann's Warehouse) *
[Ernani](#) at Met w [Angela Meade](#) *** 1/2
[An Evening With Patti Lupone and Mandy Patinkin](#) ***
[Follies](#) *** 1/2
[Fragments](#) ***
[Galileo](#) with [F. Murray Abraham](#) **
[The Gershwins' Porgy And Bess](#) *** 1/2
[Godspell](#) ** 1/2
[Goodbar](#) * 1/2
[Hair](#) ***
[Hand To God](#) ***
[Hero: The Musical](#) * 1/2
[How The World Began](#) * 1/2
[Hugh Jackman: Back On Broadway](#) ***
[Irving Berlin's White Christmas](#) ***
[It's Always Right Now, Until It's Later](#) *** 1/2
[King Lear](#) at [Public](#) with [Sam Waterston](#) **
[Krapp's Last Tape](#) with [John Hurt](#) ***
[Lake Water](#) **
[Leo](#) ***
[Love's Labor's Lost](#) at the [PublicLab](#) ** 1/2
[Lysistrata Jones](#) *
[Man And Boy](#) * 1/2
[The Man Who Came To Dinner](#) **
[Maple And Vine](#) **
[Master Class w Tyne Daly](#) ** 1/2
[Measure For Measure/Shakespeare in the Park](#) ***
[Milk Like Sugar](#) ***
[Mission Drift](#) * 1/2
[Misterman](#) ** 1/2
[The Mountaintop](#) ** 1/2
[Newsies](#) **
[Pigpen's The Nightmare Story](#) *** 1/2
[Once](#) *** 1/2
[Olive and The Bitter Herbs](#) ** 1/2
[On A Clear Day You Can See Forever](#) * 1/2
[One Arm](#) ***
[Other Desert Cities](#) on Broadway ** 1/2
[Private Lives](#) **
[Queen Of The Mist](#) ** 1/2
[Radio City Christmas Spectacular](#) ** 1/2
[Relatively Speaking](#) * 1/2
[Richard III](#) w [Kevin Spacey](#) at [BAM](#) ***
[The Road To Mecca](#) ** 1/2
[Samuel & Alasdair: A Personal History Of The Robot War](#) ** 1/2
[The Select \(The Sun Also Rises\)](#) ** 1/2
[Seminar](#) **
[Septimus & Clarissa](#) *** 1/2
[Shlemiel The First](#) ** 1/2
[Silence! The Musical](#) * 1/2
[69 Degrees South](#) * 1/2
[Song From The Uproar](#) **
[Sons Of The Prophet](#) *** 1/2
[Sontag: Reborn](#) *



HOT ON TWITTER

1 of 2



[alyssa_milano](#)

Sleep Better: How To Use All Your Senses To Promote Sleep

<http://t.co/1UxSV5oG> /via @heykim

[Retweet](#)



[pattonoswalt](#)

Oh man. Gorgeous, touching obituary for Tony Scott by @KevinFCorrigan. This one's a gut-punch: <http://t.co/ajVp7K1L>

[Retweet](#)

Sponsored Links



Woman is 57 But Looks 27

Long Island City Mom publishes simple facelift trick that angered doctors...
[ConsumerLifestyles.org](#)



What is Scientology?

Think For Yourself and Find Out For Yourself.
[Scientology.org/What_Is_Scientology](#)

Car Sharing New York City

Find Zipcars In NYC. Get \$75 Free Driving, Join Today.
[zipcar.com](#)

[Buy a link here](#)

HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES



[Snooki](#)



[Smoking](#)



[Ask The Parent Coach](#)



[Elections 2012](#)



[Rachel Maddow](#)



[Mitt Romney 2012](#)



[Ann Romney](#)



[Natural Disasters](#)



[Nikki Haley](#)

[MORE BIG NEWS PAGES »](#)

Spiderman: Turn Off The Dark * 1/2
Standing On Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays **
Stick Fly **
The Submission **
Super Night Shot ** 1/2
Sweet and Sad **
The Table ** 1/2
Titus Andronicus at Public with Jay O. Sanders * 1/2
Tribes *** 1/2
The Ugly One **
Unnatural Acts ***
Venus In Fur ***
We Live Here **
Wild Animals You Should Know ** 1/2
Wit ** 1/2
Zarkana **

NEW YORK MUSICAL THEATRE FESTIVAL 2011

Blanche: The Bittersweet Life Of A Wild Prairie Dame *** 1/2
Central Avenue Breakdown ** 1/2
Crazy, Just Like Me ***
Cyclops: A Rock Opera *
Ennio: The Living Paper Cartoon ** 1/2
F---ing Hipsters **
Ghostlight **
Gotta Getta Girl ** 1/2 for staged reading
Greenwood *
Jack Perry Is Alive (And Dating) * 1/2
Kiki Baby ** 1/2
Kissless * 1/2
Madame X **
The Pigeon Boys ***
Time Between Us * 1/2
Tut **

FRINGEFEST NYC 2011

Araby *
The Bardy Bunch **
Books On Tape ** 1/2
Civilian **
Hard Travelin' With Woody ***
Leonard Cohen Koans *** 1/2
The More Loving One **
The Mountain Song *** 1/2
Paper Cuts ***
Parker & Dizzy's Fabulous Journey To The End Of The Rainbow ** 1/2
Pearl's Gone Blue ***
Rachel Calof ** 1/2
Romeo & Juliet: Choose Your Own Ending **
2 Burn * 1/2
Walls and Bridges **
What The Sparrow Said ** 1/2
Yeast Nation ***

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

Sponsored Links

New Policy in New York

March 2012-Drivers w/ no DUIs may qualify for \$9/week car insurance...
TheFinanceAuthority.com



Joint Relief For Ages 55+

Over 1 million people found relief with this secret! Now in New York
www.everydaylifestyles.com

Trying to Lose Weight?

Weight Watchers Online for Men: No food is off limits ever-Learn more.
<http://www.weightwatchers.com/men>

Edmunds™ – Official Site

Begin Your Car Search With Edmunds. Research, Reviews, Prices and More
www.Edmunds.com

[Buy a link here](#)

Related News On Huffington Post:



'Tribes,' Off-Broadway Play, Tells Story Of A Deaf Son Struggling To Be Heard

NEW YORK — A family dinner in the beginning of Nina Raine's "Tribes" tells the audience all it needs to know about the crisis of...

[More in Entertainment...](#)

Robin Williams As
Dwight D.
Eisenhower In...

Fall Movie Preview
2012: 'The Hobbit,'
'Django...

Lynyrd Skynyrd's
RNC Gig Canceled
Amid Hurricane...

'2016: Obama's
America' Fact-
Check

Comments

0

Pending Comments

0

[View FAQ](#)

Comments are closed for this entry

View All

Recency | Popularity

[Advertise](#) | [Log In](#) | [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