

LOG IN | SIGN UP

Google Custom Search SEARCH



JULY 21, 2009

- HOME
- POLITICS
- MEDIA
- BUSINESS
- ENTERTAINMENT
- LIVING
- STYLE
- GREEN
- WORLD
- COMEDY 23/6
- NEW YORK
- CHICAGO
- VIDEO
- BLOGGER INDEX
- ARCHIVE
- Get Email Alerts
- Make HuffPost Your HomePage



Stephen Baldwin Files For Bankruptcy 'Criminal Aspects' Probed In Cost Of Jackson Memorial

PHOTOS: Hollywood's Hottest Older Men: Better With Age? (POLL)



Michael Giltz
 Freelance writer and raconteur
 Posted: June 24, 2009 04:52 PM

- BIO
- Get Email Alerts
- Become a Fan
- Bloggers' Index

Theater: London Summer Roundup



Read More: [A Little Night Music](#), [Ben Brantley](#), [Cannes Film Festival](#), [Disney](#), [New York Times](#), [Peter Pan](#), [The National](#), [War Horse](#), [West End](#), [Woody Allen](#), [Entertainment News](#)

Google Custom Search

Buzz up! Be the First to Submit This Story to Digg

Get Breaking News Alerts

never spam

Share Print Comments

Before and after the Cannes Film Festival I spent some time in London catching up on theater and museums. Here's a roundup of what I saw, beginning with the shows that are still running so if you're headed to Europe you can act on some of these suggestions. Other shows -- like the revival of *A Little Night Music* and probably *War Horse* -- are headed to NYC in the future. Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* offers **his own take on the London theater scene here**. But he saw his shows for free while I am indebted to the Leslie Giltz Foundation for subsidizing my days

in the West End.

WAR HORSE *** (out of four) -- **Michael Morpurgo's** beloved young adult novel -- the story of a farm dragoon into WWI and told from the horse's perspective a la *Black Beauty* -- is now a smash hit musical that began at the National and **is ensconced in the West End**. It's an ideal second show to take children who were wowed by *The Lion King*. Like that show, *War Horse* makes brilliant use of puppetry to let the horse take center stage. (You can check out **the promotional clip here** to get a glimpse of how they do it.) Joey is the horse and Albert is the farm lad who befriends him. Kit Harrington makes his debut as Albert and I'm not certain if he's a major new talent or just ideally suited for this particular role, but he's wonderfully understated as the rough, simple but sweet kid who is devastated to find his dad has sold the horse to the military and joins up just so he can find Joey and bring the animal home safely. While definitely a family show, it's not very the very young or the easily upset because you do see battle scenes and death. (As with most audiences, the kids I saw it with barely murmured while men in the trenches died but were visibly moved when one of the horses is injured or killed.) Well into it's run, the show is in solid shape, with the puppetry excellent and the cast solid. Songs from the period serve as a Greek chorus and there's no softening of Albert's drunken loser of a father. But by and large it's a charming tale of a

YOUR VOTE
 could decide our \$10,000 winner.

View videos + vote

People.com

- Pals: Mischa Barton Struggled with Body Issues [READ MORE](#)
- Hailey Glassman Gushes over Jon Gosselin [READ MORE](#)
- Demi Lovato and Trace Cyrus Split [READ MORE](#)

More Celebrity News at People.com

Popular Stories on HuffPost

- Nude In NY: Where To Strut With No Stuff (NSFW PHOTOS, POLL)
Believe it or not getting nude in NY isn't such a hard feat. There are...
- UPDATE: 'Sprite Oral Sex Ad' Was Unauthorized (VIDEO)
UPDATE 5:00 PM ET The director of the fake Sprite ad, Max Issacson, has sent...

spirited animal amidst the chaos of war. Any kids entranced by the show should enjoy Morpurgo's novel. But the nominal sequel -- Farm Boy -- is little more than a longish short story fleshed out with drawings and not terribly interesting at any length. It's in an open-ended run.

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC *** 1/2 (out of four) -- The Chocolate Factory had a major success with their revival of Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday In The Park With George* and lightning has struck twice with *A Little Night Music*. While many consider My Fair Lady the greatest musical of all, there are those who would argue that Night Music is a perfect one. Every tune is in 3/4 time and those more sophisticated than I delight in how each piece of the puzzle plays off one another musically. The story is inspired by Bergman's *Smiles Of A Symmer Night* (which also inspired Woody Allen's *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*). Lovers meet at a country estate, complications ensue, true love triumphs and wisdom is earned. The cast is superlative and apparently will NOT be crossing the pond when the show transfers to NYC. (I'll especially miss Gabriel Vick as the young lover Henrik -- he looks like the younger brother of Campbell Scott and the major discovery Hannah Waddingham, who is famous in her own country but new to most of us.) And of course there's the music: "Now," "You Must Meet My Wife," "Every Day A Little Death," "Night Waltz" and of course "Send In The Clowns." Each tune is a delight and delivered with aplomb. Nothing terribly bad could happen in such a witty, enchanting world and yet everything seems at stake when love is at issue. I missed the recent one-night benefit concert production of this show in NYC but now I don't regret it so much. This production was an excellent way to see this show for the first time. They've just extended the run again through September.

ENGLAND PEOPLE VERY NICE *** (out of four) -- The National has a remarkable subsidized program where many of their shows have most seats (including some of the best) available for 10 pounds. At that price, literally ANYTHING they're producing is worth checking out. It's cheaper than a movie ticket and these are not bare-boned readings but fully staged shows with -- often -- large casts that would make them impossible to produce commercially on the West End. Case in point: *England People Very Nice*, a shambling play about immigration. If I'd paid 60 pounds, I might be less ready to appreciate the virtues of this show by Richard Bean. But when you're not selling a pint of blood to see a show, it's easier to accept the pretty good rather than being disappointed at not seeing great. Certainly ambitious, it covers the fate of immigrants to the UK from the 1500s to the present and is framed as the production of immigrants today being held in detention while they wait to hear whether their requests for asylum have been granted. At first, it's rather sketchy, with wves of French and then Jews and then Irish and Indians and so on all coming to England, only to be greeted with disdain by the matron of a pub who invariably begins a scene with, "Fucking Micks!" Or "fucking Paki's" or whichever insulting term is available. The joke of course is that each new wave gets assimilated only to treat with anger and annoyance the *next* group of immigrants. Real details are sometimes remarkable: one house of worship has apparently changed hands from the Catholics to the Jews to the Muslims. It feels a bit too schematic at first, but as the years pass and we zero in on the struggles of particular families in the present, the story gains a little weight (one recurring bit has two lovers kept apart throughout the centuries as they reincarnate into new bodies). A Greek chorus of a band does an admirable job of offering up a wide range of ethnic tunes and the large fine cast turns the broad brush strokes of the story into sometimes specific and moving moments. Ambitious, fitfully amusing and -- for 10 pounds -- quite the bargain. The show currently runs through early August.

PETER PAN (no rating) -- I saw this *new production of Peter Pan* on the very first night of its run, so it wouldn't be fair to give a genuine rating. I'll just offer up a description so you know what to expect. Personally, I love the novel *Peter Pan* by JM Barrie. I know it began as a play but the novel is where it reached its greatest realization. Children can enjoy it, of course, but adults who read it will laugh with rueful pleasure and be deeply moved by the end. Almost no stage or film version has ever come within a mile of its sophisticated scope, except for a Mabou Mines production involving one live actress playing Wendy and puppetry for all the other roles that is one of the best nights of theater in my life. The Disney animated film has cheap animation and dreadful songs, the standard theatrical version is too kiddie-ish (with the odd tradition of a woman playing Peter a terrible conceit) and this new production is no exception. It's very much in the panto tradition with a few twists: there's lots of wire work and a nifty 360 degree screen circling the crowd to give the audience the sensation of watching the characters fly across London to Neverland. Unfortunately, the design of the images is rather cartoonish and nondescript (I don't mind critiquing it because that surely can't change during the run.) The effect works well but the images are too pedestrian to really let your imagination take flight. What made this show irresistible in concept was the fact that it's actually staged IN Kensington Garden under a giant tent. The actual show is very conventional. Ciaran Kellgren is developing a fine Peter, Jonathan Hyde was admirably restrained as Mr. Darling and Captain Hook while Karen Ascoe was already

They Played Presidents: Who Was Believable? (PHOTOS, POLL)

Whether playing a fictional head of state or a real-life US president,...

John Lundberg Sarah Palin, The Anti-Poet

Watching Sarah Palin resign the other week, I remembered how frustrating it is to listen to her speak.

Shannyn Moore It's Not Sarah's Fault...Just Ask Her

When it comes to taking responsibility for her failures, Sarah Palin is...

Therese Borchard 4 Ways To Get Past Cold Feet (Or Any Kind Of Anxiety)

Fresh Living blogger Holly Lebowitz Rossi recently wrote...

Governor X: Call Girl Says She Worked With Another Married Pol

An escort who was hired by Eliot Spitzer claims to have worked with another...

Brian Kilmeade Apologizes For Racist "Pure Species" Comment

Brian Kilmeade apologized Monday for controversial comments he made on the July...

Obama Family Returns From Camp David On Sunday In Mid-Summer Style (PHOTOS)

The first family spent the weekend at Camp David, and when...

Sarah Jessica Parker And Matthew Broderick's Night Out After Babies (PHOTOS)

New parents Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew...

Colbert Mocks Conservative Pundits For Claims Of Reverse Racism; Calls Buchanan A 'Reverse Civil Rights Leader' (VIDEO)

Stephen...

Iran Uprising Blogging: Latest Updates

I'm liveblogging the latest Iran election fallout. Email me with any news or thoughts, or follow me...

Tiny Drizzle Wreaks Havoc In Desert City SANTIAGO, Chile — In one of the driest regions

mining emotional gold out of her small role as Mrs. Darling. Still, it all plays as very very typical, though parents with small children will find it painless. Two tips: one, leave a lot of time to get there since it's NOT located near the actualy Kensington Gardens by the tourist site that you (or at least I) might expect and the park itself is huge so unless you get out at the right subway stop, it can take ages to figure out exactly where it is; two, book seats not down front but in the middle rows about four or five rows back from the front for the best views. You don't want to be at the top or the bottom, but in the middle for this in-the-round production. The show is currently set to run through August.

THE CONTINGENCY PLAN: ON THE BEACH *** (out of four) -- **The Bush Theatre** is a tiny space a bit out of the way and always a dependable source of intriguing work by new playwrights. Their most recent production was *The Contingency Plan*, two plays by Steve Waters nominally linked to global warming. I saw nominally because while global warming does in fact dominate the proceedings, it's not really "about" global warming just as no really good play is about the issues it addresses but in fact uses those issues to illuminate characters and the human heart. In *On The Beach*, an old couple lives in an out of the way home on the coast and are surprised by the sudden return of their son from his work in the Antarctic and the even more sudden appearance of a girlfriend/fiance when he's never had so much as a date in the past. The son is continuing his father's work but in fact we realize his discoveries have undermined pop's lifelong conclusions about global warming. If there's a problem here dramatically, it's that we soon realize the son has *confirmed* pop's suspicions about global warming, all of which were suppressed at the time by ambitious colleagues in a manner that undermined him to the point of mental collapse and cutting himself off from the world. Act One conveys everything beautifully and when it ended I had an uncomfortable feeling. Surely I knew everything I needed to know about these people? The play felt complete and yet there was another act to go. You get this feeling every once in a while and indeed Act Two was utterly unnecessary, with a dramatic storm looming with symbolic purpose and the aging parents working out their feelings and generally seeing the show spin its wheels. it didn't quite undermine the accomplishments of the first half, just showed how sometimes enough is enough. Still, the four member cast was very strong, especially Robin Soanes as the father. *Time Out London* singled out the other play, in which the son joins the government to try and affect policy, as the stronger of the two so I'm even sorrier I didn't catch it. However, there was a bonus to seeing only this show: It begins with the dad playing a cassette tape of Neil Young's *On The Beach*, a long lost album by the prolific Canadian that he disavowed for many years but which critics have increasingly mentioned as one of his best. I even owned the recent reissue but hadn't found the time to give it a go. Hearing two or so tunes during this show -- not to mention the dad arguing for its brilliance -- whetted my appetite and now I can't stop playing the CD. It really has a shambling greatness akin to his best "quiet" work like *Harvest* and *Harvest Moon*. As far as soundtracks go for the end of the world, this one's a corker. Unfortunately, the environment isn't the only thing in danger: the Bush Theatre is being threatened with eviction (and in this economy) after years of basically getting a rent-free space above a pub that probably is useless to anyone else. They deserve support and really can't exist without subsidized housing, so go to their plays or visit their gift shop or support them in any way you can.

DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN *** 1/2 (out of four) -- Another remarkably inexpensive production at **the National** (only 10 pounds) and this one of a classic play by Wole Soyinka I'd never seen before. In it, the king has been dead for one month and it's time for his Horseman, Elesie (Nonso Anozie) to commit suicide and join him in the afterlife. Set during WW II (those based on events that took place shortly after the war ended), the tension arises when the British colonials in power discover the plan and arrest Elesie to prevent him from performing such a barbaric act. Though filled with humor and satire (the British colonials are played to devastatingly funny effect by black actors in white face), the play has the reach of a Greek tragedy as all the events tumble on top of one another in one terrible night. The women of the marketplace are the Greek chorus, deriding the black locals who work for the British, praising Elesie, demanding the traditions be observed and so on, often with delightful banter and captivating songs. And the arrival of Elesie's son (who has been "kidnapped" culturally by the British and gone to the UK to study and become a doctor) has an unexpected impact. (I thought I knew where the play was headed but was wrong.) I don't know how much of the staging and devices employed here are original or the traditional approach to this play, but it was excellent nonetheless. It so happened that I read China Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* just after seeing this and it's the perfect companion piece for another devastating look at colonialism. This production has ended and is probably too expensive to travel to the West End or the US, which is one more reason why you

	on earth, even a drizzle can cause an emergency. Less...
	Walter Breuning: Montana Resident Becomes World's Oldest Man GREAT FALLS, Mont. — Walter Breuning learned to read...
	Roubini: Economic Recovery To Be 'Very Ugly' Nouriel Roubini, the economist whose dire forecasts earned him the nickname...

HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES

Lindsay Lohan	Video	Michael Jackson
Cars	Transparency	iPhone
Religion	Iraq	Sarah Palin

[MORE BIG NEWS PAGES](#)

Books by this author

This Blogger's Books from **amazon.com.**

On the ball: with his new play All That I Will Ever Be, a post-Six Feet Under Alan Ball proves there's life after death. (THEATER): An article from: The ... (The national gay & lesbian newsmagazine)
by Michael Giltz

A cabin of one's own: New England's MacDowell Colony celebrates 100 years of artistic utopia. And the gay and lesbian artists who prospered there celebrate ... (The national gay & lesbian newsmagazine)
by Michael Giltz

should always go to the National when in London and see whatever you can there.

More in Entertainment...

Tyler Perry Treats 65 Swimming Pool Excluded...	Sarah Jessica Parker And Matthew Broderick's Night...	Tom Cruise And Kids Join Beckham Family...	Samantha Ronson Throws Lindsay Lohan's Clothes Into...
---	---	--	---

digg™ HuffPost Stories Surging Right Now

142 diggs digg it	Obama Calls On Bloggers To Keep Health Care Pressure On Congress	21 diggs digg it	Palin Implicated In Ethics Probe
54 diggs digg it	Internal RNC Memo: "Engage In Every Activity" To Slow Down Health Care Reform	30 diggs digg it	Jeff Sharlet Reveals Disturbing Details About Conservative "C Street House" Organization On Rachel Maddow Show (VIDEO)

Ads by Google

Tickets To Broadway Shows
Wicked, Hair, Jersey Boys & More Get great seats now at Broadway.com www.Broadway.com

Buy Broadway Tickets
Why Gamble? 21 Years In Business. Online 24/7 or Call 1-800-243-8849 www.PrestigeEntertainment.com

London Theatre Tickets
Mamma Mia, Lion King, Dirty Dancing Billy Elliot, Jersey Boys and more. www.londontheatreboxoffice.com

Comments 0 Pending Comments 0

[FAQ: Comments & Moderation](#) [FAQ: HuffPost Accounts](#)

Post a Comment [Get the HuffPost iPhone App.](#)

Want to reply to a comment? Hint: Click "Reply" at the bottom of the comment; after being approved your comment will appear directly underneath the comment you replied to

View Comments: [Newest](#) [Expand](#)
[First](#) [All](#)

You must be **logged in** to reply to this comment. [Log in](#) or

Ads by Google

Wicked Theatre Tickets
Wicked Broadway Tickets - Cheap. Check Our Prices. Save 10% Or More. Wicked.TicketLiquidator.com

Google™ Custom Search

