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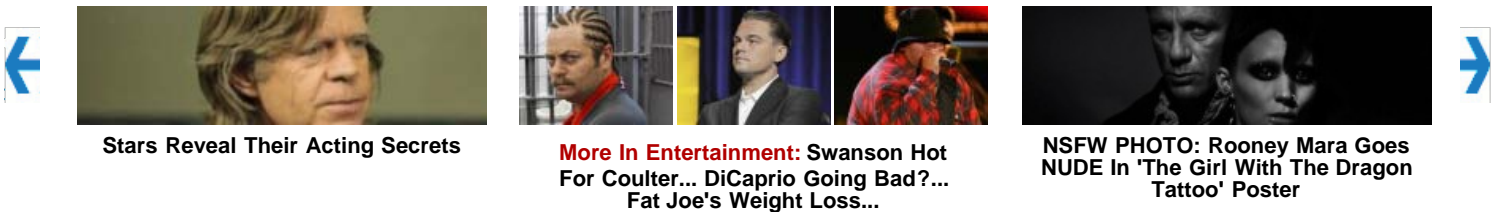
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Michael Giltz
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Theater: Rupert Everett Grows His Way Through *Pygmalion*

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PYGMALION ** out of ****
LORD OF THE FLIES * 1/2 out of ****
OPERATION GREENFIELD ** 1/2 out of ****

PYGMALION ** out of ****

Has another great play ever been so strongly eclipsed by a musical version? *Pygmalion* is one of Bernard Shaw's best works, but it is clearly in the shadow of *My Fair Lady*, one of the greatest musicals of all time. It's lovely to revisit this comic romance sans music; but it's a shame they didn't come up with any particular reason for doing so.

Rupert Everett is certainly spot-on casting as the world's most famous confirmed bachelor, that woman-hating linguist Professor Henry Higgins. He and new friend Pickering spot a ragged flower girl with atrocious grammar one evening. Higgins vows to improve her speech and manners so much that in six months time she could pass for a duchess at an ambassador's ball. By George, I think he'll do it.

The set design is particularly unattractive and the direction quite dull. (Often, actors merely stand or sit at opposite ends of the stage and talk to each other.) Both are unfortunately credited to Philip Prowse who has worked in Glasgow theater for decades.

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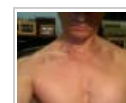


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This production opened on the road and then recast its Eliza Doolittle with one-time *Eastenders* star Kara Tointon. She is too broad as the guttersnipe and not refined enough as the reborn swan, though Tointon certainly has the loveliness down pat. The one scene in which she shines is the show's best moment: her first outing as a lady where Eliza keeps saying "How do you do?" with exaggerated elan.

Without a proper foil, the dependable Everett is a bit adrift, barking and sniping in a show far more serious and dark than the one at hand. Even the great Diana Rigg can do little here, though she does it with charm. Only Peter Eyre puts a stamp on Pickering, playing the role with subdued dignity and a voice so sonorous and lovely it makes the rest of us sound like Cockney layabouts.

LORD OF THE FLIES * 1/2 out of ****

The **Regents Park Open Air Theatre** is akin to New York's Shakespeare in the Park, a novel way to experience theater. New artistic director Timothy Sheader has smartly expanded the reach of the theater by programming more adventurous fare. It doesn't always work, but the gambit will make this venue healthier in the long run.

I'm simply not a fan of *Lord Of The Flies* in any of its forms. The story is so blunt and obvious as parable that the fun is taken out, though it does make it catnip for teachers who want a short book their students might actually read. The tale depicts British schoolboys crash-landed on an island. Decent folk would expect these lads to pull together and be sensible. Surely they'll care for the little ones and stay safe while waiting for rescue? Instead, the little beasties soon degenerate into savagery. This was a revelation once upon a time, apparently, though anyone who's ever watched little kids at play should know they can be casually cruel to one another.

This adaptation by Nigel Williams has a few good ideas, mainly adding in some evocative dance and choreography. They should have gone further and treated the story as pure myth and ritual. The lads -- led by handsome young Alistair Toovey -- give their all, but to no avail. It doesn't help that this story in particular should go barreling towards its conclusion in about 80 minutes, not pause for a 20-minute break. Tech credits however are superb. You walk into the theater and say, "Wow, what an amazing set!" thanks to smoke and wreckage that makes the stage look like the opening scene of TV's *Lost*, complete with a plane snapped in two. Unfortunately, you leave with the same thought, "what an amazing set." That is never a good sign, though full credit to designer Jon Bausor.

OPERATION GREENFIELD ** 1/2 out of ****

Little Bulb Theatre is a small company that's proving adept at both unique theatrical offerings and gaining attention for them, both key elements to survival in fringe theater. They are certainly one to watch.

Their latest show is *Operation Greenfield at Soho Theatre*. It's a goofy little tale about four kids growing up in a small town in England who form a Christian rock group to compete in the local battle of the bands contest. The script boasts a number of ideas, none of them fully developed. Music as life-changing experience has its fullest treatment when they unexpectedly dive into a David Bowie tune and have their minds blown; it is the show's most theatrical and satisfying moment. However, they soon retreat to calmer musical waters. Music as dangerous gateway to experimentation gets brief tryouts thanks to one band member being tempted by cigarettes and two of the girls suddenly making out. This too goes



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nowhere and is never mentioned again, really. Even religion barely merits a passing comment.

Mostly, the piece is a showcase for its four performers (three women and one man), all of whom have amusing moments. At times, they play "children" for laughs, rather than specific characters. Happily, they're quite funny at it. The battle of the bands climax is very satisfying and brings the show to a perfect conclusion...which they then spoil by performing another very out of character musical number that just drags out the ending. The real star here is director Alexander Scott who keeps things moving briskly and inventively throughout.

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 shows with the understanding that he would be writing a review.

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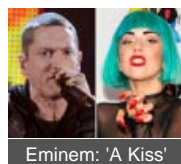
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