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HARRY CLARKE ** 1/2 out of ****

PETER PAN * 1/2 out of ****

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS * out of ****

HARRY CLARKE ** 1/2 out of ****

VINEYARD THEATRE

Who is Harry Clarke? Why, he's the alter ego or imaginary best friend or splintered personality of Philip Brugglestein! And who is Philip Brugglestein? Why, he's a kid growing up in the heartland of America, driving his dad bonkers by speaking with a British accent, even though no one in their family has even visited Europe! (Who does this kid think he is, Edwin Hubble?) And why is Philip talking to us from what looks like a patio deck by the water? Not to worry, all your questions will be answered but more will be raised by this dodgy if appealing man.

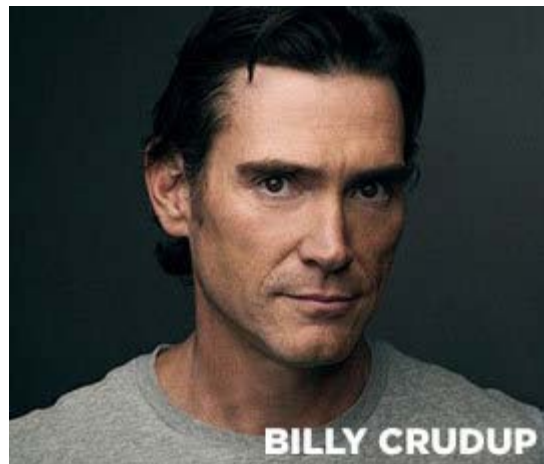
An unreliable narrator can be great fun, teasing out contradictions, leaving you to second guess your assumptions at every turn. Or in this case an unreliable narrator can frustrate you, leaving an audience wondering exactly what was intended and whether or not they should care.

Billy Crudup holds the stage in this one-person show with his usual magnetic stage presence, ably shifting through multiple accents and characters with aplomb. Philip may be a slippery fellow but he's good, sexy fun and Crudup's mastery of the material is the main drawing card of this ultimately unsatisfying work. As a plus for Crudup, Philip is only *affecting* a British accent so there's no point in questioning how good Crudup is at doing Cockney or posh or gliding back and forth between the two. He's certainly good enough to get by and that's all we need to believe.

The tone is confessional, with Philip explaining how he's always been good at British accents. A quick story sets this up nicely. Philip's father was trying to shoot a home movie and gets furious when his son

sounds like Little Lord Fauntleroy. Immediately we hear his parents fighting bitterly, Philip refusing to change how he talks and — once the folks are out of the way — revealing to the camera a new “character” Philip has created: Harry Clarke. Philip is shy and timid (he may be stubborn in sticking with a British accent but he’s bullied for it by the other kids, naturally). But the brash and forthright Harry Clarke sees what he wants and goes for it.

In the blink of an eye, Philip has moved to New York City, told everyone he meets that he really is British and never, never drops his story for a moment. (When he does try telling the truth to one friend, it does *not* go well. Philip will never make that mistake again.) One day he impulsively follows a man down the street and overhears the guy’s conversation. When they inadvertently meet at a play a few weeks later, Philip even more impulsively claims to be the cockney Harry Clarke, tour manager for Sade (!) and a dangerously fun bloke to be around. His new friend turns out to be wealthy and sexually confused, with a shy sister looking to break into music and before you know it Philip/Harry is vacationing on yachts, sleeping with multiple members of this wealthy family and wondering exactly what he’s got himself into.



That’s the problem with Cale’s play. We barely know what drives Philip when we’re plunged into the varied conflicts of his new friends. This is obviously noir territory, making Philip/Harry a cousin to Patricia Highsmith’s Ripley, the coolly opportunistic fellow who befriends and kills wherever he goes. Ripley is an astonishingly compelling vacuum of a person. Philip on the other hand *could* be a compelling mess. But we know essentially one thing about him — he adopted a British accent as a little boy. Of course that’s a pretty fascinating fact, hinting at a deep unease with who he is, his family, perhaps his sexuality and more. Yet unlike Ripley, Philip constantly questions what he’s doing, seems harmless (for a while) and yearns or at least wants to believe he won’t interfere with the lives of people around him. Or so he likes to tell himself.

We are not to take Philip at his word, needless to say. Yet Ripley’s amorality is fascinating. Philip’s self-delusion however isn’t nearly as interesting — and casually mentioning that his DVD collection contains a lot of film noir isn’t quite enough of a clue to get the blood pumping. What we’re left with is a non-mystery

perpetuated by a self-deluding if amiable fellow who doesn't quite mean anyone harm or to profit from his manipulations, even if that's precisely what he seems to do. Oops! An accidental criminal mastermind? Turns out that's not nearly as fun as the intentional kind.

You can't help wondering how far Philip will go with his (double) charade. But that's not nearly as interesting as what might be driving Philip from childhood on. Is Harry Clarke just a persona? Or is Philip mentally ill? Is Philip gay, bisexual or just sexually opportunistic? Is he a miserably unhappy person or finally revealing his true nature?

This dramatically inert tale is enlivened considerably by Crudup's cheerfully engaging, technically impressive performance — one supported by director Leigh Silverman's supportive eye and the technical team. He navigated two sound miscues on the night I attended (just brief but disconcerting "pops"), never missing a beat. Crudup is especially good when Philip is conflicted over his desires. Those internal struggles are about the only real drama in the show so it's a shame they are passingly brief. All we're left with is an explanation for the set we've been staring at all night long. (It drove me bonkers and there's no real reason it shouldn't have been explained at the start, assuming I didn't miss it.) I wanted to know Philip better but he doesn't know himself and learning more was sadly the last thing on Cole's mind.

NOTE: The show is being recorded by Audible and will be available as a digital download in January. So anyone who can't make it to the Vineyard will have a chance to hear Billy Crudup's performance. It's a canny move and this show in particular will be well suited to an audio only version. Here's hoping it succeeds and other new shows become available as radio plays too. Why not when you've got the cast at hand and a quick rewrite will easily turn most plays into compelling radio plays as well. Unlike filmed recordings of shows, they needn't just be a document of what took place but a wholly satisfying new life for a piece.

Sadly, while they usually make very much out of very little, here they make very little out of very much. The ideas are many, all under-developed and over-used. A voice-over narrator offers some commentary, but this conceit leads nowhere. They toss in all sorts of recorded music. They spray one another with hoses. They have what amounts to an elaborate set by Bedlam standards which looks like a ship of sorts, the sort of ship deck one might stage Gilbert & Sullivan on. But most of the action does not take place on a ship and when it does, the backdrop barely comes into play anyway. They had a blow-up pool to cavort in and fill with water. They ran around; they yelled and pouted and exhausted you out till one felt like a babysitter staring at their watch and wondering when the parents would finally return home.

Typically, they illuminate the play at hand. Here the play is chopped up and rearranged willy nilly, with certain passages repeated over and over again in a desperate attempt to squeeze some new meaning out of them. Once they get to the end of the story, they jump back into a passage involving Hook that was confounding to say the least. Why this scene? Why now? I know the tale inside and out and even I was a little at sea for a while. My guest, who somehow is a *Peter Pan* neophyte hadn't a clue as to what was going on half the time and mostly didn't care. I couldn't blame him.

Yes, they realized tension could be raised out of underlining the sexual tension between Wendy and Peter (Brad Heberlee, acquitting himself nicely and wishing one could see him as Peter in a better production). There it is, right at the start in the playroom: Peter and Wendy dancing to some romantic music and raising the heat in the room with an almost subconscious awareness of desire. And then they repeat that idea again. And again. The parents of the kids cavort about in sexual playacting. Hook makes barely veiled references to her body parts. (The show is hardly scandalous but besides not being good, it's probably not for kids younger than their teens.) Yet, none of this goes anywhere. They explore these ideas, pouncing on them whenever they appear in the text. But like a cat playing with a mouse, they bat the ideas around almost in boredom, not even realizing that their prey is already dead.

And so what? They've triumphed with adaptations of Chekhov and Shakespeare and Austen, among many others. Here they flop, spectacularly. But if you want to fly, you have to flap your arms and think good thoughts and dare. Even Wendy and Michael and John stumbled a bit before they took off. Bedlam will surely fly again.

PETER PAN * 1/2 out of ****

THE DUKE ON 42N ST.

You can't take huge risks and reap massive success without sometimes taking huge risks and reaping massive failure. That's the story of Bedlam, the theater company that has produced some of the best revivals in recent years, hitting such highs that they've even spun off actor/writer Kate Hamill into her own Austenian universe. And that's the story of their belly flop of a show, *Peter Pan*.

They're not alone in failing. The J. M. Barrie play is a beloved piece but it's no slam-dunk for anyone attempting more than simple theatrical family fare. The Disney animated film from 1953 is dreadful, poorly animated with godawful songs. P.J. Hogan attempted a live action version fifty years later and the results were worse. The Hugh Jackman prequel from a few years ago called *Pan*? Yikes. The Steven Spielberg sequel *Hook*? The less said the better. The live TV version from 2014? Shhh.

In truth, the safe route is to simply capture the surface charm of the original play, doing it for kids or as a holiday panto, played broadly for laughs. And yet.... The TV version with Mary Martin proved a perennial. The *Peter and the Starcatcher* books were pretty good and then transformed into a marvelous work of theatrical imagination that charmed and delighted. Mabou Mines did a legendary production at the Public Theater in 1996 that involved puppetry. It was so remarkable that thinking about it even now chills me with pleasure. And *that* production led me to the greatest adaptation of J.M. Barrie's play that there ever was or ever will be: the novel *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie. (The Mabou Mines production drew upon both the original play and the novel, *Peter and Wendy* aka *Peter Pan*.)

Yes, what I guess we must call the novelization of his play is in every way a superior work. It takes the dark, sad, bittersweet and wise undercurrents of the play and builds on them beautifully, without ever

sacrificing the bedtime story delight of the original. It improves the fey wit of Hook. It subtly colors in the growing maturation of Wendy and how that bothers and confuses Peter. And it touches on childhood and growing up and the inevitable loss of innocence this entails in a manner so subtle and heartrending that it's the sort of book a child reads happily and an adult reads sadly and is all the more brilliant for managing the trick.



(© JEREMY DANIEL)

Susanna Millonzi, Eric Tucker, Kelley Curran, Zuzanna Szadkowski, and Edmund Lewis star in Bedlam's *Peter Pan*, directed by Eric Tucker, at the Duke on 42nd Street.

Undoubtedly, the Bedlam team led by director and actor Eric Tucker read the play and/or novel and realized how rich it is and thought they'd underline the budding sexuality, the play within a play nature of so many scenes, the drudgery of parenting (even when you're just play-acting parenting) and the million other clever details that make *Peter Pan* so delightful a work in the first place. It most assuredly does not work but by god they try.

For me, the signature of Bedlam has been to make a great deal out of very little. They often have cast members double or triple up on roles, the satisfying and revealing effect. They can bring a dinner party alive with just a few rolling chairs. Like *Cheek By Jowl*, they embrace the theatrical as not merely a necessity for a small company with a small budget but in fact the very strength of the stage: eliciting our imagination.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS * out of ****

AUGUST WILSON THEATRE

Sometimes it's wise not to study the Playbill before a show starts. That added an air of mystery to the shambling, unhappy variety show that is Home For The Holidays. This Christmas-themed show collects winners of American Idol, The Voice and America's Got Talent on stage singing songs of the season in an attempt to give the Rockettes a run for their money. That was literally all I knew going in, along with the fact that I knew Candice Glover of Idol has a good voice. (I voted for her!) Being a sucker for Christmas songs (I own an embarrassing number of holiday CDs) and also believing attention must be paid to any show playing on Broadway, I was in. Sure, I expected it might be kitschy, silly, or just plain bad but I didn't expect quite the train wreck I witnessed or to be so thoroughly mystified by the goings-on until I opened my Playbill after it was over.

It began simply with a voice declaring, "Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Candice Glover" and there she appeared in a spotlight singing the first verse of "Oh Come All Ye Faithful." Then the voice declared, "Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Bianca Ryan" who then sang the second verse. Naturally, when the voice returned, I expected them to introduce the third competition winner, Josh Kaufman. Instead, they introduced...actor Danny Aiello, who appeared on stage, sitting on a stool, sporting sunglasses (!) and telling a story about his dirt poor childhood and an early Christmas memory. If you'd told me a celebrity guest star was going to come on stage and share a Christmas memory, I must confess it would have taken me a long, long time to guess Danny Aiello (an excellent actor), much less that he would sport sunglasses for most of the show while growling out Christmas memories.

But why are the background singers suddenly getting to step forward and solo? (Turns out they're YouTube sensations.) And just when I thought, "Gee these two are doing Steve and Eydie to a t," darned if they don't introduce each other as husband and wife team Peter and Evynne Hollens. Ok, but with all these people onstage and Danny Aiello perfectly capable of being our host, who is this other woman coming out to deliver two or three very brief and anonymous bits of set-up? She's sporting a dress that might give Dolly Parton pause ("Is this too much?"), plus, she's having difficulty getting even the banal music-is-part-of-the-season lines out. Happily, the Playbill clued me in to the fact that she's Kaitlyn Bristowe, from the 11th season of *The Bachelorette*! It all begins to make sense in an everything and the kitchen sink way. YouTube, reality TV, talent shows, and an actual honest to goodness star in Danny Aiello? This show has it all.

Obviously, no one involved is going to be touting this show on their CV anytime soon. But in the spirit of the holidays, I did observe some generous spirit on display. (Truly!)

When baritone sax player Adison Evans missed her cue for a solo and to bop around for a minute, trumpet player Enrique Sanchez covered nicely by goofing around and miming “I can’t hear you” until she caught up. When a red curtain didn’t fall to the stage as intended, someone jumped in to yank it down — and when that led to it getting entangled on the set, Peter Hollens tossed it off without missing a vocal, someone off stage finally dragged it out of sight and Glover darted a glance to make sure all was well.

Bianca Ryan won America’s Got Talent when she was just 11 years old and like so many child prodigies making the transition to adulthood and a career has proven challenging. Despite modeling her clothing, her hand gestures and her vocals on Mariah Carey, she still looks ill at ease on stage despite 12 years of experience since that triumph. More to the point, her voice is shaky at best. But the show does everything it can to support her, from sweetening her vocals with the Hollens at every possible turn and generally doing what it can.

Kaufman has perfectly competent vocals and a pleasant if anonymous persona. He does that stutter-step rocking motion that makes me feel like I’m at a Hillsong service but he can sing, even if one forgets his performance the moment it’s over. Yet again, the show does what it can to showcase him.

Most notably is the generous spirit of Candice Glover, who is a very good singer and could easily blow these two off the stage at every turn. Yet she modulates her voice when duetting with either of them, which is most of the show. A smarter director would have realized Glover was the real deal and weighted the show to her talents. Bizarrely, Glover barely gets to sing an entire song on her own. Again and again the two or three of them take part in song after song, when obviously for pure entertainment value the show should have begun and ended focusing solely on Glover (with a big chunk of Glover singing in the middle). It’s almost perverse of *Home For The Holidays* to not do the obvious.

But I like to think there's a certain, we're all in this together vibe going on, a welcome Christmas spirit of generosity. Sure they could have amped up the fireworks a little with Glover but to what point? When the ship is going down, why fight over a seat at the captain's table? Aiello shared only happy Christmas memories. But I'll bet most people can share holiday stories about dreadful presents, angry fights and unhappy memories with just as much glee. Here's hoping all involved can turn this show into one rueful memory they can laugh about during better times to come.

Theater Of 2017

The Fever (The Public's UTR Festival) **

Lula del Ray (The Public's UTR Festival) **

La Mélancolie des Dragons (The Public's UTR Festival at the Kitchen) **

Top Secret International (State 1) (The Public's UTR Festival at Brooklyn Museum) **

The Present **

The Liar *** 1/2

Jitney *** 1/2

The Tempest (Harriet Walter at St. Ann's) *** 1/2

Significant Other * 1/2

The Skin Of Our Teeth ***

Natasha, Pierre And The Great Comet Of 1812 (w Groban) ** (third visit, but *** if you haven't seen it)

Everybody (at Signature) ** 1/2

Idomeneo (at Met w Levine conducting) *** 1/2

Sunday In The Park With George (w Jake Gyllenhaal) ****

The Light Years * 1/12

The Glass Menagerie (w Sally Field, Joe Mantello) *** 1/2

946: The Amazing Story Of Adolphus Tips **

The Price (w Mark Ruffalo) *

Come From Away *

Miss Saigon **

Picnic/Come Back Little Sheba * 1/2

Broadway By The Year: The 1940s **

Vanity Fair (at Pearl) ***

Latin History For Morons * 1/2

On The Grounds Of Belonging (workshop production w Bobby Steggert)

Wakey Wakey ***

Present Laughter (w Kevin Kline) ***

CasablancaBox ** 1/2

Amélie * 1/2

The Play That Goes Wrong **

War Paint **

In and Of Itself ***

Indecent ** 1/2

The Hairy Animal (covered briefly in “Mourning Becomes Electra” review) ***

The Antipodes **

Anastasia **

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory **

Oslo *** 1/2

The Little Foxes **

Groundhog Day ** 1/2

Babes In Toyland (Kelli O'Hara at Carnegie Hall) ** 1/2

Mourning Becomes Electra **

A Doll's House, Part 2 *** 1/2

Bandstand ** 1/2

Pacific Overtures (at CSC) ***

Six Degrees Of Separation (w Allison Janney) **

Twelfth Night (Public Theater Mobile Unit) ** 1/2

Rooms **

Arlington ***

All The President's Men (Public Theater one-night event at Town Hall) ** 1/2

Happy Days (w Dianne Wiest) *** 1/2

Derren Brown: Secret *** 1/2

The Whirligig * 1/2

Sojourners and Her Portmanteau **

Broadway By The Year 1997-2006 ***

The Boy Who Danced On Air ** 1/2

The Government Inspector ** 1/2

A Doll's House, Part 2 (with Julie White and Stephen McKinley Henderson) ***

Desperate Measures ***

The Honeymooners **

People, Places & Things **

M. Butterfly * 1/2

Red Roses, Green Gold no stars

Of Thee I Sing (MasterVoices concert presentation at Carnegie Hall) ** 1/2

The Band's Visit (Broadway) *** 1/2

Junk **

Actually **

Harry Clarke ** 1/2

Bedlam's Peter Pan * 1/2

Home For The Holidays *

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Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review. All productions are in New York City unless otherwise indicated.