

August 29, 2012

HUFF POST ENTERTAINMENT

Edition: U.S. ▾



FRONT PAGE POLITICS BUSINESS MEDIA CELEBRITY TV COMEDY FOOD STYLE ARTS BOOKS LIVE | ALL SECTIONS

Entertainment | Celebrity TV Political Hollywood Features Hollywood Buzz Videos

HOT ON THE BLOG

John Hillcoat
Harry Shearer

Sen. Ben Cardin
Jeffrey Sachs



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



Michael Giltz

Freelance writer

GET UPDATES FROM MICHAEL GILTZ

Like 102

Theater: "Shlemiel The First" Klezmer Musical Sings But What's With The Restraint?

Posted: 12/16/11 03:08 PM ET

React > Inspiring Funny Hot Scary Outrageous Amazing Weird Crazy

Follow > Musical Theater, Theater, Video, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Musicals, Yiddish, Entertainment News

SHARE THIS STORY

Get Entertainment Alerts

[Sign Up](#)

Submit this story

SCHLEMIEL THE FIRST ** 1/2 out of ****
NYU'S JACK H. SKIRBALL CENTER

Writer Isaac Bashevis Singer helped popularize folk tales about the foolish men of Chelm, a city in Poland. In this mythical spin on a real place (G-d help them), the wise men of Chelm mess things up while the women either clean up after them or patiently wait for the men to fix things themselves. Is it really so different from anywhere else?

Singer turned some of his tales into a stage play and then it became a musical combining folk tunes with new lyrics just like Singer combined folk stories with his modern wit. Robert Brustein wrote the book, Arnold Weinstein wrote the lyrics and Hankus Netsky composed the music. The result is a lot of foolishness called *Shlemiel the First*.

Shlemiel bickers with his understanding wife and isn't too upset when the wisest of the wise men of Chelm suggests he go out to the wide world and tell them exactly how wise the wisest man of Chelm truly is. So off Shlemiel goes, only he's tricked by a thief into giving up his food and heading back home when he thinks he's exploring new worlds. When Shlemiel finds this "new" town that features a woman exactly like his wife and kids exactly like his children and wise men exactly like the wise of men of Chelm (in fact, they even call this new place Chelm as well!), naturally he and the wise men decide there must be TWO Chelms. So poor Shlemiel must try and avoid the temptation to kiss wife #2 while the men figure out what went wrong and how to fix it.

SPONSOR GENERATED POST



CBS Films

Help Us Write 'The Words'

Quick Read | Comments (26) | 08.20.2012

FOLLOW US

MOST POPULAR ON HUFFPOST

1 of 2

Isaac Balloons Into A Hurricane, New Orleans Threatened

Recommend 647

Limbaugh's Wild Isaac Conspiracy

Like 6k

MAP: Hurricane Isaac's Path Aims For Gulf Coast

Recommend 206

GOP Candidate Compares Pregnancy From Rape To What?

Recommend 18k

GOP Approves Abortion Ban

Recommend 7k

Sylvester Stallone's Half-Sister Dies At 48

Recommend 264

Silly? Of course, happily so, with a lot of rib-tickling word play and groaners thrown in for spice in this collaboration between [Theater For A New Audience](#) and [National Yiddish Theatre](#). The production itself is right in tune with the show. The costumes by Catherine Zuber are amusing (they include some imposing bosoms for the women built into the padding) and quick to change since a number of the actors double their parts. The set by Robert Israel simply and deftly sets the tone by including a sloping floor to keep people off balance along with doors and windows all akilter. The bed of Shlemiel and his wife provides quite a bit of good comic business since it's standing straight up and people "climb" in and out and toss and turn in amusing ways. The lighting and sound by Jennifer Tipton and David Meschter continue to build on the atmosphere, with Meschter doing an especially good job at miking the actors without making them sound too miked, so the show has a more natural, old school feel.

Above all there's the Shlemiel Band, led by pianist and conductor Zalmen Mlotek, which does full justice to the music of the show and even provides an entertaining intermission. They receive the strongest applause of the night and rightly so.

So what's the problem? If you can believe it, a certain... restraint. It's not often one sees a broad comedy and walks away thinking, "Gee, I wish they'd played that a little louder, a little bigger." But Michael Iannucci is too bland and unprepossessing to command the stage as Shlemiel and doesn't even try to up his game. Shlemiel should be the comic engine that drives the whole plot forward but he seems more like a straight man here, and not a very interesting one. It's easy to forget this is his show. Jeff Brooks is a little better as the smartest fool, Gronam Ox (he's got a little Nathan Lane snap in his voice) but not so much that you're overwhelmed.

The women fare much better. Amy Warren (so good in *Adding Machine* and *August: Osage County*) is a standout as Mrs. Shlemiel, nailing the humor and pathos and genuine affection of her character in every scene. Kristine Zbornik is right behind her, humorously and patiently changing her costume (usually on stage) as she flits between the imposing Yenta Pasha and several other characters. Bob Ader is shameless -- and I thank him -- as Zalman Tippish, a rich man with a horrible cough. His "I'm Going To Die" number almost outshines the show-stopper "Geography Song."

The voices are strong throughout and the music rousing and silly and that makes up for a lead who would be better off following. So the women are better than the men. What could be more appropriate for a show set in Chelm?

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](#) **

[The Atmosphere Of Memory](#) 1/2 *

[Bonnie & Clyde feature profile of Jeremy Jordan](#)

[Broadway By The Year: 1997](#) ** 1/2

[The Cherry Orchard with Dianne Wiest](#) **

[Chinglish](#) * 1/2

[Crane Story](#) **

[Cymbeline at Barrow Street Theatre](#) ***

[An Evening With Patti Lupone and Mandy Patinkin](#) ***

[Follies](#) *** 1/2

[Fragments](#) ***

[Godspell](#) ** 1/2

[Hair](#) ***

[Hand To God](#) ***

[Hero: The Musical](#) * 1/2

[Hugh Jackman: Back On Broadway](#) ***

[Irving Berlin's White Christmas](#) ***

[King Lear at Public with Sam Waterston](#) **

[Krapp's Last Tape with John Hurt](#) ***

[Lake Water](#) **



[The Most Awkward Wedding Photobombs](#)
Like 715



[Deaf Boy Asked To Make Controversial Change \(VIDEO\)](#)
Like 2k



[PHOTO: Christina Aguilera's 'Your Body' Dress Doesn't Leave Much To The Imagination](#)
Like 195

DON'T MISS HUFFPOST BLOGGERS 1 of 5



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



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

TOP VIDEO PICKS 1 of 8

Surprising New Aniston Rumor



[Pink's Super Sheer Outfit](#)



[Housewives' Clooney Connection](#)

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



[Shia LaBeouf Dropped Acid For His New Film](#)



[WATCH: Raging Grannies Have Some Words For Todd Akin](#)

HOT ON TWITTER 1 of 2

[Love's Labor's Lost at the PublicLab](#) ** 1/2
[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](#) ***
[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
[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
[Sons Of The Prophet](#) *** 1/2
[Spiderman: Turn Off The Dark](#) * 1/2
[Standing On Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays](#) **
[Stick Fly](#) **
[The Submission](#) **
[Sweet and Sad](#) **
[Titus Andronicus at Public with Jay O. Sanders](#) * 1/2
[Unnatural Acts](#) ***
[Venus In Fur](#) ***
[We Live Here](#) **
[Wild Animals You Should Know](#) ** 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 Pery 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](#) ***



[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](#)

HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES

Snooki	Smoking	Ask The Parent Coach
Elections 2012	Natural Disasters	Wisconsin
Shadow Conventions 2012	Fox News	GOP

[MORE BIG NEWS PAGES »](#)

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

Follow Michael Giltz on Twitter: www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz

[More in Entertainment...](#)

Robin Williams As
Dwight D.
Eisenhower In...

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

Samuel L. Jackson:
'Unfair' Hurricane
Isaac Avoid...

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

Comments

0

Pending Comments

0

[View FAQ](#)

Comments are closed for this entry

View All

Recency | Popularity

[Advertise](#) | [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**