

## Theater: The Show Must Go On! Barry Manilow Opens on Broadway

Posted: 01/30/2013 7:52 am

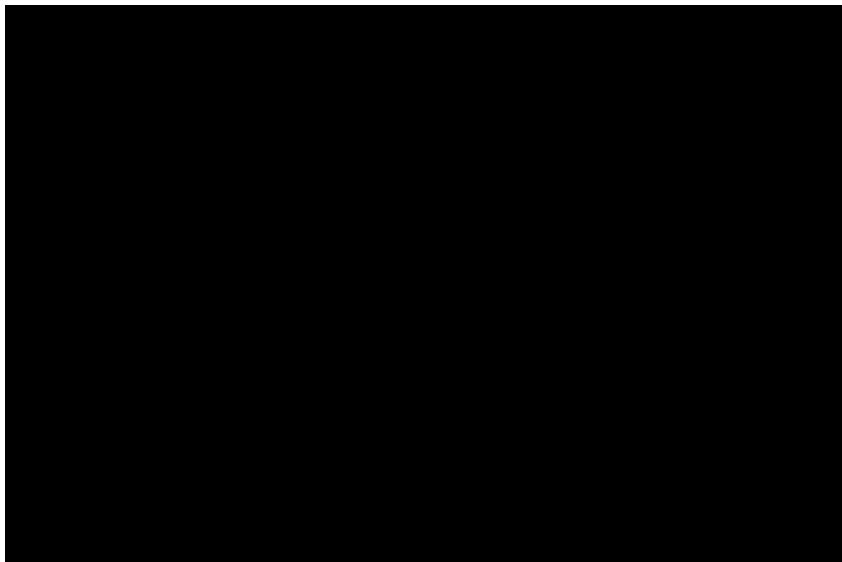
### **MANILOW ON BROADWAY** \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\* **ST. JAMES THEATRE**

What drama! Laid low by the flu, old schooler trouper Barry Manilow had to cancel shows and delay his Broadway opening night. But with the legendary Clive Davis and legions of devoted fans in place, he finally hit the stage on Tuesday night and belted it out as best he could.

Not since Hugh Jackman has there been a show on the Great White Way as critic proof as this one. Before his illness, Manilow was packing them in and hitting grosses that ranked alongside mega-hits like *Wicked* and *The Book Of Mormon*. Obviously, the chance for fanilows to see him in the relatively intimate setting of the St. James Theatre is a powerful lure and whatever critics say, they'll keep coming as long as the show keeps extending.

It's a tricky night to review since Manilow was clearly not at full steam or at times even half steam. His voice was sketchy and intentionally mixed low into the sound system so that the music and the backup singers could carry him as much as possible. He's a real pro, though and always engagingly modest. If he pulled off a big note, Manilow would amusingly make a face of self-deprecating surprise. He apologized repeatedly, urged people to come back again soon (when his voice would fully recover) and worked his voice with skill, making the most of what he had. (And dashing off stage for a second towards the end of the evening, only to come out sounding -- briefly -- stronger than he had the entire night.)

Did it matter to the fans? It did not. They yelled and screamed and sang along and listened to the old stories and old jokes with delight. Manilow said at the start he was so sick, "I coughed up enough phlegm to float Fire Island. " Later he joked (sort of) that he was the Justin Bieber of his era. "No seriously," he said. "Ask your mother." To which the woman sitting behind me responded to her seatmate, "Don't worry. She's here!"



At 69-years-old, Manilow wouldn't have the voice he had in the 1970s even at the best of times, of course. But he's a showman. Even when he's done singing or runs out of breath on a song, the arrangement builds to a crescendo and Manilow flings his arms out wide at

the musical finale as if he's just hit a high C and the audience loves it.

Without irony, Manilow says the audience will probably know every single song he's going to sing that night and isn't that amazing? "Not many people could say that," he notes. This is schmaltz of the sort Hugh Jackman might winkingly refer to or Martin Short out and out satirize but it comes across somehow sweetly or perhaps endearingly boastful from Manilow, who's been a pop music fixture for 40 years. He's got 25 Top 40 hits and almost twice as many on the Adult Contemporary charts, a radio format where Manilow is considered the most popular artist of all time.

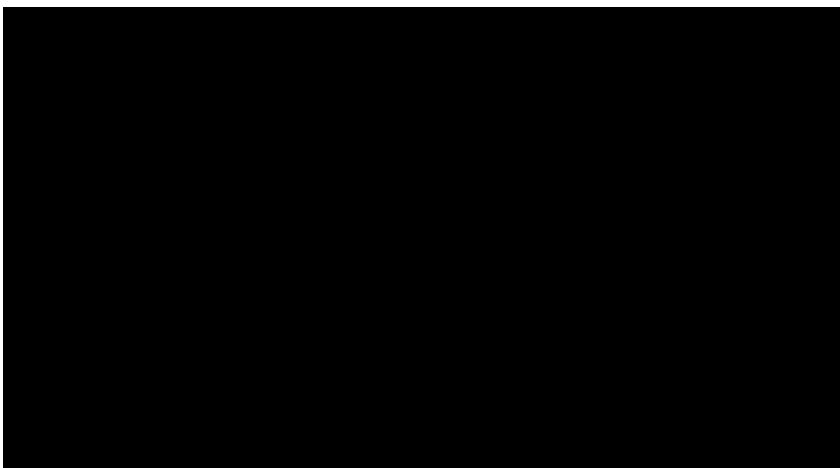
And he promised to play them all (in a knowing nod to Judy Garland), from "Looks Like We Made It" to "Copacabana (At The Copa)" to "I Write The Songs" to "Can't Smile Without You." (Actually, we sang that last one for him.) While most of them are not standards as such (that is, songs that are covered regularly by other artists), they are very durable pop songs indeed. Given Manilow's strong album sales in the last few years with his tributes to the 1950s and so on, this was not a nostalgia fest as such but a victory lap.

What it wasn't, unfortunately, was any attempt to shape a serious show that would make the artistic case for Manilow that he deserves. Musically, you might have chosen just a bare stage with Manilow and a Steinway (like the one he famously bought with his hard-earned dollars early in his career). Or you might go the other route and bring on a full orchestra. But all they did was take his touring band, plop them on the stage and turn up the volume. The arrangements were dull and obvious (though some of this might have been compensation for his voice), the look was threadbare and I doubt they even bothered to whip up a new costume for Manilow. Larry Amoros is credited with "special material" but in general there is no attempt to deliver anything other than what you might have seen from Manilow on tour a thousand times before.

The confetti cannon at the end (noticeably skimpy on confetti) and the very weak graphics that flash behind him throughout the night are touches that simply won't do. When they show a video clip of waves crashing on a shore during an otherwise strong vocal performance of "Even Now," you realize that they weren't really trying. Those lazy gestures overshadowed his strongest moments, like a video duet with himself (a la Barbra Streisand), a very sweet "I Am Your Child" from his debut and a key song from his musical *Harmony*.

That's a pity. His catalog is strong enough that Manilow could have delivered something special and made this stand not just another stop on his tour but a genuine event. Not that his fans will agree with one word of this; they'll leave happy and humming the tunes they've known for so long. Hey, I'm playing the CD *Ultimate Manilow* while I write this. We're coming up on the 30th anniversary of his 1984 masterpiece *2:00 A.M. Paradise Cafe*; is it too much to hope he'll play even smaller spaces, like a genuine jazz clubs, and do that one justice?

For those Fanilows who can't make it to New York City, here's a vintage video of Barry Manilow singing his break out hit and first of three #1 songs, "Mandy."



**THE THEATER SEASON 2012-2013** (on a four star scale)

*As You Like it* (Shakespeare in the Park with Lily Rabe) \*\*\*\*  
*Chimichangas And Zolof* \*  
*Closer Than Ever* \*\*\*  
*Cock* \*\* 1/2  
*Harvey* with Jim Parsons \*  
*My Children! My Africa!* \*\*\*  
*Once On This Island* \*\*\*  
*Potted Potter* \*  
*Storefront Church* \*\* 1/2  
*Title And Deed* \*\*\*  
*Picture Incomplete* (NYMF) \*\*  
*Flambe Dreams* (NYMF) \*\*  
*Rio* (NYMF) \*\*  
*The Two Month Rule* (NYMF) \*  
*Trouble* (NYMF) \*\* 1/2  
*Stealing Time* (NYMF) \*\*  
*Requiem For A Lost Girl* (NYMF) \*\* 1/2  
*Re-Animator The Musical* (NYMF) \*\*\*  
*Baby Case* (NYMF) \*\* 1/2  
*How Deep Is The Ocean* (NYMF) \*\* 1/2  
*Central Avenue Breakdown* (NYMF) \*\*\*  
*Foreverman* (NYMF) \* 1/2  
*Swing State* (NYMF) \* 1/2  
*Stand Tall: A Rock Musical* (NYMF) \* 1/2  
*Living With Henry* (NYMF) \*  
*A Letter To Harvey Milk* (NYMF) \*\* 1/2  
*The Last Smoker In America* \*\*  
*Gore Vidal's The Best Man* (w new cast) \*\*\*  
*Into The Woods at Delacorte* \*\* 1/2  
*Bring It On: The Musical* \*\*  
*Bullet For Adolf* \*  
*Summer Shorts Series B: Paul Rudnick, Neil LaBute, etc.* \*\*  
*Harrison, TX* \*\*\*  
*Dark Hollow: An Appalachian "Woyzeck"* (FringeNYC) \* 1/2  
*Pink Milk* (FringeNYC) \* 1/2  
*Who Murdered Love* (FringeNYC) no stars  
*Storytime With Mr. Buttermen* (FringeNYC) \*\*  
*#MormonInChief* (FringeNYC) \*\*  
*An Interrogation Primer* (FringeNYC) \*\*\*  
*An Evening With Kirk Douglas* (FringeNYC) \*  
*Sheherizade* (FringeNYC) \*\*  
*The Great Pie Robbery* (FringeNYC) \*\* 1/2  
*Independents* (FringeNYC) \*\*\* 1/2  
*The Dick and The Rose* (FringeNYC) \*\*  
*Magdalen* (FringeNYC) \*\*\*  
*Bombsheltered* (FringeNYC) \*\* 1/2  
*Paper Plane* (FringeNYC) \*\* 1/2  
*Rated M For Murder* (FringeNYC) \*\* 1/2  
*Mallory/Valerie* (FringeNYC) \*  
*Non-Equity: The Musical!* (FringeNYC) \*  
*Blanche: The Bittersweet Life Of A Prairie Dame* (FringeNYC) \*\*\* 1/2  
*City Of Shadows* (FringeNYC) \*\*\*  
*Forbidden Broadway: Alive & Kicking* \*\*\*  
*Salamander Starts Over* (FringeNYC) \*\*\*

*Pieces (FringeNYC) \**  
*The Train Driver \*\*\**  
*Chaplin The Musical \* 1/2*  
*Detroit \*\* 1/2*  
*Heartless at Signature \*\**  
*Einstein On The Beach at BAM \*\*\*\**  
*Red-Handed Otter \*\* 1/2*  
*Marry Me A Little \*\**  
*An Enemy Of The People \*\* 1/2*  
*The Old Man And The Old Moon \*\*\* 1/2*  
*A Chorus Line at Papermill \*\*\**  
*Helen & Edgar \*\*\**  
*Grace \* 1/2*  
*Cyrano de Bergerac \*\**  
*Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf? \*\*\**  
*Disgraced \*\**  
*Annie \*\* 1/2*  
*The Heiress \*\**  
*Checkers \*\* 1/2*  
*Ivanov \*\*\**  
*Golden Child at Signature \*\* 1/2*  
*Giant at the Public \*\*\* 1/2*  
*Scandalous \* 1/2*  
*Forever Dusty \*\**  
*The Performers \*\**  
*The Piano Lesson at Signature \*\*\* 1/2*  
*Un Ballo In Maschera at the Met \*\*\* 1/2 (singing) \* (production) so call it \*\* 1/2*  
*A Christmas Story: The Musical \*\**  
*The Sound Of Music at Papermill \*\*\**  
*My Name Is Asher Lev \*\*\* 1/2*  
*Golden Boy \*\**  
*A Civil War Christmas \*\* 1/2*  
*Dead Accounts \*\**  
*The Anarchist \**  
*Glengarry Glen Ross \*\**  
*Bare \*\**  
*The Mystery Of Edwin Drood \*\* 1/2*  
*The Great God Pan \*\* 1/2*  
*The Other Place \*\* 1/2*  
*Picnic \* 1/2*  
*Opus No. 7 \*\* 1/2*  
*Deceit \* 1/2*  
*Life And Times Episodes 1-4 \*\**  
*Cat On A Hot Tin Roof (w Scarlett Johansson) \* 1/2*  
*The Jammer \*\*\**  
*Blood Play \*\* 1/2*  
*Manilow On Broadway \*\* 1/2*

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. All productions are in New York City unless otherwise indicated.

Follow Michael Giltz on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz](http://www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz)