



Theater: Theater Of War on the Intrepid; Broadway By The Year Is Back!



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THEATER OF WAR ON THE INTREPID (upcoming event)

BROADWAY BY THE YEAR 1997-2006 \*\*\* out of \*\*\*\*

THEATER OF WAR ON THE INTREPID

THE INTREPID SEA, AIR & SPACE MUSEUM

It's Fleet Week in New York City, the time of year when Manhattan looks like the outdoor set of an old Hollywood movie, thanks to sailors walking down the street in their uniforms (but rarely breaking into song). You can find some of the many events dotting the week right here, including diving demonstrations by Navy divers in a tank in Times Square, Coast Guard drills, ship tours and more. But for anyone looking to do something more meaningful than paying for a round in a dive bar along the waterfront, there's Theater Of War.



A Dramatic Reading of Scenes from Sophocles' **PHILOCTETES**

A new version by Bryan Doerries



ZACH GRENIER



KATHRYN ERBE



REG E. CATHEY

A passion project of writer, director and translator Bryan Doerries, *Theater Of War* is an ongoing series of performances and discussions that taps into the elemental power of Greek tragedy. It introduces military veterans who perhaps never identified with theater to see themselves depicted in characters that will resonate as long as people go to war. It gives those civilians on the outside a way to gain a little insight into what people in the military must face. Or perhaps, more accurately, it allows them to realize how little they do understand what people under fire live with. Theater Of War celebrates theater while using it as a tool for healing. As powerful as the words of Sophocles remain, it's often the comments of veterans that will linger the longest. (Doerries has a book about the journey he's gone on in developing this piece.)

For Fleet Week, a performance will be held on the *Intrepid*, with actors Reg E. Cathey, Kathryn Erbe and Zach Grenier delivering selections from the play *Philoctetes*, followed by an audience discussion. Don't worry if you're not in NYC during Fleet Week. Doerries has become an artist in residence for the City Of New York for two years and is staging Theater Of War in more than 20 cities worldwide throughout this year. Check here for upcoming cities and events.

BROADWAY BY THE YEAR 1997-2006 \*\*\* out of \*\*\*\*

## THE TOWN HALL

The long-running celebration of musical theater dubbed *Broadway By The Year* had old-fashioned drama at its latest event Monday night at Town Hall in New York City. A last minute cancellation by the acclaimed Emily Skinner (a family illness) led to troupers stepping in to fill the void on short notice, young talent getting a chance to step from the chorus into the spotlight and a happy ending for all involved. Atypically, this show was at its best in the comic numbers and some dance pieces. Perhaps that's due to the decade being celebrated, one in which a lot of weak Broadway musicals came out. In the old days, Broadway delivered the hit songs on the radio. In the late 1990s, it sounded more like Broadway was being invaded by the power ballads of pop, and not in a good way. But talent will out and the stars of this event scored with the strong material and outshone the lesser stuff. So what are you waiting for? Tickets for the final Broadway By The Year of the season on June 19 are on sale now.

Broadway By The Year collects songs from a certain period of history (in this case 1997-2006) and pairs up a rotating cast of performers to knock them out. Since its held on a Monday when most Broadway shows are dark, you get everyone from current Broadway stars to cabaret legends to rising talent, along with some nifty dancing. Still, scanning the list of shows impresario Scott Siegel was drawing from didn't inspire confidence. *Jekyll & Hyde? Taboo? Footloose? The Scarlet Pimpernel?* A lesser tune from *The Lion King*? Hey, they've got to play the cards Broadway dealt them. Luckily, some of the flops included cheesy/fun songs crossing over from the radio and others were jukebox shows like *Swing!* and *Never Gonna Dance* drawing on classic Broadway tunes.

What I might remember best is Christina Bianco, a talent known for her musical theater impersonations. She shot to fame thanks to a YouTube interpretation of the Bonnie Tyler pop hit "Total Eclipse Of The Heart" that

featured lines sung in the style of everyone from Barbra Streisand to Norah Jones to Christina Aguilera. It's a knockout you can easily find online, so I'm including her most recent video below, one that shows Bianco celebrating Shirley Bassey. Because that Tyler hit was shoehorned into the notorious flop *Dance Of The Vampires*, we had the perfect excuse to nudge Bianco into doing her famous routine again. She also opened the second act with "The Wizard And I" from *Wicked*, but that's such a bad song, I'll just ignore her fine rendition.

Instead, I was impressed by her duet with Josh Young on "All The Wasted Time" from *Parade*. And I was blown away by her excellent performance of "Gimme, Gimme" from *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. She was sexy, fun and emotionally gripping, building the song beautifully to its climax — this is an eleven o'clock number and she proved why. Bianco is lucky her skill at mimicry has given her some visibility, a cabaret act and YouTube fanbase that lets her perform for paying audiences. But it will be a loss if she never gets to deliver the goods in a real show and "Gimme, Gimme" shows she can do it.

But Bianco wasn't the only story. Stephanie D'Abruzzo was the trouper stepping in on short notice. A member of the original cast of *Avenue Q*, D'Abruzzo showed up to knock out that show's best dramatic song "A Fine, Fine Line." (Granted, she was in the show for two and a half years, so rehearsal time needed was likely brief.) She also tackled the subtly tricky melody of "Feed The Birds," a classic number from the film *Mary Poppins*, which has one of the best batch of tunes for a movie musical in history.

While that *Avenue Q* song has humor, it's not a comic piece. But BBTY did have a lot of humor, and not just

Bianco's "Total Eclipse Of The Heart." It also had "Holding Out For A Hero," which Maxine Linehan belted out with full Steinman-esque power. (All she needs is a little rasp to beat Tyler at her own game.) She played it straight but the backup singers (composed of rising talent spotted by Siegel) couldn't help goofing a bit with their choreography at such a silly arrangement. "Pick Yourself Up" has a light air, though it was the dancing of Danette Holden and Jeremy Benton that brought a smile to your face. Benton was even better duetting with the charming Danny Gardner on "Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life" from *Spamalot*, in which Gardner cheered up the glum Benton with some tap-tap-tapping and they both delivered the droll lines with brio. Gardner also scored by scatting on "It Don't Mean A Thing," which found him hoofing with the dance duo Gaby Cook & Bobby White. They may be dance partners but Gardner was enough to make any couple a little polyamorous on the dance floor.

Brian Charles Rooney battled a bug all evening, gamely doing his best and preventing Siegel from having to recast half the event at the last minute. But even at full voice, he'd be hard pressed to make me care for "The Prayer" from *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. Still, it was admirable trouper behavior in the-show-must-go-on vein. While miscast on the Johnny Cash tune "I Walk the Line," Rooney did let off a convincing yee-haw at the end. In contrast, Maxine Linehan may be Irish but she sounded right at home in the June Carter Cash spot. That made me want to hear more from her in a way that the generic ballad "Someone Like You" from *Jekyll & Hyde* or the not-quite-hidden-gem "The Next Best Thing To Love" from *A Class Act* did not. As with other artists in the show tackling lesser songs, she elevated them.

Producer Scott Siegel also has a good track record of spotting new talent at showcases around the country and giving them a spotlight in New York City. He's doing it again with the show *Broadway Rising Stars* on July 10. And he did it Monday night. Newcomer Pedro Coppeti stepped out of the chorus and had fun with "I Am Adolpho" from *The Drowsy Chaperone*. He has a good voice and confident presence but hopefully will learn not to keep selling the laughs. Humor is usually stronger when the character one's playing isn't in on the joke so completely. Fellow chorus members Emily laquinta and Jeanine Bruen acquitted themselves very nicely with the iconic "I Will Never Leave You" from *Side Show*. They too have something to learn; both sang very well until the climax when they started *American Idol*-ing away, pushing their voices too much and spoiling the magical connection the conjoined twin sisters have, a magic they started to create for a while. On the other hand, that's exactly what too many young talents on Broadway do (over-sing) so maybe they're in sync with the times.

It's no surprise that the people with the best songs often had the best night. Finding good material, good shows - and then getting the part! — is half the battle for Broadway performers. Make that 90% of the battle. Both Farah Alvin and Josh Young have enjoyed considerable success but still need a great part in a great new show or thoroughly great revival to put them over the top for good. They're both ready. I don't think there's much nuance to get out of "Don't Cry Out Loud" but Alvin has a strong voice to sell that durable pop staple. As the Broadway show *Mamma Mia* proved, however, the pop song "The Winner Takes It All" has unexpected emotional power and she scored. Alvin did even better with the lovely night's opener "Back To Before" from *Ragtime*.

Josh Young sang beautifully all night, from his first number (the ok ballad “You Walk With Me” from *The Full Monty* that he made sound better than it deserved) to the so-so closer “Endless Night” from *The Lion King*. (Ditto.) But Young really nailed it on the meatier numbers he had, including that duet from *Parade* and “Barrett’s Song” from *Titanic*. They both seem primed for even bigger things. As Alvin and Young demonstrated, Broadway By The Year always celebrates the past of musical theater and just as often they celebrate what should be Broadway’s future in terms of talent.

## 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 \*\*\*

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If you don't register and vote, you don't get to complain.

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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.***