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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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Surfing Through "The History Boys"

I saw this Alan Bennett play in London last year and couldn't wait to see it again on Broadway. It's a great production of a good play. The story of a group of lads (about 18 years old) studying for the entrance exam to Oxford and Cambridge, it's filled with wit, humor and -- rather unexpectedly -- song. Richard Griffiths commands the stage as Hector, a winning teacher who encourages free thinking and knowledge for knowledge's sake. He also gives the older lads a ride home on his motorcycle so the unhappily married Hector can fiddle with their privates. His arch enemy is a new teacher brought in to coach the lads for their exams and give them tips for brightening up their essays, like arguing that it was Great Britain that prompted WWI or that it was Japan that was caught sleeping during Pearl Harbor -- anything "clever" to catch the eye, and truth be damned. This simple clash of ideas is fodder enough for a great show -- and indeed one of the most gripping moments occurs when Hector gives the gay Jewish lad Posner a detailed lecture on a poem by Hardy. (Believe me, the audience is transfixed.) And with the boys encouraged to sing old British pop tunes, act out the endings to classic films like "Brief Encounters" or practice French by pretending to visit a bordello, the stage is bursting with energy. A pity that Bennett feels the need to make his wider aims so obvious by throwing in politics, TV historians, making the "clever" teacher a complete fraud and then capping it off with a sentimental gambit more appropriate for "Goodbye Mr. Chips." But 90% of the show is pure delight and I'd love to be there on closing night in September. It's already been filmed, so you'll be able to see the movie version this fall with the same cast. Don't miss it.

POSTED BY MICHAEL IN NEW YORK AT 3:19 PM



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