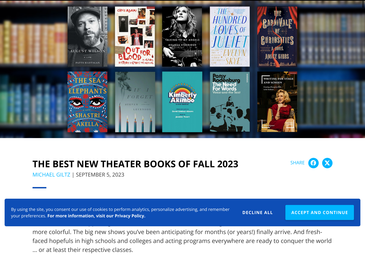


# THE BEST NEW THEATER BOOKS OF FALL 2023

MICHAEL GILTZ | SEPTEMBER 5, 2023

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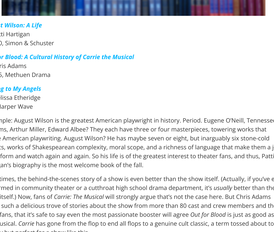
more colorful. The big new shows you've been anticipating for months (or years!) finally arrive. And fresh-faced hopefuls in high schools and colleges and acting programs everywhere are ready to conquer the world ... or at least their respective classes.

With all that anticipation comes a lot of waiting. Even on days when you're attending the theater, you've still got to do *something* until you're in your seat and waiting for the curtain to rise. Don't worry. We've got you covered with these great new books linked to the world of theater. Dive in and don't forget to use your show program as a handy bookmark!




***August Wilson: A Life***
By Patti Hartigan
$32.50, Simon & Schuster

***Out for Blood: A Cultural History of Cerrie the Musical***
By Chris Adams
$29.95, Methuen Drama

***Talking to My Angels***
By Melissa Etheridge
$30, Harper Wave

It's simple: August Wilson is the greatest American playwright in history. Period. Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee? They each have three or four masterpieces, towering works that define American playwriting. August Wilson? He has maybe seven or eight, but marguably six stone-cold classics, works of Shakespearean complexity, moral scope, and a richness of language that make them a joy to perform and watch again and again. So his life is of the greatest interest to theater fans, and thus, Patti Hartigan's biography is the most welcome book of the fall.

Sometimes, the behind-the-scenes story of a show is even better than the show itself. (Actually, if you've ever performed in community theater or a cutthroat high school drama department, it's *usually* better than the show itself.) Now, fans of *Cerrie: The Musical* will strongly argue that's not the case here. But Chris Adams offers such a delicious trove of stories about the show from more than 80 cast and crew members and those rabid fans, that it's safe to say even the most passionate booster will agree *Out for Blood* is just as good as the musical. *Cerrie* has gone from the flop to end all flops to a genuine cult classic, a term tossed about too loosely but perfect for a show like this.

Grammy- and Oscar-winning rocker, songwriter, and trailblazing artist Melissa Etheridge takes to the stage this September with her new one-woman Broadway show about her journey. À la Bruce Springsteen's acclaimed run. You'll want to dive into her greatest hits beforehand, as well as this new memoir about Etheridge's life since her *first* best-selling book came out more than 20 years ago. She's had marvelous highs and devastating lows since then, and Etheridge shares it all in *Talking to My Angels*. If you can't get to the show, you'll want this book. And if you do get to the show, you'll want this book even more. She's that kind of performer.

***If I Forget and Other Plays***
By Steven Levenson
$22.95, Theatre Communications Group

***Kimberly Akimbo***
Book and Lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire; Music by Jeanine Tesori
$17.95, Theatre Communications Group

***Gunplays: Five Plays on Inner City Violence and Guns***
By William Electric Black
$29.95, Applause Books

Writer Steven Levenson shot to fame as the Tony-winning book writer for the smash hit musical *Dear Evan Hansen*. He was also the show runner on the must-see Emmy-nominated miniseries *Fosse/Verdon*. And Levenson is attached to a new movie adaptation of *Fiddler on the Roof*. But first, get to know Levenson's acclaimed work as a playwright. His debut collection includes *The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin*, *The Language of Trees*, and his pre-9/11–set family drama *If I Forget*, which *The New York Times* calls "passionate and provoking."

The little show that could, *Kimberly Akimbo* won five Tony Awards, including Best Musical. The story of a young woman dealing with an illness that ages her prematurely, it's a must-see on Broadway and when the show tours in fall 2024. Can't wait? Neither can we. So check out the cast album to savor the performances of the Tony-winning cast and music of Tony winner Jeanine Tesori. Then grab this title so you can read the marvelous book and lyrics by Tony winner David Lindsay-Abaire. It's a charming story no matter what form you enjoy it in.

From 2013 to 2018, playwright William Electric Black presented five dramas at the Theater for the New City in NYC about the plague of gun violence. One might have hoped they became works of history documenting an era before simple and widely supported steps were taken to tackle this problem. Instead, they are as timeless as ever. The stories range from a family grappling with the aftermath of gun violence to a school in lockdown to a teen girl looking to buy a gun as protection from her violent mother. Reading the collection now is reading what we hope will be history, as it happens.

***The Hundred Loves of Juliet***
By Evelyn Skye
$28, Del Rey

***The Carnivale of Curiosities***
By Amiee Gibbs
$29, Grand Central Publishing

***The Sea Elephants***
By Shastri Akella
$28.99, Flatiron Books

In *The Hundred Loves of Juliet*, author Evelyn Skye puts a reincarnation twist on the timeless tale of two star-crossed lovers. In contemporary Alaska, Helene and Sebastien meet for the first time, but their inevitably tragic romance will play out just as it has for dozens of lovers before them. Meet ... passionate romance ... despair. Again and again and again. Unless, for once, the latest in a long line of Romeos and Juliets can change their fate.

Ahh, the circus. It's as pure a setting for theatrical magic as any other. And in Amiee Gibbs's acclaimed debut, *magical* is exactly the word for the Carnivale of Curiosities, a circus in Victorian London where — for a price — any wish can come true. Two performers fall perilously in love, a brutal man of power makes an offer the circus can't refuse, and proprietor Aurelius Abre seeks to pull off one final trick to keep his ersatz family together.

In *The Sea Elephants*, queer son Shagun can never be the man his violent father demands in the conservative world of 1990s India. Shagun thinks an all-boys boarding school might be the answer. But his real home becomes a traveling troupe of street performers who reenact Hindu myths as they travel the country. Shagun stays one step ahead of his father's threats to send the boy to a forced conversion center as he discovers the joy of acting. And that journey leads him right into the arms of the charming and sweet photographer Marc, the one person who can show Shagun the worthy — and worthy of love — person he is ... and not just with his photographs.

***The Need for Words: Voice and the Text***
By Patsy Rodenburg
$30.95, Bloomsbury Academic

***Writing for Stage and Screen***
By Sherry Kramer
$30.99, Methuen Drama

***The Arden Encyclopedia of Shakespeare's Language***
By Jonathan Culpeper, Andrew Hardie, and Jane Demmen
$540, Arden Shakespeare

Finally, three works for the serious student of theater, whether you're an actor looking to improve your vocal skills, a writer ready to learn more about how to write for stage and screen, or an actor, a writer, or anyone involved in drama who wants to dive into the words of Shakespeare.

*The Need for Words: Voice and the Text* is a classic textbook by Patsy Rodenburg, one of the best voice coaches in the world. The foreword is by the late, great actor Antony Sher. Part One introduces you to the many ways — not one "correct" way — to speak everything from modern prose to the Bard. And Part Two features practical exercises. Rodenburg's influence extends to the world of business and politics, so you don't need to tread the boards to benefit from her ideas.

How do playwriting and screenwriting actually work? How do audiences experience them? Author Sherry Kramer takes you step-by-step through the specific ways an audience experiences a piece, drawing on examples ranging from the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* to the TV series *Fleabag* and even films like *Pirates of the Caribbean*. If you want to write for stage or screen, it's invaluable. If you're a fan and want to appreciate what you're watching even more, it's revealing.

And if you *really* want to indulge the lexicographical fanatic in your life, nothing — and we mean *nothing* — can top the hefty, two-volume *Arden Encyclopedia of Shakespeare's Language*. It's like the ultimate collection of those modest footnotes in your copy of *Hamlet* explaining a pun or the meaning of a word to the audience in Shakespeare's day. What exactly would people think when one character calls another a harlot? Shock? Surprise? Indifference? And what's the significance of someone eating fish instead of beef? This dictionary explains it all for you, from A to Z, naturally.

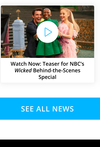
And don't forget about these recent picks:

**The Best New Theater Books of August 2023**
**The Best New Theater Books of Summer 2023**
**The Best New Theater Books of May 2023**
**The Best New Theater Books of April 2023**
**The Best New Books of Spring 2023**

*Michael Giltz is the cohost of the weekly entertainment podcast* Showbiz Sandbox. *He covers all areas of entertainment as a journalist, critic, feature writer, and analyst. Giltz has written for numerous outlets, including the New York* Daily News, New York Post, New York Magazine, the Los Angeles Times, Huffington Post, Entertainment Weekly, and The Advocate. *When Michael's not attending the theater, he's reading about it.*

## NEWS:

Auli'i Cravalho on *Moana 2* and Being the First Disney Princess to Age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All the Festive Things You Can Do in New York City During the Holiday Season

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