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BroadwayGinger

- for the love of theatre -

Top 10 Reasons to Drop Everything and see HUNCHBACK at Aurora/Theatrical Outfit Yesterday

August 25, 2017 August 26, 2017 BwayGinger



Got any plans this weekend? Perfect. Go see a musical. And make it *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* at the Aurora Theatre in Lawrenceville.

Aurora and Theatrical Outfit's joint production of the musical adaptation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* based on the songs from the Disney movie and classic Victor Hugo novel of the same name opened mid-July at [Aurora](http://www.auroratheatre.com/the-hunchback-of-notre-dame/) (<http://www.auroratheatre.com/the-hunchback-of-notre-dame/>) and will transfer to the [Rialto Center for the Arts](http://rialto.gsu.edu/event/hunchback-notre-dame/) (<http://rialto.gsu.edu/event/hunchback-notre-dame/>) in September. It's beautiful. It's dark. It's perfection. Despite its "Disney" tag, there's nothing fluffy Disney or kid-friendly about this wonderful musical. At its core, it is a true adaptation of Hugo's book, representing harsh realities of living in a broken world.

Whatever you do, don't miss *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and here is why.

1. It's basically the movie on steroids.

The Hunchback movie has always disappointed me. It brought us some of Alan Menken's very best music coupled with a genre-ambiguous story that sits homeless between depressing and happy ending-driven. The songs were fantastic, eagerly awaiting an expanded score and overhauled book. Enter the 2014 stage adaptation at La Jolla Playhouse. With a book by Peter Parnell and about a zillion extra songs by Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz, this new *Hunchback* ditches the wishy-washy attempt at child appeal and leans boldly into a genuine take on this dark, sad story. More songs. More backstory. Richer plot. Huge kudos to Aurora/Theatrical Outfit for choosing a rock solid musical.

2. "Top of the World," "In a Place of Miracles," and many more new tunes.

The 10+ added songs- many more if you count the frequent Latin choir background- bring a fresh wholeness to the score. Like Disney's good stage musicals, the extra tunes give audiences a new favorite song from a musical they thought they knew so well. You'll leave the theatre with "Top of the World" in your head and really might cry over "In a Place of Miracles."



3. That set though!

For those who watched the La Jolla production, Aurora's set will look familiar. Designed by Shannon Robert, the whole stage is the interior of Notre Dame itself, complete with a painted floor and stone statues of saints (don't worry- I hate myself for that alliteration as much as you do). But better than La Jolla's, Robert ingeniously depicts Quasimodo "gazing at the people down below" by using a freestanding staircase that easily swivels about the stage. With no suspension of disbelief, the audience often sees Quasi high atop a church tower overlooking Paris, especially effective in "Out There" and "Top of the World." As an added bonus, nostalgic Disney fans get to see this Quasi perform his signature parapet slide which, as '90s Disney VHS tapes remind us, appeared in every preview for *Hunchback* ever.

4. Themes on themes on themes.

Hunchback is largely plot-driven, taking the audience through a never-ending sea of emotions. These are evoked through the inventive direction of Justin Anderson as he pulls out many poignant themes, including the comparison between Quasimodo and his stone gargoyle friends (virtually unexplored in the La Jolla premiere), the power of those who are physically weak but emotionally strong, and of course the line that appears in both the first and final song, "What makes a monster, and what makes a man?"



5. The hardest-working ensemble in the world.

You'd think there were 40 people in that cast. Throughout the whole show, the ensemble is ubiquitous- on stage as characters, off-stage singing in Latin as a church choir, sometimes townspeople, sometimes gypsies. Oh and sometimes gargoyle puppeteers. Discussing what a tragedy it is that *Hunchback* has yet to premiere on Broadway, one cast member jokingly told me, "Well I can see why! Who wants to do all this eight times a week for months? It's exhausting!"



6. Oh hey Lowery Brown, where have you been all my life?

As captain of the guard, Phoebe, Lowery Brown comes close to stealing the whole show. His stirring vocals particularly during “Finale” coupled with his commanding presence secure him in the ranks of Atlanta’s best. It begs the question- where have I been, that this is the first time I’ve seen this incredible talent in action?



7. Puppets.

I’d love to have been a fly on the wall for the moment the creators of the La Jolla production decided how to handle the gargoyles. My best guess is they shrugged and said, “Meh, let’s just throw some people in grey robes and call it a day.” Were they gargoyles? Were they just saints? Lol honestly, who knows. Aurora/Theatrical Outfit’s production looks the issue square in the face and solves it. With puppets. This design is strongest during “Made of Stone,” as Quasimodo has all but lost hope. One by one, the puppeteers lay down their puppets, showing a harsh comparison between the gargoyles’ immobility and Quasimodo’s defeatism.

8. The unstoppable choreography of Ricardo Aponte.

Oh y’all, *Hunchback* sees Ricardo Aponte’s choreography at its finest. Composed mostly of songs sprinkled with dialogue- think *The Phantom of the Opera*, but shorter and with an actual plot- Aponte was busy. His stellar melding of various dance styles drives home the idea that the outcast gypsies are a melting pot of nomads from many cultures. His work brilliantly enhances the story rather than merely making a pretty spectacle to look at. The characters don’t just dance because it’s a moral imperative for musicals. They dance because that’s part of who their characters are, a rare approach that is refreshing to see right here in our city.



9. Julissa Sabino, the only Esmeralda.

You think you've seen Esmeralda, and then you see Julissa Sabino's interpretation, and everything changes. She takes on the resilience for which the character is so well known, but she adds a distinctly feminine gentleness and quirky affectations that bring Esmeralda down from a macho, invincible gypsy to a woman who can admit her imperfections without letting them hinder her. She never sacrifices kindness for strength. Can we just go ahead and hand Sabino that Suzi Bass Award? Please and thank you.

[Check out my conversation with Julissa from this summer!](https://broadwayginger.wordpress.com/2017/06/17/julissa-sabino-talks-returning-to-in-the-heights-with-auroras-musicals-by-moonlight-series/)

[\(https://broadwayginger.wordpress.com/2017/06/17/julissa-sabino-talks-returning-to-in-the-heights-with-auroras-musicals-by-moonlight-series/\)](https://broadwayginger.wordpress.com/2017/06/17/julissa-sabino-talks-returning-to-in-the-heights-with-auroras-musicals-by-moonlight-series/)



10. Haden Rider, my new favorite Quasimodo.

As Quasimodo, Rider tackles the interesting challenge of playing a man with a strong heart but a deformed, weak-looking body. With his whole being, he distinguishes so effectively the difference between the Quasimodo the world sees and the true Quasimodo in his head. We see him transform for the duration of his solos from a man with a physical impediment and raspy voice into a man with a strong posture and stunning voice. Rider's tenor vocals are simply unmatched. He delivers "Out There" with ease, even with strep throat (as he told me was the case the first time I attended the show). Frankly, it's an exhausting process to watch. And he does it magnificently.

You got your tickets yet?

In short, go see the show. As someone who has attended Atlanta theatre for years, I can firmly say this is the best local production I have ever seen. It's a spectacular musical, and there could not possibly be a better version than Aurora/Theatrical Outfit's.

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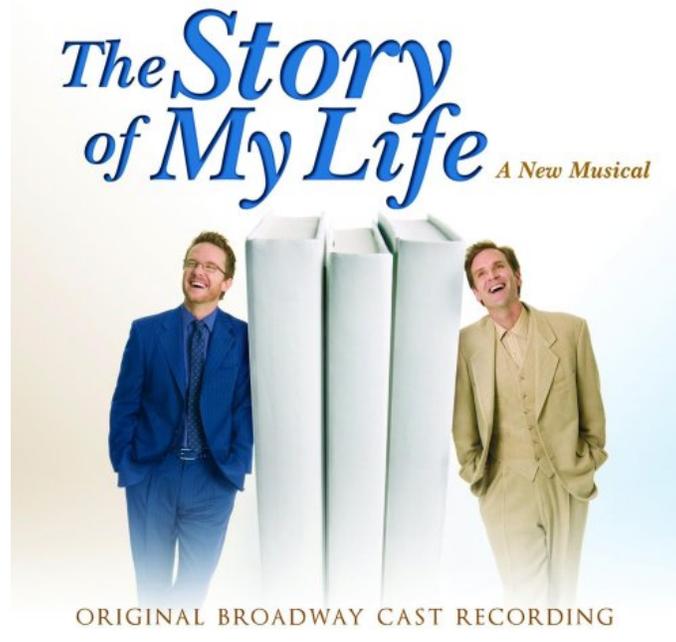
For more information and to purchase tickets, [click here \(http://www.auroratheatre.com/the-hunchback-of-notre-dame/\)](http://www.auroratheatre.com/the-hunchback-of-notre-dame/) (Aurora Theatre) or [here \(http://www.theatricaloutfit.org/shows/the-hunchback-of-notre-dame/\)](http://www.theatricaloutfit.org/shows/the-hunchback-of-notre-dame/) (Theatrical Outfit).



The Guilty Pleasure Round- Musicals I Love Against All Reason

[July 3, 2017](#) [July 5, 2017](#) [BwayGinger](#)

They're not the most critically-acclaimed. They can't claim many awards. But they're unapologetically delightful. Weeping through a musical has its merits (oh, hey Aurora's upcoming production of HUNCHBACK), but sometimes going to a musical means learning nothing except how long you can smile before your mouth loses all feeling. So today, let's just have a feel-good listening party, ok? This is kind of my way of saying some musicals are better out of context. And heard rather than seen.



1. *The Story of My Life*, music and lyrics by Neil Bartram

The recipient of Ben Brantley's most fantastic collection of zingers in the form of a review, this two-man show is indeed uncategorizable, absurd, and incredibly cheesy. It even has this weirdly dark rabbit-hole parallel to IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE while unashamedly plagiarizing all of WIND BENEATH MY WINGS (the movie). In all of its unoriginal glory, listening to THE STORY OF MY LIFE is a solid hour of joy. There's something incredibly meta about writing blog posts while listening to a musical about a writer trying to find inspiration.

Smiliest song: "The Butterfly"

The Butterfly - Story of My Life, Will Chase

Fast-track to smiles line: *When you flap your wings to stretch yourself, it might seem small to you, but you change the world with everything you do.*

Cringe-worthiest line: *And with snow on the back of our pants, we'd wait for our angels to dance.*

LEGALLY BLONDE

The Musical

2. Legally Blonde, music and lyrics by Laurence O'Keefe and Nell Benjamin

Eyeroles always accompany mention of LEGALLY BLONDE in industry circles- followed of course by one brave soul sheepishly uttering, "...but actually I really like it." Everyone in the circle subsequently concurs and giggles with relief.

OMG you guys, a bubble-gum pop, screlt-laiden musical version of the quintessential fluffy chick flick? It's disrespectful to everyone from Antoinette Perry to the actress playing the Star-to-Be in [name that local production of] ANNIE. In spite of it all, "So Much Better" skyrockets my confidence upon every listen. And I believe I've never listened to Kate Shindle sing "...best friggin shooooeeess!!" without lip syncing and believing I can conquer the world.

Smiliest song: "Legally Blonde Remix"

Legally Blonde the Musical Part 16 - Legally Blonde Remix

Fast-track to smiles line: *And soon all y'all gonna know much better! I am so much better than before!* [as a Southerner, I relate to the "all y'all" phrase on a spiritual level]

Cringe-worthiest line: *I'm not a fool, and as a rule I do not 'bond.'* [I'm sorry what? What the what does that even mean?]



3. *A Little Princess*, music by Andrew Lippa, lyrics by Brian Crawley

The second-worst professional musical I have ever seen with my eyes- second only to a B-level tour of a knock-off Cirque du Soleil- I'd advise listening to the album, but you can skip watching it live. Without having any real clue what's happening in the show, you find yourself happily botching the pronunciation of the African words as you dance to "Good Luck, Bonne Chance" and mirror-belt the "I want song"'s staunch, yet never-revisited theme, "I want to live out loud."

Smiliest song: "Let Your Heart be Your Compass"

Let Your Heart Be Your Compass

Fast-track to smiles line: *If that makes me headstrong, fine! That's a fault I'm glad is mine!*

Cringe-worthiest line: That moment Lippa rhymed "lucky" with a forced "plucky." And the irrationally mean but secretly jealous bad guy, played by Julia Murney says it all with a straight face.



4. *Chess*, music by Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus, lyrics by Tim Rice

Speaking of NYT zingers, theatre critic-at-large of the '80s-00s Frank Rich cuts CHESS no slack, with unsparing highlights like, "characters onstage at the Imperial yell at one another to rock music," referring to the score as "a suite of temper tantrums," with the "theatrical consistency of quicksand." Speed-round, because we're having so much fun: "drab," "pompous pretensions," "incoherent," "jerry-built," "sketchy."

Rich's opinions aside, I can go for the in-concert recording from 2009 in a heartbeat. Soaring duet between Idina Menzel and Josh Groban? Yes please! Even its painfully '80s pop hit, "Bangkok" brings a smile to my face every time. Unlike some of the unabashedly feel-good aforementioned shows, this one is packed with overdramatic wannabe LES MIS tune after another. I think the smiling comes in the nostalgia created therein. And giggling ensues because it's borderline nonsensical in every way.

Smiliest song: "Nobody's Side"

Fast-track to smiles line: *How could I leave her? Where would I go? I cross over borders, but I'm still* [something? I actually have no clue what word he says there. I'm sure it's inspirational]

Cringe-worthiest line: *And now let us dedicate ourselves to the spirit of chess:*

*We are one united family,
Black and white.*

The game–

Our one true guiding light,

Sweeping through

The darkest corners

To express

Countries, classes,

Creeds as one,

In love of chess. [yes this is literally a hymn to chess. What is it, a game or a god?!]

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[Julissa Sabino Talks Returning to IN THE HEIGHTS with Aurora's Musicals by Moonlight Series](#)

[June 17, 2017](#) [BwayGinger](#)

Displaying JulissaSabino_TheatricalHS2_AMT.jpg

Joyful is the best way to describe Julissa Sabino.

With enough excitement to fuel all of Metro Atlanta, this diligent actress clearly possesses a contagious passion for her work and a relentless desire to continue stretching herself as a performer. In the interview below, she shares about the process involved in returning to the role of Vanessa in Aurora's encore performance of IN THE HEIGHTS- previously featured on BroadwayGinger as one of [Atlanta's must-see shows of the summer](https://broadwayginger.wordpress.com/2017/05/17/atlantas-top-5-must-see-summer-shows/) (<https://broadwayginger.wordpress.com/2017/05/17/atlantas-top-5-must-see-summer-shows/>)– and how she is more than ready to dive back in and explore the character once again.

How has it been revisiting IN THE HEIGHTS?

I think it's always great! I got to revisit TOXIC AVENGER before, and I'm revisiting IN THE HEIGHTS, so this is my second time revisiting a show, but this show in particular is so much about community and choosing the parts of your tradition you're going to keep with you as you move on, and which parts you're going to leave behind. Especially the second time around, those relationships are really amplified among the characters in the script. It's really great. It's such an ensemble show; I don't think there's a small part in that. Everybody's so integral to the community, and they all form it.

So what effect do you feel like doing it again and again over a long period of time has on the show and the way it comes out?

Gosh, I feel like it's such a wordy show! You know? It's not a normal musical where everything is very legato; everything's very staccato and very fast, so I think doing it a second time and getting out of your head word-wise- our Usnavi, Diego, he's done this show I think 3 times now, and you can see his finesse on stage. That's the perfect word for it. His cleanliness, and finesse in the performance because he just *is* Usnavi at this point and doesn't have to think about his lines. He gets to just kind of observe the world around him, which is what every actor wants to do, to go on stage and not think about what we're doing, only observe what everyone else is giving us, and I think that's the really cool gift of getting to do something like this a second time around.

How is the process going to be different for the concert version?

Gosh, you know, for concert versions I think always energy is the number one word, and of course you have less time to make everything really clean. Ann-Carol Pence, our wonderful leader in music she makes the show, so I know she's going to stress our cut-offs being extremely clean because anytime you're in a field- this sounds really nerdy- but there are no walls, there's nothing for the sound to reverberate off of, so things can get very muddy. Everyone sounds like Ariana Grande, and you can't understand where one word starts and the other finishes.

So diction is really important when you're outside and making things entertaining when you're far away in a field and not in a beautiful theatre. And then Aurora's really nice, because you don't get a bad seat the way it's set up very close. There is premium seating for this event, for those who want to get closer, but I know energy is going to be a huge thing. We're still going to do the lines, I'm sure the dances will be a little bit smaller, and stuff like that, but essentially, it's going to be the essence of the same show. It'll be nice to do it concert-style so we get to concentrate on the words.

It sounds like the perfect show for a concert since it's so dense!

[IN THE HEIGHTS writer Lin-Manuel Miranda] is so presentational anyhow as a human being, and this show is his baby, so it really shows the best parts of his personality, so I think just being at a mic and just singing the show is great. Usnavi has so many funny lines, it's just going to be really great to play those straight out to the audience.

As far as "making things entertaining from far away" like you mentioned earlier, how will you personally be doing that?

Yeah, gosh, for me, voice is so important. you can always make people watch you if you're saying the right thing with the right intention. My hair always helps! [laughs] I'm a head-bobber. But for this is going to be all about positioning and taking equity of the stage. I think we're on the festival's center stage, so we've been on this space for a small concert before, so it will be about highlighting the people who are on stage up front. Just really using all those theatre tools we learned in college! It's crazy, the more professional I get, the more I'm like, "Oh yeah, I should be warming up every day like my college teacher told me." Because it really does make a difference in your work.

So what are you most looking forward to about this version?

Gosh, I guess seeing everybody again! It sounds really lame, but this is one of the most special shows to me. Everyone from our dance captain to our ensemble, they were working non-stop in rehearsal. Even when people weren't using them, they were working backstage cleaning stuff. I've just never seen a process where people, no matter far the show was, they always wanted the show to be better during rehearsal and during the run. So I know that when we get together this time again, everyone's just going to be more clean and it's just going to be a sharper, better show.

It's a cool opportunity for the patrons who missed it last year, because I know a lot of people missed it because we had so many nights sold out. I'm really excited to get the cast together again now that we've all had a year of other shows and a year to just grow and stretch our muscles. To get to do this one again will be so much easier for us.

So particularly with your character, what are you looking forward to most about stepping back into that?

Our director, Justin Anderson, I hadn't worked with him before, but I had known him in the theatre community for a long time, and I knew he always asks a lot of his actors. So my particular task for IN THE HEIGHTS was to be more grounded. I'm very happy as a human being; joy is not hard for me to display on stage, but stability and strength while being vulnerable and not completely falling into a puddle is very hard for me because I have the inclination to want to lean towards extreme emotion.

Vanessa doesn't really show very much emotion. That's her face guard, how she protects herself. So I got a lot of, "That's great, but less." So I'm really excited to get to try that again, because I feel like as we age, we always experience different things in life, and I feel like this year, I have kind of hardened a lot, and not in a bad way, but just that I know how to deal with people and I'm not emotional all the time. So I'm really excited to visit the character now that I've grown, and the things that were a challenge to me before, I'm excited to tackle them now instead of being overwhelmed by them like I was the first time.

That's so great to get a chance to revisit and see how you've grown and how you can apply that!

Yeah, because by the end of the run, I really felt like I got it, but I really wished that I'd had it from the beginning. So I'm excited to be able to do it for one night and just hit it right from the top. And the show is really fun! It's not a show where afterwards you're like, "Ugh I'm just going to go home and cry!" It's a joy to do!

Aurora continues their Musicals by Moonlight series with IN THE HEIGHTS tonight, June 17, at the Duluth Town Green at 8pm. Aurora says, "Free to the public and part of Duluth Art Week, the show will be held on the Festival Center stage. Bring the whole family and a picnic dinner (cooler with drinks perfectly acceptable) to enjoy during the show. Lawn seating begins at 5:00pm for the 8:00pm performance. Beer and wine also available for purchase." [Click here \(http://www.auroratheatre.com/musicals-by-moonlight/in-the-heights-in-duluth/\)](http://www.auroratheatre.com/musicals-by-moonlight/in-the-heights-in-duluth/) for more information!

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7 Songs I Love from Musicals I Don't

June 12, 2017 [BwayGinger](#)



A succinct, sassy title for this playlist could be, "The Partial Credit Round" or "The Best of the Worst," but I'm not in the business of adding more to my Broadway enemies list than Alan Cumming (sorry, Alan).

No matter how many nerd friends rave over them, there are so many musicals I won't listen through (again) if you paid me. With that said, it seems time and again these same shows have about a song and a half or so of pure gold tucked away, which I'd low-key lose it over were they listed in a musical revue. So today let's pay tribute to those shows that really don't do it for me, but they still get their five minutes of fame and/or playing time on my Shower Jams playlist.

1. "Prologue" *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812*

Backstory: A front-runner for the 2017 Tony Awards which ended up disappointing, THE [MEDIocre AT BEST] COMET of 1812 made its first appearance Off-Broadway, starring HAMILTON's Phillipa Soo as Natasha just four years ago.

Why it's a nugget of gold: You can't go wrong with accordions any day of the week. Let's just start there. The Russian melody backing the prologue sets the "complicated Russian novel"'s scene flawlessly- rounded out with shockingly straightforward lyrics which encourage the audience to read their programs for full character names and then introduce the characters a la The Twelve Days of Christmas. Who does that?! It's like a 21st-century take on "Tradition" from FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, and it's delightful.

NATASHA, PIERRE AND THE GREAT COMET OF 1812 (Broadway) - "Prol...

2. "The Proposal/The Night was Alive" from *Titanic*

Backstory: Not a musical version of the Leo DiCaprio movie, this adaptation sailed (#sorrynotsorry) to Broadway eight months before the release of James Cameron's film. TITANIC the musical took home Best Musical and four other Tony Awards (its Best Musical competitors are also obscure), losing in multiple categories to the stellar CHICAGO revival.

Why it's a nugget of gold: Three words: Brian d'Arcy James. BDJ's Fred puts his heart on the line as he dictates a telegram to his lady in New York, imploring her to marry him on his return. Lyrically, the earnest ballad is a triumph. "Marry me! May the Lord who watches o'er watch over thee!" The third-wheeling telegrapher jumps on board as he tells the audience how greatly the telegraph job has improved his social life. Out of context, his verses hang awkwardly, but all is forgiven as he beautifully descants over BDJ's final refrain.

Titanic "The Night Was Alive"

3. "What do I Need With Love?" from *Thoroughly Modern Millie*

Backstory: The star-making performance for Sutton Foster in the title role, originated by Julie Andrews in the 1967 film, also marked the first of Foster's collaborations with composer Jeanine Tesori.

Why it's a nugget of gold: Jimmy, oh Jimmy. It's the classic anti-love song so characteristic of the American musical theatre since the beginning of time. The first song of (spoiler) Millie's love interest, the proudly unattached Jimmy claims immunity to the trap of love while showing the desire for just that. Gavin Creel oozes charm as he sings the playful tune's endearingly contradictory lyrics.

Gavin Creel sings "What Do I Need With Love" at Club Med with Seth Ru...

4. "What a Waste" from *Wonderful Town*

Backstory: The second Bernstein/Comden/Green musical of the early Broadway canon centers around sisters who- wait for it- move to New York in search of fame on The Great White Way. Ever heard of a Broadway show like that? Yeah, me neither. Classic light-hearted '50s shenanigans ensue.

Why it's a nugget of gold: "What a Waste" is the antithesis of the love letters to New York usually found on the Broadway stage. Sung by a naysayer calling malarkey on the notion that NYC is the end of everyone's rainbow, this Bernstein tune features story after story of prodigies whose careers tanked upon moving to the Big Apple. Between the playful tune and unexpected twist on the New York musical, this song truly represents what made Golden Age Broadway absolutely delightful. [Not to be confused with MISS SAIGON's song of the same title, which is less about New York and more about brothels in Bangkok.]

5. **"Take a Chance on Me" from *Little Women***

Background: Based on the Louisa May Alcott classic about the adventures of four sisters at the time of the Civil War, it bears the official subtitle "that Sutton Foster skit where hers was the only Tony nomination."

Why it's a nugget of gold: "Sometimes late at night, I watch you in that attic pacing back and forth like a maniac..." With some downright creepy lyrics to kick it off (but it's a musical, so how creepy can it be?), Laurie (Danny Gurwin) spends an entire song trying to impress Jo (Foster) by recounting his fictitious achievements which she couldn't care less about. But bless his heart, he keeps trying. And then he loses to her in a boxing match.



6. **"Muddy Water" from *Big River***

Backstory: What better style to accompany a musical HUCKLEBERRY FINN than the classic country sound of Roger Miller? Let me set the scene: Huck and Jim are in pursuit of adventure and freedom down the Mississippi river- Huck from his smothering guardians and Jim from slavery. Spoiler alert: Mark Twain awards a happy ending for all.

Why it's a nugget of gold: Oh y'all, if ever there were a song that makes you want to run out and conquer the world, it's "Muddy Water." Without a specific destination in mind, Huck and Jim fearlessly hit the big river (again, #sorrynotsorry), crooning all the way down. Then just when you think the exciting harmonies can't get any better, they up and modulate. You're not ready.

BIG RIVER 1985 Tony Awards

7. "Revolting Children" from *Matilda*

Backstory: A year after BILLY ELLIOT and SPRING AWAKENING dimmed their Broadway lights, and it looked like the days of angsty European youths on the Great White Way were over, in came Roald Dahl's *Matilda* and co. But unlike the trio of Billys- three actors who alternated performances as the title character, because child labor laws are a thing- MATILDA's leading ladies were found ineligible for a Best Actress Tony nom. Not to worry, as they received a special Tony honor instead.

Why it's a nugget of gold: Speaking of conquering the world, there's nothing like a chorus of pint-sized revolutionaries to inspire you to rebel against, well, anything. When it opens with a kid riffing a capella, you know it's going to be off-the-chain. Not to be confused with "Stick it to the Man" from SCHOOL OF ROCK, this giant "I'm here!" number features the kids revolting in the best way they know how- misspelling words, misusing hockey sticks, drawing on the chalk-board, and other such indecorous behaviors. Using an unstoppable rock beat, it's as cute as it is exciting.

MATILDA: THE MUSICAL (Broadway) - "Revolting Children" [LIVE @ Lett...

[Dis]agree wholeheartedly with my thoughts? Perfect. Let's talk about it. Join the conversation on Twitter ([@BwayGinger](https://twitter.com/bwayginger) (<http://twitter.com/bwayginger>)) we can discuss Broadway and Atlanta theatre all the time.

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How to Converse with Theatre Nerds (and Survive a Tony Awards Party)

[June 5, 2017](#)[June 4, 2017](#) [BwayGinger](#)



The Tony Awards night is Christmas for theatre people (or actually Hanukkah would be more fitting, wouldn't it?).

It's the magical June night when a group of the best people in the world (theatre kids) pile on the couch to unashamedly geek out and fangirl for a solid 3 hours. Public Tonys viewing parties are some of few places where you can bet a group of 100+ strangers will think it totally natural to discuss the worst Tony Awards tragedies of all time, and instead of giving you weird looks when you burst into some Broadway tunes, they'll pick up the harmony alongside you. And then BOOM! BFFs for the evening.

But it is possible that some run-of-the-mill fans step foot into such a gathering without a full breadth of Tony knowledge and love for obscure Sondheim shows. My heart goes out to those who receive incredulous looks for not knowing who Patti LuPone is or the number of minutes in a year. So to rescue those people, I have compiled a simple cheat sheet to surviving any conversation with a hardcore theatre nerd. And coming out of a Tonys party without looking like a fool.

1. **Eight times a week.** This refers to the Broadway performance schedule. And you will hear this phrase every five and a half seconds during the Tonys. Please note that when someone says it, it's bound to be part of what they consider a really profound statement. Practice your adequately awed face in the mirror.
2. **THEATRE.** Because theatre nerds are anglophiles, it's "theatre," not "theater." To answer your question, yes they can tell from your voice how you're spelling the word in your head.
3. **OBC.** This stands for "Original Broadway Cast" and is a vital step in understanding nerd-speak. Theatre nerds will repeatedly remind you that the original actors to play [name that role] on Broadway were the best, though hipster nerds prefer the original out-of-town tryout understudy.
4. **Ensemble.** No one refers to the "chorus." The cool kids say "ensemble" instead, because chorus sounds as though the members of the company are less important. Tiny, laughable distinction, really. But seriously, don't say chorus.
5. **Colm Wilkinson** (<http://singularsensationbway.blogspot.com/2013/10/best-of-youtube-les-miserables-takes-on.html>). Aka, "Mr. Les Mis." This brilliant guy was the original Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables* on the West End and Broadway in the '80s. He fittingly played the bishop in the *Les Mis* movie as well. Because he's perfect.
6. **Idina Menzel** (<http://singularsensationbway.blogspot.com/2013/10/wicked-week-spotlight-on-elphabas.html>). I dearly hope anyone who steps foot in a Tonys party now knows her name, but what's a cheat sheet for if not to save the day? She originated the role of Elphaba in *Wicked*, for which she won a Tony Award. And oh yeah, she voiced Elsa in *Frozen*. And she's perfect.
7. **Aaron Tveit** (<http://singularsensationbway.blogspot.com/2013/11/best-of-youtube-aaron-tveit-and-norbert.html>). He'll honestly never stop being a relevant, gorgeous leading man, having made himself known through his appearance as Gabe in *Next to Normal* (<http://singularsensationbway.blogspot.com/2012/11/next-to-normal-j-robert-spencer.html>), Enjolras in the *Les Miserables* movie, and of course Danny in the recent *Grease Live*. But get in line, because everyone and their mother is in love with him.
8. **Andrew Lloyd Webber.** British composer who wrote many, many award-winning musicals including the currently running *Sunset Boulevard*, *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. His works are constantly produced on and off Broadway, and you could say they will never die (with the exception, of course, of *The Phantom of the Opera 2: Love Never Dies*).
9. **Broadway is always better.** If you tell a theatre nerd that you loved *Les Mis* after only seeing the movie, you'll get the death stare. Even worse would be if you let it slip that you actually liked a movie soundtrack better than an OBC recording. Rule of thumb: Terrence Mann beats Russell Crowe any day.
10. **Lin-Manuel Miranda.** Ok, if you don't know him, I'm not helping you.

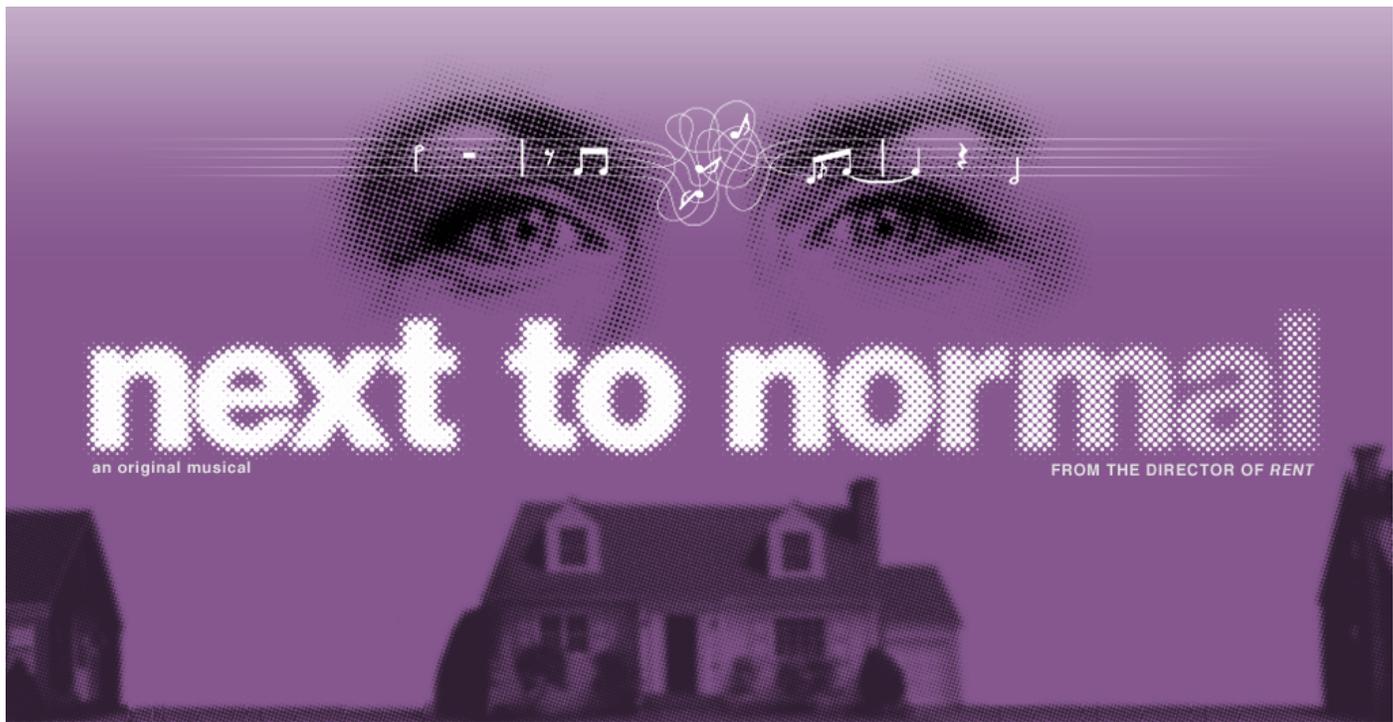
Follow @BwayGinger (<http://twitter.com/bwayginger>) on Twitter for more Broadway love, Atlanta theatre news, and sassy live-tweets. And then let's be best friends, ok?

A version of this piece was originally published as part of the KCACTF Region IV Institute for Theatre Journalism Advocacy. You can read the dated, pre-Hamilton version from February 2014 [here](http://www.kcactf4.org/2014/02/how-to-talk-to-a-theatre-nerd-at-kcactf/) (<http://www.kcactf4.org/2014/02/how-to-talk-to-a-theatre-nerd-at-kcactf/>).

Tagged [Lists](#), [Summer](#), [Tony Awards](#) [Leave a comment](#)

[Musical Swap! Become Obsessed with 7 New Musical Albums this Summer](#)

[May 22, 2017](#) [May 22, 2017](#) [BwayGinger](#)



Is there anything quite like the thrill of consuming a new musical? It's that insatiable need only quenched by the blessed "repeat all" button.

After a decade or so of nonstop musical consumption, new musical obsessions seem a far-gone delight as formerly novel shows now sit overlaid in the music library. But take heart! New (or previously unknown) albums are as endless as the INTO THE WOODS prologue. So let's have a good old-fashioned musical-swap.

Using seven musicals probably long past the looped listening stage, I've extrapolated- sometimes liberally- parallel shows possessing similar characteristics. But mostly it's an excuse to promote some of my favorite shows. Let's kick off the summer by diving into some new musical obsessions!

Worn out *Les Miserables*? Check out *Ragtime*.

1998. Music and lyrics by Lyn Ahrens and Charles Flaherty.

Packed with rousing number after (over)dramatic ballad, RAGTIME possesses the heart of LES MIS sprinkled with the musical sound of turn of the century America. Throw in Audra McDonald and Brian Stokes Mitchell and just try listening to anything else for the next month.

Best hit: "Wheels of a Dream"

Recommended recording: RAGTIME Studio Cast Recording (also check out the Original Broadway Cast recording's version of "Sarah Brown Eyes" which was written after the studio cast recording)

Wheels of a Dream (Jessye Norman Tribute) - Brian Stokes Mitchell - 19...

Worn out *Dear Evan Hansen*? Check out *Next to Normal*.

2009. Music and Lyrics by Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey

It's the modern rock musical style that so defined early 2000s Broadway. There's angst. There's mental illness. There's a pole-dancing hallucination (WHAT? Yes, kinda). Like this season's Tony Awards ringer, N2N dives into the values of friendship and family, ultimately resting on the value of life over happiness.

Best Hit: "You Don't Know/I am the One"

Worn out Newsies? Check out *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

1998. Music and Lyrics by Frank Wildhorn.

You know that musical that defined your childhood, but apparently no one else's, and you're lucky if you discover anyone who has even heard of it? Oh hey, THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL. This underappreciated adaptation of the classic novel stars a post-LES MIS Terrence Mann and includes- if you listen closely enough to group numbers- a pre-legendary Sutton Foster. Like NEWSIES, inspirational male underdog choruses centered around an adventure to take down the bad guys dominate this 25-song album.

Best Hit: "Into the Fire"

Worn out Wicked? Check out *The Wild Party* (Off-Broadway)

2000. Music and Lyrics by Andrew Lippa.

Idina Menzel's showstopping "Life of the Party" is the electrifying "Defying Gravity 2.0" we didn't know we needed. This addictive prohibition-era musical depicts a disintegrating night in the life of a clown named Burrs (a sinister Brian d'Arcy James at his best), a vaudeville performer named Queenie (an on-edge Julia Murney), and their unbalanced friends (including Menzel and her then-husband, the always-smooth Taye Diggs). Note: as odd Broadway trivia would have it, another composer penned a musical of the same title using the same subject material. It's inferior.

Best Hit: "Life of the Party"

Worn out *The Book of Mormon*? Check out *The Fantasticks* (Off-Broadway)

1960. Music and lyrics by Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones.

It's Pyramus and Thisbe without a lion and with some crazy parents, a semi-trustworthy narrator, and a comical song about fake rape. You wouldn't recognize the voice of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST's Lumiere- Jerry Orbach- as he croons the sentimental opener, "Try to Remember," and maybe classic Broadway seems in no way to resemble modern hits. But with the same parodied flavor as THE BOOK OF MORMON, THE FANTASTICKS compiles outlandish circumstances atop a solid '60s musical theatre platform.

Best hit: "It Depends on What You Pay"

Worn out *Into the Woods*? Check out *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*

1962. Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.

"Something familiar, something peculiar, something for everyone, a comedy tonight!" Honest. Simple. This opener leaves no question about what we're getting into. Before Zero Mostel biddy-biddy-bum-ed as Tevye in Anatevka, he won a Tony Award as the clever slave Pseudolus in ancient Rome. Like Sondheim's later hit INTO THE WOODS, FORUM has a whimsical, yesteryear setting. But with fewer fairy tale characters and more Roman guards. And tragical courtesans.

Best hit: "Comedy Tonight"

Worn out *Hamilton*? Check out *Gypsy*

1959. Music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.

No, *GYPSY* is nothing like *HAMILTON*. But the entertainment industry-centric *GYPSY* is a must for all theatre fans, ranked by some as the best musical of all time (and I'm not just saying that because theatre people are egotistical and love shows about themselves). Just as Rodgers and Hammerstein is a prerequisite for the entire musical canon, the best work of Lin-Manuel Miranda's chief inspiration must precede anything Miranda. Lyrically, it's hard to beat good old Steve.

Best hit: "Everything's Coming up Roses"

Tagged [Forum](#), [Gypsy](#), [Lists](#), [Next to Normal](#), [Ragtime](#), [Summer](#), [The Fantasticks](#), [The Scarlet Pimpernel](#), [The Wild Party](#) [Leave a comment](#)

It's Too Darn Hot, so Check out Atlanta's Top 5 Must-See Shows this Summer!

May 17, 2017 May 17, 2017 [BwayGinger](#)



Summer in the South can be downright miserable without proper distraction from the heat.

Fortunately for us, the Atlanta theatre family is offering ample distractions in the forms of some rockin' shows all summer long! From parks to beloved local venues, ITP to OTP, this season in Atlanta has us counting ourselves lucky to be southerners. Now that all of our interstates are back in place (BLESS), let's celebrate by venturing all around the city and laughing as we sail through.



Beauty and the Beast at the Atlanta Lyric Theatre

When: June 9-25

Elevator pitch: I mean first of all, it's one of the best Disney musicals ever. As for the timing, God bless the Lyric for capitalizing on the recent release of the Emma Watson movie. I give them 5 stars and a cookie for this decision. But better than the movie, this version will include the songs written for the Broadway show, including my personal favs, "If I Can't Love Her," and "If I Can't Love Her (reprise)." (although, tbh I could go my whole life without hearing "Human Again" again)

But really, why fight Atlanta traffic? But to get right down to the point, the big draw for me is seeing the hilarious Jeff McKerley work his antics as Lumiere. Y'all, I would watch this man read the phone book. Serious question: is that a thing?

Get those tickets! (<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&sqi=2&ved=0ahUKEwit4ZrWuO3TAhWCz4MKHcjDwCOFggpMAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Fatlantalycrictheatre.com%2Fshow%2Fdisneys-beauty-and-the-beast%2F&usg=AFOjCNFc6T8W-9k30eGlpkKF3ZlcCW7oBg&sig2=er03ke7PhEgzxApobjW-7Q>)

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&sqi=2&ved=0ahUKEwit4ZrWuO3TAhWCz4MKHcjDwCOFggpMAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Fatlantalycrictheatre.com%2Fshow%2Fdisneys-beauty-and-the-beast%2F&usg=AFOjCNFc6T8W-9k30eGlpkKF3ZlcCW7oBg&sig2=er03ke7PhEgzxApobjW-7Q>



The Dancing Handkerchief at Theatrical Outfit

When: June 1-18

Elevator pitch: To close their 40th season, Theatrical Outfit is bringing us a brand new musical that has yet to see the light of day. According to TO, this world premiere "blends the emotional accessibility of Disney princesses with the odd-ball pop-rock sensibility of Sergeant Pepper or Ziggy Stardust and evokes the imagined lands of Narnia and Alice's Wonderland." Literally, what's not to like?

But really, why fight Atlanta traffic? Get excited y'all, because the songs are written by the Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony Award-winning Robert Lopez, who brought us FROZEN, AVENUE Q, and THE BOOK OF MORMON! I, for one, will be on the edge of my seat waiting for the next Lopez earworm.

Get those tickets! (<http://www.theatricaloutfit.org/shows/the-dancing-handkerchief/>)



Robin Hood at Serenbe Playhouse

When: June 2-August 13

Elevator pitch: When's the last time you remember hearing about a stage production of ROBIN HOOD? (Your nephew's middle school play doesn't count) The oh so familiar story of the good guy running through the woods, robbing the rich to feed the poor, and romancing a fair maiden in the process is perfect subject material for this creatively outdoor theatre.

But really, why fight Atlanta traffic? It's no secret that this spring's fabulous production of GREASE made me promise myself I'd never miss another Serenbe show (see: [10 Reasons You Can't Miss GREASE at Serenbe](https://broadwayginger.wordpress.com/2017/04/12/10-reasons-you-cant-miss-grease-at-serenbe-playhouse/) (<https://broadwayginger.wordpress.com/2017/04/12/10-reasons-you-cant-miss-grease-at-serenbe-playhouse/>)). I'm excited to see a refreshingly fun, family-friendly adventure story. And how often do you get to see a woodsy play actually take place in nature?

Get those tickets! (<http://www.serenbeplayhouse.com/shows-events/current-season>)



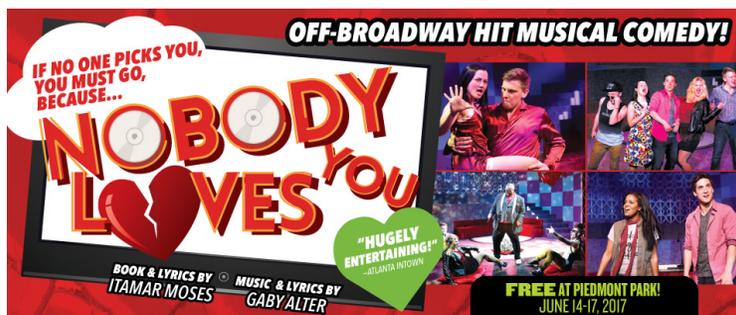
Memphis (AGAIN!) from Aurora

When: May 20 on the Suwanee Town Square

Elevator pitch: If you hate FREE Tony Award-winning musicals with infectious music and uncontrollably awesome dancing, skip this one. But if you're human, the millionth reincarnation of Aurora Theatre/Theatrical Outfit's MEMPHIS will kick off your Atlanta summer with just the right combination of excitement and inspiration.

But really, why fight Atlanta traffic? I fell in love with MEMPHIS when I saw the original Broadway cast and first tour, and I can tell you Aurora's production was just as good. With dynamite vocals and endless, lovable energy, Travis Smith's Huey Calhoun is not to be missed.

Get those tickets! (<http://www.auroratheatre.com/musicals-by-moonlight/memphis-in-suwanee/>)



Nobody Loves You from Horizon Theatre

When/Where: June 14-17 at Piedmont Park

Elevator pitch: Can we just agree that it's a crime to not go see a FREE musical? Ok perfect. Now that's out of the way... Horizon has been the real MVP of the Atlanta theatre scene for the last few years as they have brought back crowd favorites- usually starring local stud Nick Arapoglou, if we're being honest- for free encore performances in a popular Atlanta hangout spot.

But really, why fight Atlanta traffic? As a general rule, I'd pay to see Leslie Bellair work her comedic magic any day of the week (see: her single-handed portrayal of a two-character fight in TOXIC AVENGER). If it's free, that's what you'd call a no-brainer.

Get those tickets! (<http://www.horizontheatre.com/plays/nobody-loves-you-piedmont-park/>)



BONUS: In the Heights from Aurora Theatre

When/Where: June 17 at the Duluth Town Green

Elevator pitch: Free shows on free shows, y'all! Honestly, this is an easy one. Before there was HAMILTON (the musical, not the historical figure), almost-EGOT-er Lin-Manuel Miranda penned a semi-autobiographical musical called IN THE HEIGHTS. This encore performance of Aurora/Theatrical Outfit's non-stop Dominican party about the importance of family and identity closes out the Lawrenceville company's FREE Musicals by Moonlight series with a bang.

But really, why fight Atlanta traffic? Opening Aurora's new season late last summer, IN THE HEIGHTS perfectly combines musical theatre rap- which is

apparently a thing now- with endearing characters and a heartfelt message. But let's be real, the endlessly talented Julissa Sabino as Vanessa makes attending this show a moral imperative.

Get those tickets! (<http://www.auroratheatre.com/musicals-by-moonlight/in-the-heights-in-duluth/>)

Hit me up on Twitter ([@BwayGinger](http://twitter.com/bwayginger) (<http://twitter.com/bwayginger>)) and tell me which shows you're hype for this summer!

Tagged [Atlanta](#), [Atlanta Lyric Theatre](#), [Aurora Theatre](#), [Horizon Theatre](#), [Previews](#), [Reviews](#), [Serenbe Playhouse](#), [Theatrical Outfit](#) [Leave a comment](#)

NATIVE SON is Non-Stop at Marietta's New Theatre in the Square

May 10, 2017 May 10, 2017 [BwayGinger](#)



A hazy stage, so smoke-filled one can hardly see through it. Just before the play begins, it clears to reveal two platforms and chain-link fences in the background. An African-American man enters frantically with clothes in hand, pulling on his pants and shirt as he addresses the audience. Other characters vocally supply eerie sound-effects on their gradual entrances. Thus begins NATIVE SON at Marietta's New Theatre in the Square. Its fragmented nature throws the audience into the middle of the story, a perfect prelude to a frantically-structured narrative.

Bigger- yes that's his name- chauffeurs for a white family, but when he brings home the oldest daughter Mary (Shay Alexi) very drunk and tries to keep her silent as her blind mother hears them arrive late at night, he accidentally smothers the girl to death. And no, that's not a spoiler, as this all transpires in the first ten minutes.

The play follows the story of Bigger (Dee Jordan) almost entirely non-sequentially, as the audience sees his choices interrupted by the voice in his head, another character altogether (known as "Black Rat," which you'd only know with a labeled production shot in hand). Black Rat (Rahshaun Cormier) functions at first as the voice of reason- or foolishness- but as the play progresses, both he and the real Bigger alternately live Bigger's life. One moment, Bigger is speaking to the private investigator, the next it's his alter-ego doing the interacting as Bigger supplies the voice.

The experience is exhausting in the best way. The jumpy, though not impossible to follow, style mirrors Bigger's perpetually conflicted mental state. As such, this allows the audience to ride along with him and truly sympathize with his plight. Under the powerful direction of Emil Thomas, the piece exemplifies how a theatrical style alone can convey the emotions of the central character. From the moment it starts, we're all in and without an intermission, don't get a reprieve until the very end.

With no microphones in sight, a bare bones set, and few- if any- recorded sound effects, this unplugged atmosphere refreshingly emphasizes Nambi E. Kelley's rich text, allowing it alone to tell the story. This script choice suits the Emil Theatre's small space well, and the subject matter rings relevant in a time when race relations continue to dominate social media discussions. Its fast pace is accentuated by an equally fast-paced and poignant lighting design by Stephen Reilly, to whom I'd give star billing. Why do Bigger and Black Rat strip down in the final sequence? I couldn't tell ya. I also couldn't tell ya what those last few lines were.

Follow [@BwayGinger](http://twitter.com/bwayginger) (<http://twitter.com/bwayginger>) for more Atlanta theatre news, reviews, and snarky opinions. And then let's be best friends and talk about how much we love Aaron Tveit.





Tagged [Atlanta](#), [Reviews](#) [Leave a comment](#)

10 Reasons You Can't Miss GREASE at Serenbe Playhouse

[April 12, 2017](#) [May 14, 2017](#) [BwayGinger](#)



Full disclosure: GREASE is not my favorite musical. As a rule, it's one of those movies reserved only for girls' nights every few years or some other context in which there are enough distractions involved that we can all forget it has no plot. But y'all. Serenbe Playhouse's production has completely changed that image for me. Set outdoors on a T-shaped stage in a wide open field, this interpretation is the best I've ever experienced. And here's why.

1. **That opener though.**



It begins at the Rydell High School graduation with Miss Lynch, Patty Simcox, and Eugene Florczyk remarking on the classy behaviors these supposedly Wally Cleaver-type teens exhibited during their time at this learning institution. Their rose-colored speech is interrupted by the first chords of the title song as dancers slide in and Rizzo (a powerful Julissa Sabino) takes the stage, mic in hand, to own "Grease is the Word." I think my exact whispered words to my companion, after dropping my jaw, were "Oh I was NOT ready for that!"

2. **Summer Nights. Need I say more?**

As the intro to possibly the most popular song from the movie started, I could see the whole audience very visibly adjust their posture in anticipation. The whole song can best be described as completely satisfying. With the Pink Ladies on one set of rolling mini-bleachers and T-Birds on another, choreographer Bubba Carr incorporated a wonderful mix of "standard" sequences we're all expecting to see from this song specifically, while building on them to bring a fresh look to the beloved piece.

3. **Triple threats on triple threats.**



Since Serenbe uses the Broadway version- as opposed to the movie we're familiar with- significant portions of the narrative in this adaptation look different from what some may be expecting. But only in good ways. Serenbe's production is primarily ensemble-based, contrasting to the movie which shifts the focus to heavily showcase stars like John Travolta. This company-led musical demands that every single one of the core of about ten characters not only sings as the featured singer in a solo/duet (which, I might add were a delightful addition!), but every lead performer flaunts top-notch dance abilities as well. Not to mention the ensemble who we've come to assume at this point is made up of brilliant dancers. To answer the question all nerds are asking, yes, Keneckie sings "Greased Lightning" instead of Danny.

4. **Atlanta celebs.**

Thrown in for cameos, local Atlanta radio personalities appeared in the show as well. Cindy Simmons (former co-host of Star 94's morning show for a hundred years or so), along with her mother and husband, was featured as one of the stars of the drive-in movie that Danny and Sandy attend, and "new guy Brian" from Q100's Bert Show slips in there as the Teen Angel at some performances.

5. **Rizzo. RIZZO, Y'ALL.**

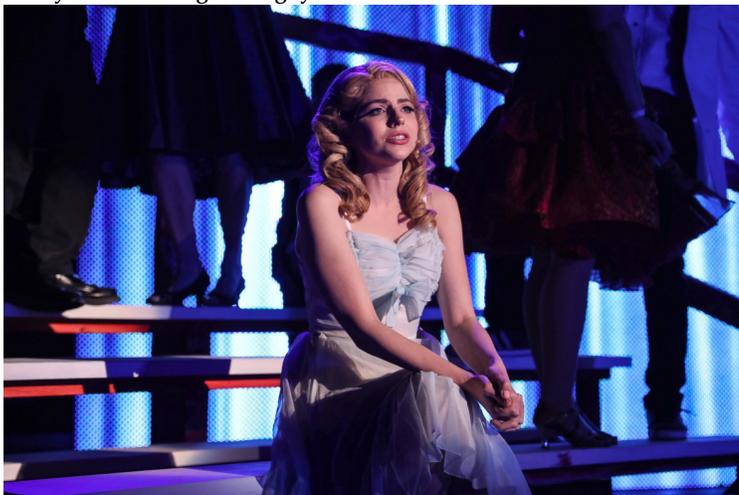


There aren't enough words to express how much you must see Julissa Sabino as Betty Rizzo. She was adorable as Vanessa in *IN THE HEIGHTS* at Aurora last year, and as Rydell High's resident bad girl, she takes her skills to the next level. Oozing with that appealing rebellious nature you'd expect of Rizzo, Sabino also brings out the heart of the character, reminding the audience this bad-ass is really just a teenager at the end of the day.

6. **It works in ways the movie didn't.**

Remember how in the movie the characters are one-dimensional at best with barely any development? This adaptation fixes those problems significantly. Patty Simcox has a thing for Danny, which Danny takes advantage of to make Sandy jealous. ChaCha doesn't own the dance floor at all, but actually makes a fool of herself at the prom. As for the rest of the T-Birds and Pink Ladies, their aforementioned solos/duets show these Rydell cliques are made of real people rather than space-fillers. Oh and they don't even try to have that car race that was so epically lame in Fox's *GREASE LIVE* that even Aaron Tveit's lovely face couldn't redeem those awkward five minutes.

7. **Sandy doesn't change for a guy.**



The clencher, the most significant element that makes this show a refreshing change from the movie is the way Sandy and Rizzo's characters overlap. Rizzo sings "There are Worse Things I Could Do" to Sandy after discovering Rizzo is pregnant. In a move that ultimately transforms Sandy's character, the song placement makes it about Rizzo directly telling Sandy that while she realizes she's "the bad girl," at least she has life experience and depth, unlike the squeaky clean blondie. "Sandra Dee (reprise)" powerfully follows right after Rizzo's exit. With this in mind, Sandy doesn't change her wardrobe and demeanor because she wants Danny to like her again; she changes because, boys aside, she wants to take chances and experience the world. She wants to be fearless. She wants to have depth. She wants to be Rizzo.

8. **India Tyree.**

With a recent featured appearance in Aurora's premiere of *SWEEP*, I'd add India to the list of Atlanta actors to see in 2017. As Jan, the Pink Lady in pigtailed, her charisma overflows in the adorable delivery of every line, and the precision in her characterization makes her a joy to watch.

9. The lovely men.



As much as I'd love to stick to serious, professional-sounding critiques, the reality is you just can't talk about GREASE at Serenbe Playhouse without mentioning how attractive all the guys are. Michael Stiggers Jr. does not disappoint as Danny. Jeremiah Parker Hobbes' swag is out of this world as Keneckie. Honestly, the men are all straight-up eye candy. Thanks, Serenbe fam.

10. It shows us vast possibilities of where theatre can go.



Is it still an incomplete story with large plot holes and a leading lady that has no character? Absolutely. But it's the most delightful two or so hours you could spend in this lovely spring weather. The execution of the music is spot-on. The dancing is nostalgic as well as inventive. The set takes advantage of modern technology through the use of a backdrop screen. The whole show utilizes an immersive drive-in movie motif from the moment you step onto the property. It's one of those refreshing shows that brings something new to the table and reminds us why live theatre is an art form. It reminds us how a Broadway musical can be expanded into something new and exciting.

GREASE runs through April 16 at Wild Flower Meadow at Serenbe Playhouse. [Click here \(http://www.serenbeplayhouse.com/shows-events/current-season\)](http://www.serenbeplayhouse.com/shows-events/current-season) for more information and tickets!

Photo credits: BreeAnne Clowdus

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Review: Tony-Winning Music Prevails in Aurora's THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

[March 31, 2017](#)[March 30, 2017](#) [BwayGinger](#)

Laundry lines. Walls made of doors and windows. With no curtain to hide the set, Aurora Theatre invites the audience into the world of THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY the minute they walk in the door.

The music in BRIDGES showcases some of composer Jason Robert Brown's best work. There's no question every time Kristin Markiton (Francesca) and Travis Smith (Robert) open their mouths to sing, pure gold emerges. Brown's Tony Award-winning score comes to life brilliantly in the hands of Aurora's performers. Were this an in-concert performance, the show would be nearly flawless. But it's primarily in the execution of the book that this piece falters.

BRIDGES tells the story of Francesca, a housewife left alone at home for three days as her husband and bickering children leave on an unexciting trip. When a handsome stranger, Robert, knocks on her door asking for directions, what Francesca had envisioned as a quiet weekend alone becomes a whirlwind affair that causes her to question where her priorities really lie.



The first act's story coasts on introduction of characters, inciting incidents, and sexual tension, but the beginning of act two reveals the aforementioned plot preliminaries are all the narrative has to offer. The show is then left with an empty second half that runs out of steam, kept afloat only by the music. Pick any song involving the two leads, and it could be considered the best in the show, rounded out with minimal but sufficient company involvement.

We could talk forever about the excellent symbolism communicated in the set: walls made of frames constructed from household doors and windows, and how these set elements represent the connection between Francesca and Robert, and so on. And then there's the realistic kitchen, which maybe has microphones in the kitchen cabinets? Whatever attention to detail enabled the cabinets to close loudly enough to be heard around the theatre was not wasted. Ironically, the same cannot be said for the sound mixing of many spoken lines which were drowned out by background music.

Kristin Markiton as Francesca soars on her expert vocal skills, though she lacks much more. Her nearly expressionless performance as the central character falls flat, leaving much to be desired and many questions about her character at the end. Rather than a woman torn between staying with her family and running off to her romantic fantasy, her one-dimensional portrayal comes across as altogether indifferent.

Known to Aurora audiences as Huey Calhoun, the graceless DJ with a heart of gold from 2015's production of MEMPHIS, Smith is anything but awkward as Robert. His voice enraptures the audience from the first moment he sings, and his stirring portrayal embodies the ultimate dreamlike hunk with his every movement, while simultaneously carrying a very sweet quality as well.

The Bridges of Madison County is presented through April 16. A discount matinee will be offered on Wednesday, March 29 at 10 a.m. with tickets starting at \$20. Regular tickets range from \$30-\$65 and can be purchased online at tickets.auroratheatre.com (<http://tickets.auroratheatre.com/>) or by calling the Box Office at 678-226-6222.

Photo credit: Chris Bartelski

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