

# THE THEATRE

## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

### The Children

In Lucy Kirkwood's play, a pair of retired nuclear engineers are visited by an old friend during a world crisis. Directed by James Macdonald, in a Manhattan Theatre Club transfer from the Royal Court. (*Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens Dec. 12.*)

### Early Shaker Spirituals

A return engagement of the Wooster Group's piece, drawn from a 1976 album of Shaker songs and featuring Elizabeth LeCompte, Frances McDormand, and Suzzy Roche. (*The Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. thewoostergroup.org. Previews begin Dec. 7. Opens Dec. 9.*)

### Farinelli and the King

Mark Rylance stars in the Shakespeare's Globe production of Claire van Kampen's play with music, in which the depressed King Philippe V of Spain is soothed by the beautiful voice of a castrato. (*Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.*)

### Farmhouse / Whorehouse

At the Next Wave Festival, Lili Taylor performs Suzanne Bocanegra's piece, an "artist lecture" looking back on Bocanegra's childhood in Texas, where her grandparents' farm sat across the road from a famous brothel. (*BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 12-16.*)

### Hanjo

As part of the Noh-Now series, SITI Company stages Yukio Mishima's modern adaptation of a fourteenth-century Noh play, with the actors rotating through the roles. Leon Ingulsrud directs. In English and Japanese. (*Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. Dec. 7-9.*)

### Jack and the Beanstalk

The writer-actor Mat Fraser and the feminist burlesque star Julie Atlas Muz collaborated on this panto-inspired morality tale for all ages. (*Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-598-0400. In previews. Opens Dec. 10.*)

### Suddenly

PuppetCinema's Zvi Sahar created this puppet adaptation of the Israeli writer Edgar Keret's short-story collection "Suddenly, a Knock on the Door," presented at the Next Wave Festival. (*BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 6-9.*)

### Twelfth Night

Fiasco Theatre, known for its D.I.Y. version of "Into the Woods," stages the Shakespeare comedy, directed by Noah Brody and Ben Steinfeld. (*Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.*)

## NOW PLAYING

### The Band's Visit

It has a wisp of a plot: an Egyptian police orchestra, conducted by Tewfiq (Tony Shalhoub),

lands in the wrong town in the Negev Desert, where the locals, stone-faced and few, put the musicians up for the night. In the morning, they leave. And yet David Yazbek and Itamar Moses's new musical, based on a 2007 Israeli film, fills up the stage with feeling, the muted kind that dwells in missed connections and half-remembered tunes. The director, David Cromer, has enormous trust and patience in his material, letting the emotional music of an uneventful night in the middle of nowhere rise to the surface. But the show's not so secret weapon is Katrina Lenk, who plays Dina, a café owner with a dry stare and a drier wit. When she finally opens up to Tewfiq, in a song about the "jasmine wind" that brought in Umm Kulthum on her mother's radio, she's a radiant presence. (*Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.*)

### Bright Colors and Bold Patterns

In his uproarious solo show, the writer-performer Drew Droege takes us on a bittersweet exploration of the gay soul on the night before a wedding in Palm Springs; the show's title refers to the dress code, which proscribes guests from wearing either of those things. Enraged by this diktat and fuelled by margaritas and cocaine, Droege's Gerry holds court in a cabana, unleashing hilarious, biting bitchiness for the benefit—and to the growing discomfort—of a couple of frenemies. Under Michael Urie's assured direction, the show rushes along with manic energy, before settling into a more reflective pace. Gerry looks confidently garrulous at first, and he speaks fluent pop culture (the riffs on "Steel Magnolias" and Olympia Dukakis are especially funny), but he also embodies the jitters of aging gay men trying to hold on to a colorful identity in an increasingly beige world. (*SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.*)

### The Dead, 1904

A melancholy specimen of dinner theatre, Irish Rep's adaptation of James Joyce's novella returns for an encore run. Staged and served in the unusually sumptuous rooms of the American Irish Historical Society, "The Dead, 1904" invites audiences into a holiday party thrown by two musical Dublin sisters and their niece. Sipping glasses of sherry, viewers eavesdrop on song and conversation. Then everyone gathers for a flavorsome meal (the cranberry relish deserves a curtain call) before retiring upstairs for a disquisition on marriage and mortality. The sensitive adaptation, by Paul Muldoon and Jean Hanff Korelitz, only occasionally betrays its prose sources; the cast, which includes Melissa Gilbert, is largely excellent; the direction, by Ciarán O'Reilly, typically lively. Still, it is a tricky thing to be asked to chew and to feel all at once. Is the true finale the snow-softened meditation on existence or the custard-soaked pudding? (*American Irish Historical Society, 991 Fifth Ave., at 80th St. 212-727-2737.*)

### Harry Clarke

David Cale's play begins in South Bend, Indiana, with Philip Brugglestein, a queer boy who always felt more comfortable when speaking in a British accent. As a kid, he even invents an alter ego, a Cockney charmer called Harry

Clarke. Harry lies dormant for a few decades, until Philip, jobless and aimless, revives him during an encounter with a handsome man. The sparkle-eyed Billy Crudup plays Philip and Harry and the dozen or so other characters, which means that Crudup, as the pansexual Harry, has sex with himself several times. Cale's plot isn't all that credible; neither are the characters. But Crudup embodies them with empathy and impishness. "Harry Clarke" could have been a downer, in which the void at Philip's core consumes him. Instead, it's a fairy-tale meditation on what it might mean for anyone to put aside a timeworn identity and feel "absolutely, exhilaratingly, alarmingly free." (*Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.*)

### The Last Match

A play with plenty of underspin, Anna Ziegler's gripping and contemplative drama unfolds during a close-fought U.S. Open semifinals match. The ranking player is Tim Porter (the staggeringly charismatic Wilson Bethel), an American golden boy beginning to feel his age. He faces Sergei Sergeyev (a captivating Alex Mickiewicz), a volatile Russian who's a decade younger. Under Gaye Taylor Upchurch's direction, the match is a nail-biter, even as Ziegler pauses to eavesdrop on the men's thoughts, memories, and interactions with the women in the stands. Zoë Winters is poignant as Tim's wife, Mallory, a no-nonsense former athlete, and Natalia Payne is delightful as Sergei's girlfriend, Galina, an all-nonsense sometime actress. In ways both moving and heavy-handed, tennis becomes a metaphor for life: "The pressure and the failure and the death and the ambition and the coming up short," as Tim says. (*Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.*)

### Latin History for Morons

In his latest comic monologue (a Broadway transfer from the Public), John Leguizamo is class clown turned substitute teacher, sprinting from the Aztecs to Sonia Sotomayor in less than two hours—with dance breaks. When his son was in eighth grade, Leguizamo tells us, he was picked on by racist bullies and stumped by a history project for which he had to find a hero. Hoping to fortify his boy with heritage, Leguizamo deep-dived into textbooks, returning with pearls of knowledge: did you know that twenty thousand Hispanics fought in the Civil War? Still, he struggles to find encouraging tales of indigenous forebears, who, like his son, were on the losing side of most battles. Directed by Tony Taccone, the show makes the occasional hackneyed turn—it's unclear why Montezuma is rendered as a flaming homosexual—but quickly rights itself, and Leguizamo lands clear comic punches, especially when sending up his own machismo. (*Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.*)

### Meteor Shower

At eighty intermissionless minutes, this intelligent and surprising work about marital life and modern-day repression, by the writer and performer Steve Martin, moves at a fast clip, providing many laughs and "Aha!" moments along the way. The plot centers on two couples—or are they?—who are meeting for a little wine and to watch a celestial event in Ojai, California. Trouble ensues as social decorum gives way to the id. The director, Jerry Zaks ("Hello, Dolly!"), cares about his actors, and he appears to have done a great job making them all feel cared for, from the