Broadway Yearbook, 2001–2002

Steven Suskin

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Broadway Yearbook, 2001–2002

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by Steven Suskin

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Broadway Yearbook, 1999–2000
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2001–2002 BROADWAY YEARBOOK

Steven Suskin

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For

Helen, Johanna,

and Charlie

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Broadway Yearbook, 2001–2002

The Curtain Rises

The 2001–2002 Broadway season was the most difficult in memory. The events of September 11 cast a large shadow on the nation and the world. Compared with the overall situation, the problems of any particular industry are of minor importance; but it was a hard time for people around Broadway to be entertaining, and entertained.

Broadway curtains rose once more after a two-day, three-performance cancellation, but nothing was the same. Business was understandably dismal; the total gross for the week of the attacks, with most shows giving only five performances, was $3,647,734. (Thirty-six percent of the business came from three shows that began the week with strong advance sales, *The Lion King*, *42nd Street*, and *The Producers*; the latter, alone, accounted for 15 percent of the week's total.) This compared with $9,603,505 for the week ending September 9—which in itself had been a bad week, falling from $11,586,215 the week before.

Business on Broadway was already declining even before the attacks, due to a poor economic outlook and a related reduction in incoming tourists. *Variety* had an extended story about the grim prospects for the fall, complete with gloomy prognostications from top theatre executives, in the issue that hit the newsstands on September 10. (One major producer was quoted as saying "it's times like now—September, October and through to January—that things are going to be put to the test.")

Five shows shuttered immediately; they were doing marginal business, anyway. Additional expected closings were averted, thanks to an effective advertising campaign combined with steep discounting. Advance sales, though—except for the biggest hits—did not recover. The Broadway economy has always been led by sellouts; people buy tickets to a show they are only vaguely interested in seeing because they want to go to the

theatre on a given date and can't get seats for their top choices. The longer seats remain available for the biggest hits, the harder it is to sell tickets for other shows.

A word should be said, in passing, about the people of the theatre industry. As the weekend of that fateful week arrived, with the country in mourning and the fire still smoldering fifty blocks away, the casts of twenty-three Broadway shows dragged themselves into their dressing rooms, put on their makeup, and forced themselves before the footlights —not an easy thing to do. This applies not only to onstage performers but also to stagehands, musicians, wardrobe, managers, press agents, and other backstage personnel. The spirit in evidence onstage, at this most disheartening time, was heartening.

Moving from matters economic to artistic, the 2001–2002 season was a marked disappointment. The 2000–2001 season was dominated by *The Producers*, which received the most phenomenal critical and audience response in memory. This was accompanied by a second musical comedy hit, *The Full Monty*. (The latter was severely weakened by *The Producers*, settling for a moderately profitable run of less than two years.) On the nonmusical side, there were two major crowd-pleasing moneymakers, the multiple award winner *Proof* and the popular comedy hit *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*.

The 2001–2002 season featured nothing of particular interest, other than the cyclonic whirlwind that breezed onto Broadway under the title *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*. The musical output was especially weak, with the Tony Award going to a poorly received show that even its supporters admitted was flawed. The nonmusical offerings were somewhat more noteworthy, with three intriguing but problematic works struggling for attention.

What most onlookers tended to overlook was that 2001–2002 *did* contain two major successes: a musical that might well prove more profitable than *The Producers* and a play that was a hotter ticket than *Proof* by far. The musical, *Mamma Mia!*, received mixed-to-unfavorable reviews, being a triumph of nostalgia-targeted marketing over art. The play, *The Graduate*, got the very worst reviews of the entire season: ten-out-of-ten pans, as tabulated in our critical scorecard. *The Graduate* nevertheless outgrossed all of the year's plays and half of the musicals.

Six shows in addition to *Mamma Mia!* and *The Graduate* managed to recoup their investments before season's end, which is an impressive number. (The 1997–1998 season had only two.) The 2001–2002 hits included limited engagements of three relatively inexpensive, one-person shows, but even so; eight of the season's twenty-six commercially produced ventures earned a profit, with another five potentially likely to join

the moneymakers. This can only be seen as a positive statistic, regardless of artistic quality.

It was a season of one-person shows, with six opening on Broadway. (Based on a season of thirty-five official Broadway openings, that's roughly one out of six.) Five came clustered in a row, no less, the entire output from December through February. Add in three two-character plays, and you have nine shows—more than a quarter of the Broadway season—with a grand total of twelve actors.

This might seem an ominous trend, driven by excessive production costs and a lack of investors. In some ways, it was. However, these nine shows included my choice for the best Broadway offering of the season, the aforementioned *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*. Also in the group were three other entertainments with four additional dazzling performances, from Barbara Cook, John Leguizamo, Jeffrey Wright, and Mos Def. So let's not fear shows with small casts, only shows with small talents.

The thirty-five shows included fourteen revivals; not the largest number ever—the 1995–1996 season had seventeen—but the most in five years. As has been the case in recent seasons, March and April—between the spring thaw and the Tony nomination deadline—were overcrowded with openings; seventeen shows, half of the annual crop, within eight weeks. There was far from enough business to go around, with the shows ganging up on each other and discount offers abounding.

Total Broadway gross sales (as usually defined, after deduction of commissions and certain union benefits) for the season were $642,545,026; total attendance was 10,958,432, with an average ticket price of $58.63. Sales and attendance were down from 2000–2001, when the totals were $665,424,767 and 11,937,962, respectively. The ticket price, needless to say, was up from 2000–2001, when it had been $55.75.

The dropoff of $20 million in the gross was not a surprise; the week of the terrorist attack counted for a $6 million deficit alone. Still, this was the first time since the 1985–1986 season that the total gross fell. Without the $3 increase in the average ticket price, it would have been an even steeper drop. More indicative of the situation was the falloff in total attendance from 11,937,962 to 10,958,432. That's 8.2 percent, or one million fewer tickets; the lowest attendance since 1997–1998, and the first drop in attendance since 1990–1991.

Playing weeks were 1,430, the lowest level since 1996–1997 and the first time this figure dropped since 1991–1992. (Playing weeks represent the total number of individual weeks that performances were given over the course of the season, in all Broadway theatres combined.) Ten of the thirty-eight Broadway theatres were dark for more than half of 2001–2002; the Minskoff was empty the entire season, with the marquee from

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer—which closed May 13, 2001—haunting Forty-fifth Street until the summer of 2002. (The Minskoff finally reopened in October 2002 with previews of *Dance of the Vampires*, after seventy-four dark weeks.) Seven other houses were dark for eight months or more, including desirable theatres like the Booth, the Broadway, and the Richard Rodgers.

Ticket prices continued their inevitable climb. *The Producers*, with typical bravado, raised their top ticket to $100 on the day after they opened in mid-April 2001. (They actually charged $99, onto which patrons were compelled to add a buck for so-called theatre restoration.) This price was matched in 2001–2002 by *Mamma Mia!*, *Into the Woods*, and the reigning *Lion King*. More astoundingly, some long-running musicals that weren't doing especially strong business saw fit to raise their price to $95. The standard for nonmusicals became $75 (or $76.25, with the restoration charge), which had been tentatively introduced in 2000–2001 (but not by *Proof* or *The Allergist*). One play, the limited engagement of *The Crucible*, charged $86 and managed to sell extremely well —although not well enough, it seems, to quite recoup their high costs.

The Producers can also be blamed for a second development. Broadway Inner Circle, a for-profit agency formed by some of the *Producers* producers, placed prime seats for their show on sale to the general public for $480. ("When you got it," to quote Max Bialystock Brooks, "flaunt it.") The prime seat scheme was adopted by four other shows in early 2002. This was understandable in the case of hot tickets like *The Graduate* and *The Crucible*, both of which charged $250; it was more of a stretch for the long-running revivals of *Chicago* and *Cabaret*, which offered seats for $180.

One foresees that more and more prime seats for hit shows will be withheld from general circulation, in favor of fat cats and the expense account crowd. While this sounds like a terribly greedy act on the part of producers and theatre owners, the fact is that illegal scalpers and brokers have been selling tickets to hits at bloated prices since the days of Flo Ziegfeld. Starting with *The Producers*, some of this money is finally getting into the pockets of investors and royalty recipients. Which is a small victory, anyway.

Broadway Yearbook 2001–2002 presents an analytical discussion of each show that opened on Broadway between May 28, 2001, and May 26, 2002. I have also deemed it fitting to include certain non-Broadway productions of importance, such as the Meryl Streep–Mike Nichols *Seagull* and the City Center Encores! series. The shows are discussed in chronological order; an alphabetical arrangement might make it easier to browse

through to find a specific show, but it seems pertinent to have the reader discover each show in the same order as the critics. Timing—that is, competition on the date of opening—is a significant factor in the reception and fate of Broadway shows.

The opening-night credits and cast list are followed by a discussion of the production. I neither ask nor expect the reader to necessarily agree with my opinions. You will no doubt concur with some and not others, hopefully more of the former than the latter. Taste is individual, or at least it should be. I have tried to be consistent in my opinions and to support my arguments (in the nonargumentative sense of the word). It is one thing to turn thumbs up or thumbs down; it is another thing to explain *why* the thumb is nudged toward the heavens or the opposite. Or someplace in between.

My aim has been to keep things informative and instructive; hence, the discussion is laced with examples from general Broadway history (and my checkered experience on and around Forty-fourth Street). What were the shows like? How were the shows received, by both the critics and the audiences? What other factors contributed to their success or failure?

The discussion of each production is followed by a section of related data, starting with dates and length of run. Performance and preview totals have been compiled using data from the League of American Theatres and Producers. In some cases these differ from the "official" counts appearing elsewhere; I consider the League tabulation—reported week by week, along with the grosses—to be more accurate. Profit/loss information comes from a variety of sources, including the invaluable *Variety*. Shows from nonprofit organizations have been similarly classified where applicable, based on an estimate of surplus income generated by the production. It should be understood that a show that ends its Broadway run with a loss might well make up the difference from post-Broadway income. Conversely, it is not unknown for a show to have recouped its costs but—due to an overextended run or unforeseen touring costs—slip back into a deficit.

Shows that were still running on May 27, 2002—the first day of the 2002–2003 season—are so indicated. (For the sake of completeness, closing dates and performance totals are included for shows that ran into 2002–2003 but closed before this book went to print.) Next comes the critical scorecard, which gives the reader a general idea of the critical reception of each production. The scorecards are based on the opinions of up to ten critics from major newspapers and magazines. The number of reviews varies; not all attractions were covered by all the critics. (One production this season received no reviews, due to extreme circumstances.) The scorecards usually reflect the opinions of critics from the *New York*

Times, the *Daily News*, the *New York Post*, *Newsday*, the *Associated Press*, *Variety*, the *Village Voice*, *USA Today*, and *New York Magazine*, as well as assorted others.

Reviews have been rated in five categories:

Rave	Overwhelmingly positive, enthusiastically indicating that the show should be seen
Favorable	Positive, indicating that the show is good though not outstanding, or that the show is good despite minor flaws
Mixed	Positive and negative aspects are presented, with no overall recommendation; sometimes the reviewer is simply unclear
Unfavorable	Negative, indicating that the show doesn't work—often despite positive elements or good intentions
Pan	Overwhelmingly negative, indicating—often with a hint of annoyance—that the show was downright bad

Quite a few of the reviews fall somewhere between two categories. I have called 'em like I see 'em, although the tenor of some reviews is open to interpretation.

A brief financial section gives the reader an idea of the show's box office performance. Figures, again, have been compiled using information from the League of American Theatres and Producers. Finally, Tony Awards (and nominations) received by the show and its personnel are listed, along with other major awards.

Following the main body of the book are six appendixes that, it is hoped, will prove a useful supplement to the discussion of the season.

And so the curtain rises, as they say, on *Broadway Yearbook 2001–2002*.

See you at the theatre.

The Shows

JULY 11

A Thousand Clowns

The first new show of the 2000–2001 season was a limited-engagement revival headed by a big-name TV superceleb who had long wanted to star on Broadway in the play, regardless of ability or suitability. Despite a bumpy tryout, it came to town and quickly died.

The first new show of the 2001–2002 season was another limited-engagement revival headed by a big-name TV superceleb. Who had long wanted to star on Broadway in the play. Regardless of ability or suitability. Despite a bumpy tryout, it came to town. And did slightly better, but only slightly.

There were major differences between Kelsey Grammer's *Macbeth* and Tom Selleck's *A Thousand Clowns*. In the first place, Grammer was a current-day Hollywood star, reportedly earning a whopping $1.76 million per episode of *Frasier*. (Per episode, I say; multiply that figure twenty times per season.) Selleck was a former Hollywood star, with eight seasons' worth of the adventure series *Magnum, P.I.*, and film hits like *Three Men and a Baby* on his résumé. Still somewhat bankable, and presumably with lots of cash in the bank. (Selleck: "I know people will laugh at this, but I'm not going to make enough money to pay my mortgage with this.") But Selleck's star, as a star, was relatively faded. That is to say, he wasn't turning down a million a week to appear on Broadway.

The first show of 2000–2001, a revival with a big TV star, quickly closed. The first show of 2001–2002, another revival with a big TV star, did better—but only slightly.

It should also be pointed out that *A Thousand Clowns* had been unsuccessfully revived on Broadway less than five years earlier. In an interview with *Playbill*, Selleck said that when he was offered a role in a dif-

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present

TOM SELLECK
in
A THOUSAND CLOWNS
by
HERB GARDNER

also starring
BARBARA GARRICK
NICOLAS KING
BRADFORD COVER
with
ROBERT LUPONE
and
MARK BLUM

Scenic Design ALLEN MOYER
Costume Design MARTIN PAKLEDINAZ
Lighting Design BRIAN MACDEVITT
Sound Design PETER FITZGERALD

Casting LIZ WOODMAN
Production Stage Manager JANE GREY
Production Manager ARTHUR SICCARDI

General Management NINA LANNAN ASSOCIATES
Marketing NANCY RICHARDS GROUP
Press Representative IRENE GANDY

Directed by
JOHN RANDO

Cast (in order of appearance)

Murray Burns Tom Selleck
Nick Burns Nicolas King
Albert Amundson Bradford Cover
Sandra Markowitz Barbara Garrick
Arnold Burns Robert LuPone
Leo Herman Mark Blum

Time: April 1962
Place: Manhattan

ferent revival—the 2000 production of *The Best Man*, I'd suspect—he replied, "I don't want to do this play, but if you ever want to do *A Thousand Clowns*, I'm your guy." And so he did.

Grammer's attempt was less of a stretch than Selleck's, perhaps. Kelsey was trained at Juilliard, although he dropped out without graduating. He appeared on Broadway in an earlier, almost-as-bad *Macbeth*, and actually played the role when leading man Philip Anglim was indisposed by a bad case of reviews. Selleck, on the other hand, came to town with a charming personality—he was the winner of four People's Choice Awards for Favorite Male Television Performer—but little ammunition, acting-wise. Charm goes a long way, in eccentric comedies at least, and Mr. Selleck was able to get by.

Herb Gardner's *A Thousand Clowns* is not your everyday, forty-year-old

Broadway comedy. To begin with, it's very good; at least, it was when it opened in 1962. Gardner was a professional cartoonist, creator of a strip called *The Nebbishes*. His wife at the time, an aspiring actress, got a role in a small off-Broadway show that showed little promise. "I can write something like that," he reportedly said, and he did. *A Thousand Clowns* was a sizable success, although it ran about forty years less than Rita Gardner's show, *The Fantasticks*.

A Thousand Clowns was one of the first of the new breed of offbeat comedies that took the stage in the early 1960s. You note that I don't call them Jewish comedies. Broadway had seen numerous comedies over the years by writers who happened to be Jewish, from George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart to Lillian Hellman and Arthur Laurents. There had also been occasional "Jewish plays" catering to Jewish audiences, usually starring people like Gertrude Berg or Molly Picon. But sophisticated American-Jewish humor suddenly became bankable with the TV popularity of Sid Caesar in the 1950s. Caesar's merry band of writers included Neil Simon, Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner, Larry Gelbart, and Woody Allen, all of whom had a hand in writing the book on late twentieth-century American comedy.

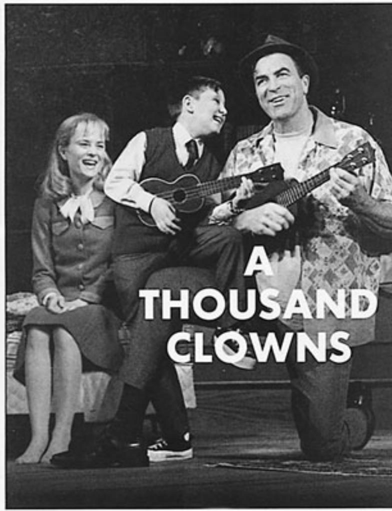
This new type of humor reached Broadway in October 1960, when Mike Nichols and Elaine May brought their act to the Golden in *An Evening with Nichols and May*. *A Thousand Clowns* came next, on April 5, 1962. This was followed by Neil Simon's smash hit *Barefoot in the Park*, which opened in October 1963 and broke the 1,500-performance mark. (Simon's *Come Blow Your Horn* preceded *A Thousand Clowns* into town, but it was of the "Jewish play" category.) By the time Murray Schisgal's *Luv* opened in October 1964, these so-called offbeat comedies had set a new tone for Broadway comedy. Mike Nichols—not coincidentally—was coauthor and star of *An Evening with Mike Nichols and Elaine May*, and director of *Barefoot* and *Luv*.

Herb Gardner had a deliciously offbeat way with words, with a tendency to overwrite; his dialogue was full of flavorable nooks and crannies.

Murray Burns, the unconventional hero of *A Thousand Clowns*, is an unemployed comedy writer. Unemployed by choice. Raising his unconventional twelve-year-old nephew in an unconventional manner, he runs afoul of the child welfare authorities. Scrambling to keep custody of the kid—one of those preteen little-old-men favored by Broadway comedy writers—he beds one of the welfare workers, and even goes back to work for Chuckles the Chipmunk (see below). This ne'er-do-well with child was not an altogether novel situation; Arnold Schulman's *A Hole in the Head*—a comedy hit in 1957, a Frank Sinatra–Frank Capra motion pic-

ture in 1959—had pretty much the same setup. But the magic of *A Thousand Clowns* was in the characters, and especially in the text. Gardner turned out to have a deliciously offbeat way with words, with a tendency to overwrite; his dialogue was full of flavorable nooks and crannies.

A Thousand Clowns does not have a Jewish theme, but it seems to be very much about second-generation Jewish-American assimilation. Murray's ex-employer, kiddie show star Leo Herman (aka Chuckles the Chipmunk), is written as a "Jewish" Jew. He wears his ethnicity on his sleeve in the same manner as Sid Caesar or Jackie Mason. Murray's brother, talent agent Arnold Burns, is the opposite. Dressed in impeccable suits with well-chosen ties and cufflinks, he is as assimilated as can be (for 1962 anyway). Murray himself falls somewhere in between. Like Arnold, he does not show outward signs of his religion. Unlike Arnold, though, he doesn't try to hide it. Murray enthusiastically celebrates Irving R. Feldman's birthday, Irving R. Feldman being the purveyor of Murray's favorite pastrami sandwich. (Arnold would not, under any circumstances, importune his neighbors to celebrate Irving R. Feldman.) Murray does not act like he's Jewish, or like he's non-Jewish; call him American. The play's love interest, a novice social worker from Queens on her first day of fieldwork, is also presumably Jewish. At least, her name is Sandra Markowitz.



I looked forward to the first Broadway revival of *A Thousand Clowns* when it was announced by the Roundabout for the summer of 1996. Robert Klein, who had done a superb job in *The Sisters Rosensweig*, headed the cast; Gene Saks, director of Simon's *Brighton Beach* trilogy and *Lost in Yonkers*, was at the helm. (Saks, in his acting days, created the role of Chuckles.) I hadn't seen the original *A Thousand Clowns*, having been nine years old at the time, but I was very familiar with the play and the marvelous 1965 screen version that was closely adapted from the Broadway staging. (Fred Coe produced and directed both.) Would the play seem a little dated? a little clunky? a little long?

A Thousand Clowns
Opened: July 11, 2001
Closed: September 23, 2001
83 performances (and 7 previews)
Profit/Loss: Loss
A Thousand Clowns ($77.50 top) was scaled to a potential gross of $546,521 at the 1,095-seat Longacre Theatre. Weekly grosses averaged $236,000, with business peaking at $269,000 in late July. Total gross for the twelve-week run was $2,658,624. Attendance was about 57 percent, with the box office grossing about 43 percent of dollar-capacity.

Critical Scorecard

Rave	0
Favorable	5
Mixed	0
Unfavorable	0
Pan	5

Yes, indeed. There were extenuating circumstances, though. Klein, his leading lady Jane Addams, and director Saks quit or were fired midway through rehearsals. Judd Hirsch, star of Gardner's *I'm Not Rappaport* (1985), took over the lead, under the direction of Roundabout associate director Scott Ellis. Not surprisingly, the production was a shambles. (Gardner has a reputation for being difficult. His troubled 1974 comedy *Thieves* changed stars, director, and producers during previews.) The Roundabout *A Thousand Clowns* was poorly reviewed; it seemed dated, clunky, and long.

You might think that this reception would dissuade new producers from turning around and mounting a commercial production of the play only five years later. But Tom Selleck wanted to do it. ("When he began his career as an actor," Selleck's *Playbill* bio informed us, "Tom's favorite play was *A Thousand Clowns*; with this appearance he is fulfilling a life-long career ambition.") If you are a producer who believes that Tom Selleck on Broadway is going to sell tickets (at $77.50) like hot knishes, you'll let him do any darn play he wants. Except, maybe, *Macbeth.*

Selleck didn't sell many tickets, it turned out. Certainly not in advance. The plan was to garner good reviews on the road—*A Thousand Clowns* played tryouts in Raleigh/Durham (North Carolina), Chicago, and Boston—and build up a strong Broadway advance. I don't know what kind of advance they ended up with, but they made the highly unusual last-minute decision to cut out a week of previews and move up their Broadway opening. Traditionally, moving up the opening implies that preview business is lousy and the show has run out of money. (The official word was that Gardner was ill, leaving the implication that the producers were afraid he wouldn't make it through the extra week. After which we never heard anything more about Gardner's health.)

Selleck was well matched by his supporting cast, which was less than exemplary. A glance at the 1962 stage and 1965 film casts might prove instructive. Saks appeared in both; so did William Daniels, as Albert.

(Daniels started out as a teenager in *Life with Father*; made an award-winning splash off-Broadway in Edward Albee's *A Zoo Story* in 1960; moved on to the role of John Adams in *1776*; won six Emmys for *St. Elsewhere*; and was elected president of the Screen Actors Guild.) Sandy Dennis, who created Sandra, became a full-fledged Broadway star in 1964 with *Any Wednesday*; her role was undertaken in the film by Barbara Harris. A. Larry Haines was brother Arnold onstage; Martin Balsam played the role on film, and rather astoundingly snagged an Oscar in the role. (In Arnold's big scene, Balsam gave what you might call a primal scream—a startling moment that apparently won him the award.)

True, performers like these might well have made Selleck look like an amateur from Hollywood; but they certainly would have helped the play. Mark Blum, as an ennervating Leo (Chuckles), gave the only performance I would care to see again; he was also good in *The Best Man*, from the same producers. Ten-year-old Nicolas King made an interestingly quirky Nick. Unfortunately, it was difficult to understand much of what he was saying; he talked in paragraphs, as if he had carefully memorized the words but neglected the punctuation. That's often a problem with child actors, especially in a case where they're playing characters who talk like little old (Jewish) men.

The 1996 Broadway revival was dated, clunky, and long. You might think that this would dissuade producers from mounting another only five years later.

Selleck mentioned in interviews that as an acting student, he would do scenes from *A Thousand Clowns* whenever he got the chance. His performance looked it. He was not bad, not bad at all. But there is more to the character than meets the page, and here Selleck was helpless. In acting school, Selleck tells us, the reaction was always "Why are you doing this play? You should be doing *The Rainmaker*. You should be doing Tennessee Williams guys." Murray Burns is a New Yorker with pickle brine in his veins. Selleck is USC all the way. I'm all for casting against type; but the guy you cast against type needs to be able to *act*. Jason Robards was not a New Yorker, either, nor was he Jewish. But he was an actor.

Murray has a speech in the first act about his sister Elaine. Elaine, who stopped by one day with her seven-year-old son and two suitcases; went downstairs to buy a pack of filter-tip cigarettes; and didn't return until six years later. He matter-of-factly explains that the boy's father is not a question of where, but a question of who. "You might call Nick a bastard, or a little bastard, depending on how whimsical you feel at the time."

This speech, to be effective, must be delivered passionlessly, without pity; just the facts, with an occasional joke thrown in. And that's how

Selleck did it. Robards was passionless here, too; but there was pain behind the words. (The play takes place circa 1960, when there was still a stigma against illegitimacy—especially in what was presumably a middle-class Jewish family.) With Robards, you felt that Murray Burns had cried about this, when no one was looking, and forced himself—as a defense—to adapt the matter-of-fact, sardonic attitude. That was Murray's character, as Robards played him. He casually shrugged off everything that was important, allowing the audience to recognize what was important by the way he casually shrugged it off. Selleck just said the words. He said them very nicely, and he was charming as he said them; but where was Murray?

"You're not a person, Mr. Burns—you're an experience," complains Albert, the exasperated welfare worker, and that sums things up neatly. Selleck was nice and charming and more or less lovable; but Murray, in his characterization, was very much *not* an experience.

JULY 12

Major Barbara

The Roundabout Theatre Company moved to the Broadway-eligible Criterion Center in 1991 and under Todd Haimes's direction quickly became a major force in the New York theatre. While they had been turning out revivals since 1966, Roundabout shook things up with their 1993 revival of Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie*. Director David Leveaux took an old-fashioned, seventy-year-old drama, inserted Broadway novices Natasha Richardson and Liam Neeson, and turned it into the steamiest play of the season. This was followed by a delightful revival of Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick's *She Loves Me*, which transferred to the Atkinson (for an unsuccessful run); a strong rendition of Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land*, with Christopher Plummer and Jason Robards; and a highly entertaining Brian Bedford-Richard Wilbur exploration of two *Molière Comedies*. The 1995–1996 and 1996–1997 seasons were less notable, although Frank Langella was highly acclaimed for his performance in Strindberg's *The Father*.

But it was the 1997–1998 season that elevated Roundabout into a class with Lincoln Center Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, and the New York Shakespeare Festival. Revivals of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* and John Kander and Fred Ebb's *Cabaret* picked up both best revival Tony Awards for that season, along with four of the eight best actor/actress awards. *Side Man* opened after the Tony deadline; it would pick up the Best Play Tony the following year. All three would transfer to open-ended runs; while *Cabaret* proved to be a major hit, both plays struggled and closed at a loss. Still, the sudden burst of artistic success was reminiscent of the glory days of the Shakespeare Festival, with such hits as *That Championship Season* and *A Chorus Line*.

Said success helped Roundabout to acquire and renovate the old Selwyn Theatre, one of those ghost houses on Forty-second Street. That is,

the string of successful shows attracted enough benefactors and corporate sponsors to continue underwriting the Roundabout season and fund the theatre project as well. The largest sponsor, apparently, was American Airlines, whose name now graces the Roundabout's main stage.

As fate would have it, the artistic success of the 1997–1998 season proved short-lived. The Roundabout continued to do pretty much what they had been doing in the manner in which they had been doing it. But art is a tricky business. The 1998–1999 season saw only two "Broadway" productions. (The Roundabout also produces a series of "off-Broadway" productions—that is, in a smaller theatre with a lesser set of union scales.) Much was expected from their revival of the Cy Coleman–Dorothy Fields–Neil Simon musical comedy *Little Me*. The show, though, is exceedingly stubborn. It failed, originally, in 1962; it failed when the three authors revised it in 1982; and it was even less successful in the Roundabout's revision, despite the presence of Martin Short and Faith Prince. This was followed by James Goldman's *The Lion in Winter*, one of those not-too-good plays that becomes a well-known title by virtue of its motion picture version (which starred Katharine Hepburn). Stockard Channing and Laurence Fishburne played it at the Roundabout, but it remained not too good.

The 1999–2000 season began with *The Rainmaker*, another one of those not-too-good plays that becomes a well-known title by virtue of its motion picture version (which starred Katharine Hepburn). This one was scuttled by a strange performance by Woody Harrelson; a film and television star, he was a fish out of water as the rainmaker. This was followed by an awkward production of *Uncle Vanya* starring Derek Jacobi, Roger Rees, and Brian Murray. How bad could it be? you wondered, until the truth of the situation smothered you after forty minutes. The season ended with the gala opening of the new American Airlines Theatre and the old Kaufman and Hart rib-tickler *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, headed by Nathan Lane (just before donning Max Bialystock's mantle). This production received its share of enthusiastic reviews and did strong business, but it seemed weak at the knees to me. Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* was somewhat less favorably reviewed—by the more "important" critics, anyway—but I found it compelling theatre. I just compiled a list of my top twenty Broadway experiences of the three seasons since *Cabaret*. *Betrayal* is the only entry from the Roundabout.

Shaw is always a safe choice for a nonprofit. How can you go wrong? And no royalties to pay!

This was followed by two misbegotten revivals. Noël Coward's *Design for Living* is a difficult vehicle for various reasons, starting with the fact

ROUNDABOUTTHEATRECOMPANY

TODD HAIMES, Artistic Director
ELLEN RICHARD, Managing Director
JULIA C. LEVY, Executive Director, External Affairs

Presents

Dana Ivey · Cherry Jones · David Warner
David Lansbury · Denis O'Hare · Zak Orth

MAJOR BARBARA

by
George Bernard Shaw

Brennan Brown · Beth Dixon · James Gale
Denis Holmes · Rick Holmes · Kelly Hutchinson
Richard Russell Ramos · Henny Russell · Jenny Sterlin

Set Designer	*Costume Designer*	*Lighting Designer*	*Original Music Composed by*
John Lee Beatty	Jane Greenwood	Brian MacDevitt	Dan Moses Schreier
Hair and Wig Design	*Production Stage Manager*	*Technical Supervisor*	*Casting by*
Paul Huntley	Roy Harris	Steve Beers	Jim Carnahan, C.S.A. *and* Amy Christopher, C.S.A.
General Manager	*Founding Director*	*Associate Artistic Director*	*Dialect Coach*
Sydney Davolos	Gene Feist	Scott Ellis	Kate Wilson

Press Representative Boneau/Bryan-Brown · *Director of Marketing* David B. Steffen

Directed by
Daniel Sullivan

This production is funded in part by a generous grant from The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation.

Major support for the inaugural season at the American Airlines Theatre generously provided by The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation.

Roundabout Theatre Company is a member of the League of Resident Theatres.
www.roundabouttheatre.org

ROUNDABOUTTHEATRECOMPANY

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Cast (in order of appearance)

Lady Britomart Undershaft Dana Ivey
Stephen Undershaft Zak Orth
Morrison Denis Holmes
Barbara Undershaft Cherry Jones
Sarah Undershaft Henny Russell
Charles Lomax Rick Holmes
Adolphus Cusins Denis O'Hare
Andrew Undershaft David Warner
Rummy Mitchens Jenny Sterlin
Snobby Price James Gale
Jenny Hill Kelly Hutchinson
Peter Shirley Richard Russell Ramos
Bill Walker David Lansbury
Mrs. Baines Beth Dixon
Bilton Brennan Brown
Factory workers Eli Gonda, Jeremy Furhman, Jeremy Lewit, Brian Shoaf

Place: The library of Lady Britomart Undershaft's house in Wilton Crescent, London; the yard of the West Ham Shelter of the Salvation Army; and Undershaft's Factory in Middlesex
Time: January 1906

that it was written to order for its original stars, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne and Coward himself. The Roundabout sensibly assembled an intriguing director (Joe Mantello) and an intriguing pair of newly minted stars (Alan Cumming and Jennifer Ehle), the very same recipe that resulted in the aforementioned *Anna Christie*. There is an inherent danger of attempting a new-style production of an old play. When it works, you're a genius. Otherwise, thud!

And then Roundabout turned to its most highly anticipated production ever, the first Broadway revival of Stephen Sondheim and James Goldman's *Follies*. Another intriguing young director—Matthew Warchus, of *Art* fame—came up with another new take. When it works, as in *Cabaret*, you're a genius. But when you're dealing with a beloved musical with legions of die-hard fans, the thud! is magnified tenfold.

For the opening slot of 2001–2002, Roundabout turned to a safe choice. Shaw is always a safe choice for a nonprofit. Who will attack you? How can you go wrong? And, besides, no royalties to pay! Molière and Rostand and Ibsen and Chekhov all need translations. Unless you're content to trot out an archaic text in the public domain, you either commission a new version or pay to use a recent one; Shaw and Shakespeare are free. Roundabout produced four Shaw plays in their previous ten seasons, *Candida* in 1993 and—on their non-Broadway stages—*Misalliance* (1997), *You Never Can Tell* (1998), and *Arms and the Man* (2000). All four of which were—well, safe choices. None were especially memorable except for the last, which was critically excoriated.

That this *Major Barbara* was not to be just another workmanlike classic became apparent with the announcement of the star and director. Cherry Jones has become one of Broadway's few dependables: dependably good, dependable to return to the stage this year and next year and every other year. (Ms. Jones, at this point in her career, seems to be a modern-day Julie Harris.) Can a production of *Major Barbara* be merely workmanlike with Ms. Jones in the title role? Not likely.

The presence of Daniel Sullivan, too, could only further raise expectations. Sullivan's recent work included *Dinner with Friends* and *Proof*, both of them good plays (and Pulitzer Prize winners). They also happened to be excellently directed. Sullivan also directed Ms. Jones in the 2000 revival of *A Moon for the Misbegotten*; between *Moon for the Misbegotten* and *Major Barbara*, he directed two off-Broadway shows for Lincoln Center Theater, *Spinning into Butter* and *Ten Unknowns*.

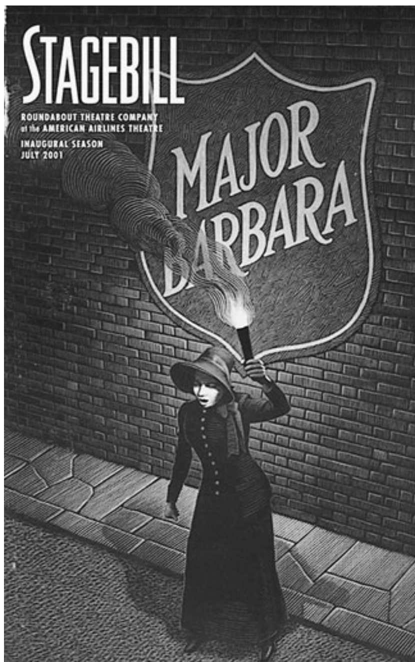
Shaw and Sullivan and Jones were well met, with pleasing results. Pleasing, yes; highly pleasing, no. This *Major Barbara* had just about everything you'd wish, except a spark. Jones gave a skillful and enjoyable performance in a role for which she was well suited; one can't expect her to stretch herself every time, can one? After *Pride's Crossing* (at Lincoln Center in 1997) and *Moon for the Misbegotten*, she deserved a role that didn't require superhuman effort for a change. She was well supported by Dana Ivey—who, oddly, received first star billing. Ms. Ivey played Lady Undershaft as if she were the star; she found laughs throughout the text—always valid laughs—which helped move the ninety-year-old, two-and-three-quarter-hour play along.

Cherry Jones is one of Broadway's few dependables: dependably good, dependable to return to the stage this year and next year and every other year. Can *Major Barbara* be merely workmanlike with Jones in the role?

And then there was the Andrew Undershaft of David Warner. Mr. Warner appeared as if out of nowhere. At the age of twenty-two, he em-

barked on the fast track to stardom with the Royal Shakespeare Company. He played leading roles in Peter Hall's *War of the Roses* trilogy in 1963 and starred as Richard II in 1964 and Hamlet in 1965. Warner became a movie star in 1966 as the eccentric hero of *Morgan!*, abruptly changing course. He left the stage altogether in 1972, spending the ensuing three decades playing motion picture villains in such films as *The Omen*, *Time after Time*, and *Titanic*. And then he suddenly turned up, at the age of sixty, as the Roundabout's Undershaft. And he was very good; despite his long absence—apparently the result of a numbing case of stage fright—Warner can speak, and he can act. The outspoken Undershaft speaks for Shaw—or, rather, the outspoken Shaw speaks through Undershaft—and Warner's intelligent handling of the role capably transmitted Shaw's ideas. But he never leapt across the footlights at you.

And it helps to have Andrew Undershaft leap across the footlights. A self-described "profiteer in mutilation and murder," Undershaft rails against "Christmas card moralities of peace on earth and goodwill among men." To Undershaft there are two things necessary for salvation: "Money and gunpowder." (Adolphus, Undershaft's Greek-speaking prospective son-in-law, notes "that is the general opinion of our governing classes. The novelty is in hearing any man confess it.")



Undershaft jabs away at religion, government, and morality. The seven deadly sins, to him: "Food, clothing, firing, rent, taxes, respectability, and children. Nothing can lift those seven millstones from Man's neck but money; and the spirit cannot soar until the millstones are lifted." Let Lady Undershaft admonish him: "You ought to know better than to go about saying that wrong things are true. What does it matter whether they are true if they are wrong?" Undershaft jabs right back: "What does it matter whether they are wrong if they are true?"

Undershaft shocks moralists by praising alcohol: "It makes life bearable to millions of people who could not endure their existence it they were quite sober. It enables Parliament to do things at eleven at night

Major Barbara
Opened: July 12, 2001
Closed: September 16, 2001
74 performances (and 32 previews)
Profit/Loss: Nonprofit [Loss]
Major Barbara ($65 top) was scaled to a potential gross of $349,943 at the 740-seat American Airlines Theatre. Weekly grosses averaged about $243,000, with business building to $287,000 for the Labor Day week. Total gross for the fourteen-week run was $3,217,456. Attendance was about 82 percent, with the box office grossing about 69 percent of dollar-capacity. (These figures are not indicative, as the potential was calculated at the top ticket price, but subscribers paid less.)

Critical Scorecard

Rave	4
Favorable	4
Mixed	0
Unfavorable	1
Pan	0

that no sane person would do at eleven in the morning." He really goes after politicians, casting lances that are curiously sharp ninety-five years later. "Let six hundred and seventy fools loose in the street, and three policemen can scatter them. But huddle them together in a certain house in Westminster; and let them go through certain ceremonies and call themselves certain names until at last they get the courage to kill; and your six hundred and seventy fools become a government." As to the power of the ballot: "When you vote, you only change the names of the cabinet."

In short, Undershaft is Shaw. *Major Barbara* is deceptively named. Undershaft's daughter is strong-minded and heroic, but she hasn't got a chance. Shaw gives her good arguments, yes; but only when he's given Undershaft lines to top her. Undershaft rails against class and government and religion. You don't expect the playwright'll allow himself to be bested, do you?

In Jones and Warner, Sullivan had two strong and highly capable actors. But where was the struggle between them? Where was the cat-and-mouse game? Barbara has all the attributes, Undershaft has all the cards. In this production, Warner simply sat back and waited until Shaw provided gunpowder (in the way of words).

While it is not my place to suggest alternate casting, I can't help but consider a few men on the Roundabout roster at the beginning of this discussion. Christopher Plummer or Frank Langella, for example. Both have an onstage presence that allows them to electrify the stage *without* words. (So do Derek Jacobi and Brian Bedford, who are less likely for the role.) One can imagine Plummer, especially, stealing the audience's attention by simply leaning silently against a bookshelf. Picture Plummer and Jones as Undershaft and Undershaft. While Jones is speaking, you can't help but constantly shift your eyes toward Plummer; when Chris starts going,

you feel compelled to keep turning to Cherry. This is the sort of thing that keeps theatregoers on the edge of their seats. The only crackling of the evening, from where I was sitting, emanated from Ms. Ivey and Denis O'Hare, who was extremely good in the Roundabout's *Cabaret* (as the black marketeer) and even better as Adolphus.

John Lee Beatty's scenery was memorable, at least his Wilton Crescent library was. (Another Beatty set you'd love to have as your living room.) The dank Salvation Army shelter was suitably poverty-struck, but I wonder what Sullivan and Beatty were up to with the final scene. I would never suggest that director and designer stick slavishly to the playwright's instructions, but Shaw—more than any playwright you can name—was pretty definite in what he intended. He placed the scene in an outdoor section of the factory, on the crest of a scenic slope; punctuated by cannon parts and "several dummy soldiers more or less mutilated, with straw protruding from their gashes. . . . One of them has fallen forward and lies, like a grotesque corpse." Sounds like he was trying to make a point, no? The Salvation Army yard—where the "goodly" go for salvation—is fetid and foul and polluted; the munitions factory, where Undershaft reigns as the Prince of Darkness, is Utopia—complete with clean air.

Pleasing, yes; highly pleasing, no. *Major Barbara* had just about everything you'd wish, except a spark.

In this production, the scene was played inside a hangar-like factory. Stray from the playwright's vision if you have a reason, boys; the Roundabout's *Design for Living* had ridiculously exaggerated sets, but they served a distinct purpose. Sullivan and Beatty appeared otherwise to stick close by Shaw throughout the evening. I suppose they had a purpose, but from where I was sitting it seemed less effective than Shaw's proscribed locale.

Jones and Sullivan and Shaw's *Major Barbara* had a lot going for it. Not quite enough to cross the line from admirable to memorable, though.

AUGUST 6

If You Ever Leave Me . . . I'm Going with You!

Imagine a Broadway evening with Neil Simon, with a title like *Cut Some Jokes . . . It's Too Damn Funny!* Out he comes, in a comfortable-looking cardigan. After a joke-laced opening monologue, he says: "And now I'll do a scene from *The Odd Couple*." Thirty minutes in, he shows a film clip of himself on the couch with Ed McMahon at the *Tonight Show*, in a line with Mel Brooks, Larry Gelbart, and Imogene Coca. Next he puts on an old man's fright wig and says, "And now, here's one of my favorite moments from *The Sunshine Boys*."

Not your traditional Broadway show, but it sounds good to me.

Now imagine another Broadway evening. Out comes old Doc Simon, and as soon as he's gotten us warmed up, he says, "And now I'll do a scene from *God's Favorite*. . . . And here's one of my favorite moments from *The Curse of Kolchenikov*." And then he shows some videos of his daughters at the pool in Malibu while he plays tennis with Manny Azenberg. Would you pay $66.25 for this?

Renée Taylor and Joe Bologna came out to present their greatest hits, the problem being that they don't *have* any greatest hits.

Which gives you an idea of what we were up against with Renée Taylor and Joe Bologna's *If You Ever Leave Me . . . I'm Going with You!* The stars came out to present their greatest hits, the problem being that they don't *have* any greatest hits. Their stage catalogue consists of two Broadway flops, one off-Broadway flop, and some unproduced flops. The sort of material that you or I or Neil Simon would hide on the top shelf of a dusty bookshelf in the basement, rather than boast about at show-and-tell.

The evening started with a montage of filmed testimonials from peo-

Cast

Renée Taylor
Joe Bologna

CORT THEATRE
138 West 48th Street
A Shubert Organization Theatre
Gerald Schoenfeld, *Chairman* Philip J. Smith, *President*
Robert E. Wankel, *Executive Vice President*

MARTIN MELZER STEPHEN MELZER
LEONARD SOLOWAY STEVEN M. LEVY
present

RENÉE TAYLOR JOE BOLOGNA
in

If you ever leave me... I'm going with you!

Scenic Design KENNETH FOY
Costume Design ALVIN COLT
Lighting Design KEN BILLINGTON
Sound Design JON GOTTLIEB

Production Manager ARTHUR SICCARDI
Production Stage Manager FREDRIC H. ORNER
Marketing THE WALTON GROUP

Press Representative THE PETE SANDERS GROUP
General Management LEONARD SOLOWAY PRODS/VICTORIA STEVENSON

Associate Producers
LARRY SCOTT BOB BENDER DONALD R. & SANDRA L. DECICCIO

Written and Directed by
RENÉE TAYLOR and JOE BOLOGNA

ple like Milton Berle and Sid Caesar, not in their prime, looking like shriveled-up old men. And then the stars entered. Bologna in a purple tuxedo, Taylor in a purple dress. They were both in purple, the sets were purple, everything was purple, apparently on purpose. Taylor waltzed on directly under an open ladder, also apparently on purpose. This was a bad omen, especially since she looked somewhat like a purple tugboat. (I'm allowed to say this, because she continually referred to herself as *zoftig.*)

So what we had were two old people in purple, walking and crawling and otherwise ambulating around the uncomfortable set. They had some funny lines along the way, yes, but the humor was pretty incidental. Most of the jokes came from stage left, where Ms. Taylor spent most of the evening. Taylor and Bologna staged the thing themselves, presumably in their living room, capturing it all on video camera by remote control.

Taylor was a kooky actress in the Elaine May mold. She was discovered by May, actually, when the latter directed the 1964 improvisational off-

Broadway revue *The Third Ear*. May's ex-partner, Mike Nichols, paid a visit; he was looking for an understudy for his new Broadway play, *Luv*, the Murray Schisgal romp that starred Eli Wallach, Anne Jackson, and Alan Arkin. Taylor got the job, and it was off to Broadway. (Understudying the two men was another youngster, Gene Wilder.) Taylor's most visible early role was as Eva Braun, peeling grapes for Dick Shawn in *Springtime for Hitler*, a musical-within-a-movie in some old Mel Brooks film. (*The Producers*, it was called; perhaps you've heard of it?)

Meanwhile, Taylor met Bologna in 1964. ("Bologna" is an Italian word for ersatz ham.) The Jewish Renée married her Italian Joe in 1965, smack-dab on *The Merv Griffin Show*. This was considerably cheaper than hiring a caterer. The gist of *If You Walk Out during Intermission . . . I'm Going with You!* had to do with the trials the pair was forced to endure due to what was then considered a mixed marriage. They never seem to have heard of *Abie's Irish Rose*, the monster hit of 1922 that ran until 1928 and covered the same territory. Neither were they familiar with Eli's Irish Anne, Mel's Italian Anne, or Stiller's Italian Meara, three showbiz marriages that were up and running well before Joe met Renée. Which makes them fourth-rate, by my count.

The pair set down to writing together. The result was *Lovers and Other Strangers*, an evening of four short plays centering on an Italian boy marrying a Jewish girl—which is to say, a fictionalized view of their courtship. The show opened on September 18, 1968, at the Atkinson, with a cast headed by Taylor and Zohra Lampert (but not Bologna) and directed by Charles Grodin. Moderately amusing but spotty, was the verdict. Facing such competition as Neil Simon's *Plaza Suite*, Arthur Miller's *The Price*, and Abe Burrows's *Cactus Flower*, *Lovers and Other Strangers* struggled for two months and closed after seventy performances. It was adapted into a successful 1969 film of the same title, with neither Taylor not Bologna on-screen. Richard Castellano, an ethnically Italian actor shaped like an eggplant, made the transfer and re-

If You Ever Leave Me . . . I'm Going with You!
Opened: August 6, 2001
Closed: September 23, 2001
53 performances (and 24 previews)
Profit/Loss: Loss
If You Ever Leave Me . . . I'm Going with You! ($66.25 top) was scaled to a potential gross of $434,440 at the 1,081-seat Cort Theatre. Weekly grosses averaged about $141,407, peaking at $176,000 the week after the opening. Total gross for the ten-week run was $1,361,049. Attendance was about 43 percent, with the box office grossing about 33 percent of dollar-capacity.

Critical Scorecard

Rave	0
Favorable	0
Mixed	1
Unfavorable	3
Pan	5

ceived an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of the father of the groom. Castellano's oft-repeated catchphrase—"so what's the story?"—entered the vernacular. For a while, anyway.

Taylor and Bologna came back to Broadway in May 1981 with *It Had to Be You*, a two-character play presenting another fictionalized view of their courtship. This one was even more mirthless—unless, I suppose, you like that sort of thing—and folded after forty-eight performances.

Off they went again, to wherever it is out west that people like Taylor and Bologna go when they are not trying to storm Broadway. They reappeared sixteen years later—this time off-Broadway—with a geriatric sex farce called *The Bermuda Avenue Triangle*. (Bermuda Avenue is in Las Vegas; the third side of the triangle was an embarrassed Nanette Fabray.) This one ground on for five unsuccessful months at the Promenade.

If You Ever Leave Me . . . I'm Going with You! was more or less a spliced-together collection of scenes from *Lovers and Other Strangers*, *It Had to Be You*, and *The Bermuda Avenue Triangle*. Which is to say, Taylor and Bologna's greatest hits. Except they didn't have any hits.

Taylor waltzed on directly under an open ladder, apparently on purpose. This was a bad omen.

From 1993 through 1999, Taylor appeared on the sitcom *The Nanny*, receiving a couple of Emmy Award nominations in the process. The producers of *If You Ever Leave Me* seemed to be banking on Taylor's TV fame to sell tickets. The ads awkwardly exclaimed "TV's *The Nanny*'s Mother on B'way." I can just imagine all those many fans of TV's *The Nanny* throwing down their copies of the *Times* and exclaiming, "Aha! *The Nanny*'s Mother on B'way! Cancel the barbecue, Muriel, it's only one hundred thirty-two fifty a pair, plus service charge."

Me, I never watched TV's *The Nanny*. As I entered the Cort, Taylor and Bologna were—to me—a third-rate copy of Jerry Stiller and Anne

Meara, whom I always placed second to Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson. Nothing I saw in *If You Ever Leave Me . . . I'm Going with You!* changed my opinion.

Fleeing along Forty-eighth Street after the show, I overtook a woman, her daughter, and her daughter's daughter. They had presumably been sitting farther toward the back, as I got out of the theatre quick, let me tell you. The daughter turned to her mother and grandmother and said: "The joke I didn't understand is, what did he mean when he said 'Gentile'?"

"Bologna" is an Italian word for ersatz ham.

I spent the day of the evening I saw *If You Walk Out during Intermission . . . I'm Going With You!* on Centre Street, at the New York State Civil Court. So trust me when I say, *If You Ever Leave Me* was more painful than jury duty.

AUGUST 14

The Seagull

I've been going to opening nights, when the occasion has presented itself, since 1969, when I attended the premiere of a sorry musical comedy entitled *Come Summer*. (Ray Bolger, Agnes de Mille, nearly three hours without cracking a smile.) I have continued to attend openings whenever tickets came my way. The most memorable opening night, in my experience, was August 12, 2001, when Mike Nichols's star-studded production of *The Seagull* opened at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park.

There we were: me and Nathan and Matthew and Sarah Jessica and Rosie and Warren and Annette and 1,894 others, standing beneath the narrow overhang outside the four gates leading into the theatre. It had started drizzling as my wife and I passed Balto, the bronze Alaskan sled dog two hundred paces west of Fifth Avenue and Sixty-sixth Street. By the time we reached the Delacorte and picked up our tickets, it was real rain—and plenty of it. But no one was about to leave, seeing as how this was the hottest ticket in memory. Since *The Producers*, anyway. The theatre did not open for seating at 7:30, presumably because they didn't want to seat people in the rain. The Delacorte, home to the New York Shakespeare Festival's Shakespeare in the Park, is an open-air theatre. There is an administration building under the bleachers, containing box office and concession stands and the like, but no other shelter.

So there we were, trying to keep dry under the few feet's worth of overhang ringing the building. The place was packed with familiar faces. While the free-to-the-public *Seagull* tickets were usually distributed on a first-come, first-serve basis, the opening-night audience consisted of some critics; some top-dollar donors; a strong contingency of theatre-business VIPs; and—because it was a Sunday evening, when Broadway shows are dark—just about every star around. Standing under our umbrellas, it