

GLENDIA FRANK
in New York

Revivals, one path to make Broadway great again, are an acid test for directors, who have the choice of honouring the time period, updating the issues or stamping their signature on a revered work. With minimalist like Ivo Van Hove, you can anticipate what the evening will bring. With other directors, it's more of a mystery.

Like fine wine, *Falsettos* (1992 Tony Award), at the Walter Kerr Theatre, has improved with age. The first act, titled *March of the Falsettos*, is as accomplished as *Sweeney Todd*. The story by director James Lapine and William Finn (score and lyrics) begins when Marvin (Christian Borle) leaves Trina, his wife (Stephanie J. Block), and 12-year-old son (Anthony Rosenthal) for Whizzer (Andrew Rannells). Everyone's perspective is given a voice -- and a poignant, creative freshness. The familiar songs (Trina's "I'm Breaking Down," the choral "Everyone Tells Jason to See a Psychiatrist") are unconditionally appealing. The full-cast, neon-costumed "March of the Falsettos" is spectacular, funny, and healing. These are people you care about, struggling toward happiness.

Focus shifts in Act II. The power of *Falsettoland* is more extra-literary, dependent upon your experience with the mysterious AIDS crisis of 1981, but Whizzer's solo ("You Gotta Die Sometime") as sung by Rannells is haunting. The moveable cubes and skyscraper cut-outs by set designer David Rockwell and lighting by Jeff Croiter add other creative dimensions. This is a don't-miss revival.

The Front Page, a 1926 comedy by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur about tabloid journalists and an escaped murderer, creaks along pleasantly enough at the Broadhurst Theatre. But somewhere in Act II, it pops to life -- as the Nathan Lane Show. Lane plays Walter Burns, the incorrigible publisher for whom any ends justify the means. Until then John Goodman is our treat. Rather than flattening the bumbling sheriff into a caricature, he explores a grab bag of emotions without losing one beat of the broad

comedy. The rest of the cast under the direction of Jack O'Brien (*The Coast of Utopia*) is a roster of Broadway talent: Jefferson Mays, John Slattery, Sherie Rene Scott, Holland Taylor, Robert Morse, Dylan Baker, Patricia Conolly, and David Pittu.

Liev Schreiber as the cynical Vicomte de Valmont provides the emotional foundation for the current *Liaisons Dangereuses* by Christopher Hampton at the Booth Theatre. Under the guidance of Josie Rourke, Valmont is a willing pawn in the hands of the heartless Marquise de Merteuil (Janet McTeer). He seduces a convent girl (Elene Kampouris) to win a bet and the beautiful but honourable Mme. de Tourvel (Birgitte Hjort Sorensen) to prove he can. She ignites genuine passion in the sexy Lothario, who is bewildered by his feelings. When the Marquise demands that he break with Mme. de Tourvel, he does so but his dismay is heart breaking. The betrayal of love destroys everyone. Learning that Mme. de Tourvel has lost her will to live, he leaves himself unexposed in a duel.

The usually magnetic Janet McTeer is lost in her role. She plays it more like a one-note Cruella Deville from the Disney movie *101 Dalmatians* than as an aging beauty desperate to keep her power. Her performance is in sharp contrast to Kampouris, Sorensen and Mary Beth Peil, who offer beautifully nuanced characters.

The adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* by Stephen Karma (*The Humans*, 2015 Tony Award) under the direction by Simon Godwin at the American Airlines Theatre is an interesting catastrophe. It begins well although there is too much business. In the colour-blind casting, Harold Perrineau as Lopakhin, the serf who has risen to landholder, waits in a tiny nursery chair for Mme. Ranevskaya (Diane Lane) and her family to return from France. But soon the production begins to buckle, hinting of other periods and countries. The virile males -- the elderly landholder who keeps borrowing money and Yasha, a cad -- are also cast colour-blind, which leads later in the play to a speech confusing the serfs with slaves in America. There are no black women.

At the party, time and place are ignored. The actors are dressed for a surrealistic Mardi Gras and perform strange and sensual dances. The scene, which epitomizes the fall of aristocracy and Ranevskaya's refusal to

acknowledge the social shift, a scene that offers a poignant but shabby elegance to contrast with the news that she has lost the estate, is here an interlude or even comic relief. Diane Lane, among others, has been miscast as the abstracted aristocrat. The performance prize goes to the Joel Grey as Firs, the old servant who dies alone in the family home. I am looking forward to *The Cherry Orchard* set in the South and clear about its intentions.

Off Broadway at the Laura Pels Theatre, *Love, Love, Love* by Mike Bartlett (*King Charles III*) is funny and provocative, from the razor-sharp script and set designs by Derek McLane to the crisp performances under the direction of Michael Mayer (Tony Award for *A View from the Bridge*).

The central conflict is between the one life we all have and our responsibilities. In Act I, Henry introduced his girlfriend Sandra (a compelling and beautiful Amy Ryan, *A Streetcar Named Desire*) to his brother, Kenneth (Richard Armitage). They chat and disappear into Kenneth's room. It's the 1960s summer of free love. (Sandra's bright Mary Quant dress is by Susan Hilferty).

Act II brings more surprises. Daughter Rose (Zoe Kazan) is in crisis, but Kenneth and Sandra, now married, almost missed her award recital and her birthday. These boomer parents encourage Rose and her younger brother (Ben Rosenfield) to smoke and drink – to pretend to be adults -- just before they announce their divorce, a spur-of-the-moment decision. The momentum seems so logical – each has been unfaithful – but Rose is distraught.

By Act III, the moral centre seems to have shifted although the players remain true to themselves. Fear of death and the couple's hunger for life clash with their responsibilities. The divorced couple meet again at Henry's funeral. Kenneth proposes Sandra leave her ailing husband and travel the world with him. The adult children's lives are in shambles. Rose asks them for a loan to buy an apartment. They refuse. And so self-involvement is once more challenged. How much do we owe our families? And for how long? This is totally engaging theatre.

The name Cirque du Soleil is a guarantee of world-class acrobatics, but it takes more to break into New York theatre. *Banana Shpeel* (2010) directed by the New Vaudevillian Davis Shiner, and *Zarkana* (Radio City Music Hall, 2011), a high-tech fantasy about a magician seeking his lost love, were critical failures. This season Cirque has returned with two shows. *Paramour* (Lyric Theatre) takes Cirque in a new direction, Broadway-style story telling. This disjointed musical offers a post-feminist protagonist, a red-headed singer (Ruby Lewis) caught between her love for a songwriter (Ryan Vona) and the director (Jeremy Kushnier) who can make her a star. The Cirque performances are distracting although dramatic tension is heightened until the strange close drops into nothing, just as it drops the heroine -- down down down off the roof. I admire most Cirque shows. This is the only one I would not revisit.

Kurios: Cabinet of Curiosities at Le Grand Chapiteau on Randall's Island remains in the Cirque tradition of brilliantly bizarre costumes, odd props and a sketchy story about The Seeker, a scientist, who enters a magical world. Highlights include two actors playing Siamese twins; a gymnast balancing on an unsteady tower of chairs; and colourful, jelly-limbed acrobats morphing into new creatures. Seeing is disbelieving. Ground and air explode with daring feats. The acts bring a freshness and distinctive perspective to familiar routines. But the wild-haired scientist is not Zoe, the lost girl, or the headless stranger of *Quidam*, who settled deep into the imagination.

BROADWAY LISTINGS: *Aladdin*, New Amsterdam; *Alton Brown Live: Eat Your Science*, Ethel Barrymore Theater; *Beautiful - the Carole King Musical*, Stephen Sondheim; *The Book of Mormon*, Eugene O'Neill; *A Bronx Tale - The Musical*, Longacre; *Cats*, Neil Simon; *The Cherry Orchard*, American Airlines; *Chicago the Musical*, Ambassador; *Cirque du Soleil*, *Paramour*, Lyric; *The Color Purple*, Bernard B. Jacobs; *Dear Evan Hansen*, The Music Box; *The Encounter*, Golden; *Falsettos*, Walter Kerr; *Fiddler on the Roof*, Broadway; *The Front Page*, Broadhurst; *The Great Comet*, Imperial; *Hamilton*, Richard Rodgers; *Heisenberg*, Samuel J. Friedman; *Holiday Inn*, Studio 54; *The Humans*, Schoenfeld; *The Illusionists - Turn of the Century*, Palace Theatre; *Jersey Boys*, August Wilson; *Jitney*, Samuel J. Friedman; *Kinky Boots*, Al Hirschfeld; *Kristin*

Chenoweth: My Love Letter to Broadway, Lunt-Fontanne Theatre; *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Booth; *Lewis Black: Black to the Future*, Marquis; *The Lion King*, Minskoff; *Matilda the Musical*, Shubert; *Oh, Hello on Broadway*, Lyceum; *On Your Feet*, Marquis; *The Phantom of the Opera*, Majestic; *The Present*, Ethel Barrymore; *School of Rock*, Winter Garden; *Something Rotten*, St. James; *Waitress*, Brooks Atkinson; *Wicked*, Gershwin.