

Getting Out

'Sunset Boulevard' in Southern Maine

By SHEILA BARTH
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Besides its craggy, pristine coastline, Maine has another gem that people from here and beyond flock to - the Ogunquit Playhouse.

Currently in its 78th season of bringing Broadway and Hollywood stars, internationally celebrated directors, Broadway trappings, costumes, and sets to its large-scale, award-winning musical productions, the Playhouse recently grabbed the coveted rights to present Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1993 multi-Tony Award-winning musical, "Sunset Boulevard," appearing at the picturesque coastal town's 10 Main St. theater through August 14.

Executive Artistic Director

Bradford Kenney was also fortunate to lure acclaimed British director Shaun Kerrison to Ogunquit again, to helm this production; longtime star Stefanie Powers, to portray forgotten 1920s silent movie star, Norma Desmond; and co-star Sal Mistretta, who appeared in the same role of Desmond's faithful butler-chauffeur, Max Von Mayerling, on Broadway and in the original Los Angeles musical. The production also boasts an energetic, large supporting cast.

Todd Ivins of New York, who has his own collection of awards, provides fantastic set and projection design that seamlessly fuses from an onstage background movie screen, then spills onto the live stage with precise timing. Too, Music Director Ken Clifton and orchestra produce full, rich

accompaniment in all numbers.

Most people know the story because of Billy Wilder's 1950 classic noir film about a forgotten silent screen movie star who's living in the past and a young writer who, by happenstance, meets and exploits her. Underneath, the plot reveals a scathing expose of the Hollywood studio system that "owned" its stars, created their images and controlled their private lives, for its own profit.

Norma Desmond is a fictional character whom time, the studio and fans have forgotten for 20 years, but she can't surrender her past glory. In her own mind, she is still THE star - the one and only Norma Desmond - who's waiting for her next big crack at the spotlight and strolling down the red carpet.

However, instead of focusing

on the movie studios' "piranhas," this version of "Sunset Boulevard" has a sympathetic Cecil B. DeMille (Mitch Greenberg), and others who humor her, fawning over Desmond when she visits a movie set, thus minimizing the sinister backroom, couch antics of pre-1950's producers and directors.

Stefanie Powers is the quintessential Desmond, which she portrays to the hilt - bedecked in designer Anthony Powell's jeweled, glittering, flowing gowns and turbaned regalia; her every movement and step's a flourish with exaggerated fanfare. Although her mental stability is crumbling, like her deteriorating mansion, time may have forgotten Desmond, but she hasn't forgotten her time as a silver screen goddess. The star of former TV

series "Hart to Hart" and adoring lover of movie star William Holden, (who played the role of young writer Joe Gillis opposite Gloria Swanson in the original Billy Wilder movie), Powers has surprising depth, dramatic power and a strong, trained voice. Her co-star, Todd Gearhart, as Desmond's struggling writer-gigolo, Gillis, lends clout; while Sal Mistretta as Max is the understated, effective fulcrum in this sad balancing act.

Despite a few technical glitches, in which individual actors' microphones failed, or a projection on the wall purported to show Desmond's face during a home movie produced only shadows, this production is admirable. The packed 650-strong audience applauded spontaneously during several scenes, especially dur-

BOX OFFICE

Two-act, multi-award-winning musical, book by Don Black and Christopher Hampton, music by Andrew Lloyd Webber; starring Stefanie Powers, appearing now through August 14 at the Ogunquit Playhouse, 10 Main St., Ogunquit. Showtimes are Tuesday, Friday, 8 p.m.; Wednesday, Thursday, 2:30, 8 p.m.; Saturday, 8:30 p.m. but August 14 at 3:30 and 8:30 p.m.; Sunday, 2 p.m. Tickets range from \$52 to \$67. Call the Box Office at 207-646-5511 or visit www.ogunquit-playhouse.org.

ing Desmond's triumphant lines when she mistakenly thinks the studio wants to see her, proclaiming, "Let them wait". She's equally commanding when she grovels, begging Gillis to not leave her; then she unleashes her full glory in the shocking ending.

BOX OFFICE

Two-act, 2-1/2-hour, two-person play, written by Joanna McClelland Glass, starring Richard Mawe and Becky Webber, directed by Eric Engel, appearing now through August 8 at Gloucester Stage Company, 267 East Main St., Gloucester. Performances are Wednesday-Saturday, at 8 p.m.; matinees, August 7 at 3 p.m., August 8 at 4 p.m. Tickets are \$37; seniors, students, \$32. Call 978-281-4433 or visit www.gloucesterstage.org.

Jenna MacFarland Lord's set is excellent, with her subtle use of a window with projected trees, clouds, and snow to denote change of season and time of day. And Molly Trainer's costumes are 1960's conservative chic.

"Trying" is a poignant play about a non-romantic May-December relationship that touches everyone - a bittersweet reminder of the cycle of life and its passage, all too soon.

'Trying' - a touching tale in Gloucester

By SHEILA BARTH
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Playwright Joanna McClelland Glass' two-act, 2-1/2-hour, two-person play, "Trying," is a multifaceted view of the titled word that's poignantly presented at the Gloucester Stage Company.

The play is part of the the-

ater's summer season of love, laughter and redemption. Set in Georgetown, Washington, D.C., in 1967-8, from November to June, "Trying" is based on Glass' personal experience. It's the fictionalized account of 25-year-old Sarah Schorr, who, like playwright Glass, hails from the prairie town of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. She has taken

a one-year position as personal secretary to Judge Francis Biddle, a prestigious attorney general during World War II who served under Franklin D. Roosevelt and was a primary chief judge of the post-war Nuremberg Trials. He proudly spouts that his father was a Yale man, but he graduated from Harvard.

Biddle is an eloquent, crochety, crusty, arthritic who's set in his ways at 81, or as he puts it, "will be 82 next year". He has a myriad of ailments and illnesses and is very aware that he is on his way out, while Sarah ("with an h") is a young woman on the brink of her life, who is undaunted by his outbursts and his insistence on doing things independently.

The play is like a carefully-choreographed ballet, with Biddle's fuss-budgety outbursts and unbending demands for everything in its place and a place for everything; his insults and inability to hold a secretary, contrasting Sarah's emerging growth and steadfastness.

While she's a bugger for work, he's a bugger for correct speech. Split infinitives are a thorn in his side, he says, and "Our language is deteriorating at the speed of light". His office, located in his

1830's former stable, is in disarray. He bitterly complains about stupid former secretaries, one who accidentally set the place on fire because she left the space heaters on. He corrects Sarah constantly, calling her "single-minded and nagging". He's disinterested in her personal life, and sneers at her training with speed writing instead of the long-accepted Gregg secretarial methods.

While writing his memoirs and answering letters, Biddle reveals his human side - the loss of his son, which he never overcame. He tosses out names and incidents involving prestigious heads of states and politicians that read like an American historical lexicon: FDR and his wife, Eleanor; the Rev. Endicott Peabody, who taught "sanctimonious religiosity" at Groton; Oliver Wendell Holmes; Bobby Kennedy, Hu-

bert Humphrey, Richard Nixon, among others.

Sarah isn't starry-eyed, though. She's there to do a job and do it well - and she does. By inches, Biddle admits he forgets things and can't accomplish all he wants. He's a proud, intelligent, accomplished man, who dismisses his memory "lapses" offhandedly, while Sarah is humble, yet persistent. She refuses to wither under his harangues.

In the climactic scene of when Biddle asks her to not leave and vows to try harder, the audience is reverently hushed. When Sarah asserts herself at times, the audience applauds her spunk.

Accomplished actor Richard Mawe is magnificent as Judge Biddle. However, newcomer Becky Powers delivers a fine performance but is inaudible when she turns her back to the audience.

Several shades of blue in 'Violet'

By SHEILA BARTH
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Battling last Saturday night's traffic to Watertown was harrowing but worth the trip to see F.U.D.G.E. Theatre Company Inc.'s production of off-Broadway, award-winning musical play, "Violet".

Based on Doris Betts' 1973 story, "The Ugliest Pilgrim," the play has a compelling, musical score composed by multi-award winner Jeanine Tesori, with book and lyrics by Brian Crowley, that won the Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical over all Broadway shows in 1997. It also took the Obie and Lucille Lortel awards that year.

"Violet" won instant acclaim with its gospel, rock, country, rhythm and blues numbers and heartwarming story of two misfits, set in the Deep South during the early rumblings of the Civil Rights movement in 1964.

F.U.D.G.E. (Friends United Developing Genuine Entertainment) is a small, dedicated, award-winning theatrical group that has consistently produced edgy, top drawer entertainment in Black Box spaces. This brief run of "Violet" is no exception. The cast, musicians, and direction are superlative.

Besides Music Director Jose Delgado winning many awards, he's also an outstanding performer, composer, arranger, and faculty member at Emerson College who heads his own company, Jose Delgado Music Studios. His efforts at the keyboard and as conductor of the rich-sounding five-piece band in "Violet" are fantastic.

F.U.D.G.E. co-founder-ar-

tistic director Joe DeMita has a first-rate production here, with relatively minor glitches. His set design, which includes a ramp, a few levels on either side of a centrally-located, semi-circular shady blue mountain scene, is uneventful, though. During scenes in an evangelical tent or TV show, a barely discernible church window image is superimposed on the mountain scenery.

The plot is heartwarming, tender. It's the story of a young woman named Violet, whose entire life is marred by an unfortunate accident that occurred when her dad's ax handle loosened, flew off while he was chopping wood, and disfigured her face when she was 13 years old. She complains he waited too long to get it repaired properly. At 25, and orphaned, Violet has taken all of her money to travel by bus from her sleepy town in North Carolina to Tulsa, Okla. She is convinced the TV healing preacher there can miraculously eliminate the hideous scar running across her face and nose, thus restoring her natural beauty - and her psyche. She has suffered from taunts, abuse, cruel stares all of her life, and wants desperately to cast off her pain.

On the bus, amid several stops, she meets two soldiers, a white man named Monty, and a black sergeant named Flick, who impact her life. Jared Walsh as blond soldier Monty comes across initially as a self-centered white guy, but softens towards Violet, while singing love song, "You're Different," to her. Both men see her inner beauty.

Besides his fine acting skills, Kaedon Gray as black sergeant

BOX OFFICE

Two-act musical, music by Jeanine Tesori, book and lyrics by Brian Crowley, appearing with the F.U.D.G.E. Theatre Company Inc. at the Arsenal Center for the Arts Black Box Theatre, 321 Arsenal St., Watertown, through August 7. Performances are August 5, 6, at 8 p.m.; August 7 at 4 p.m. Tickets are \$20; but Thursday, August 5, is pay whatever you can at the door only. For reservations, call 781-245-0500 or visit www.FudgeTheatre.com.

Flick unleashes his fabulous vocal range and training in all numbers; as does singer Nelly Mupier when she lets loose in gospel solos. James Petty in cameo roles as burned-out evangelical preacher, bus driver, and radio soloist, is also impressive. So is the rest of this cast.

Violet has several flashbacks, reflecting on highlights of her life, including the accident, which meld the past with the present. Both 25-year-old Violet, (touchingly portrayed by Shawna O'Brien), and younger Violet, (youthful looking Kacey Staiti), are terrific, but Staiti's pseudo Southern accent makes it difficult at times to understand her.

Also, neither Violet's scar is visible, but it's needed in order to fully see and understand her pain. Instead, Staiti is charmingly cute, and O'Brien is downright beautiful.

Overall, F.U.D.G.E.'s two-hour adaptation is an impressive work of theatrical art that reaches out and touches humanity's inner soul - in a marvelous, miraculous, musical way.

NORTH

Theater for all

Stoneham Theatre at 395 Main St., Stoneham, is running 10 days of theater fun for all ages. From August 5 to August 15, the theater's young company presents its Summer Festival, composed of many youth area performers, including Molly Geaney of Lynn. On August 6 at 10 a.m., August 7 and 8 at noon, children in grades 4-6 perform in "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers". On August 6 at 7 p.m. and August 7 and 8 at 3 p.m., children in grades 4 through 9 appear in the musical, "Annie Get Your Gun;" and on August 5, 7, and 8, at 7 p.m., children in grades 7-9 appear in the musical "Footloose".

On August 12 and 15, at 8 p.m., and August 14 at 5 p.m., high school students and 2010 graduates appear in the dramatic play, "Columbinus;" on August 13 at 8 p.m., August 14 and 15, at 2 p.m., they perform in the musical, "Crazy for You;" and on August 13 and 15 at 5 p.m., and August 14 at 8 p.m.; they present "Bat Boy: The Musical". Tickets for each performance are \$15; students, \$10. Call 781-279-2200 or visit www.stonehamtheatre.org.

Crossword Puzzle

- ACROSS**
- 1 Michigan and Ontario
 - 6 Swabbing tools
 - 10 Cutlet meat
 - 14 Representative
 - 15 Fiery gem
 - 16 "Othello" character
 - 17 Windfall
 - 18 Track event
 - 19 Low card
 - 20 80-day trip?
 - 23 Brainchild
 - 24 Lanka
 - 25 Boom periods
 - 28 Topsoil
 - 31 Of sound quality
 - 35 Epistle
 - 37 Marry
 - 39 Actress Kedrova
 - 40 Burn one's bridges
 - 43 Writer Wiesel
 - 44 Hurry!
 - 45 Game played with 32 cards
 - 46 Right-hand page
 - 48 Musial and Getz
 - 50 Tee preceder
 - 51 Take to court
 - 53 Pen fluids
 - 55 Location of El Dorado?
 - 62 Not kosher
 - 63 Tiller
 - 64 Wide-eyed
 - 65 Indigo plant
 - 66 New York state canal
 - 67 D sharp
 - 68 Say it ain't so
 - 69 Horse shade
 - 70 Fencing confrontations

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- 21 Lack
- 22 Food scrap
- 25 Digestive disorder
- 26 Former D.C. hostess Mesta
- 27 Follower of Zeno
- 29 Canary sound
- 30 One of those girls
- 32 Wall recess
- 33 French interjection
- 34 Bowling alleys
- 36 Sleeping-sickness spreader
- 38 Prokofiev opera, with "The"
- 41 That guy's
- 42 Of tragedy
- 47 "Gang"
- 49 Flyers
- 52 Old anesthetic
- 54 Military mess
- 55 Caen's river
- 56 Layer of ore
- 57 Champion
- 58 Lamb's pen name
- 59 Digestive fluid
- 60 Oblong circle
- 61 Moistens
- 62 Small amount

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