

THE 2014 THEATER BOOK GIFT GUIDE

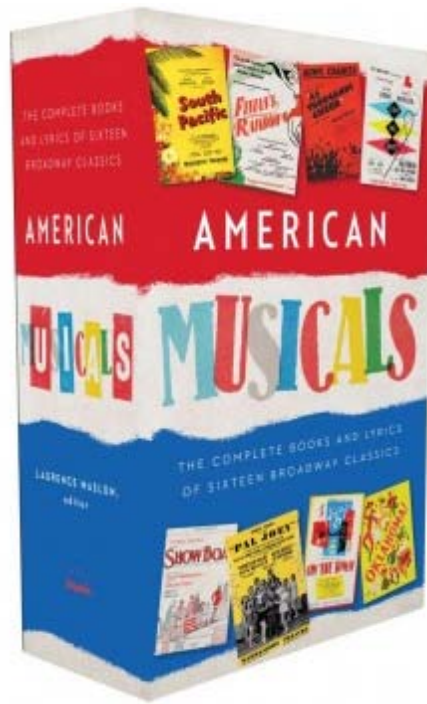
MICHAEL GILTZ | DECEMBER 16, 2014

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All your holiday shopping problems solved (along with a few ideas for yourself).

Looking for the perfect gift for the theater buff in your life? Look no further. Here's a rundown of great books to give, ranging from gorgeous coffee table treats to acclaimed biographies and best-selling fiction. And don't bother printing this out and leaving it on the kitchen counter with a few selections helpfully circled: Get something for yourself as well.

Pair these titles with the books we highlighted in our [summer beach book guide](#) and you'll have two dozen great ideas for gifts that are ideal for everyone on your list — and every budget.

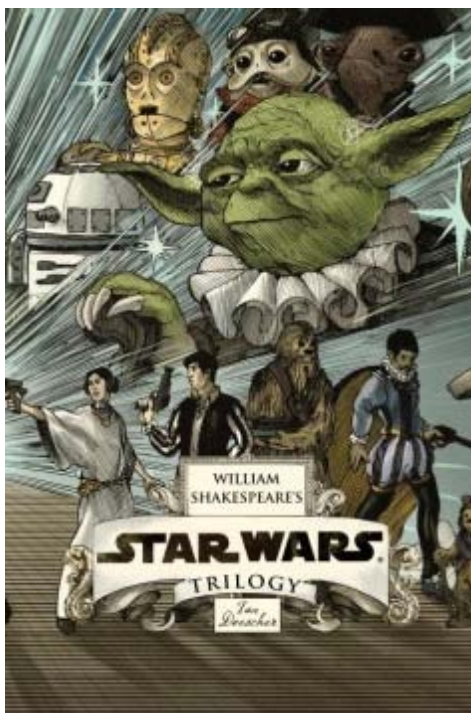


Plenty of people own cast albums, but how many of them own the actual full libretto for classic musicals? Those used to be stocked in bookstores whenever a big show hit Broadway. But now they're rare indeed. So the Library of America stepped in with ***American Musicals: The Complete Books and Lyrics of 16 Broadway Classics 1927–1969*** by Laurence Maslon (\$75, Library of America). This comprehensive and delightfully imposing two-volume set offers definitive books and lyrics to a dizzying array of shows, ranging from *Show Boat* (in a newly restored version) to *My Fair Lady* (which has been out of print for decades). Ideal for teachers and theater mavens, it makes listening to a cast album a far richer pleasure than ever before. OK, bring on the sequel, for shows from 1970–2014! [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)

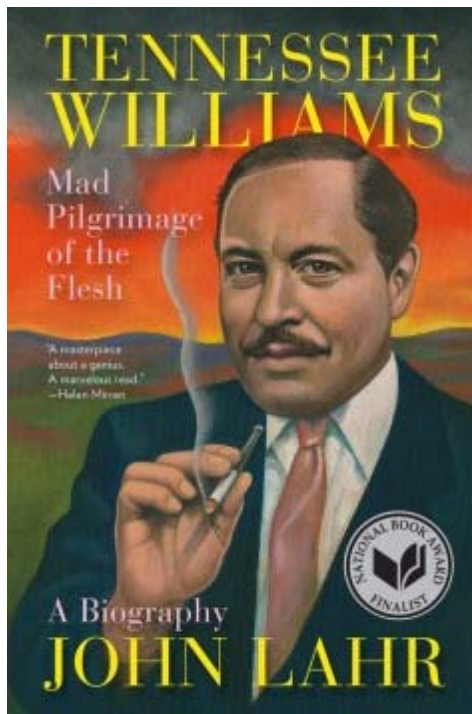


Barbra Streisand hasn't hit the stage in a long, long time, but she still feels like a Broadway baby, thanks to her breakthrough performances Off-Broadway to *Funny Girl* on stage and screen and so much more. (Besides, rumor has it the *Funny Girl* revival is back on with the young actress we all want to see in that role, so what better time to celebrate the original?)

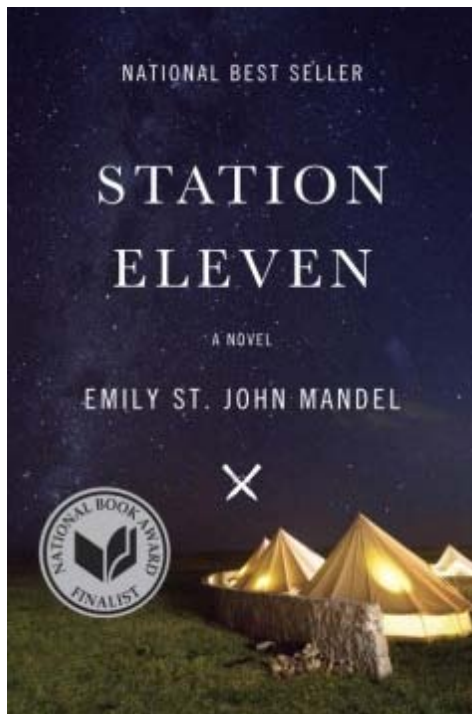
Streisand: In the Camera Eye by James Spada (\$40, Harry N. Abrams) collects more than 170 images of this icon by some of the greatest photographers of our time. Stunning, gorgeous, striking — and that's just the cover. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)



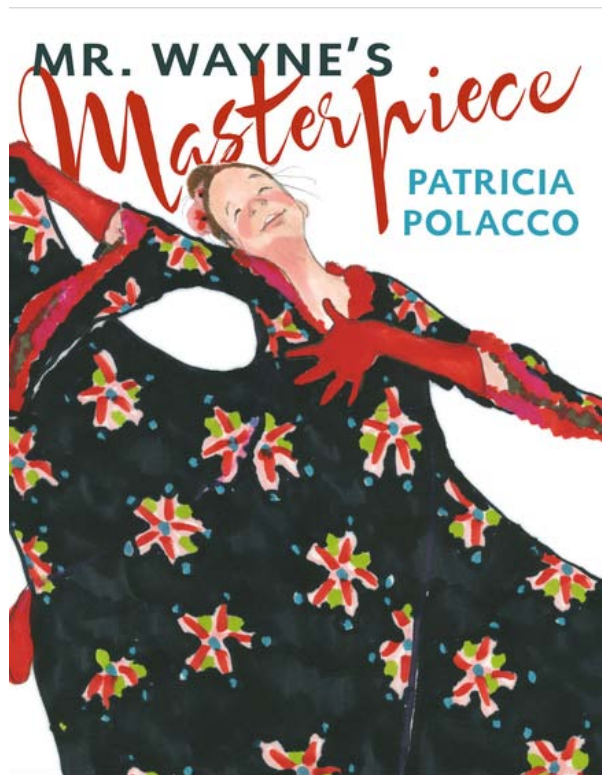
Sure, that friend of yours has the complete Shakespeare plays and can quote a sonnet at the drop of a hat. But does he have this? ***William Shakespeare's Star Wars Trilogy: The Royal Box Set*** by Ian Doescher (\$44.85, Quirk) sounds ridiculous. Shakespeare? *Star Wars*? But it's a loving mashup done with wit and verve, and, no, your friend doesn't have it. It's a great way to hook younger sci-fi fans on Shakespeare as well, by the way. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)



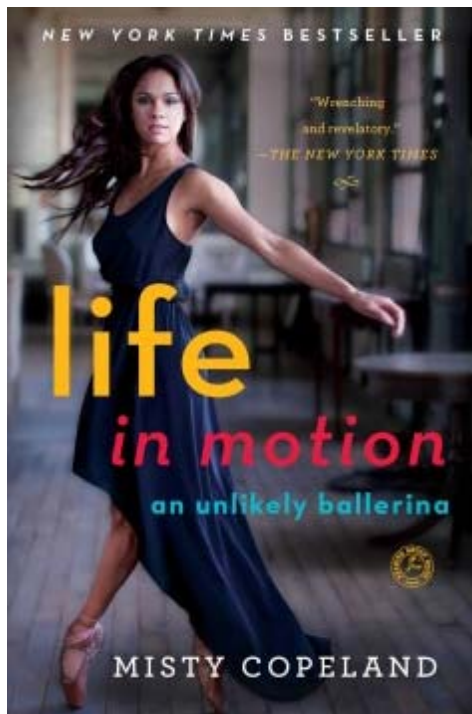
Shakespeare will be performed as long as there are stages on which to stand, of course. Tennessee Williams is among the many who have come in the Bard's wake and made their own claim to fame. He had meteoric success and then flamed out, becoming more well known as a personality than as an active playwright by the end of his life — though obviously the plays were always there. John Lahr, already the writer of a legendary biography (of his father, no less), has now delivered a late-career masterpiece with Tennessee Williams: ***Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*** (\$39.95, W.W. Norton & Company). It interweaves the plays of Williams with his personal life in a fascinating, convincing way, offering up incisive portraits of Elia Kazan and others along the way. Widely acclaimed as the theater biography of the year. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)



Apparently, postapocalyptic America will be teeming with traveling theater companies. That was the conceit behind some recent plays and it's the intriguing premise of ***Station Eleven*** by Emily St. John Mandel (\$24.95, Knopf). A bestseller that was short-listed for the National Book Award, it's a mesmerizing work of fiction about life before and after a pandemic upends everything. Postplague, our heroine begins to tour the Great Lakes region with the Traveling Symphony, a company that mounts plays by Shakespeare. It's a rich work that encompasses everything from *Star Trek* to sadness. Life is miserable but it's a comfort to know theater goes on, isn't it? [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)



For some people, the idea of getting on a stage and facing an audience isn't comforting — it's terrifying! In the charming new picture book ***Mr. Wayne's Masterpiece***, written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco (\$17.99, Putnam), that's the very dilemma faced by Polacco as she remembers a childhood nightmare: drama class. Luckily, the instructor lets her work on painting the sets rather than playing a role. But guess what happens when the lead actress suddenly moves away and Polacco is the only one who knows her lines? Any child will enjoy the book, though budding thespians (and those who shudder at the thought) will be especially tickled, as will any adult who stumbles through a toast or having to give a presentation at work. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)

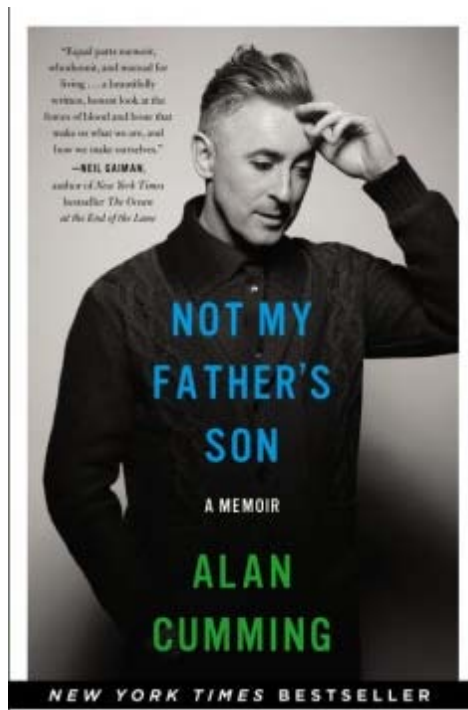


Misty Copeland was never shy about being in the spotlight. Just out in paperback is ***Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina*** (\$15.99, Touchstone), the story of her remarkable career. Copeland has gone from a 13-year-old girl sleeping on a hotel room floor with her many siblings to only the third African American soloist dancing at the American Ballet Theatre. Her tale is gripping, from overcoming obstacles to the immense challenges of a life as a prima ballerina. Fierce fans of dance and casual fans of *Billy Elliot* will savor this one. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)

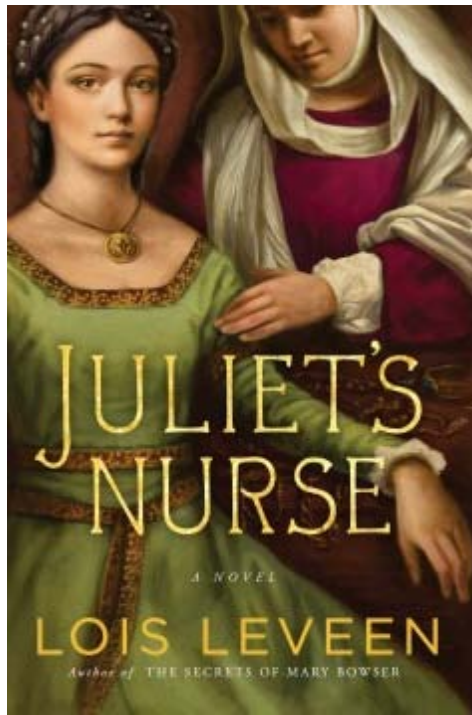


Here's another gorgeous art book, this one celebrating the many talents of Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias. Not familiar with him? You should be. He was a set designer, a brilliant caricaturist,

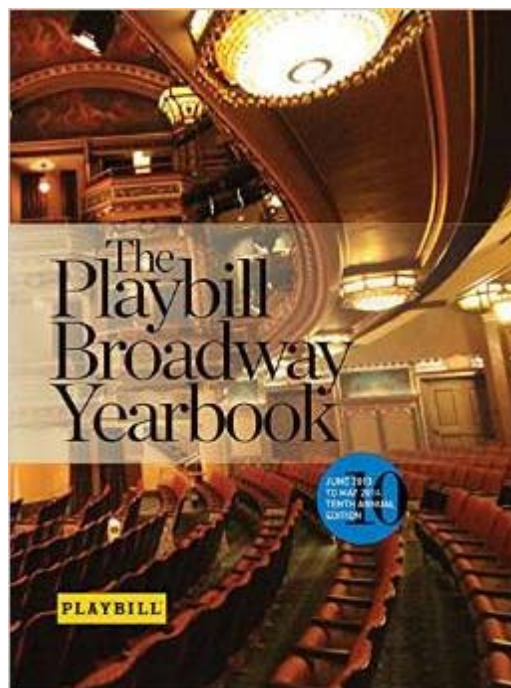
and an art historian, among many other talents. Covarrubias designed the set and costumes for *La Revue Negre*, the show that made Josephine Baker a star. He came to New York, drew countless covers for *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*, befriended Eugene O'Neill, chronicled the jazz scene in Harlem with his drawings, influenced Al Hirschfeld among others, and went on to brilliant work as a painter. ***Miguel Covarrubias: Drawing a Cosmopolitan Life*** (\$55, University of Texas Press) is a catalog linked to a major exhibition of his work at the [Georgia O'Keefe Museum](#) (running through mid-January) that will hopefully travel the world. Until then, you can start with this to appreciate his wide-ranging talents. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)



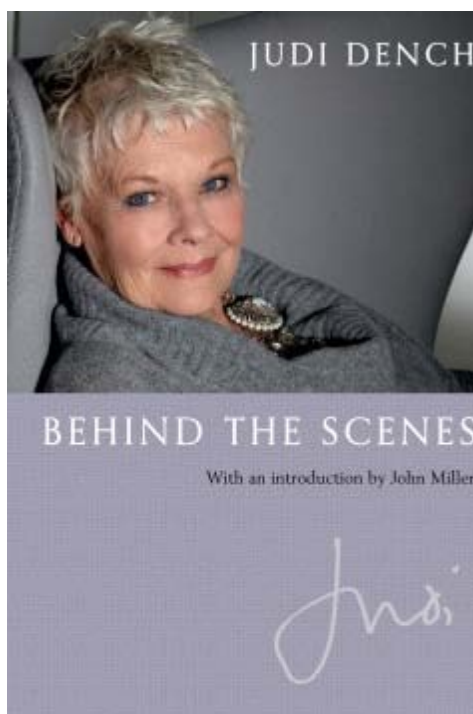
Unlike Covarrubias, everyone knows Alan Cumming. But do they know him well? The past, present, and probably future star of *Cabaret* tells his story in ***Not My Father's Son*** (\$26.99, Dey Street Books). A childhood marked by an abusive dad is just the first revelation in a memoir packed with them, from his career on stage, screen, and TV's *The Good Wife* to his family's surprising roots. Cumming is an actor who embodies a seemingly open and confiding nature — he's ribald, shocking, and always honest. So the secrets he reveals here are all the more surprising. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)



Has there ever been a novel about a wet nurse? Probably not. But author Lois Leveen cannily tells the backstory of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* through the eyes of Angelica, that young lover's boon companion from birth. (And the character with the most lines, after its doomed duo.) In doing so, with ***Juliet's Nurse*** (\$25.99, Atria/Emily Bestler Books) Leveen creates a novel that inevitably leads up to one of the great romantic tragedies in theatrical history. And she illuminates the emotional roller coaster of a wet nurse, in this case a woman whose own child dies the same day Juliet is born. Quite naturally, Angelica finds herself emotionally and physically bonded to the baby as if Juliet were her own. It's an impressive work lovers of Shakespeare in particular will enjoy. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)



Whether you go to every show on Broadway (if only!) or head to the Great White Way once every few years or catch the big shows when they tour in your town, there's no better way to capture the entire season than ***The Playbill Broadway Yearbook June 2013–May 2014*** (\$39.99, Playbill/Applause). This annual covers every show on Broadway during that season — not just the new debuts, but long-running hits as well. And it covers everything, from head shots of everyone in the show to extensive credits, descriptions, critical and box office info, backstage dish that might come from anyone involved in the production (be it one of the show's stars or a choreographer or the guy working the lights high up in the rafters), and much more. Everyone takes their *Playbill* home after attending a show; now you can take a *Playbill* home for the entire season. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)



Let's end with a legend: Judi Dench. Everyone loves this no-nonsense actress, whether on stage, screen, or film. But surely Dench is above all a star of the theater. Her name equals automatic box office in London or New York like few others and has for decades. Dench already wrote a memoir years ago. Now she offers ***Behind the Scenes*** (\$29.99, St. Martin's Press). Filled with images, it's like sitting with Dench while you both look through her scrapbook. She shares witty and blunt anecdotes about her career, telling whatever story the well-chosen photos bring to mind. It's disarming, fun, and catnip for fans of this brilliant talent. She hasn't been on Broadway since her Tony-winning turn in *Amy's View* in 1999. But she'll always be ready for a command performance with this in your collection. [Click here for more info and quick ways to buy this title.](#)

Michael Giltz is the founder of [BookFilter.com](#), a site where you can discover new releases

every week in every category, along with curated picks on the books worthy of your time, just like the ones he recommended above. Giltz is a freelance journalist who has written thousands of features, reviews, and cover stories about theater and the arts for numerous national publications including Huffington Post, New York Daily News, New York Post, Los Angeles Times, Entertainment Weekly, The Advocate and many others.

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