



## BOOKFILTER'S BOOK GUIDE FOR THEATER BUFFS

MICHAEL GILTZ | NOVEMBER 20, 2017

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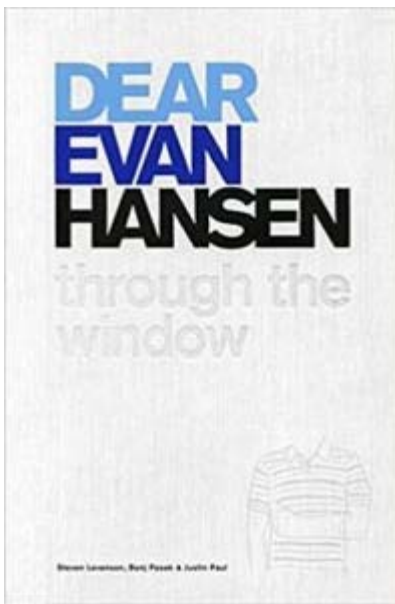
**The savvy reader's favorite website BookFilter.com chooses the best theater books ready for wrapping, exclusively for Broadway Direct.**

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The joy of live theater is a gift you share with the talented performers on stage and an audience catching its breath in the dark. It's a stirring, beautiful experience — and then it's over. And when you can't sit in the orchestra seats or stand backstage working the curtains, you can re-create that magic with books. Novels that use the stage to tell a new story, memoirs that dish on what it's really like to put on a show, gorgeous coffee table books celebrating the art: Those are just a few examples of the books theater lovers will cherish. What could be a better gift this holiday?

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**[DEAR EVAN HANSEN: THROUGH THE WINDOW](#)**



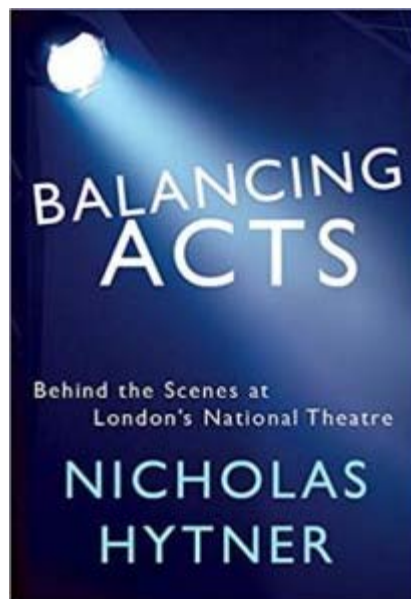
By Steven Levenson, Benji Pasek & Justin Paul

\$40, Grand Central Publishing

With the remarkable success of a behind-the-scenes coffee-table book for *Hamilton*, you can now expect any show that captures lightning in a bottle to publish the same. First up? The acclaimed musical *Dear Evan Hansen*. Just as its Tony-winning lead, Ben Platt, takes his final bow, the creators have produced a collectible keepsake that charts the nearly decade-long journey of the show. Cast and crew interviews, behind-the-scenes photos, an exploration of Evan Hansen's fictional world, and, of course, the full libretto make this ideal for passionate fans.

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## BALANCING ACTS



By Nicholas Hytner

\$28.95, Knopf

Nicholas Hytner is an exemplary theater director, having helmed everything from *Miss Saigon* to a brilliant revival of *Carousel* to the film version of *The Crucible* when he took charge of London's National Theatre from 2003 to 2015. This diary offers blow-by-blow details of what that role actually means, from budget meetings to casting calls and supporting talent to raising money and bemoaning the busker who stands in front of the theatre playing one song — poorly — over and over again throughout Hytner's reign. The forward alone is worth the price of admission and should be anthologized by anyone wishing to illustrate the frenzied 1,001 claims on the time of an administrator. If you were lucky enough to be in London and see some of the triumphs he backed, this memoir is essential. But anyone fascinated by the compromises and creativity in putting on a single show, much less an entire season at the National, with all its moving parts and various stages to be filled, will be in heaven.

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## ANNA ZIEGLER: PLAYS ONE



By Anna Ziegler

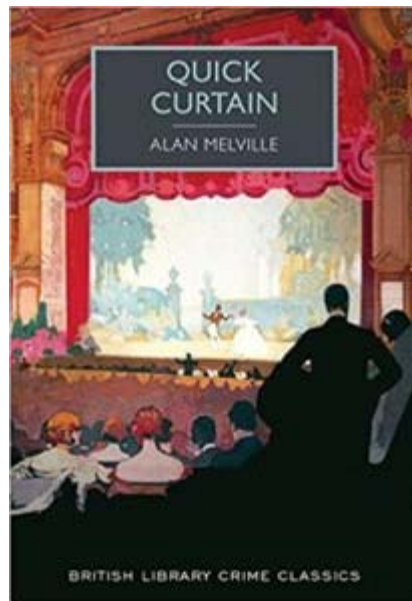
\$30.95, Oberon Books

Playwright Anna Ziegler has seen Nicole Kidman star in her play *Photograph 51* in London's West End. In New York City today, she is the rare dramatist to have two new plays appearing at

two separate spaces at the same time: *The Last Match* and *Actually*. And her play *Boy* was named by Huffington Post as one of the best dramas of 2016. (OK, it was me saying that at Huffington Post.) With a clutch of film and TV projects along with commissions for new plays, Ziegler is clearly one to reckon with, and this collection of four dramas is very much the first of what promises to be many. It contains *Photograph 51*, *The Last Match*, *A Delicate Ship*, and *Boy*.

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## QUICK CURTAIN



By Alan Melville

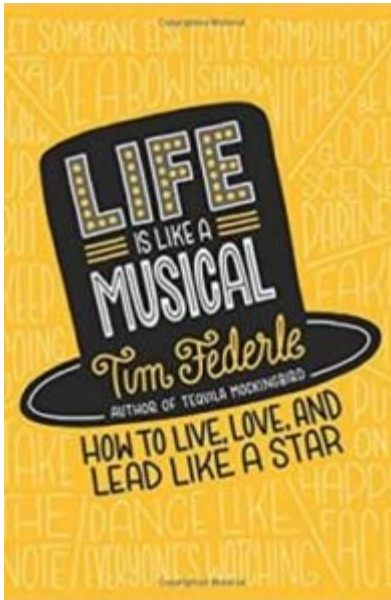
\$12.95, Poisoned Pen Press

This dishy satire of the theater world and the mystery novel was first published in 1934. You wouldn't know it from the timeless characters on tap — including producer Douglas B. Douglas (the impresario capitalizing on a sudden death some 20 years before fellow producer David Merrick first appeared on the scene), a starlet who entertains more people at her home than on stage, an unflappable stagehand named Robert, and a critic who writes his reviews before seeing a production because all shows are the same — just stuff and nonsense from start to finish. The story is set in London, where the leading man is murdered on stage in front of an opening-night audience. Egads! Devotees of the Great White Way will love the rabid fans who descend on a funeral like locusts, and egotistical stars on the rise and fall. Equally fun is Melville's tweaking of the conventions of the crime novel. He has a police detective living in luxury à la Lord Peter Wimsey; said detective's son working for a lark at a newspaper; and so

many clues and twists and turns that we guarantee you won't figure out whodunit or why. No, really, you won't, because the last thing Melville was interested in was playing fair and giving you all the clues. He pulls out the rug from under us in a farcical finale filled with a flurry of letters and telegrams and confessions. If you need the perfect stocking stuffer for Stephen Sondheim, this is it. The only real surprise is that this goof has apparently never been staged.

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## LIFE IS LIKE A MUSICAL



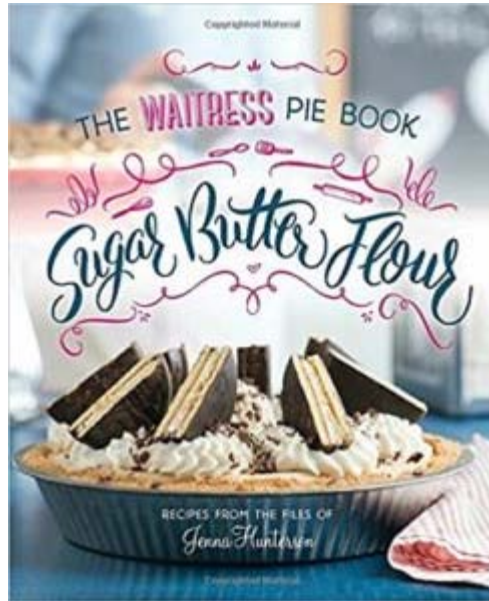
By Tim Federle

\$18, Running Press

The super-famous Tim Federle has written a string of bestselling novels for kids and young adults, including *Better Nate Than Never*, that make valentines to musical theater seem positively mean-spirited in comparison. He's also written the book for the Tony-nominated musical *Tuck Everlasting*, danced in shows, written goofy recipe books for cocktail enthusiasts, and accomplished about a thousand other things. How does he do it all? He's glad you asked! Federle's guide to life, liberty, and the pursuit of tickets to the latest Broadway hit shares the tips he learned while doing everything from being one of a thousand people performing at the Super Bowl halftime show to playing a polar bear at Radio City Music Hall. He'll tell you how to win at life and love with 50 tips on treating every day as a musical. You don't have to be a musical theater fanatic to benefit from his wisdom ... but why would you not be a musical theater fanatic? This book is perfect for anyone who knows all the words to all the songs in all their favorite shows.

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## SUGAR, BUTTER, FLOUR: THE WAITRESS PIE BOOK



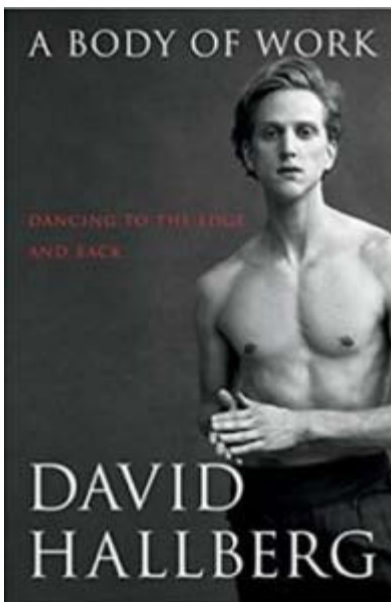
By Jenna Hunterson

\$25, Pam Krauss/Avery

Pop star Jason Mraz has just joined the hit Broadway musical [Waitress](#). But since you can't take him home with you, this clever cookbook is the next best choice. Keying off the show's clever conceit, there are recipes for pies to mend a broken heart, pies to celebrate a new beginning, and — if Mraz is lucky — pies to celebrate your Broadway debut. The recipes were whipped up by Jenna Hunterson, the proprietor of Lulu's, and each pie has a show-stopping twist, like a rum-spiked cookie crust. Take a bow ... and then take a bite. Perfect for the foodie who loves seeing musical theater and fusses over where to grab a meal afterward.

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## A BODY OF WORK



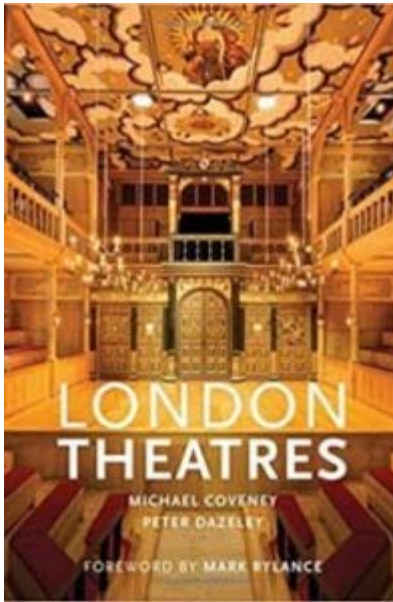
By David Hallberg

\$28, Touchstone

Dance buffs will savor the remarkable story of David Hallberg, the first American to join the famed Bolshoi ballet as a principal dancer — only to see the life he had committed himself to through endless hours of rigorous work be destroyed in the blink of an eye by a devastating ankle injury, unsuccessful surgery to repair the damage, and his resulting search for identity as he wondered who he was if he wasn't a dancer. Hallberg dances again, of course, as a principal at the American Ballet Theatre. He also mentors boys who might be drawn to dance, via a scholarship, and encourages new choreographers. From a childhood of bullying to the peak of the dance world, Hallberg has already a body of work that is impressive, one that will speak to anyone pursuing a life of creativity or simply searching for inspiration from someone who has pushed to pursue the impossible.

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**LONDON THEATRES**



By Michael Coveney and Peter Dazeley

\$50, Frances Lincoln

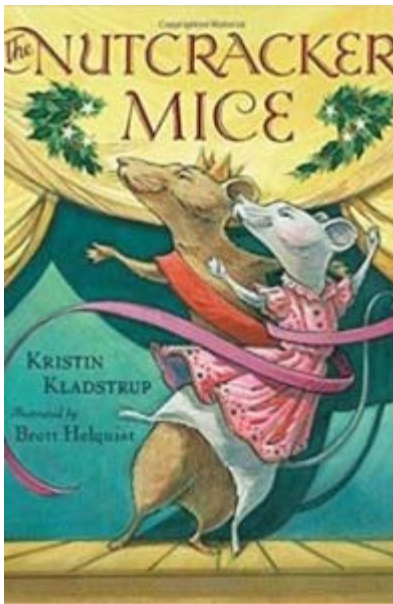
This gorgeous coffee-table book pays tribute to the jewels of the London theater. Whether you've been lucky enough to head to the West End or just dreamed about it, this book shows off these beautiful spaces in a way that lets you linger and ooh and aah over their sumptuous details — something you could never do while taking your seat and clutching a program and a box of chocolates. You get to savor 45 of London's top theatres, complete with stories about their history, the architects who designed them, and the shows that are among their most famous. With an introduction by the great actor Mark Rylance, this is armchair traveling for theater buffs, perfect for the friend who is always pointing out neat little details in this building or that.

Forward by Mark Rylance.

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**THE NUTCRACKER MICE**





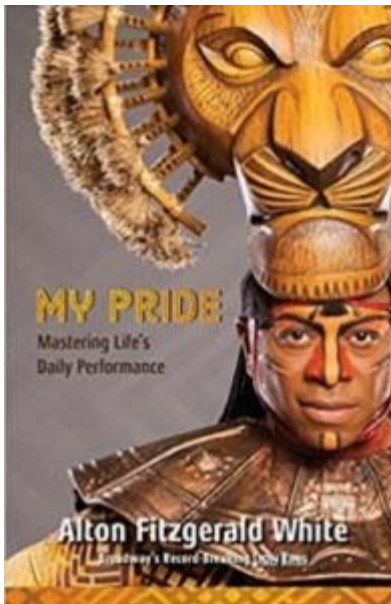
By Kristin Kladstrup; illustrations by Brett Helquist

\$17.00, Candlewick

The latest charmer from author Kristin Kladstrup is set in St. Petersburg, Russia, and its beautiful Mariinsky Theatre. The time is December 1892, and Tchaikovsky is about to debut a new ballet called *The Nutcracker*. Little does he know that the mice of the Mariinsky Theatre are also mounting *The Nutcracker*, though those artists are rather perturbed to discover that mice are the central villains in the narrative. Esmerelda, the newest star of the Russian Mouse Ballet Company, must keep everyone's tails untangled as they rehearse the piece and wonder if any other mice will bother to attend. And their human friend, Irina — the 9-year-old daughter of the theatre's custodian — must make sure the entire company is wiped out as vermin before their dancing abilities can be seen and appreciated. A middle-grade book with illustrations by Brett Helquist, perfect for sharing aloud or to be devoured by young theater buffs as preparation perhaps for seeing *The Nutcracker* for real. We recommend a snack of cheese and crackers.

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**MY PRIDE (BROADWAY'S MOST BELOVED KING)**



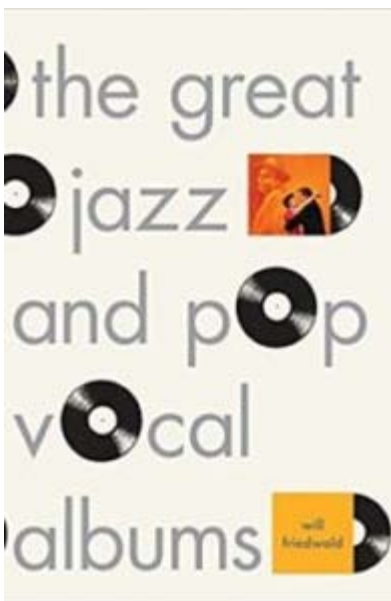
By Alton Fitzgerald White

\$24.99, Disney Editions

Actor Alton Fitzgerald White is the only black actor who has played a lead role in five original hit shows: *Miss Saigon*, *Smokey Joe's Café*, *Ragtime*, *The Color Purple*, and [The Lion King](#), in which he is the longest running Mufasa. Though it includes stories from his rich career, this is an inspirational work for those who want to discover purpose and pleasure in doing the work, even if the work is repetitive and hard (and doesn't always wrap up with an audience on their feet). Perfect for anyone who needs to be inspired.

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## THE GREAT JAZZ AND POP VOCAL ALBUMS



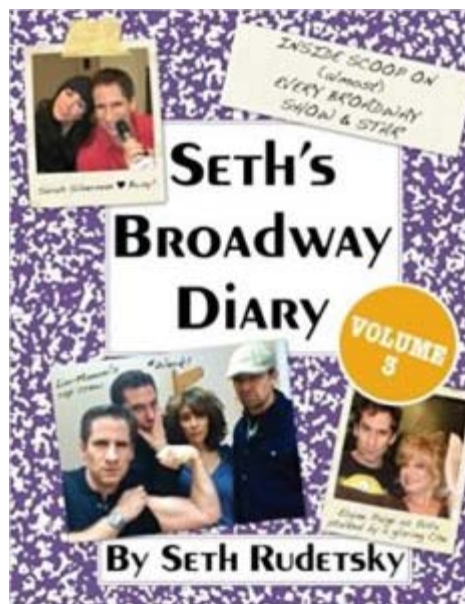
By Will Friedwald

\$40.00, Pantheon

If you're lucky, it will take you hours upon hours to read this career capper of a book by music critic Will Friedwald. Not because it's so long, but because every time he talks about an album, you can't help but cue up a CD or download it on a streaming app and listen to it too. You'll revisit classics like Frank Sinatra's "In The Wee Small Hours" and Louis Armstrong's "Meets Oscar Peterson," and undoubtedly check out some great albums you've never heard before. The excuse for all this fun is a sort of desert-island-discs roundup of Friedwald's favorites, from Carmen McRae and Ella Fitzgerald to offbeat choices like Tiny Tim (!) and Della Reese's contribution to the Latin craze. Artist to artist, Friedwald varies his insights, exploring the thumbnail sketches of their careers; the songwriters an artist worked with; the cheapskate managers who hurt their album productions (Armstrong was usually asked to record late at night after doing a full concert); and the perennial mystery of why Doris Day is underappreciated by so many, starting with Day herself. Since so many of these albums draw upon the Great American Songbook, you're learning about Gershwin and Porter and Berlin and so many other Broadway gems — as sung by the most celebrated artists on some of the best albums of all time. A treat that's perfect for anyone who wants to dive deep into music from when popular meant Broadway.

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### SETH RUDETSKY'S BROADWAY DIARY, VOLUME 3



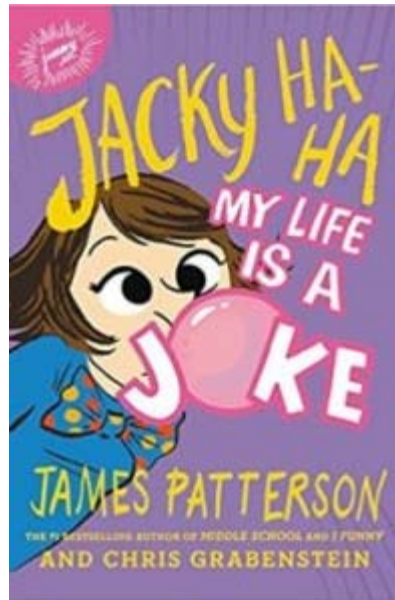
By Seth Rudetsky

\$19.99, Dress Circle Publishing

Seth Rudetsky has gone from the orchestra pit to the spotlight thanks to his wit, affable personality, “friend to the stars” insider dope, and regular column in *Playbill*. This third collection of “Onstage and Backstage” gathers the latest batch, with Rudetsky dishing in a friendly manner about precisely what Patti LuPone said to him when he suggested putting her signature songs from *Evita* in a lower key, what it’s like to be pals with Audra McDonald (he remembers her most embarrassing anecdotes and tells them better than she does), and other stories from and about Lin-Manuel Miranda, Laura Benanti, Gavin Creel, Megan Mullally, and everyone else you can name if he doesn’t name them first. You can catch Rudetsky’s videos on his website, hear him on the Sirius XM Broadway channel, and now with this book, you can put him under the tree or the menorah. Perfect for anyone, as the theater jack-of-all-trades would tell you himself.

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## JACKY HA-HA: MY LIFE IS A JOKE



By James Patterson and Chris Grabenstein

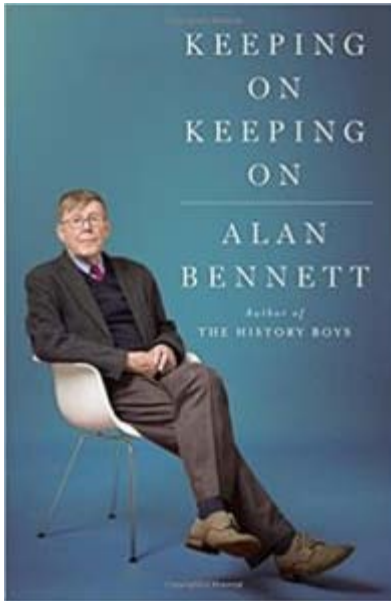
\$13.99, Jimmy Patterson

Kids who grab the spotlight and won’t let go will love Jacky Ha-Ha, the heroine of James Patterson’s middle-grade comedies. Jacky has suddenly realized she loves the stage and nothing will keep her off of it ... except parents who insist she get a job for the summer. Lucky for Jacky, there’s a local production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the works, and if she can just find the time to audition, rehearse, and perform in that alongside work and babysitting her

little sisters, Jacky can still see her name in lights after all. Perfect for the kid who wonders why they don't have an agent after clearly being the highlight of their school's talent show.

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## KEEPING ON KEEPING ON



By Alan Bennett

\$40, Farrar, Straus and Giroux

The diaries of playwright Alan Bennett are great treats for theatergoers, offering the delicious sensation of sharing tea with this cranky, self-effacing, funny, and fussy man as he makes his way through life. Bennett has become a national treasure, much to his bemusement, but that has only sharpened his instincts when it comes to art and politics and life. Each year, his diary is published in the *London Review of Books*. But having an entire decade in one volume makes his journey all the more impressive. Covering 2005 to 2015, this edition features Bennett working on the premieres of four new plays, film versions of *The History Boys* and *The Lady in the Van* (both disappointments), and all the daily drudgery he covers with such verve. Perfect for anyone who can't quite believe geniuses get stuck in long lines and rail against the government and glory in off-hours access to London museums, all with the same imperfect spirit as the rest of us.

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## THE MOTH PRESENTS ALL THESE WONDERS



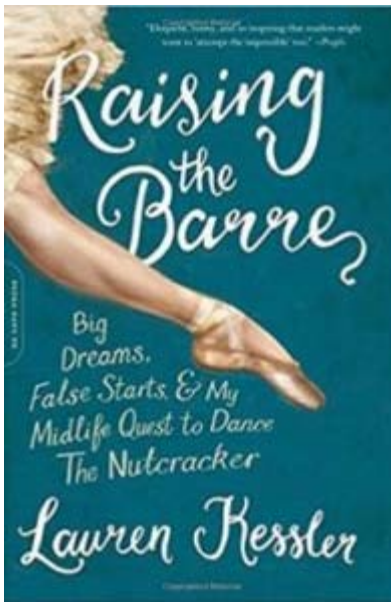
Edited by Catherine Burns

\$25, Drown Archetypes

Has it been 20 years? The Moth organization celebrates two decades of championing the art of storytelling with this compilation of its greatest hits. The stories presented here are among the most popular and have been edited and crafted to work as well on page as they have on stage and in the Moth's popular podcast. You do get big names like Tig Notaro and John Turturro, but you also discover scientists and teenagers and people who never imagined themselves telling their stories to the world. A pop star admits they are a one-hit wonder, an astronomer describes their emotions upon first gazing at the surface of Pluto, and on and on the stories come. Perfect for the gabber in the family because it might keep them quiet for a change. Or perfect for the one in your family who might need a little push to open up — the Moth loves to emphasize that everyone has a story to tell.

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**RAISING THE BARRE**



By Lauren Kessler

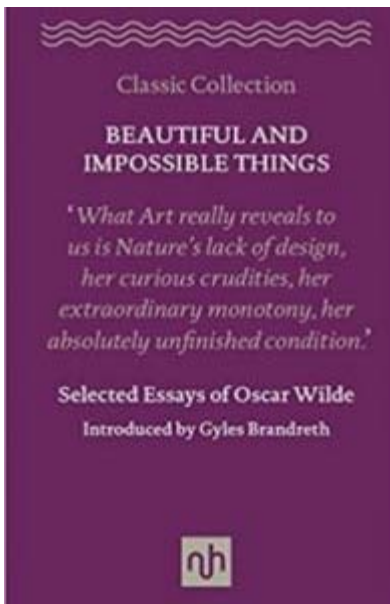
\$15.99, Da Capo Press

Now in paperback, this bestselling memoir charts the determination of author Lauren Kessler to fulfill her childhood dream to dance in *The Nutcracker* with a professional company. Did we mention she's a journalist and at the midpoint of her life? Telling how her dreams of a dance career were crushed at 12 by a very famous ballet instructor, Kessler reveals how she binge-watched live performances of the ballet from performances around the country and then conceived the cockamamie plan to get on stage and take part with the Eugene Ballet Company as an honest-to-goodness member of the troupe. Perfect for anyone who needs to be reminded to keep dreaming ... and then do something to make those dreams come true.

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**BEAUTIFUL AND IMPOSSIBLE THINGS: SELECTED ESSAYS OF OSCAR WILDE**





By Oscar Wilde

\$18.95, Notting Hill Editions

Oscar Wilde wasn't merely witty (not that witty isn't enough). He was also insightful, pointed, discerning, and erudite. This handsome collection of essays features a wide-ranging number of topics. But theater buffs will zero in on his performance piece, the dramatic dialogue "The Decay of Living," and another on Shakespeare. The rest of the pieces on everything from prison reform to interior design and the masterpiece "Soul of Man" simply broaden your appreciation for the mind that produced *The Importance of Being Earnest* and other comic gems.

*Michael Giltz is the creator of the website [BookFilter](#), a book lover's best friend. Subscribe to their free weekly email newsletter [here](#).*

**KEEP READING:**

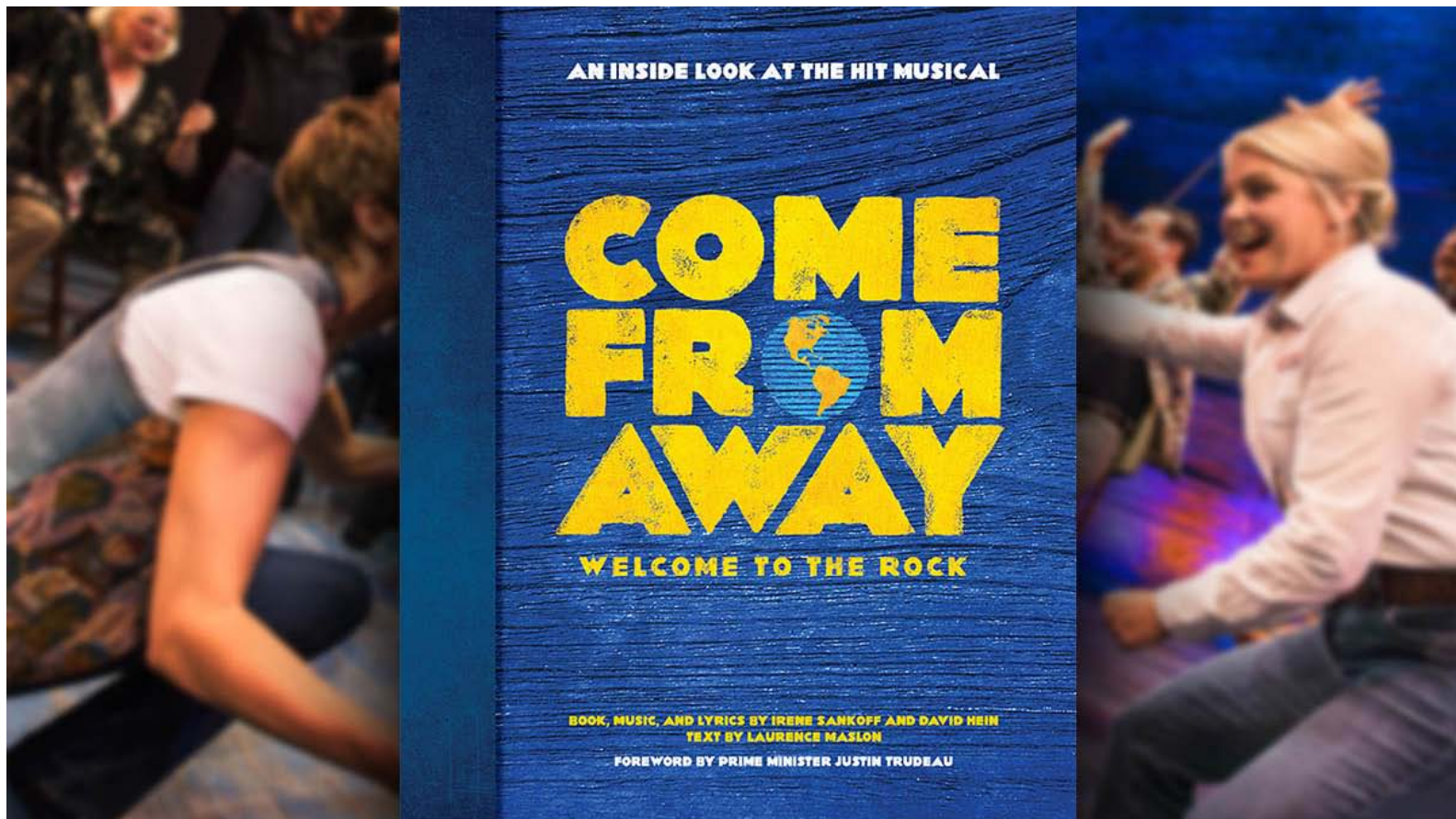




**Bookfilter's February Pick of the Month**



**Mean Girls on Broadway: "I'd Rather Be Me" Official Lyrics & Meaning**



## *Come From Away* Launches Book

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