

BOOKFILTER'S WINTER PICKS FOR THEATER LOVERS

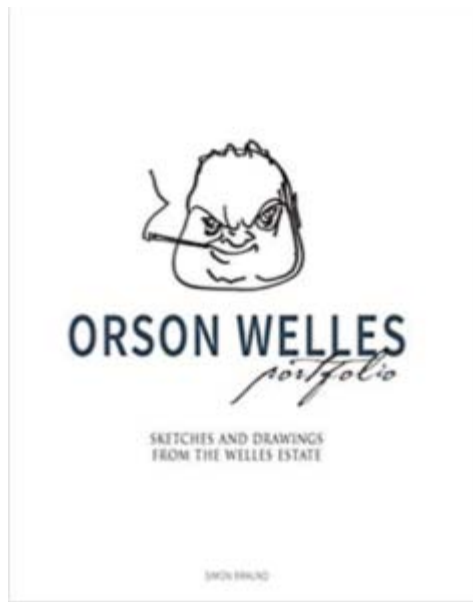
MICHAEL GILTZ | FEBRUARY 13, 2019

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The savvy reader's favorite website BookFilter.com chooses the best theater books ready to take their bow, exclusively for Broadway Direct.

Ah, winter! The time of year you show your true devotion to the theater by braving the cold and snow to see a new play or musical. Or, when you're lucky, you are blessed with glorious weather and pat yourself on the back for planning ahead and banishing any thought of snowstorms or ice. But while you head for that pre-show meal or a late night drink afterwards, there's always time to catch up on books about the theater. Here are the newest and best.

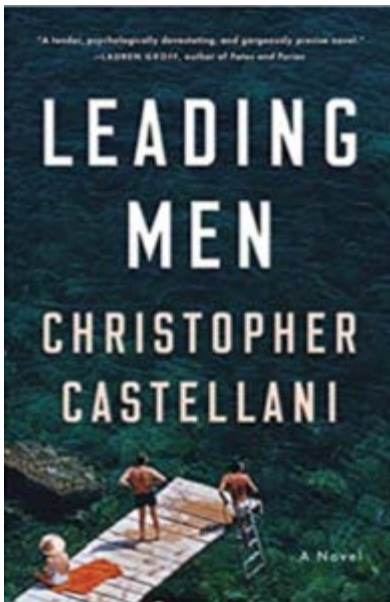
[Orson Welles Portfolio: Sketches and Drawings From The Welles Estate](#)



By Simon Braund
\$50, Titan Books

The remarkably talented Orson Welles conquered theater and radio and film in a meteoric career. He made it all seem easy – working on a radio show before dashing off to the theater and then sketching out new ideas over a late dinner. For him, it was easy. Among his many skills? Visual design. This coffee table-worthy book authorized by the Welles estate is bursting with sketches and drawings and storyboards, the genesis of ideas that would come to fruition with work like his groundbreaking voodoo “Macbeth” on stage, the film “Citizen Kane” and a thousand other projects both real and only imagined. From his early childhood fascination with Shakespeare to tantalizing glimpses of what might have been, these artistic offerings show a protean talent free to dream big. Now if only someone would rescue and reissue the Welles guide to staging Shakespeare’s plays that he published when barely a lad!

Leading Men



By Christopher Castellani
\$27, Viking

It's safe to say "Tennessee Williams" is not the playwright's greatest creation: too many of his characters are forever seared into our consciousness. But boy, the colorful Tennessee sure gives them a run for their money. It's no wonder author Christopher Castellani chose to base his debut novel on that vivid, larger than life man and perhaps his one true love. That would be Frank Merlo, a blue collar guy from New Jersey who served honorably in World War II and then served honorably as the right-hand man and devoted partner to a needy but generous giant of the theater. In this acclaimed work, Castellani describes the glamorous but secretive world of gay men in the 1950s with what the New York Times dubbed almost a Fitzgeraldian glow. Williams and Merlo shared their lives from 1947 (when Williams was already a superstar) to 1963 and "Leading Men" captures in full their bittersweet and sexy and sad romance.

Sounds Like Titanic: A Memoir



By Jessica Chiccehitto Hindman
\$25.95, W.W. Norton

Jessica Chiccehitto Hindman had the makings of a nutty, hard-to-believe memoir. This aspiring violinist made it from the mountains of Appalachia to study classical music at Columbia University in New York City. So how did she end up touring with The Composer, a purveyor of easy-listening faux-classical music hawked at street fairs and PBS drives around the country? Worse, she never really played the violin on stage; she and other musicians simply mimed a performance for audiences while a CD played through the speakers. From endless nights eating at chain restaurants to smiling as fans snatched up one crappy album after another while praising Hindman's talent, her dream of being a professional violinist had turned into a depressing — but profitable — nightmare. But her professional nadir is just the starting point here. Hindman also jumps back and forth in time, describing in intimate detail her childhood obsession with the violin, the genuine sacrifices her family made to get her lessons, and how, even at 11 years old, Hindman realized she was good ... but not that good. Hindman turns a one-note joke of a job into a rich and painful look at the drive to succeed in the arts. She may have fallen short as a violinist, but she triumphs as a writer.

[Our February Book Of The Month: Read the full review here.](#)

[Staging Musicals: An Essential Guide](#)



By Matthew White
\$35.95, Methuen Drama

Director and writer Matthew White is a major force in UK theater. Among many notable achievements (a revival of “She Loves Me” at the Menier Chocolate Factory, not to mention “Little Shop of Horrors” in the West End), he co-wrote and directed the Olivier-winning musical “Top Hat.” Drawing on those years of experience (not to mention his days as an actor), White gives theater students, working professionals and fans some genuine insight into how to stage a musical. Whether you’re an ambitious member of your local community theater, dreaming of making it on Broadway or just want to know more about what goes into creating your favorite shows, White gives a step by step guide from start to finish.

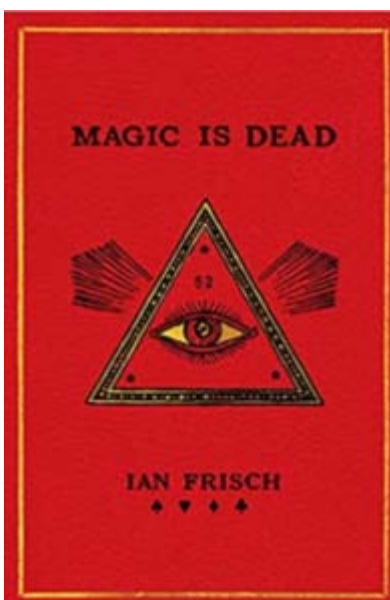
Genesis Begins Again



By Alicia Williams
\$17.99, Atheneum

Genesis is the young heroine of this coming of age young adult novel. She struggles to see herself in a positive light and that means stepping into the spotlight seems the scariest thing of all. If she can't celebrate herself, why would anyone else? But as so many fans of the arts know, performing is not just about making it big and winning awards. It gives you confidence and self-respect and so much more. And that's exactly what Genesis discovers when she joins the choir and is urged to enter a talent show. This book isn't "about" the theater, but anyone who loves what exposure to the arts can accomplish in kids will take it to their hearts.

Magic Is Dead

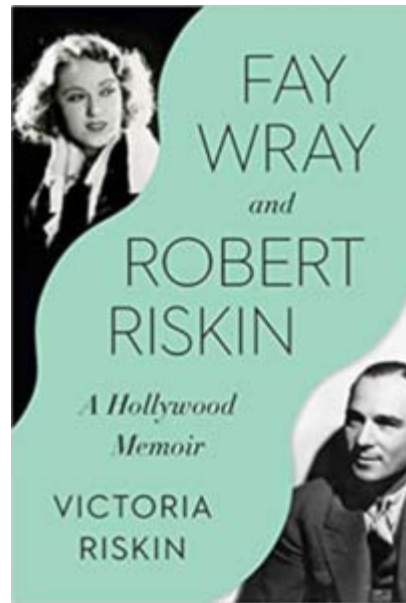


By Ian Frisch

\$26.99, Dey Street Books

Magic is dead! Or is that just an illusion? Journalist Ian Frisch stumbled onto a “secret” society of young magicians looking to revolutionize their craft. He became enamored with their world and their passion and their art. A casual interest soon blossomed into a passion for magic, Frisch’s own tentative steps into performing it himself (pretty gutsy when he’s hanging out with the best of the best) and documenting both the history of magic and the new generation upending its rules. From bold newcomers like Laura London and Daniel Madison to world-famous names like David Blaine and Penn Jillette, “Magic Is Dead” performs a neat bit of sleight of hand, for Frisch reveals that magic is very much alive and well.

Fay Wray and Robert Riskin: A Hollywood Memoir



By Victoria Riskin

\$30, Pantheon

With “King Kong” firmly established on Broadway (when the big guy isn’t breaking his chains, leaving the theater early and heading to the Empire State Building, that is), what better time to catch up with the life of actress Fay Wray? She spent decades in Hollywood, but is forever remembered as the original scream queen, the beauty who killed the beast in 1933’s “King Kong,” the inspiration for the new Broadway show. Yet her ties to the theater are many, from Wray’s first husband (a failed playwright) to her romance with the brilliant Clifford Odets and finally her marriage to Oscar winner Robert Riskin. He had modest success on Broadway and

(like Wray, who appeared in a few flops on the Great White Way), much bigger success in Hollywood, notably “It Happened One Night.” Their daughter chronicles this Hollywood memoir, but it should prove irresistible to theater buffs as well.

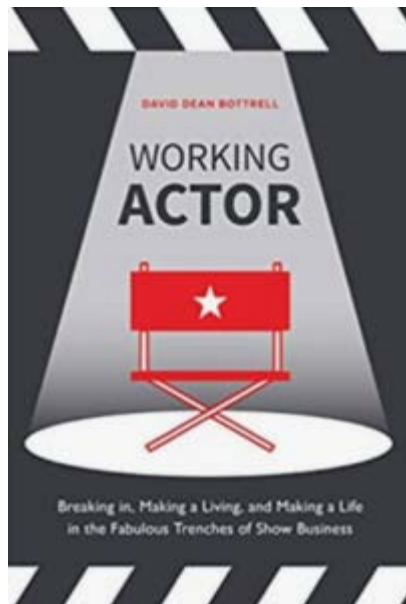
The Bear, The Piano, The Dog, and the Fiddle



By David Litchfield
\$17.99, Clarion Books

This picture book sequel to “The Bear and the Piano” continues to celebrate the simple joys of making music and performing. It satisfies the soul, it bonds fellow artists into friends for life and is its own reward. Gentle, whimsical and charming, author David Litchfield’s newest book will strike a chord with anyone who has ever thrilled to that primal, Mickey Rooney/Judy Garland-like urge to just put on a show.

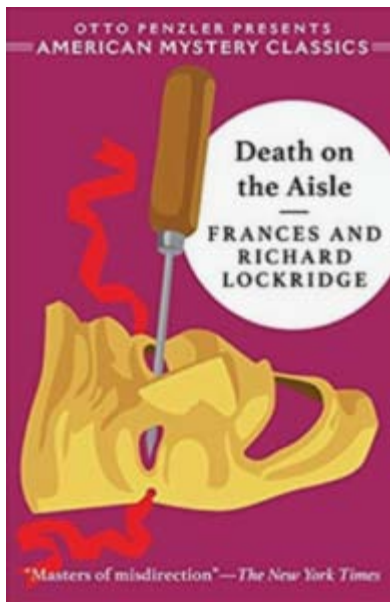
Working Actor



By David Dean Bottrell
\$16.99, Ten Speed Press

Look up actor David Dean Bottrell on the Internet Movie Database and you'll see that "working actor" is both accurate and a badge of honor. He's done everything from soap operas to sitcoms to dramas on TV, running the gamut from "patron" on one show to an acclaimed arc on "Boston Legal." Bottrell also writes screenplays, directs, teaches acting and delivers a column to the actor's resource Backstage. Here he gathers practical advice and inspiration for the newbie or the professional looking for some new pointers as they struggle to make it in the industry. Whether you're auditioning for Broadway or TV ads or industrial films, Bottrell has probably been there and done that and can offer up a few tips. A bracing dose of reality for acting students, it also makes clear that "working actor" is a lofty goal...but it can be done.

Death on The Aisle: A Mr. and Mrs. North Mystery



By Frances and Richard Lockridge
\$15.95, American Mystery Classics

Mr. and Mrs. North rival Nick and Nora from the “Thin Man” series as one of the great crime-solving couples in the genre’s history. Created by the real-life husband and wife team of Frances and Richard Lockridge, they starred in 26 novels, a Broadway play, a movie (starring Gracie Allen) and both radio and TV shows. In this, their fourth light-hearted mystery, the backer of a Broadway show is found dead in a theater on West 45th Street. Charmingly, the Norths dither and delight as they solve the murder. Think TV’s “Hart To Hart” for the sort of warm chemistry they create. And the behind the scenes look at Broadway of the 1940s is a treat.

Notes From A Black Woman’s Diary

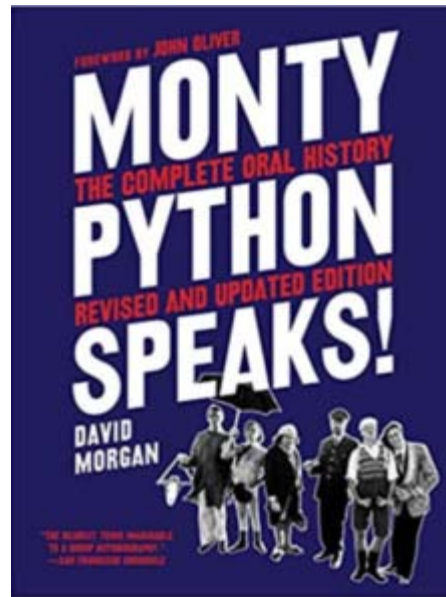


By Kathleen Collins

\$17.99, Ecco

The late Kathleen Collins exploded onto the literary scene with her posthumous short story collection “Whatever Happened To Interracial Love?” Now her sadly neglected body of work grows even more impressive with this new collection. Along with diary entries and more short stories, it contains both an unmade screenplay and an unproduced play. That drama is “The Brothers,” the story of a middle-class family in mid-century America roiled by racism and sexism. Don’t be surprised if it’s staged soon, but why wait?

Monty Python Speaks: An Oral History

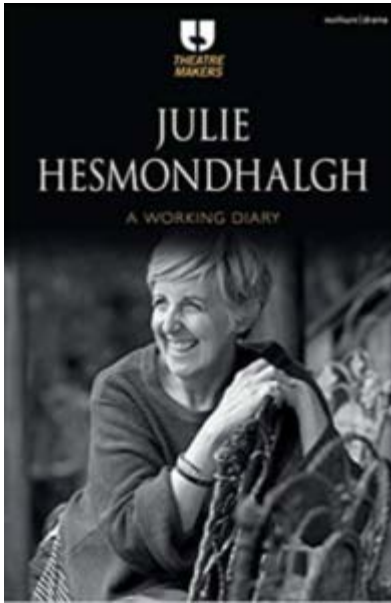


By David Morgan

\$17.99, Dey Street Books

Whether you think of their concert comedy performances, the smash Broadway musical “Spamalot!” or direct descendants like the silliness of “The Play That Goes Wrong” (now ensconced Off Broadway and on tour) or Taylor Mac’s upcoming comedy “Gary: A Sequel To Titus Andronicus,” Monty Python’s influence on the theater is obvious. (Indeed, the perfect farces of the sitcom “Fawlty Towers” would make a delicious stage show.) So theater buffs of a silly sort should delight in this revised and updated oral history of Monty Python. They began in TV and conquered film but they are vaudevillians at heart. Anyone who loves the theater should love learning more about their absurd, sophomoric and brilliant work.

A Working Diary



By Julie Hesmondhalgh
\$25.95, Methuen Drama

Actor Julie Hesmondhalgh typifies the life of so many British actors, at least those who are talented and in-demand. In 2016-2017, she jumps back and forth from stage to TV to film to radio, all while keeping a diary that should be a treat for fans and aspiring actors alike. Best known in the UK for her long-running stint on the primetime soap “Coronation Street,” Hesmondhalgh documents a remarkably productive period. She was wrapping up a year of theater with her politically committed troupe Take Back. And then – take a deep breath – she tackled everything from the third season of the TV drama “Broadchurch” to a revival of the play “Wit” that might just transfer to the West End to diving into extensive rehearsals with director Mike Leigh for his epic period film “Peterloo.” And that’s just the tip of the iceberg. As one expects from British actors, Hesmondhalgh is witty, insightful, self-deprecating and wears her intelligence easily.

Michael Giltz is the creator of the website [BookFilter](#), a book lover’s best friend. He has written for *Huffington Post*, *New York Post*, *New York Daily News*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Advocate*, and many other publications, profiling talent, covering the theater business, and reviewing shows in *New York City* and *London*. When he’s not attending the theater, he’s reading about it.

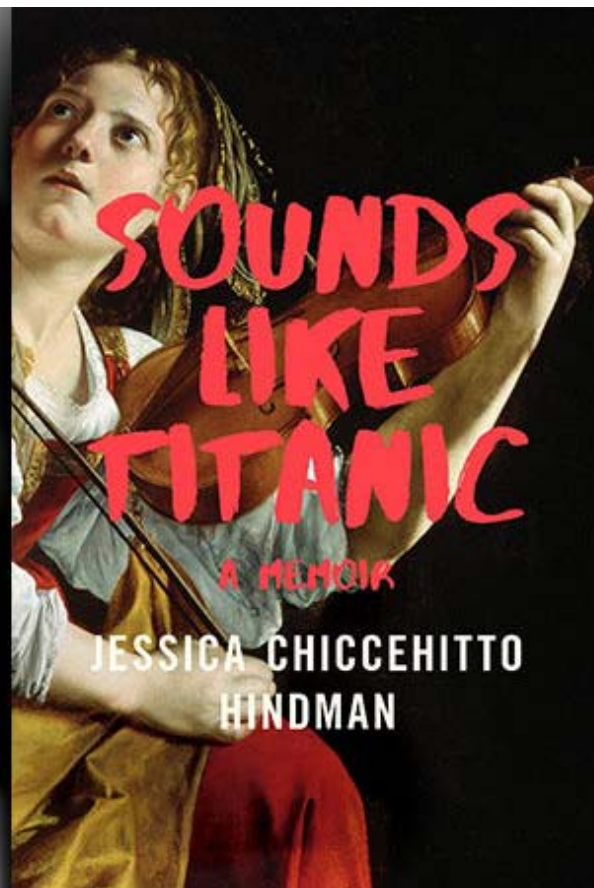
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Broadway's Rising Stars: Winter/Spring 2019



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



Bookfilter's February Pick of the Month

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