



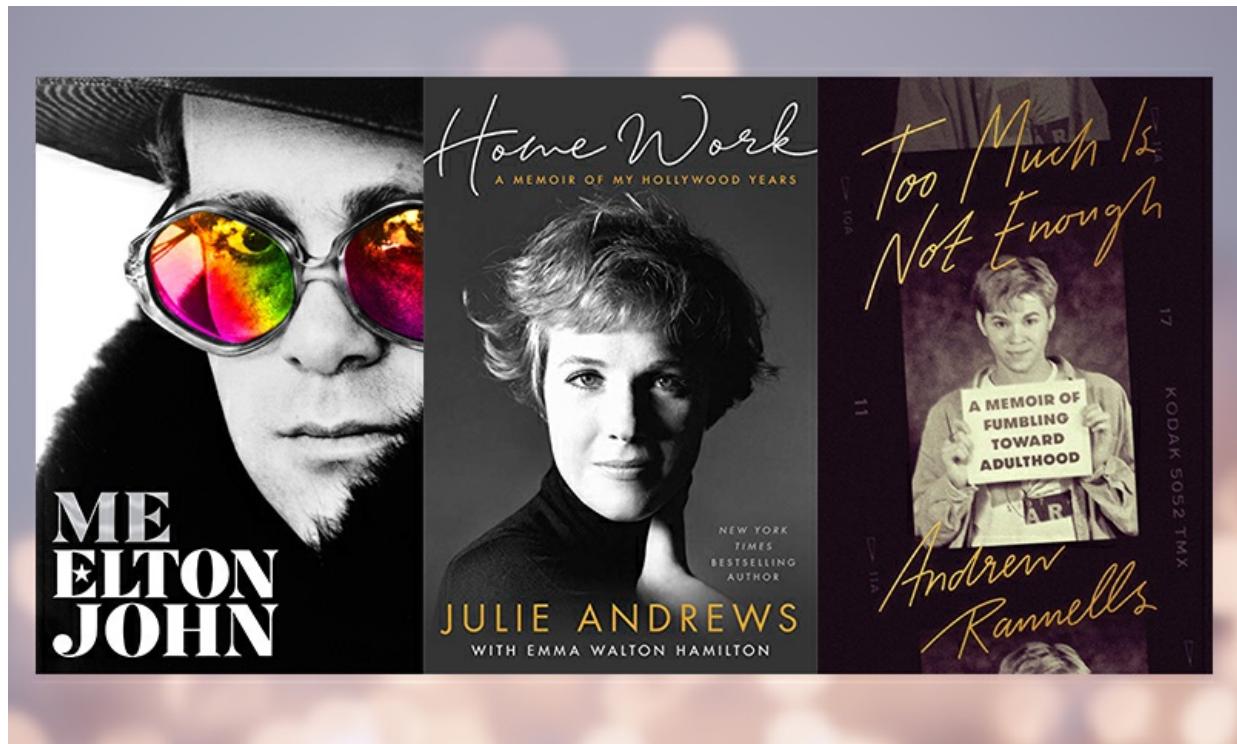
BOOKFILTER'S 2019 HOLIDAY BOOK GUIDE FOR THEATER LOVERS

MICHAEL GILTZ | NOVEMBER 26, 2019

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The savvy reader's favorite website [BookFilter.com](#) chooses the best theater books ready to be wrapped with a bow, exclusively for Broadway Direct.

Books are the perfect holiday gift for theater lovers. Whether they tell a story set in the theater, inspire someone to pursue their dream, or bring the history of the fabulous invalid to life, theater books will always appeal to superfans. Here are the latest and greatest from this year's crop.



Me

By Elton John
\$30, Henry Holt & Co.

Home Work: My Hollywood Years

By Julie Andrews
\$30, Hachette Books

Too Much Is Not Enough

By Andrew Rannells
\$26, Crown Archetype

Here are three great biographies from musical-theater mainstays.

Elton John is the most successful pop star turned Broadway composer in history. So his chatty, compulsively readable memoir covers drugs and rock 'n' roll dreams. But he also dishes on *The Lion King*, *Aida*, and *Billy Elliot*. (Of course, we wanted even more on *Lestat*.)

Julie Andrews's second autobiography focuses on her Hollywood years. That means familiar stories about *The Sound of Music* and *Mary Poppins*. It also means stories about other movies that celebrated, began on, or ended up on stage, movies like *Star!*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and culminating with her triumph in *Victor/Victoria*. Who can ever get enough Julie Andrews?

Actor Andrew Rannells doesn't have the résumé of the other two superstars yet. But he does have *The Book of Mormon* and *Hairspray* and *The Boys in the Band*, to name a few of his successes. Not too shabby. His memoir takes the Steve Martin tack and charmingly focuses on his childhood, his first love, and his artist's life before that big break.



A Is for Audra: Broadway's Leading Ladies from A to Z

By John Robert Allman (author) and Peter Emmerich (illustrator)
\$18.99, Doubleday Books for Young Readers

Double Bass Blues

By Andrea J. Loney (author) and Rudy Gutierrez (illustrator)
\$17.99, Knopf Books for Young Readers

Feed Your Mind: A Story of August Wilson

By Jen Bryant (author) and Cannaday Chapman (illustrator)
\$17.99, Abrams Books for Young Readers

Is it ever too soon to preach the joys of theater to little kids? No, it is not! These three picture books make a great introduction.

To be honest, *A Is for Audra* is a picture book that's even better for adults than kids. Tykes will get a little instruction ("P is for Patti!"). But adults get to argue over which artist should claim which letter of the alphabet. (B is for Bernadette? Barbra? Betty Buckley?) Believe, us 26 letters are not enough.

Double Bass Blues is a charmer about a little boy toting home a giant double bass from school. He shines in the orchestra with his friends ... and then he shines again at his grandfather's jazz club. The images are great!

Finally, *Feed Your Mind* is a tribute to America's greatest playwright, August Wilson. His love of reading becomes palpable in this heartfelt celebration of the powers of a well-fed mind.



The Inheritance

By Matthew Lopez
\$19.95, Faber & Faber

Methuen Drama's Modern Plays: 60th Anniversary Gift Set

\$135, Methuen Drama

In *The Inheritance*, Matthew Lopez's acclaimed drama uses E.M. Forster's novel *Howards End* to anchor a sprawling drama that covers decades and spans generations. It's an addictive, funny, and wise story that has been enjoying as much acclaim in New York as it did in London. This is the must-read play of the current Broadway season.

Anyone who savors owning and reading and then rereading plays knows the venerable publisher Methuen. To celebrate their 60th year, they held a contest to pick one key play from each decade. The result is this lavish seven-work set that includes *A Taste of Honey* from the 1950s, *Top Girls* from the 1980s, and finally, *This House* from the 2010s, to name just three. A tribute to both the authors and the company wise enough to keep them in print.



The Movie Musical!

By Jeanine Basinger
\$45, Knopf

In the Long Run: A Cultural History of Broadway's Hit Plays

By Jordan Schildcrout
\$39.15, Routledge

Listening for America: Inside the Great American Songbook From Gershwin to Sondheim

By Rob Kapilow
\$39.95, Liveright

Here are three wide-ranging works that any theater fan will find impossible to resist.

Jeanine Basinger's new book is *The Movie Musical!*, and you know you're in good hands because she included the exclamation point. Needless to say, a huge chunk of these shows began on the stage before heading to film, or headed to the stage after their big-screen success. But any musical buff will also enjoy her appreciation and analysis of pure movie musicals including *The Jazz Singer* and *La La Land*. Read it and you'll be setting your DVR for months to come, trying to catch the ones you've missed on TCM.

Author Jordan Schildcrout lasers in on the hit play. Critics often prefer the serious, sober shows that close in a week. But Schildcrout insists much can be learned by looking at the biggest hits from each decade. He looks at the wide impact or telling perspectives of iconic shows such as *Life With Father* and *Deathtrap*. Needless to say, Neil Simon pops up a few times!

Public radio favorite Rob Kapilow is known for illuminating classical music with the fervor and fun of Leonard Bernstein. Now he turns to the Great American Songbook with similar passion. His insight combined with the ability to share it easily will deepen your knowledge of the best that Broadway has to offer.



The Chelsea Girls

By Fiona Davis
\$27, Dutton

Leading Men

By Christopher Castellani
\$27, Viking

City of Girls

By Elizabeth Gilbert
\$28, Riverhead Books

Dive into these three bestsellers that savor the world of the theater.

Author Fiona Davis might have her biggest hit yet with *The Chelsea Girls*, a 1950s-set drama about the Chelsea Hotel, McCarthyism, and two women making their mark in the world of theater. These fast friends decide there's no reason they shouldn't produce the Broadway show they want to see, though the Red Scare might have something to say about that.

It's no wonder author Christopher Castellani chose to base his debut novel, *Leading Men*, on Tennessee Williams. That larger-than-life playwright is almost as colorful as his greatest characters. Here, Castellani brings Williams to life without letting the man overshadow his one true love: Frank Merlo, a blue-collar guy from New Jersey who served honorably as the right-hand man to this needy but generous genius.

Eat. Pray. Love. Go to the theatre. That's our motto, and memoirist and best-selling author Elizabeth Gilbert brings it to life in *City of Girls*. This acclaimed, sexy work is about life in the freewheeling world of the 1940s New York theater scene. In it, Vassar College dropout Vivian is sent to NYC to live with her bohemian aunt Peg, the owner of a wonderfully down-on-its-heels theatre called the Lily Playhouse. Since that sounds a lot like heaven, you know that whatever stumbling blocks appear (and there are many), Vivian's adventure is going to be great fun.



[*The Contender: The Story of Marlon Brando*](#)

By William J. Mann
\$35, Harper

[*Still Here: The Madcap, Nervous, Singular Life of Elaine Stritch*](#)

By Alexandra Jacobs
\$28, Farrar, Straus and Giroux

[*Life Isn't Everything: Mike Nichols, As Remembered by 150 of His Closest Friends*](#)

By Ash Carter and Sam Kashner
\$30, Henry Holt & Co.

Three new biographies give great theatrical talents their due.

In William J. Mann's hefty but not exhausting new biography, he emphasizes that Marlon Brando's real passion was for political activism. Begin with that fact clearly in mind, he says, and Brando's circuitous and frustrating career isn't so haphazard. For fans of the theater, the first third is filled with great stories about Stella Adler, the creation of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and the howl of despair in a soon-forgotten play called *Truckline Café* that made the entire theater world sit up and take notice. Frustrating, wasteful, brilliant, giant in appetites and intellect and righteous anger, Brando has never made more sense.

Speaking of Brando, Elaine Stritch studied alongside him and Harry Belafonte when she first started out. She turned that into a great anecdote — just one of many that peppered her classic one-woman show, *Elaine Stritch: At Liberty*. Sure, Stritch made the most of her life in that legendary performance. But a life as dark and rich as hers deserves an outsider's perspective, and that's what entertainment writer Alexandra Jacobs gives her in a book ranging gamely from the Great Depression to *30 Rock*.

Mike Nichols would be remembered forever just for his ground-breaking comedy with Elaine May. Then you have the classic films, starting with his brilliant debut, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. But for us, that's all overshadowed by his impact on the theater. Sadly, Nichols refused to write his own memoirs. *Life Isn't Everything* is the next best thing: a string of anecdotes by those who worked with this genius at every stage of his brilliant career. It's like the Irish wake of your dreams, peppered with tales that illuminate what made Nichols so great — and so great to work with.



Midsummer's Mayhem

By Rajani LaRocca

\$16.99, Yellow Jacket

This sweet young-adult novel puts a new spin on Shakespeare's romantic and magical play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Mimi is the youngest in her overachieving Indian American family and yearns to figure out how to make her mark. A love of cooking and a contest at the local bakery seem just the ticket. Then, a mysterious boy named Vic leads her deeper and deeper into a forest behind her house that's bursting with exotic, almost magical ingredients. Inspired, Mimi tries out her new skills on her family and watches as her dad eats and eats and eats, her brother falls in love with his own image (a future actor, surely), and her other siblings wreak havoc with sudden romantic entanglements. Hmm, it sounds a lot like ... Yes, but the fresh setting and delightful heroine make this more than just the latest variation on a play by Will.

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child: The Journey

By Jody Revenson

\$39.99, Arthur A. Levine Books

Working Actor

By David Dean Bottrell

\$16.99, Ten Speed Press

Come From Away: Welcome to the Rock — An Inside Look at the Hit Musical

Book, music, and lyrics by Irene Sankoff and David Hein

Text by Laurence Maslon

\$40, Hachette Books

For those who dream of being in the audience in person and those who just want to learn more about how it's done, three glimpses behind the scenes take you there.

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child continues to pack them in at productions circling the globe. Given it's one of the most elaborate stage plays in generations, a look at how the show was made and all the craft that goes into it is long overdue. It's no surprise that this book itself is a handsome production, filled with photos and sketches and the determination of all involved to do J.K. Rowling proud.

Actor David Dean Bottrell has done everything from soap operas to sitcoms and 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 writes a column for the actors' resource *Backstage*. In *Working Actor*, he gathers practical advice and inspiration for the newbie or the professional who's looking for some new pointers. A bracing dose of reality for acting students, it also makes clear that "working actor" is a lofty goal, but it can be done.

The Canadian musical *Come From Away* is an honest-to-goodness, smash hit. Created by two relative neophytes, this feel-good, based-on-real-life story with a somber 9/11 backdrop will soon be one of the 100 longest-running shows in Broadway history. *Welcome to the Rock* is a keepsake that includes the complete book and lyrics, of course, but there's more, including an intro by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the usual making-of stories. More unusual, it includes new interviews with the actual airplane passengers and Gander, Newfoundland, residents who came together that memorable and sad day when planes were diverted in the wake of the attacks and strangers opened their doors to stranded travelers. That focus on what really matters elevates *Welcome to the Rock*, just as it elevated the musical in the minds of fans and critics who have embraced it all along.

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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