



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2019

MICHAEL GILTZ AT WORK

THEATER: "For Colored Girls" Returns. Finally!

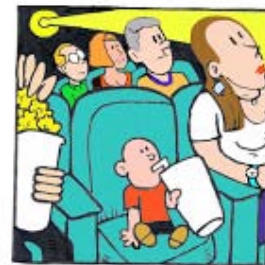
**FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE/
WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF** ** 1/2 out of ****
PUBLIC THEATER

Well, that's a relief! After decades of hearing about but never getting a chance to actually see the play *For Colored Girls: Who Have Considered Suicide/When The Rainbow is Enuf*, I assumed it must be a dusty relic. It's not.

Playwright Ntozake Shange's work (last seen in a major NYC revival in 1995, apparently) is certainly of its time, the mid-1970s. But it's hardly dated. Shows devoted to women of color are still needed. Stories of abuse and mistreatment and plain old indifference are still necessary. And the simple brave acts of sharing those hungers and desires, of admitting you fall and get back up, of finding strength in community and sisterhood are still powerful.

Shange calls her combination of movement, dance, music and poems/monologues a choreopoem. When first performing these pieces, Shange simply couldn't stand still the way poets and authors were politely expected to do. She just couldn't. She had to speak up, to speak out, to get in *motion*. Sitting still was not an option. It still isn't.

Today, *For Colored Girls* doesn't shock with its structure and style, though it would still be a refreshing presence on Broadway. Decades of poetry slams and spoken word, revues, works of theater built around dance and text quilted into a whole, and a growing if still-too-small body of work by women and people of color all make *For Colored Girls* more familiar to audiences today. You can see where it came from and what it led to and, happily, you can judge it on its own terms as art, not just for its importance. On those terms, it's still vital if imperfect.



Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in NYC and can be reached at mgiltz@pipeline.com

FAVORITE LINKS

[Americablog](#)

[Five O'Clock Lightning baseball blog](#)

[Deep Pop -- Lori Lakin's Blog](#)

[The Back Page -- Jason Page on ESPN Radio](#)

[Cine-Blog -- George Robinson's Blog](#)
[Documents On Art & Cinema - Daryl Chin's Blog](#)

[Brucie G's Wondrous Blog Of Adventure and Mystery -- Bruce Greenspan's Blog](#)

BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ [2019 \(81\)](#)

► [November \(1\)](#)

▼ [October \(21\)](#)



For me, it plays like a revue. Seven women take the stage, each one in a brightly colored dress and identified in the program as the Lady in Blue, the Lady in Brown, the Lady In Orange and Red and so on. Disarmingly, they begin by echoing the chants and poems recited and remembered by little girls in playgrounds and streets for generations. Pretending to jump rope or skip or performing elaborate hand movements (or at least elaborate enough to bewilder any boys like me watching from afar), the actresses cavort about the stage. Then the action slides into more adult concerns with Shange effectively delivering her first and most important message: women find strength and courage with each other from their earliest age and must never give that up.

And they're off, with a monologue or poem gliding into a dance or song and then back into another spoken word piece. The topics range from losing your virginity on the night of your high school graduation (finally!) to being harassed on the street to mocking men's endless need to apologize to a childhood fascination with the hero Toussaint Louverture to worrying you've made too much space for someone in your life and crowded yourself out.

As with any revue, some pieces and performers land better than others. For me, the moments that focused on the men and what they did or didn't do were far less interesting than the ones that focused inwardly on the women themselves. Turning the Lady in Purple into a person with a hearing loss (played with expressive beauty by Alexandria Wailes) worked a treat. As the Lady in Blue, Sasha Allen of *The Voice* let loose on the biggest vocal numbers. And in the Tony-winning role of the Lady in Red, Jayme Lawson was a magnetic presence. However, her big monologue about an abusive man has been dimmed by decades of seeing that story played out on cheap TV shows and the like. Plus, real drama comes from how the Lady in Red would deal with that pain, not the mere plot twist of what the man does. Still, her transition from a woman to a little girl begging daddy to be nice is beautifully done and Lawson is definitely one to watch.

As the Lady in Brown, Celia Chevalier was the least compelling, but

BOOKS: Don't Bother Trying To
"Find Me"

THEATER: "The Sound Inside"
Gets Muffled By Final...

THEATER: Stuff and Nonsense
for Friendly Crowds --...

THEATER: "Scotland, PA" or,
The Bloody King Of Bur...

THEATER: "For Colored Girls"
Returns. Finally!

The Movies, Books, Theater,
Concerts, CDs I've See...

BookFilter Reading List

TV and Film Must Watch List

THEATER: "Forbidden
Broadway" Is Back and
Broadway...

THEATER: "Soft Power" In
Hard Times

THEATER: "Dublin Carol" Hits
a Mournful But Hopefu...

THEATER: COLE PORTER
REVUE "DECLINE AND
FALL" IS T...

THEATER: "Terra Firma" Is On
Shaky Ground

THEATER: "The Glass
Menagerie" Sans Tricks Or
Trea...

THEATER: Wrestling With
Faith in "Heroes Of The Fo...

THEATER: A Bright Future In
Reach For "Chasing Rai...

THEATER: The Not-So "Great
Society"

THEATER: BOO! A Halloween
Scare Fest Closes Its Ey...

THEATER: "A(loft) Modulation"
-- A Play With Jazz ...

THEATER: "Freestyle Love
Supreme" and "Derren
Brow...

BOOKS: A Fantasy Classic
Finally Translated Into E...

► September (10)

► August (9)

the collective group is strong enough to lift everyone's game up. Still, this particular production has flaws. The staging by director Leah C. Gardiner was a sort of in-the-round compromise. Most of the audience is in traditional stadium seating facing the performance space. But there is also a semi-circle of audience members on stage; it's like watching people who are watching a show being performed in the round. And the performances certainly play to everyone. You feel the show yearns to be done this way completely -- it's a communal experience, after all -- but simply didn't have that as an option.

I also would love to see the musicians visible on stage, rather than tucked away. (Not to get all John Doyle on you, but even the cast might play instruments/percussion as well.) The scenic design of Myung Hee Cho certainly did it no favors. A blurry, mirror-like reflective material encircles the stage and is effective. But clear plastic crystals hanging from the ceiling give the room a chintzy '70s vibe. And revealing about a half dozen disco balls at the finale felt desultory. (They lowered about a foot from the ceiling in underwhelming fashion.) Further, I am allergic to finger snapping as a sign of approval or applause. Even done ironically, it makes me want to flee for the exit. That's one dated element that could be easily lost -- and replaced by the more physical and inspiring raising of hands a-flutter, as one does in appreciation of deaf performers, which appropriately makes an appearance here.

None of that detracted from the exuberance of a cast performing the show the night I caught it, on the anniversary of Shange's birth October 18, 1948. We missed her being in attendance by just one year, since she died on October 27, 2018. Which leads me back to the original mystery. To be blunt, *For Colored Girls* is a very inexpensive work to put on. It made history by running on Broadway for 742 performances, far longer than *A Raisin In The Sun*, to make one obvious comparison. So what took them so long to bring it back? Despite my cavils about this particular production, I'm delighted to say, it's not because of the play itself. *For Colored Girls* still has something to say and it always will.

THEATER OF 2019

Frankenstein: Under The Radar Fest at the Public ** 1/2
 Minor Character: Under The Radar Festival at the Public ***
 Ink: Under The Radar Festival at the Public ** 1/2
 Choir Boy ** 1/2
 White Noise ** 1/2
 Kiss Me, Kate ***
 Ain't No Mo' *** 1/2
 Ain't Too Proud **
 The Cradle Will Rock * 1/2
 Mrs. Murray's Menagerie *** 1/2
 Oklahoma! (on Broadway) ** 1/2

► [July](#) (7)
 ► [June](#) (3)
 ► [May](#) (6)
 ► [April](#) (10)
 ► [March](#) (5)
 ► [February](#) (1)
 ► [January](#) (8)

► [2018](#) (38)
 ► [2017](#) (6)
 ► [2016](#) (2)
 ► [2015](#) (29)
 ► [2014](#) (2)
 ► [2013](#) (5)
 ► [2012](#) (17)
 ► [2011](#) (15)
 ► [2010](#) (10)
 ► [2009](#) (43)
 ► [2008](#) (86)
 ► [2007](#) (781)
 ► [2006](#) (2412)
 ► [2005](#) (5)

Socrates **
The Pain Of My Belligerence *
Burn This **
Hadestown *** 1/2
All My Sons * 1/2
Tootsie ** 1/2
Ink ***
Beetlejuice **
Estado Vegetal ***
Hans Christian Andersen * 1/2
Cirque du Soleil: Luzia ***
BLKS ** 1/2
Moulin Rouge ** 1/2
Bat Out Of Hell **
Unchilding **
Sea Wall/ A Life ** 1/2
Harry Potter and the Cursed Child ***
Betrayal *** 1/2
Fifty Million Frenchmen ** 1/2
Freestyle Love Supreme ** 1/2
Derren Brown: Secret ***
(A)loft Modulation * 1/2
The Great Society **
I Can't See *
Heroes Of The Fourth Turning ** 1/2
Chasing Rainbows: The Road To Oz ***
The Glass Menagerie (dir Austin Pendleton & Peter Bloch) **
Terra Firma (debut of The Coop theater company) **
Forbidden Broadway: The Next Generation ***
Dublin Carol ** 1/2
Soft Power **
The Decline and Fall of The Entire World As Seen Through The Eyes
Of Cole Porter ***
For Colored Girls ** 1/2
Scotland, PA

*Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the creator of **BookFilter**, a book lover's best friend. It's a website that lets you browse for books online the way you do in a physical bookstore, provides comprehensive info on new releases every week in every category and offers passionate personal recommendations every step of the way. He's also the cohost of **Showbiz Sandbox**, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day with top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his website. Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called **Popsurfing** and also available for free on iTunes.*

POSTED BY MICHAEL GILTZ AT 10:00 PM 

NO COMMENTS:

[Post a Comment](#)

[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)