



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2019

MICHAEL GILTZ AT WORK

## THEATER: "OKLAHOMA!" IS OK THE SECOND TIME AROUND!

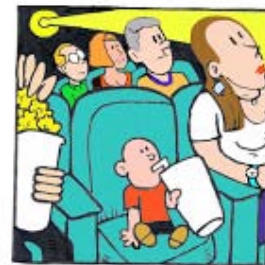
**OKLAHOMA!** \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*

### CIRCLE IN THE SQUARE

Few things are as wonderfully indulgent as the chance to go see a new Broadway show...twice! Whether you're comparing casts, looking to deepen your appreciation or giving a show you weren't thrilled with a second chance, returning to a work of theater before it's gone forever (and most theater disappears all too soon, *Phantom* excepted, of course) is a marvelous luxury.

I saw the dark, daring revival of *Oklahoma!* at St. Ann's Warehouse last fall and it confounded and confused me. Now I've seen it again on Broadway and [pretty much everything I said then holds true now](#). Since most critics raved, that's a compliment to a show that has moved into a new space but lost none of its edge. Indeed, I think the heady success of that first mounting has allowed everyone involved to breathe a sigh of relief and enjoy themselves a little more. This production will go dark, but it's less afraid now to have fun along the way. My opinion hasn't changed on this take (if anything, it's been cemented) but it's a pleasure to savor the parts that go into director Daniel Fish's vision. Some thoughts:

**HELLO TO THE TONY WINNER FOR BEST REVIVAL** -- In a rather thin season, only two musical revivals have hit Broadway: *Oklahoma!* and *Kiss Me, Kate!* [I enjoyed \*Kate\* more](#) but there's not a soul on the planet who is excited by it. Everyone has an opinion about *Oklahoma!* and many of them are passionate in support. It's a riskier project based on a superior show; indeed, few shows are the equal of *Oklahoma!* much less its superior. Plus, *Oklahoma!* offers a lot more talent to cheer on in both supporting roles and technical contributions. Passion will always triumph over professionalism so I'll bet



Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in NYC and can be reached at [mgiltz@pipeline.com](mailto: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 \(31\)](#)

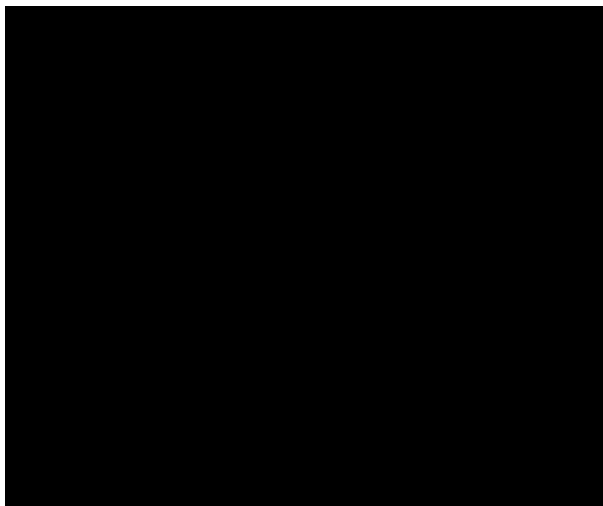
► [June \(1\)](#)

► [May \(9\)](#)

*Oklahoma!* clutches the big prize of Best Musical Revival. (This assumes they'll keep this category separate from Play Revival and let these two duke it out.)

**WHAT A GORGEOUS REIMAGINING OF THE SCORE** -- Since we're talking about Tonys, the most deserved one should go to Daniel Kluger for his orchestrations, arrangements and music supervision. The seven member orchestra (along with star Damon Daunno on guitar) has a bluegrass vibe and the orchestrations reveal what a wondrous work the music of Richard Rodgers truly is -- not that we needed reminding. The smaller ensemble would work a treat for community theaters and regional productions around the country, if R&H would allow a classic presentation to include this more intimate approach to the music. The Tony for orchestration hasn't gone to a revival since *Sweeney Todd* in 2006 but I'll bet *Oklahoma!* pulls it off.

**AND SPEAKING OF TONYs, THEY CAIN'T SAY NO TO ALI STROKER** -- Stroker caught my eye in the lovely, 2015 revival of *Spring Awakening* by Deaf West Theatre. Now she's a ball on fire as the man-loving Ado Annie. By far this show's best element is the love triangle between Ado, her slightly dim but lovable cowpoke Will (James Davis) and the peddler Ali Hakim (Will Brill, picking up right where Mallory Portnoy left off). For all my complaints about the show, what a treat they pull off here. Will becomes more than a joke, the ugly ethnic stereotype that can be Ali is erased entirely and Stroker breaks down barriers because she was the best damn person for the role...and might just deserve a Tony for choreography, given the marvelous way she reveals character just by the way Ado swoops and dips and glides around the stage in her wheelchair. All three should be competing in the supporting actor categories. Here's Stroker and the cast performing her comic highlight "I Cain't Say No" on *The Tonight Show*.



**BLONDE ON BLONDE** -- It's not all good news. As is often true at Circle in the Square, there's not a bad seat in the house, though surely

▼ April (10)

THEATER: "INK" STAINED  
WRETCHES GET THEIR  
DUE

THEATER: "TOOTSIE" IS A  
DRAG

THEATER: "ALL MY SONS"  
LACKS A FAMILY

THEATER: "HADESTOWN"  
FINDS HEAVEN ON  
BROADWAY

THEATER: "BURN THIS"  
BARELY SMOLDERS

THEATER: THE PAIN OF "THE  
PAIN OF MY  
BELLIGERENCE"...

THEATER: QUESTIONING  
"SOCRATES"

THEATER: "OKLAHOMA!" IS  
OK THE SECOND TIME  
AROUND!...

THEATER: LESS IS MORE AT  
"MRS. MURRAY'S  
MENAGERIE"...

THEATER: "THE CRADLE  
WILL ROCK" PUTS YOU TO  
SLEEP

► March (5)

► February (1)

► January (5)

► 2018 (33)

► 2017 (6)

► 2016 (2)

► 2015 (17)

► 2014 (2)

► 2013 (5)

► 2012 (17)

► 2011 (15)

► 2010 (10)

► 2009 (43)

► 2008 (86)

► 2007 (781)

► 2006 (2412)

the folk seated on stage by the crockpots cooking up some chili had extra fun. This time my seat was right by the ramp where the actors usually entered and exited. It was terrific...but it also gave me a new perspective on the set. The expanse of unvarnished wood melting into a brown backdrop depicting farmland proved especially monotonous. Setting the show in a barn of sorts and serving chili and cornbread during intermission? Perfect! Still, did the overall look of the set have to prove so bland to the eye?

**KEEP MESSING WITH IT** -- I may not agree with director Daniel Fish's vision here, but I'll defend to the death his right to vision it. As my guest said, mess with it all you want -- *Oklahoma!* will survive. This production mildly hints at a gay angle by having Curly and Jud talk so close to one another in one scene they seem ready to kiss, yet that idea isn't taken seriously. But why *not* an *Oklahoma!* where the tension between the two men arises from attraction? (The nominal love interest Laurey would have all the more reason to be annoyed with both of them.) Or why not the idea I considered at length in my original review: [cast Jud as black or Native American](#) and suddenly the outcast nature of that character makes perfect sense.

This is *Oklahoma!* after all, one of the seminal works of musical theater. It deserves to be done in a reverent, classic style; it also deserves to have the darker shadows explored (as they were in the tremendous 1998 West End revival that turned Hugh Jackman into a star); and it deserves to be torn down and reimagined completely as it is here. (And stop saying they didn't change a word of the dialogue, as if staging and action and orchestration and everything else don't matter too. The words may be the same but the action at the climax is dramatically, substantially new.) No matter what you do to it, *Oklahoma!* will be perfectly OK, so boring old purists can just shush. I can't wait to see the *next* revival.

## 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

*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 [6:44 PM](#) 

---

## NO COMMENTS:

[Post a Comment](#)

[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

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