

June 11, 2009

# Entertainment by Chris Narloch

## **The Little Mermaid on Broadway** *Plus Hair, 9 to 5 & West Side Story*

**T**he President is a theater queen? That was my reaction upon hearing that the First Couple, Barack and Michelle Obama, took in a Broadway show on a recent Saturday date night.

Perhaps it was Michelle's idea. In any event, Mr. and Mrs. 'O' wisely chose to see Lincoln Center's highly praised revival of the August Wilson play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and apparently ticket sales

Starshine," but far from being dated, the ultimate anti-war/free-love musical seems completely in the moment.

An incredibly talented cast of handsome young people – over two

### West Side Story

The other hit revival on Broadway is this superb production of the famous musical by Jerome Robbins, Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim.

Miraculously, the creator of the original book, Arthur Laurents, now 90, is the director this time out. Hot off his dynamite revival of *Gypsy*, with Patti LuPone, Laurents]



for the show doubled the next day.

I am all for supporting theater, and I applaud the Obamas for giving Broadway the Presidential seal of approval. (Lord knows I do my part to spread the word.)

This month I write about the newest Disney musical on Broadway, as well as the red-hot revivals of *Hair* and *West Side Story*. Also reviewed, the musical versions of two movies, *9 to 5* and *The Toxic Avenger*.

### Hair

By the time you read this, the sensational Broadway revival of *Hair* will probably have won the Tony for Best Musical Revival, and I would have to agree with that.

The iconic '60s show features the memorable hits from yesteryear, "Aquarius" and "Good Morning

dozen in all – breathe new life into *The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* under the stunning direction of Diane Paulus, who also helmed the production when it debuted last summer in Central Park.

Skeptics were worried that the Public Theater revival might not survive the transfer indoors to a Broadway venue, but the performance I saw in the Al Hirschfeld Theater was a triumphant success.

The pleasure in the audience is palpable all the way through the show, and it reaches its zenith when cast members invite the audience on stage to sing with them during the final number, a joyous, communal version of "Let the Sun Shine In."

is on a roll.

Far from being embalmed, the show bursts with life, thanks to a fantastic cast that includes Matt Cavenaugh as Tony, Josefina Scaglione as Maria and Karen Olivo as Anita.

Scaglione, a classically trained opera singer from Argentina, is especially stunning, both physically and vocally, and the show crackles with sexual tension like never before.

Laurents also effectively heightens the gang tensions in the story, which is essentially a musical version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The score remains one of the most beautiful in Broadway history.

LITTLE MERMAID  
continues on page 86

### **The Little Mermaid**

Sacramento's own Broadway diva, Faith Prince, who lives here when she isn't performing in New York, joined the cast of *The Little Mermaid* this April.

You can catch Prince performing the plum role of Ursula in the Broadway version of the Disney musical until March 2010.

The show is a spectacular, eye-poppingly colorful and very entertaining transfer from screen to stage, and Prince is perfect as a campy villainess. (Her wardrobe and wig alone are worth the price of a ticket.)

Kids will love the show, and gay men will enjoy the playful camaraderie between Flotsam and Jetsam, as well as the sexy costume worn by King Triton, whose beautiful bare chest sparkles with glitter.

### **9 to 5 the Musical**

Huge Dolly Parton fan that I am, it pains me to say that the multi-

talented country diva's Broadway version of her hit film is more than a little disappointing.

Parton wrote both music and lyrics, and there are some nice songs in the show. Unfortunately, *9 to 5 the Musical* is so close to the original in terms of the book, written by the movie's screenwriter, Patricia Resnick, that it ultimately feels like an inferior remake.

The musical version is also raunchier than the movie, which is a mistake, and the director, Joe Mantello, hits the audience over the head with jokes that really aren't all that funny.

The good news is the cast, which features the terrific Allison Janney in the Lily Tomlin part, and an endearing performance by Megan Hilty in the role of Doralee, made famous by Parton. (Stephanie J. Block is just as so-so as Jane Fonda was in the film.)

### **The Toxic Avenger**

Cheesy movies often make

delicious off-Broadway shows, and this new musical comedy sci-fi spoof is no exception. I loved every trashy minute of it.

Featuring a talented cast willing to endure any indignity for a laugh *The Toxic Avenger* is the musical version of a 1984 B-movie about a 98-pound weakling bullied by goons who is transformed into the titular hero after landing in a drum of toxic waste.

Since the story is set in New Jersey, there is plenty of toxic waste to go around, and the creators of the show, Joe DiPietro, and David Bryan of Bon Jovi, have a field day with jokes at the expense of the Garden State.

Sight gags (and sightless gags) abound, and the very funny lyrics are delivered with verve by every member of the cast, including the hilarious Nancy Opel, who sings a jaw-dropping, tour de force duet with herself.