

THE DALTONIAN

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ARTS

Late 2023 Broadway Roundup!

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Between September and December, eight shows will be opening on Broadway. Read on to see which new stories will be told under the neon lights for this upcoming season.

Musical Revivals

Two of this season's new shows are revivals of musicals productions that were staged on Broadway at some point in the past.

Revivals are often the most interesting shows because they bring back something that was great the first time around, adding a new twist to make it relevant for a contemporary audience. Recent revivals that have been very provocative are last year's *1776*, a show about white men signing the Declaration of Independence, but this time around with an all-female color-conscious cast that forced the crowds to acknowledge the lack of women during the actual historical event. Another example is last year's gender-bent revival production of *Company* (a show about the pressure to get married which relayed a completely different message to its audience when the main character, Bobbie, was played by a woman rather than a man, as in the original). Hopefully, the following shows will join the ranks of these powerful and interesting revivals.



Merrily We Roll Along

Merrily We Roll Along chronicles the tumultuous relationship between Franklin Shepard and his two lifelong friends Mary and Charley, as well as Franklin's life in showbiz in Hollywood. This musical is special because it presents the plot in reverse chronological order: the show starts with an angry mood as Franklin and his friends fight, ending their relationship. And rather heartbreakingly, it closes with a happy and hopeful note as the friends meet each other for the first time.

Merrily We Roll Along was written by Stephen Sondheim, one of the most influential figures in twentieth century musical theater, known for shows such as *West Side Story*, *Into the Woods*, and *Sweeney Todd*. Sondheim is known for the very complicated rhythmic and melodic songs he writes that feature deep themes such as grief, death, remorse, passion, true love and many more. Frank Rich of the *New York Times* wrote that Sondheim's songs are so poignant that to be a fan of his work is "to have one's heart broken at regular intervals." *Merrily We Roll Along* definitely has several very memorable songs, most notably *Our Time*, *Not a Day Goes By*, and *That Frank*, a very fast and staccato song that mocks high status cocktail party small talk.

When it originally opened in 1981 with a cast made up mostly of teenagers and young adults, *Merrily We Roll Along* was met with negative reviews and it closed after just 16 performances and 44 previews. People didn't appreciate the play's non-chronological plot line and the decision to cast young people in the role of older people. This revival production, however, stars well-known actors — Daniel Radcliffe (who played Harry Potter in the movies), Jonathan Groff (who played King George III in *Hamilton*) and Lindsey Mendez (who played Elphaba in *Wicked*) — and that will likely lure crowds in and allow the production to run for longer.

Merrily We Roll Along is currently showing at the Hudson Theatre; its first preview was on September 19th, and it opened on October 10th. Reviews so far have been very enthusiastic. For example, on the night that it opened the *New York Times* remarked that "Maria Friedman's unsparing direction and a thrillingly fierce performance by Jonathan Groff have given the show a hard shell it lacked [...] *Merrily* has been found in the dark."



Spamalot

The other revival coming to Broadway this season, *Spamalot*, is a comedic musical retelling of the famous tale of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table on their journey to find the Holy Grail. Based on Monty Python's classic 1975 movie, this musical first opened on Broadway in 2005. It was a great success in 2005, winning a Tony for Best Musical and running for four years. In a *New York Times* article, the director of this show, Josh Rhodes, characterized *Spamalot* as "a beautiful satire of Broadway, and of the class system." This revival production stars Christopher Fitzgerald (Boq in *Wicked*) and James Monroe Iglehart (Genie in *Aladdin*). *Spamalot* is being produced at the St. James Theater. Its initial preview was on October 31, and it opened on November 16.

New Musicals

Alongside the musical revivals, three new musicals will be coming to Broadway this season. Like some of the most beloved musicals — *Evita*, *Hamilton*, *Funny Girl*, and *SIX* — two of these musicals are based on true stories.



How to Dance in Ohio

How to Dance in Ohio is about a group of autistic adults preparing for a formal spring dance in a counseling center in Columbus, Ohio. It was inspired by an HBO documentary of the same name. The show promises to be a heartwarming adventure filled with love, stress, intense emotion, and excitement. It is unique as it sheds light on the experience of autistic individuals, which is relatively uncommon in the media. This show stars Caesar Samayoa (Kevin, *Come From Away*) and Ashley Wool (*These Three Girls*). *How to Dance in Ohio* is being produced at the Belasco Theater. It starts previews on November 15 and its opening night will be on December 10.



Harmony

Harmony tells the story of the Comedian Harmonists. This group of six male singers came together in 1920's Germany and impressed the world with their outstanding harmonies. Before ascending to Broadway, *Harmony* finished an off-Broadway run at the National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene. This show, with music by Barry Manilow, stars Chip Zien (The Baker, *Into the Woods*), Julie Benko (Fanny Brice, *Funny Girl*) and Sierra Boggess (Christine, *Phantom of the Opera*). *Harmony* is playing in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. *Harmony*'s initial preview was on October 18 and its opening night is on November 14.



Gutenberg! The Musical!

The third new musical coming to Broadway is not based on a true story, but it does reference a historical figure: Johann Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press. *Gutenberg! The Musical!* is a two-man comedic show satirizing a backer's audition (where writers try to sell their shows by singing and acting through the entirety of it in front of a panel of potential producers) about Gutenberg and a made-up and preposterous version of his life story. The plot follows two co-workers at a nursing home with a dream to make it to Broadway, so even though this musical definitely should be categorized a comedy, it does also include sweet plots about old life-long dreams and aspirations. This musical was written by the co-writers of *Beetlejuice* and stars Josh Gad and Andrew Rannells, co-stars of hit musical comedy *The Book of Mormon*. It is playing in the James Earl Jones Theatre; its preview was on September 15 and its opening night was on October 12.

Straight Plays

In addition to these five musicals, three straight plays will be coming to Broadway in the remaining months of 2023. Some of the most exciting plays on Broadway last season (e.g., *Leopoldstadt*, *Fat Ham* and *Ain't No Mo'*) were straight plays, or shows without songs. The following three plays promise to provoke and delight, and excitingly, unlike the vast majority of Broadway plays, two of them are written by women.



Jaja's African Hair Braiding

Jaja's African Hair Braiding is set in a Central Harlem hair braiding shop around 125th street where many different immigrant women create beautiful masterpieces atop the heads of neighborhood women. Written by Jocelyn Bioh, who is making her Broadway debut, this musical explores themes of community, love, the concept of being an outsider, and much more. This show stars many young actors who are also making their Broadway debuts such as Maechi Aharanwa, Brittany Adebunola, and Rachel Christopher. One fun fact about this show is that most of the hairstyles are actually braided in real-time (on wigs) onstage! *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* is being produced at the Samuel J Friedman Theatre. The show's preview was on September 12th, and its opening night was on October 3rd. Its run has already been extended twice. This is really an impressive bragging right for this show, as most shows don't get extended multiple times so close to their opening. Overall it's been given really good reviews and called "wildly entertaining," with a "talented ensemble."



I Need That

I Need That, written by the prolific playwright Theresa Rebeck, is a comedy that follows the hilarious journey of Sam, a man who the Department of Health has threatened with eviction if he doesn't clean up his apartment filled with hoarded old objects. The only problem is that he can't seem to let go of anything from his past, no matter what his daughter Amelia says. *I Need That* stars Danny DeVito (*Wormwood*, *Matilda*) and his actual daughter Lucy DeVito. As the New York Times reported, Danny and Lucy DeVito are "playing the roles they know best: father and daughter." This play is showing at the American Airlines Theatre. Its first preview was on October 13, and its opening night was on November 2.

Appropriate

Appropriate is about the three children of a wealthy man in Arkansas who has recently died. As the children slowly pick through everything in their father's house they find all sorts of surprises among the small trinkets. They find sweet memories of their late father, but also some ugly family history. This show explores white American privilege, alcoholism, greed, love and tolerance, while maintaining the feeling of a dramatic comedy. *Appropriate* was written by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins in 2014 and is only coming to Broadway now, serving as his Broadway debut. The play stars Natalie Gold (*Succession*), Alyssa Emily Marvin (*Grey House*), and Sarah Paulson (*Ocean's 8*). This show is showing in the Hayes Theater. *Appropriate's* official preview on Broadway is on November 29, and its opening night is on December 18.

Dalton theater teacher and director Rory Boyd exclaims: "An exciting season of Broadway beckons! Some of these shows I know very little about, some I have loved for many years –

the season seems a fairly even balance of promising new works and thoughtful revivals. I'm excited to see as many as I can and looking forward to the artistic discussions they will generate!'

New Theater faculty member Isabel Thorton agrees, and also reminds readers that "while this looks like an exciting Broadway season, students should be sure to check out the scene off-Broadway, too! Theaters like the Public, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Soho Rep, La MaMa and St. Ann's Warehouse (and many more) offer perspectives of theater-makers not often represented on mainstream stages. Who knows? You might even be able to say of a new hit show, "I saw that before it came to Broadway!"

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