

Datebook



SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM | Tuesday, October 7, 2014 | Section E

THEATER REVIEW

Revival's a dud — but singer sparkles

By Robert Hurwitz

Emily Skinner makes a good case for taking a new look at one of the worst bombs in the careers of each of the three American musical theater giants who wrote it — Richard Rodgers (score), Stephen Sondheim (lyrics) and Arthur Laurents (book). So do a few others in the cast. But 42nd Street Moon's scrappy, rare revival of "Do I Hear a Waltz?" — which opened Saturday at the Eureka Theatre — isn't that look.

Flatly staged and unevenly performed, director Greg MacKellan's 42nd Street "Waltz" seems to stumble between being a hastily arranged producers'

"Waltz" continues on E2



Photo by [unreadable]

Emily Skinner skillfully interprets a major bomb of musical theater.

Do I Hear a Waltz?
Musical. Music by Richard Rodgers. Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Book by Arthur Laurents. Directed by Greg MacKellan. Through Oct. 19. 42nd Street Moon, Eureka Theatre, 215 Jackson St., San Francisco. Two hours, 20 minutes. \$25-\$75. (415) 255-8207. www.42ndstreetmoon.org.



Photos by Paul Chinn / The Chronicle

Rosa Petterson (left), Jamany Snead, Chyna Kane Ross and Omar Evans dance at the Destiny Arts Center studios in Oakland.

OAKLAND

Finding a safe haven in dance

Film documents how Destiny Arts Studio transforms young lives

By Mary Ellen Hunt

It's a hot day in North Oakland, but in the cool studios of Destiny Arts Center, all it takes to get the dancers going is to push "play" on the music. Though they haven't performed together in a long time, as Télépopmusik's "Breathe" throbs through the air, the moves — along with the laughter and good-natured one-upmanship — come easily.

Wrenching personal struggles and enormously satisfying successes have led to the tight-knit camaraderie that endures between Destiny dancers, five of whom are profiled in "F R E E," a documentary by Suzanne LaFetra and David Collier that premieres at the Mill Valley Film Festival this weekend.

A lively, articulate group, the dancers speak thoughtfully yet candidly about how Destiny has shaped their lives,

snapping their fingers in approval when someone says something that resonates. A few of them have graduated from the program, moving on to college or jobs, but when they come together, the conversation is as easy as the dancing, as if they had never left.

"Destiny is the place where anybody can come," says Chyna Kane Ross, 17, a senior in high school who still dances

Destiny continues on E2



Jamany Snead (left) hugs Rosa Petterson at the studios as Chyna Kane Ross stands by.

DAVID WIEGAND *Television*

Despite fine acting, scripts are the real horror show

FX advises you to tune in to the "American Horror Story: Freak Show" premiere Wednesday night "if you dare." Obviously, that line was written by the network's marketing people without the benefit of having seen the first two episodes of Ryan Murphy's previously wonderful anthology series.

As fans know, every year features a different story, albeit with many

**American Horror
Story: Freak Show:**
10 p.m. Wednesday
on FX.

"Flash" is a lighter "Arrow" offshoot. **D3**

of the same actors playing different roles. What made it work so perfectly for three seasons was a brilliant mix of horror and humor, both over the top.

Someone seems to have lost the recipe with

"Freak Show," however, which boasts some extraordinary performances by actors who labor in vain against a sometimes plodding script, weighed down with underwhelming horror moments, way-too-obvious metaphors about tolerating differences and a pervasively airless claustrophobia.

In what she says is her final season with "AH'S," Jessica Lange *Wiegand continues on E3*



Michelle K. Short / FX

Even masterful Kathy Bates, as the bearded lady, has a hairy time with the substandard script in "American Horror Story: Freak Show."

Amoeba is a proud partner of the

TREASURE ISLAND MUSIC FESTIVAL

THE FESTIVAL IN THE BAY

OCTOBER 18 & 19

LIVE SHOWS CALENDAR

SAN FRANCISCO - ALL SHOWS ARE FREE & ALL-AGES!

Sat., October 11 • 2pm - FROM INDIAN LAKES

CATCH THESE ARTISTS LIVE AT THE TREASURE ISLAND MUSIC FESTIVAL & ON-SALE AT AMOEBAS

<p>THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS Brill Bruisers The New Pornographers is the 1st new release in 4 years from the acclaimed supergroup. The New Pornographers, whom NPR calls "virtually peerless in the world of power-pop and indie-rock." Live at Treasure Island Music Fest, 10/19</p> <p>11⁹⁹</p>	<p>CHET FAKER Built On Glass Melbourne's Chet Faker excels at crisp, soulful songwriting that merges late-'90s R&B with a contemporary electronic palate influenced by a youth producing house & disco. Live at Treasure Island Music Fest, 10/18</p> <p>12⁹⁹</p>	<p>ALT-J This Is All Yours "A handsome alloy of dry acoustic timbre and reverberant effect, suggesting a very British convergence of texture-minded electronic music and psychedelic folk." -New York Times Live at Treasure Island Music Fest, 10/18</p> <p>12⁹⁹</p>	<p>JUNGLE Jungle Based around a core musical duo known simply as "J" and "I" who expand to a thrilling seven-piece live band, Jungle makes music that is modern soul with true global appeal. Live at Treasure Island Music Fest, 10/18</p> <p>12⁹⁹</p>
---	---	---	---

SAN FRANCISCO • 1855 Haight St. • 415-831-1200 • BERKELEY • 2455 Telegraph Ave. • 510-549-1125

ALWAYS FREE SHIPPING ON AMOEBAS.COM

COUPON

GREEN EVALUATIONS

MEDICAL MARIJUANA EVALUATIONS

OPEN DAILY 11-7

\$29 renewals
\$39 new patients

1855A Haight St. SF (INSIDE AMOEBAS MUSIC)

(415) 831-1032 • gcscf.com

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Singer shines in rare revival of musical bomb

“Waltz” from page E1

audition and a well-meaning community theater effort. It's neither, of course. Skinner may be the only certified Broadway star (Tony-nominated for her delightful Siamese twin role in “Side Show”), but she isn't the only professional onstage. But the haphazard acting and singing don't do the material any favors, and music director Dave Dobrusky's solo piano accompaniment virtually demands that you come prepared to supply your own mental orchestrations to fill out the score. It's a sadly lackluster effort given that the company has staged “Waltz” before.

And yet — it's a rare gift to see hear Skinner's lovely, light and strong but mellow, unamplified voice singing these odd Rodgers-Sondheim songs, and to experience her interpretation of the invitingly complex American-in-Venice lead character up close and personal. And it's a rare gift to get to see this oddball musical in any form.

Romantic tension

The only collaboration between its creators — and a very unhappy one, as Sondheim and Laurents have written — “Waltz” opened in 1965 as a musical adaptation of Laurents' successful 1952 play “The Time of the Cuckoo,” best known now in its more conventionally romantic film version as the '55 Katharine Hepburn



Photograph

Stephanie Rhoads (left) plays an innkeeper who provides some advice on love to an American alone in Venice, played by Emily Skinner, in 42nd Street Moon's revival of “Do I Hear a Waltz?”

vehicle “Summertime.” The play and the musical's more complicated Leona Samish (Skinner) may be seeking romance (or some “magical, mystical miracle”) in Venice, but she's had enough life experience to carry her own martini fixings and view any prospective suitor with self-protective wariness.

She's also still innocent enough to be shocked when her genially sexy Venetian pensione landlady Fioria (an engaging and tuneful Steph-

anie Rhoads) seduces one of her young married guests (David Naughton). And even more disheartened when her dashing Venetian shopkeeper suitor Renato (Tyler McKenna) turns out to be married as well. The romanticism implicit in Rodgers' score creates intriguing artistic tensions with Laurents and Sondheim's more worldly, at times cynical book and lyrics, a tension most richly embodied in Skinner's torn, suspicious, enthralled, brokenhearted, angry and always self-

critical Leona.

She gets some strong support from Rhoads and Lucinda Hitchcock Cone, as half of an older American tourist couple, and from prepossessing fifth-grader Jonah Brosscoe as her persistent street urchin guide. McKenna is a likable and reasonably passionate Renato but hasn't the range to carry his big, wooing numbers “Someone Like You,” “Take the Moment” and “Stay” (think, Ezio Pinza in “South Pacific”). With the exception of a brightly

comic Taylor Bartolucci in the small role of Giovanna, most of the rest of the cast is merely serviceable.

Maintaining interest

None of the songs is among Rodgers' most memorable, but most are well above average. Writing after the death of Oscar Hammerstein II, he seems at times to be trying to fall back on motifs reminiscent of tunes from “Carousel” or “South Pacific,” at others to reach back to his work with Lorenz Hart. Sondheim aficionados may be particularly impressed with how wittily he channels Hart in the wry looks at marital problems, “We Gonna Be All Right,” and woes of air-travel, “What Do We Do? We Fly!” Skinner sparks our interest in the songs with Leona's arrival in Venice (“Someone Woke Up”) and steadily builds it through a variety of numbers, especially a sweet, cautious wooing duet with McKenna, “Thinking,” and the trio “Moon in My Window.” She brings the show to its ill-fated romantic climax with a lovely rendition of the title song. In moments like that, 42nd Street’s “Waltz” seems like a gift to the community. But it never manages to appear as much of a gift as it is a lost opportunity.

Robert Hurwitz is the San Francisco Chronicle's theater critic. E-mail: rhurwitz@sfgate.com Twitter: @RobertHurwitz

Dance studios help transform youths

Destiny from page E1

with the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company. “You never feel like you don't fit in because there is always someone you fit in with. A company is a family, and that's what Destiny has instilled in us.”

Jamany Snead, 18, agrees. “I've danced for other companies, and I cannot go back today and say I rep that company,” he says. “They'd be like, ‘You're not part of us now.’ But I know I can go anywhere and say I'm part of Destiny — nobody would say I'm not. This is where I came from. This is a part of my life. So I don't really call it a dance company. It's say it's just home.”

Creating oasis of security

In the airy corridor that connects the studios, Executive Director Cristy Johnston Limón points out murals created by summer camp students. Embedded in them are the words love, respect, care, responsibility, honor and peace — the cornerstones of the “warrior code” enshrined in Destiny's teaching philosophy of violence prevention. It's a code reinforced in all of Destiny's classes, from the kung fu-style Jujukenbo, to the hip-hop and modern dance classes.

Today, about 500 youths come to Destiny's studios, and

“FREE” at the Mill Valley Film Festival: \$11.50-\$14. (977) 874-6833. www.mvff.com or www.freethedocumentary.com.

7:30 p.m., Saturday, Throckmorton Theatre, 142 Throckmorton, Mill Valley. Screening followed by a performance by the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company

2:30 p.m., Sunday, Smith Rafael Film Center, 1118 Fourth St., San Rafael.

► Destiny Arts Center, 970 Grace Ave., Oakland, (510) 597-1619. www.destinyarts.org.

the organization reaches an additional 1,500 students through outreach to local schools and 500 educators via professional development programs. Plus, dozens of public performances bring dance and theater to 20,000 audience members annually.

A year ago, Destiny Arts Center moved into this 7,800-square-foot former warehouse, a far cry from its former home in the basement of Longfellow Elementary School. The hope is not only to expand the classes, but also to create an oasis of security for the kids in the North Oakland community.

“Not just safe in the physical sense, but also in the psychological sense,” Johnston Limón says. “A safe haven is critical, partic-



Paul Chinn / The Chronicle

Executive Director Cristy Johnston Limón (center) and Artistic Director Sarah Crowell shape lives at Destiny Arts Center.

ularly in this community. Violence has subsided for adults, but youth are still the No. 1 victims of homicide in Oakland.” Founded in 1988 by former executive director Kate Hobbs and fellow martial artist Anthony Daniels, Destiny — an acronym for De-Escalation Skills Training Inspiring Nonviolence in Youth — began as an after-school program offering conflict resolution through martial arts and self-defense training to young people in Oakland.

Tackling difficult subjects

In 1990, Hobbs asked Sarah Crowell to inaugurate a dance curriculum. Crowell's passion for art and social justice activism led to a unique program that developed works from students' personal histories, giving them a voice while training them in a

rigorous art form.

“What I noticed was kids got really lit,” Crowell says. “They were telling stories that were real and provocative. I watched kids begin to transform, to stand taller, to talk with each other with more emotional intelligence and look forward to something in their lives rather than feel stuck.”

In 1993, Crowell created the youth company, a closely bonded core group of 20 dancers. In year-long projects, one of which is documented in “F R E E,” the dancers draw from their own lives to make works that tackle difficult topics as varied as sexism, self-hatred, bullying and gender identity.

“I feel like at Destiny, we are dancing for our community,” says Omar Evans, 22, who started dancing at Destiny at age 15.

“We are bringing awareness to stuff that's going on in our community.”

Company members also write about their lives in intensive workshop retreats, sharing and revealing often difficult experiences with each other, much of which makes its way into a piece they perform at the end of the year.

“It was a lot of getting over preconceived notions of people,” says Rosa Peterson, 18. “It taught us about each other, but also in general taught us that everyone has so much more to them than you see on meeting them.”

Exhilarating, exhausting

Ross adds: “I think it's about layers. The first layer is telling the most important people that you're closest with, then telling adults, then telling the world. We had to really get comfortable with each other to put those stories out. In the beginning, people were like, ‘I don't want that on out there.’ But that's where our peers come in, to say it's OK.”

Crowell says: “We are not the magic elixir to make their lives perfect. We give them the opportunity to have real dialogue with each other, to tell their story, to learn powerful skills and master something. But you have to work, there are no shortcuts. You learn what discipline and commitment is. It is both exhilarating and exhausting.”

Mary Ellen Hunt is a freelance writer in San Francisco. E-mail: datebook@sfgate.com

96Hours
Win this!
Nevada's Wild
Blue Yonder

NEVADA A WORLD WITHIN.
A STATE APART.

See Thursday's 96 Hours contest ad to enter!

San Francisco Chronicle | SFGate.com

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Crossword Puzzle

DOWN
1. BLOOM
3. CLIP
5. GRIFFIN
7. BIRTH
9. TEARFUL
11. FIVE
13. FIVE
15. FIVE
17. FIVE
19. FIVE
21. FIVE
23. FIVE
25. FIVE
27. FIVE
29. FIVE
31. FIVE
33. FIVE
35. FIVE
37. FIVE
39. FIVE
41. FIVE
43. FIVE
45. FIVE
47. FIVE
49. FIVE
51. FIVE
53. FIVE
55. FIVE
57. FIVE
59. FIVE
61. FIVE
63. FIVE
65. FIVE
67. FIVE
69. FIVE
71. FIVE
73. FIVE
75. FIVE
77. FIVE
79. FIVE
81. FIVE
83. FIVE
85. FIVE
87. FIVE
89. FIVE
91. FIVE
93. FIVE
95. FIVE
97. FIVE
99. FIVE

Today's Crossword

DOWN
1. BLOOM
3. CLIP
5. GRIFFIN
7. BIRTH
9. TEARFUL
11. FIVE
13. FIVE
15. FIVE
17. FIVE
19. FIVE
21. FIVE
23. FIVE
25. FIVE
27. FIVE
29. FIVE
31. FIVE
33. FIVE
35. FIVE
37. FIVE
39. FIVE
41. FIVE
43. FIVE
45. FIVE
47. FIVE
49. FIVE
51. FIVE
53. FIVE
55. FIVE
57. FIVE
59. FIVE
61. FIVE
63. FIVE
65. FIVE
67. FIVE
69. FIVE
71. FIVE
73. FIVE
75. FIVE
77. FIVE
79. FIVE
81. FIVE
83. FIVE
85. FIVE
87. FIVE
89. FIVE
91. FIVE
93. FIVE
95. FIVE
97. FIVE
99. FIVE

Sudoku Puzzle

8 6 7 9 4 3 2 5 1
3 9 5 2 8 7 1 6 4
2 1 4 5 7 6 9 8 3
6 9 8 1 2 7 5 3 4
4 0 2 3 6 5 8 7 1
5 0 7 8 9 1 3 2 6
0 2 6 5 4 8 7 9 3
4 9 5 6 8 3 2 7 1
1 8 6 7 9 5 4 3 2

Challenger Chess

1. Bc4! Qxc4
2. Nf6ch! gxf6
3. Qxc4ch.

THEATER & ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

THEATER

Old Hats
Created and performed by Bill Irwin & David Shiner
Music & Lyrics by and featuring Shaina Taub
Directed by Tina Landau
HIGHEST RATING: 2 hours of gratifying laughter! SF Chronicle
PERFORMS TONIGHT AT 8!
A.C.T.'s GEARY THEATER
415 Geary at Mason
415.749.2228 • www.act-of.org
Groups of 15+, call 415.439.2309

THEATER

Old Hats
Created and performed by Bill Irwin & David Shiner
Music & Lyrics by and featuring Shaina Taub
Directed by Tina Landau
HIGHEST RATING: 2 hours of gratifying laughter! SF Chronicle
MUST CLOSE 10/12! PERFORMS TONIGHT AT 8!
A.C.T.'s GEARY THEATER
415 Geary at Mason
415.749.2228 • www.act-of.org
Groups of 15+, call 415.439.2309

ENCORE — THEATER/ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE
of the San Francisco Chronicle.
For advertising rates for theater, music & other
Performing arts categories, please call
ALMA APRILADE (415) 777-7485