

Maria/Stuart



KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL
Grote's family members let their secrets spill.

★★★★★

Sideshow Theatre Company (see Fringe & storefront). By Jason Grote. Dir. Marti Lyons. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 15mins; one intermission.

Savage, hysterical and often repulsive, *Maria/Stuart* takes the suburban family drama to grotesque extremes. A family tries to throw a birthday party for their Grandma Ruthie (Susan Monts-Bologna) but must face the secrets they've kept buried. The familiar deep dark mysteries here take the form of a shape-shifting, soda-guzzling, German-speaking monster. The family, meanwhile, holds so tightly to denial that tantrums and food flinging become the only viable release. Family dramas

are messy, yes, but it would be hard to think of one that features such gastronomical carnage—or one that makes its nastiness so endearing.

The messiness does have its limits. During the first act, the play builds an enticing atmosphere and raises a slew of compelling questions. In the second half, though, it starts to spin its wheels. The uniformly brilliant performances don't quite distract from the play's turn to a circular structure, repeating itself without pushing the story forward. When it's finally time to settle accounts, the show feels less like it's risen to a climax and more like it's hit the same wall so many times it's finally had enough. Still, it's refreshing to see a play so unafraid of making a mess of itself and an ensemble daring and capable enough to pull it off. —*Aeneas Sagar Hemphill*

The Dream of the Burning Boy



GIVING GRIEF Bass, left, and Stacey face off as Cox hangs back.

★★★★★

Profiles Theatre (see Resident companies). By David West Read. Dir. Joe Jahraus. With ensemble cast. 1hr 40mins; no intermission.

The sudden death of a well-liked high-school student weighs heavily on those left behind. His sister (Alaina Stacey) lashes out in her confusion. His girlfriend (Marilyn Bass, decked out in full Taylor Swiftian grandeur) and his best friend (Joel Collins) show a suspicious new interest in one another. And a lit teacher (Darrell W. Cox) thinks he's hidden his special degree of interest in the deceased teen.

David West Read's 2011 work presents convincing, clashing portraits of grief, even as it relies on soap-operatic twists to surpass a PSA level of gravitas. Read provides a reason for Mr. Morrow's favoritism toward the lost kid (who's nicely played by Vic Kuligowski in a pair of scenes). What neither the playwright nor director Joe Jahraus supply is an explanation for the script's woefully contracted universe. Why do we spend three extended moments with a bumbling guidance counselor (Eric Burgher, displaying his usual full-on charm but not justifying his character's prominence) yet never meet another of Dane's teachers? Read's school play is tied up a bit too tidily. —*Kris Vire*

Listings

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail, e-mail (theater@timeoutchicago.com) or fax (312-924-9350) to **Oliver Sava**. Include details, dates, times, address of venue with cross streets, nearest El station and bus routes, contact information, box-office phone number and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 9am Monday, ten days before publication date.**

- ▶ Reviewed in this issue
- * Recommended or notable
- ♪ Musical or song-based play
- ♦ Cheap

Touring shows

OPENING * ♪ **American Idiot** *Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W Randolph St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Tue–Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2, 7:30pm. \$18–\$85. 1hr 40mins; one intermission. Apr 16–21.* As entertainment, *American Idiot* is as close to a rock concert as you're likely to see in the ornate Cadillac Palace, in both production elements and attitude. This isn't the show for theatergoers who aren't into blaring guitars and strobe lights. But you wish Michael Mayer and Billie Joe Armstrong had written a little more book. Though the narrative they thread together with almost no dialogue is impressive, some characters get short shrift. —*Kris Vire*

CLOSING ♪ **An American Story for Actor and Orchestra** *Royal George Theatre, 1641 N Halsted St (312-988-9000, theroyalgeorgetheatre.com). Thu, Fri 8pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 3pm. \$60–\$65. 1hr 25mins; no intermission. Through Apr 14.* In his newest solo piece, Hershey Felder portrays Dr. Charles Leale, the Union Army surgeon who was at Ford's Theatre the night Lincoln was shot. Felder's primary source is Leale's own account, written within days of Lincoln's death and rediscovered in the National Archives last year. He enlivens his telling by interpolating songs of the day, including several Stephen Foster tunes, as well as a few compositions of Felder's own, all performed by an 11-piece onstage orchestra. Felder's an engaging stage presence, but his script tries too hard to establish Leale as a 19th-century Forrest Gump, even if the details are true to life. —*KV*

OPENING ♪ **Big Fish** *Oriental Theatre, 24 W Randolph St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Previews Thu 11–Apr 18. Opens Apr 19 at 7:30pm. Tue–Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2, 7:30pm. \$33–\$100. Through May 5.* On his death bed, a father tells his son tall tales about his past that may or may not have actually happened. Audiences can decide for themselves at this new Broadway-bound musical adaptation by Andrew Lippa and John August starring two-time Tony winner Norbert Leo Butz.

* ♪ **The Book of Mormon** *Bank of America Theatre, 18 W Monroe St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Tue 7:30pm; Wed 2, 7:30pm; Thu, Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2, 7:30pm. \$45–\$115. 2hrs 30mins; one intermission. Through Sept 8.* The key to this religious experience is its Creators: The show was begat by the holy triumvirate of *Avenue Q*'s Robert Lopez and *South Park* architects Trey Parker and Matt Stone. The accomplished score both celebrates and upends the American musical-theater tradition, just as the narrative mocks some strictures of organized religion even as it honors the transformative power of faith and religion's community organizing. What's maybe most astonishing about the new

SEATS FOR A SONG

Discounted tickets are available for same-day and advance performances at **Hot Tix**, inside the Chicago Tourism Center at 72 E Randolph St, a half-block west of Millennium Park, and at Water Works Visitor Center, 163 E Pearson St at Michigan Ave. Hours at both locations are Tue–Sat 10am–6pm and Sun 11am–4pm. Hot Tix is a service provided by the League of Chicago Theatres. Half-price tickets are also available online every day by visiting hottix.org.

Check with theaters for rush tickets—discounted tickets available at the box office one hour before performance.

Chicago production is that its cast improves upon the original Broadway ensemble. Nic Rouleau finds a comic-dramatic grounding in Elder Price's crisis of faith, but Ben Platt's sneak-attack ninja take on the jittery Cunningham is the breakout star turn here. —*KV*

▶ **CLOSING** ♪ **Catch Me If You Can** *Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W Randolph St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Thu, Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$18–\$85. Through Apr 14.* See Reviews.

CLOSING ♪ **Girls Night: The Musical** *Primary, 5 W Division St (877-386-6968, girlsnightthemusical.com). Thu–Sat 7pm. \$45–\$65. 2hrs; one intermission. Through Apr 12.* This clunky, underwritten musical revue portrays “women” from party girls to cougars to manic-depressives—if we can identify real female experience beneath such clichés—as wretched, hopeless human beings who sing and dance. Staged in a basement bar on Division Street in the heart of the Viagra Triangle, *Girls Night* is clearly an excuse to have talented-enough actresses perform various female anthems, from “I Will Survive” to “Girls Just Want to Have Fun,” for gaggles of drunken bachelorettes and, yes, “girls” out for the night. Still, the creators might have tried harder. One imagines cynical producers riding lazily on the success of chick flicks like *Bridesmaids* and *Sex and the City*, both of which, by comparison, seem profound. —*Suzanne Scanlon*

Resident companies

♪ **Aspects of Love** *Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre at No Exit Cafe, 6970 N Glenwood Ave (800-595-4849, theo-u.com). Thu 7:30pm; Fri, Sat 8pm; Sun 7pm. \$30–\$64. 2hrs 40mins; one intermission. Through May 19.* With its tracking of an actress's romantic affairs, male rivalries, intergenerational entanglements, pastoral European setting and general philosophizing about love, Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1989 musical reads like a poor cousin of Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*. The show is almost completely sung-through, though Lloyd Webber, as is his wont, has only composed about an hour's worth of music, repeating to fill as necessary. At least musical director Jeremy Ramey, leading a four-piece band, strips the score of its bombast, and the cast is filled with strong voices. —*KV*

OPENING ♪ **Augusta and Noble** *Adventure Stage Chicago, 1012 N Noble St (773-342-4141, adventurastage.org). Previews Thu 11, Fri*