

American Storm



Theatre Seven of Chicago (see Fringe & storefront). By Carter W. Lewis. Dir. Brian Golden. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 15mins; one intermission.

Carter W. Lewis's small-town drama strives for large-scale themes. Set in 1962 around a fictional Ohio horse-racing track, *American Storm* tries to live up to its title, presenting the American moment in microcosm. Trainer Jakey Hanks (Lucy Carapetyan) takes care of the stable's animals and her younger brother, Stuck (Johnny Meyer), a prodigy when it comes to recalling racing stats but otherwise "touched." Stuck's best friend is Martin (Destin Teamer), the town's lone black kid, who works as a groomer. The track is owned by the wealthy Mr. Duffet (Scott Anderson), whose social-climber wife (Susie Griffith) wants Weldon Downs to become as much a destination as Churchill. Then there's the Cuban immigrant jockey (Anthony DiNicola) who's married to the white daughter (Hilary Williams) of the bigoted track secretary (Sean Sinitski). And that's only about half the cast of characters.

Lewis sets up these soap-opera elements with skill. The connections



OFF TRACK
Carapetyan, right, makes a bet.

among the denizens of Weldon are engagingly revealed for the most part; the plot kicks into high gear when Jakey's horse, American Storm, is discovered to be a record breaker. But the playwright's efforts to connect the events in Ohio with the state of the union are more strained. All the discussion of evolving race relations and the Kennedys and the Cuban Missile Crisis makes the interpersonal drama feel more contrived. Donna McGough and the young actors, Teamer and Meyer, stand out among the large, uneven ensemble, but Brian Golden's production tends to get bogged down by traffic jams on the small stage.—*Kris Vire*

The Mikado



The Hypocrites (see Resident companies). Libretto by W.S. Gilbert. Music by Arthur Sullivan. Adapted by Sean Graney and Kevin O'Donnell. Dir. Graney. With ensemble cast. 1hr 20mins; no intermission.

Fans of the Hypocrites' joyously daft, beach-ball-filled take on *The Pirates of Penzance*, and of the generally balanced measure of irreverence and respect in Sean Graney's adaptations of classic texts, should find similar delight in the company's new take on *The Mikado*, running in repertory with *Penzance*'s third annual outing. Where *Pirates* scenic designer Tom Burch fashions the Chopin Theatre's basement into a sun-kissed beach, *Mikado*'s Michael Smallwood offers up a two-ring circus, with Heather Gilbert's lighting alternately bright and evocative.

A shared cast of ten actor-musicians enacts both Gilbert and Sullivan pieces this year in Graney's favored promenade style; roaming actors and audience members lay equal claim to the space. Co-adaptor Kevin O'Donnell cleverly reorchestrates Sullivan's score for instruments ranging from acoustic



MAIDS TO ORDER
Casey, right, and Dana Omar carry a tune.

guitar to toy piano. While the ensemble members may not find much deeper meaning in the farcical tale of hidden identities, self-contradicting laws and impossibly overlapping love connections, they mine it for every bit of fun. Shawn Pfautsch and Emily Casey are particularly impressive in dizzy double roles as Nanki-Poo/Katisha and Yum-Yum/the Mikado, respectively. Graney, Smallwood and costume designer Alison Siple thankfully veer as far as possible from exploitative Orientalism, making this a safely cringe-free family pick.—*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 ♯ **Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas! The Musical** Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W Randolph St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Tue 7pm; Wed, 2, 7pm; Thu, Fri 7pm; Sat 11am, 2, 7pm; Sun 1, 5pm. \$18-\$85. Dec 4-16. Stop hating the holidays and learn the true meaning of Christmas at this musical adaptation of Dr. Seuss's children's story.

CLOSING * ♯ **Les Misérables** Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W Randolph St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Thu, Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$18-\$100. 2hrs 50mins; one intermission. Through Dec 2. The final staging of *Les Misérables* to come through Chicago before the film adaptation hits theaters this Christmas, Laurence Connor and James Powell's production makes a solid argument for catching the musical live. With the aid of projections designed by Fifty Nine Productions, the directors create a show that's as eye-popping as it is well sung. Unfortunately, rushed tempos prevent some songs from fully blossoming. The performers make the epic story of the French Revolution personal and relatable, showing why these characters continue to captivate with their songs.—*Oliver Sava*

* **Potted Potter** Broadway Playhouse at Water Tower Place, 175 E Chestnut St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Tue 7:30pm; Wed 2, 7:30pm; Thu, Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$39.75-\$69.75. 1hr 10mins; no intermission. Through Jan 6. Two ordinary guys, albeit guys with an above-average love of pratfalls and silly hats, re-create all seven *Harry Potter* books in little more than an hour. Co-creators Daniel Clarkson and Jefferson Turner, naturals with kids and audience participation, milk the winning premise with banter and callbacks. That madcap, participatory fun waxes and wanes, and Clarkson and Turner underuse the wide stage and their own set; it's a show, but it's not always theater. Given that audiences already know their J.K. Rowling, *Potted Potter* is best when off book.—*Emily Gordon*

CLOSING ♯ **Sister Act** Auditorium Theatre, 50 E Congress Pkwy (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Thu, Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$28-\$103. 2hrs 35mins; one intermission. Through Dec 2. As the movie-to-musical cash-ins of the last decade go, *Sister Act* might be among the most well-meaning. The stage adaptation transfers the action from 1990s Vegas to 1970s Philadelphia, the better to serve Menken's lite-rock versions of Philly soul and disco; heroine Deloris Van Cartier morphs from washed-up lounge act to young striver. The changes don't do much to improve on the source material. This *Sister Act* struggles to get started, taking far too long to get to the real attraction of Deloris's bonding with the wacky nuns and

spending too much time on silly secondary business like comic numbers for the bad guys.—*Kris Vire*

Spank! The Fifty Shades Parody Mills Entertainment at Royal George Theatre, 1641 N Halsted St (312-988-9000, millsentertainment.com). Wed, Thu 7:30pm; Fri 8pm; Sat 5, 8pm; Sun 3pm. \$42.50-\$52.50. Through Dec 16. The risqué romance of a prudish young woman and the sexy man who teaches her how to get freaky comes to the stage in this musical parody by Jim Millan. Here's hoping for a choreographed paddling number.

Resident companies

♯ **Annie** Paramount Theatre, 23 E Galena Blvd, Aurora (630-896-6666, paramountaurora.com). Wed 1:30, 7:30pm; Thu 7:30pm; Fri 8pm; Sat 4, 8pm; Sun 1, 5pm. \$34.90-\$46.90. Through Dec 30. The sun comes out for everyone's favorite little orphan in this musical revival directed by Jeff Award winner Rachel Rockwell.

♯ **Best Musical! Holiday Edition!** Porchlight Music Theatre at Stage 773, 1225 W Belmont Ave (773-327-5252, porchlightmusictheatre.org). Wed 7:30pm. \$15, students \$12. Through Dec 26. The improvised musical that uses audience suggestions to create a new show from scratch every night returns with a new holiday spin.

Blue Man Group Briar Street Theatre, 3133 N Halsted St (773-348-4000, blueman.com). Wed 2pm; Thu, Fri 8pm; Sat 4, 7, 10pm; Sun 1, 4pm. \$49-\$69. The Briar Street has been the Chicago outpost for the indigo-hued drum corps since 1997, and it shows few signs of leaving anytime soon.

* ♯ **The Burnt Part Boys** Griffin Theatre at Theater Wit, 1229 W Belmont Ave (773-975-8150, griffintheatre.com). Thu-Sat 7:30pm; Sun 3pm. \$36. 1hr 35mins; no intermission. Through Dec 22. Set in rural West Virginia in 1962, *The Burnt Part Boys* tells a refreshingly simple, bluegrass-tinted tale. A decade after four miners were killed in a disaster—including the father of 18-year-old Jake (Mike Tepeli) and younger brother Pete (Charlie Fox)—the company is set to reopen the mine. Director Jonathan Berry keeps the journey visually interesting even as the actors retrace the same ground, using wooden chairs and ropes to convey a craggy, ever-changing landscape. Composers Chris Miller and Nathan Tysen have penned a lovely, twangy score, although Mariana Elder's book often seems to be stalling for time.—*KV*

Ceremonies in Dark Old Men et al Creative Arts Foundation, 7558 S South Chicago Ave (773-752-3955, etacreativearts.org). Fri, Sat 8pm; Sun 3, 7pm. \$20-\$30, students and seniors \$15. Through Dec 23. Lonnie Elder's drama follows a group of black workers in 1960s Harlem trying to get the white people out of their neighborhood so they can get more work.

♣ **Chicago Dramatists Saturday Series** Chicago Dramatists, 1105 W Chicago Ave (312-633-0630, chicagodramatists.org). Sat 2pm. \$5 donation. This weekly series presents staged readings of works-in-progress.

A Christmas Carol Goodman Theatre, 170 N Dearborn St (312-443-3800, goodmantheatre.org). Wed, Thu noon, 7:30pm; Fri 8pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2, 6:30pm. \$25-\$82. Through Dec 29. Learn to love the holidays with humbug Ebenezer Scrooge at the Goodman's 35th annual *Carol*. **A Christmas Carol** Metropolis Performing Arts Centre, 111 W Campbell St, Arlington Heights (847-577-2121, metropolisarts.com). Wed 10:30am; Fri 7pm; Sat 4pm; Sun 1, 4pm. \$28.50, kids \$15.50. Through Dec 24. Metropolis resident playwright Scott Woldman adapts Charles Dickens's