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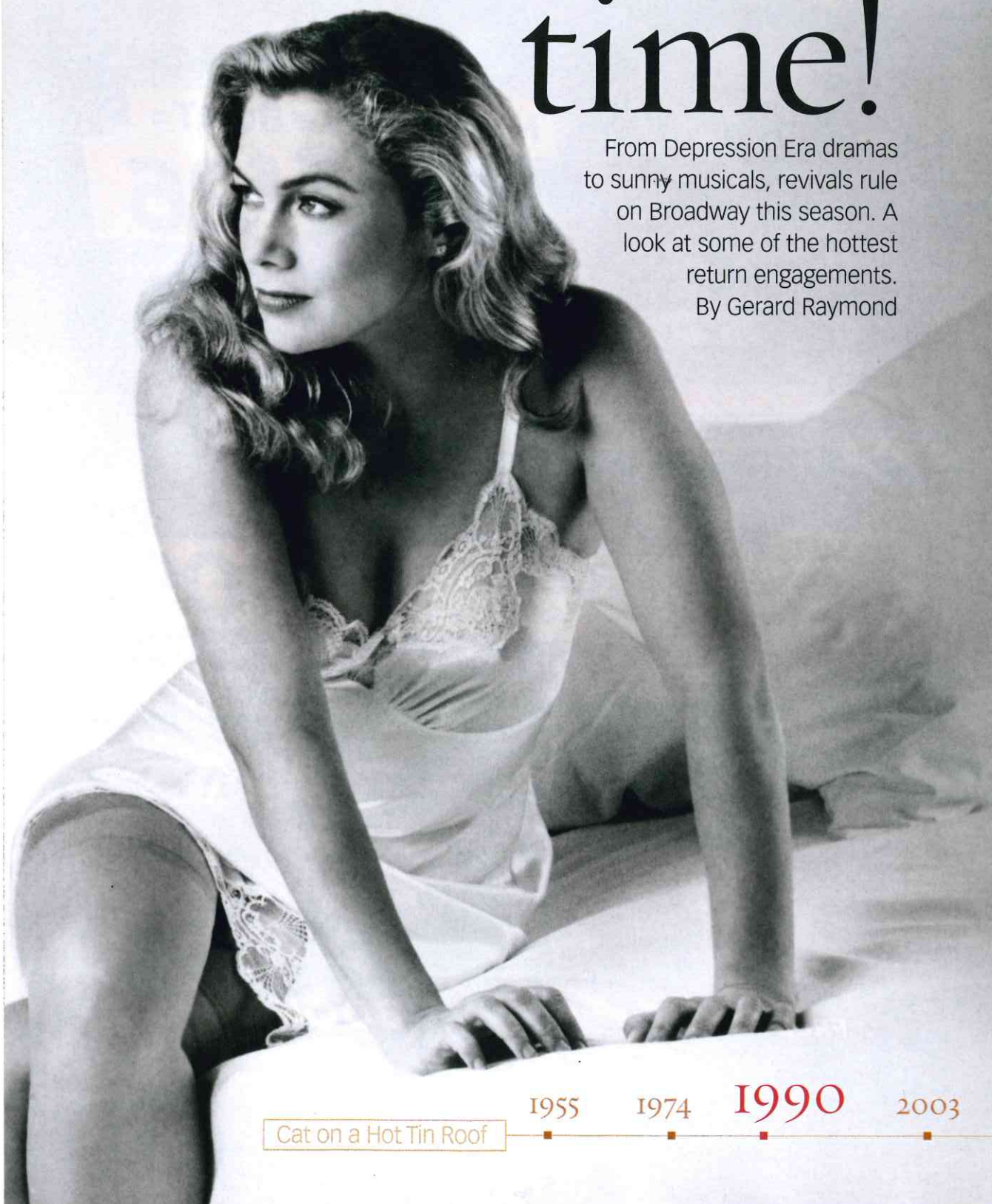
Scarlett Nights
Revivals Heat Up Broadway

Splendid Gifts that Shimmer and Shine


VOL. 12, NO. 12

One more time!

From Depression Era dramas to sunny musicals, revivals rule on Broadway this season. A look at some of the hottest return engagements.
By Gerard Raymond



Cat on a Hot Tin Roof | 1955 | 1974 | **1990** | 2003

A full-page photograph of Scarlett Johansson. She is wearing a sleeveless, light-colored lace dress and has her hand on her hip. Her hair is styled in soft, wavy blonde curls, and she is wearing bright red lipstick. The background is dark and moody.

The sensual, fierce yet vulnerable Maggie the Cat, heroine of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, has always been a plum part for an actress.

Facing page: Kathleen Turner was a slinky Maggie in the 1990 revival of the Tennessee Williams drama.

This page: Scarlett Johansson plays her in the current production, previewing this month.

Broadway is in the grip of full-blown revival fever. Among the most obvious symptoms of this heat wave: Scarlett Johansson arrives in a new revival of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The curvaceous blonde, whose plump-lipped smile and creamy skin have hypnotized audiences in films such as *Lost in Translation* (2003) and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008), steams up the stage as the slip-clad Maggie the Cat, the play's heroine. Simultaneously seductive and vulnerable, fighting to both hold on to her sexually unresponsive husband and ensure his inheritance, Maggie is one of the most vibrant characters in the American theater canon—and catnip for ambitious actresses ever since Barbara Bel Geddes originated the role in 1955. Since then, every generation has had its iconic Maggie: Elizabeth Ashley (1974), Kathleen Turner (1990) and Ashley Judd (2003) have starred in subsequent revivals on Broadway. And, of course, there is the 1958 film version, which featured the reigning Hollywood beauty of that era, Elizabeth Taylor.

Like Taylor in her lifetime, Johansson has made a smooth transition from child to teen to adult roles. Now, having just turned 28, she is arguably

2008

2013

in her physical prime, just as Taylor was when she portrayed Maggie on the big screen. However, "I never wanted to be a sex symbol, I wanted to be a character actor. Those are the ones that I admire," says the New York City native. "I think women that are curvy can be pigeonholed in that bombshell thing." Indeed, Johansson deliberately went against "that bombshell thing" for her Broadway debut two years ago, dyeing her golden tresses dark brown to play a working-class, Italian-American girl in a revival of Arthur Miller's *A View From The Bridge*.

That performance, for which she won a Tony Award, led to this production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Richard Rodgers Theatre, 226 W. 46th St., 877.250.2929), which begins previews Dec. 18. Director Rob Ashford says he was so blown away by Johansson's stage power in the Miller play, he hoped he'd get the opportunity to work with her one day. It seems the theater gods were listening:

Ashford shares the same agent with Johansson, and, knowing of the actress' desire to play Maggie, the agent suggested that his two clients have a conversation. With the star aligned, the revival became reality—although Ashford, who describes himself as "a Southern boy and a huge Tennessee Williams fan," points out that the playwright's steamy Southern Gothic stew (which has had almost as many Broadway lives as its titular feline) certainly deserves yet another mounting on its own merits. "What is so beautiful about Tennessee's writing is the poetry ... the poetry as well as the pain," the director says.

Cat is just one of several vintage shows currently making a Broadway comeback. Of course, revivals have always figured strongly on New York City stages: The 1996 edition of *Chicago* (Ambassador Theatre, 219 W. 49th St., 212.239.6200) is still playing—and it has not only surpassed the 1975 original's two-year

Evita

1979

2012



South American authenticity is the watchword for the current revival of *Evita*, the Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice musical about Argentina's First Lady, from the score's new arrangements to its Latino stars.

run, it also has the distinction of being the longest-running American musical in Broadway history. Last season's revival of *Evita* (Marquis Theatre, 1535 Broadway, 877.250.2929), about the notorious 1940s First Lady of Argentina, is also still going strong. According to director Michael Grandage, the new production was requested by the 1979 musical's composer, Andrew Lloyd Webber. "Andrew thought there were possibly two generations of people who had never seen *Evita* onstage," recalls Grandage. "He wanted us to come up with a vision that allowed a new audience an opportunity to see the production in a new way." The focus of this revival, he explains, is "authenticity," which is enhanced by new Latin American arrangements for the score, a scenic design that evokes the architecture of Buenos Aires and the casting of Argentinean actress Elena Roger as *Evita* and Latin superstar Ricky Martin as the show's narrator, Che.

Even so, this seems to be a particularly rich season for revivals—for a variety of reasons. As with *Cat*, *The Heiress* (Walter Kerr Theatre, 219 W. 48th St., 212.239.6200, thru Feb. 10, 2013), a 1947 drama by Ruth and Augustus Goetz based on the Henry James novel *Washington Square*, has a healthy dose of star power in its current incarnation. Jessica Chastain (*The Help*) makes her Broadway debut as Catherine Sloper, a plain but wealthy young woman caught between her domineering father (David Strathairn) and the first lover she's ever had (*Downton Abbey* heartthrob Dan Stevens). Despite its 1850 setting, Chastain feels "the story's very relevant because throughout history, women have been defined by the men in their lives. Catherine in the beginning of the play is defined by her father, and then she's defined by her suitor. At the end, she sets boundaries and she's defined by herself. And I'm really moved by that."

The interest of a star performer, combined with a suddenly timely text, became the driver for a new presentation of *Glengarry Glen Ross* (Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre, 236 W. 45th St., 212.239.6200, thru Jan. 20, 2013), says the revival's producer, Jeffrey Richards. A while back, he and playwright David Mamet were talking about the way the recent mortgage-industry crisis has lent an all-too-painful relevance to Mamet's cynical 1984 dog-eat-

dog drama about real estate salesmen. The playwright subsequently floated the idea of a revival to Al Pacino, who was filming a Mamet-scripted docudrama at the time—and who of course had starred in the 1992 film version of *Glengarry*. Pacino's presence clinched the deal, as a Mamet character might say, and is proving a selling point to audiences ("Pacino *Glengarry* Mamet" as the posters proclaim). Those with fond cinematic memories may be interested to learn that Pacino has a different part in the revival—that of a failing elder salesman, Shelly Levene; his movie character, Ricky Roma, the office hotshot, is played by Bobby Cannavale (currently embodying psychopathic gangster Gyp Rosetti in the HBO series *Boardwalk Empire*).



Screen beauty Jessica Chastain deglamorizes herself in her Broadway debut as *The Heiress*. Though set in 1850, the costume drama's theme of a woman defined by the men in her life remains relevant today, the actress feels.

PHOTOS: *EVITA*, RICHARD TERMINI; JESSICA CHASTAIN AS CATHERINE SLOPER, JOAN MARCUS

The Heiress

1947

1950

1976

1995

2012

In contrast to these starry vehicles, the play's the thing at Off-Broadway's Signature Theatre, whose mission is to celebrate playwrights and writers. Along with the late August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, the company is currently reviving David Henry Hwang's *Golden Child* (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St., 212.244.7529, thru Dec. 16). Hwang has taken the opportunity to rewrite the opening and closing scenes of his 1998 work, which was inspired by the life of his maternal grandmother—whose father decided to convert to Christianity in 1918 China, causing turmoil among his family. "I feel the show got short shrift when it [originally] played on Broadway," says Hwang. "I'm hoping that this is a new, improved version of the play."

Reappreciation is also the motivating factor behind Lincoln Center Theater's production of Clifford Odets' *Golden Boy* (Belasco Theatre, 111 W. 44th St., 212.239.6200, thru Jan. 20, 2013), at the same theater where the original premiered 75 years ago.

Artistic Director André Bishop says LCT's acclaimed 2006 production of Odets' *Awake and Sing!* made

Signature Theatre Company's revival of *Golden Child*, with (left to right) Jennifer Lim, Annie Q and Julyana Soelistyo, gave playwright David Henry Hwang a chance to revise his work.

them "hungry" to do more of the playwright's work. "The specific Odets language, the colorful street vernacular, the deep emotions, the fervent Americanism, the idealism and the loneliness that exists in us all: These are permanent themes of his work, and they are just as meaningful now as they were then," Bishop explains. And the dilemma of *Golden Boy's* Depression Era hero—whether he can afford to follow his dream (becoming a violinist) when he has a chance to make ready money (by becoming a prizefighter)—strikes a resonant chord in these recessionary times.

Commemorating a milestone premiere was also the rationale for the return of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Booth Theatre, 222 W. 45th St., 212.239.6200, thru Feb. 24, 2013), even though Edward Albee's lacerating love/hate story of a middle-aged couple had been revived only seven years ago on the Great White Way. This production celebrates the show's 50th anniversary and, in fact, opened on the same month and day (Oct. 13) the original did back in 1962. Meanwhile, sexual sparks fly among adolescents in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of *Picnic* (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St., 212.719.1300, thru Feb. 24, 2013). Director Sam Gold, himself a wunderkind in the New York theater world, contends that the 1953 work by William Inge is "a beautiful, romantic and often extremely funny portrait of the

Golden Child

1998

2012



PHOTOS: GOLDEN CHILD, PICNIC, TERMAHE, ORIGINAL PRODUCTION OF ANNIE, JODAN MARCUS

1977

1997

2012

Annie



dreams that burn in the young, and also an uncompromising exploration of how those dreams drive you to make choices that will have shattering impact on the rest of your life.”

It’s not all straight plays, though: Musicals are coming in for revivals, too. For producer Arielle Tepper Madover, bringing back *Annie* (Palace Theatre, 1554 Broadway, 877.250.2929) was first and foremost a labor of love. She was 8 years old when her grandmother took her to see the original production, which opened in 1977, about an indefatigable orphan’s adventures. “It was my first Broadway show and it was incredible to see all these girls who were my age singing and dancing,” Madover recalls. “Being an only child, I loved the idea that these girls had grown up as sisters. It changed my life”—getting her hooked on the theater and leading to her decision in college to embark on a producer’s career (with *Annie* on her “must-do-someday” list of shows).

Unlike *Annie*, which ran for nearly six years on Broadway, and is frequently produced around the country, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Studio 54, 254 W. 54th St., 212.719.1300, thru Feb. 10, 2013) hasn’t been seen in New York since it won the 1985 Tony Award for Best Musical in 1986. *Drood* is based on a novel by Charles Dickens—his last novel; the author, in fact, died before finishing it (and resolving the mystery of the title character’s disappearance). So composer/librettist Rupert Holmes devised an inge-

Producer Arielle Tepper Madover saw the original production of *Annie* (left, with Reid Shelton and Kristi Coombs) as a child, and now has brought the show about the plucky orphan back to Broadway (right, with Lilla Crawford and Anthony Warlow).

nious series of multiple endings for the show, which takes place within a Victorian music hall: At each performance, the audience votes on which character dispatched poor Drood, and the cast then acts out that version. “It’s very much a celebration of the collaboration between audiences and actors that has been taking place since theater began,” Holmes says. “It’s really about putting on a show.” Though an ensemble piece, this revival promises a star turn from beloved Broadway veteran Chita Rivera, playing Princess Puffer, a nefarious opium den owner.

The strong slate of return engagements this month has developed from a variety of factors, from a bankable star’s interest to a plot’s contemporary relevance to the fact that, as *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* producer Jeffrey Richards notes, “You have to seize the opportunity to do first-class productions of great works of the American theater, whenever you get the chance.” And that’s as good a reason as any to bring back a favorite play or musical. After all, a revival for one generation is a brand-new experience for the next.