

Yesterday

It really does seem like yesterday that I was on stage in what is now my third favorite role ever. A few fantastic parts over the last 6 years or so have pushed it back a few places.

I'm not one to play favorites but let's be honest... some roles just hold more meaning behind them. It was either May 29-30, 1992 or May 22-23, 1992 (I'm sitting here looking at my mobile calendar) I'll have to look at my old Log of E to find out the correct weekend but right now I have a bat roaming the premises and an Aunt visiting from California who just arrived and decided to run and hide while she could ☐

Annie will always hold a large piece of my heart. It was the last time I performed on the stage of the old high school auditorium. It was the final time (and only time) Ma 2 directed a musical I was cast in. It was the best cast of the three theatrical productions I was involved in at EHS. It was this cast and crew that first gave me the impression that a group of performers could be so much more than a group who performed two shows (I still could have done so many more) and went their separate ways. It created that sense of family that only the best experiences can create and the first which I was actually sad to see end. Several of my friends were cast as well as my sister and two of my cousins and the experience only tightened that bond. And Daniel Francis Hannigan/Rooster Hannigan/Danny the Dip was the first character that made me realize that I am a serious character actor (seems like a contradiction in terms "a serious character actor"?)

I know that I have related the audition process previously.

How I "nailed" the role of Daddy Warbucks but "could do so much more as Rooster." I just knew that I had to recreate that role somewhere down the line somehow. Even when I was not cast in the role in FCF's production a few years ago, I was not THAT upset because it would not have had the same

meaning as it did the first time. Although I did hear several audience members (many complete strangers) comment that the part was horribly miscast.

The wrap party was hilarious for many reasons. Remember "Coke II"... previously marketed as NEW Coke? Yes, this was my first and last experience with the beverage. I don't remember being as emotional after the wrap party as I was following opening night. Maybe it was sitting through the sluggish *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* that caused the tears to flow. "Ah, YES, I remember it well."

ANNNND coming this Fall... the 35th Anniversary Broadway Production. All of the orphans and Miss Hannigan have been cast. Alas... I am not a dancer which was something that came up this evening at work. There was a "Vault" photo in the Earth tonight of Aggie, Warbucks, Grace Ferrell, Annie, President Roosevelt, Lily, and myself which I attempted to scan but to no avail.

What a fun trip down memory lane!

THAT's more like it!

For the 25th anniversary celebration of Broadway's longest running musical, a special performance of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* was presented at London's Royal Albert Hall. This fully staged extravaganza was filmed for release on video; however, it was also released to a select number of movie houses throughout the world. Over the course of the next month or so, the special is highlighting Great Performances on PBS. Last night, I DVR'd the event and began watching it after I returned from work. **WOW!** Totally made me forget the totally lifeless movie released a few years

ago! This actually made me feel as if I were in the audience front row. When actually in a live audience, I have always had the opportunity to see the action from afar taking in the scope and beauty of the theatrical setting without seeing all the nuance of the performers. The filmed rendition allows the viewer to really watch the actors on stage. During *The Music of the Night*, you can actually see the Phantom “pulling the strings (or chains)” that Christine wears as he places her under his hypnotic spell. Of course, after the magnificent piece, the station had one of their pledge drive breaks... somehow I knew that would be one of the high points at which they would interrupt programming. No wonder it was on for a good 3.5 hours!

Filmed stage productions are a funny thing. They either work by drawing you in and holding your attention or fail in some degree. I recently watched the Angela Lansbury version of *Sweeney Todd*. Honestly, no matter how hard I tried I could not get into it. I guess that the process in which filming events such as these has changed in the last 30-40 years. The Phantom experience was so different because the audience seemed to be part of the show. I guess that makes sense since the show is set in a theatrical venue. I am looking forward to watching the rest of the show (even with the breaks).

Les Misérables Remastered

SO GLAD Megan could get tickets! Back in June, I learned that the 25 Anniversary of *Les Misérables* was making its way to the Stranahan. I did not forget but with all the eventful events surrounding my family the past few months, it kind of took a back seat. However, Megan was able to score us a trio of seats for tonight's show. I was willing to drive which at

times met with some rather humorous moments from young Miss Clark (**"OMG WE ARE GOING TO DIE!"**). Even walking to the theatre parking lot after the show. MWHAAAAAAAAHA!

We made excellent time even with my capable driving. We got a bit of dinner with an hour to spare before curtain. The show was even more spectacular than I remember. I last saw a high school production about 3-4 years ago and saw a professional production (it had to be) about 10 years ago at the Stranahan.

There were several changes made in the staging, scenery, and lyrics which all combined to enhance what was already one of my favorite shows.

Immediately noticeable was the changing of the backdrop pre-show. It had previously been a drawing of the young Cosette with her broom. It has been replaced by a Victor Hugo painting. I did not know that the author of the original novel as well as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was also an artist. Gone also were the captions indicating the time and location of the story. These were not needed as the action just moved at a steady clip.

The revolving platform that had previously been used in productions was also noticeably absent. Instead, different levels of perspective were used to heighten the drama. Marius sang the beginning of "A Heart Full of Love" to the mature Cosette from the ground while his love stood on her balcony (think Tony and Maria or Romeo and Juliet). Later, the audience could "see" Valjean carry the wounded Marius through the different sections of the sewers. Finally, Javert falls back and is enveloped by the water as he falls to his death.

A brilliant re-imagining of a classic theatrical event!

After the show, the three of us had our picture taken with M. and Mme. Thénardier (who as usual stole the show). We lined up and (also as Usual) I was relegated to the back but go right between the charming couple. As you may recall, I performed "Master of the House" with Carol at a recital last

spring. How I would relish the opportunity to play the role in a full scale production. I will post the picture as soon as Carol makes a copy.

The drive home was fun as well. After stopping at a gas station before getting on the turnpike for a drink (again after Megan made her patented quip about dying), we popped in the new LIVE anniversary recording. As we approached our drop off point I heard **“TURN LEFT! TURN LEFT! NO, KEEP GOING! KEEP GOING!”** HAHHAH! Sorry...at least I did not mention how many times the lovely ladies had to visit the powder room ☹ (oops)

I also learned for future reference that a high school classmate of mine live a short distance away from the theatre. A handy tidbit for those times when we have to go dashing through the snow like a few years ago on Good Friday.

Thanks Megan and Carol! ☹

Now that I know how to put accents above letters in words like *Misérables* and Thénardier, I cannot stop myself. Such a fantastic show! A silver screen version of the musical *Les Misérables* is soon to start filming with Hugh Jackman as Valjean, Russell Crowe as Javert, Anne Hathaway as Fantine, Geoffrey Rush as Thénardier, and Helena Bonham Carter as Mme. Thénardier. Set for a 2012 release. If they ruin the show with the translation to the screen, I will not be happy!

About Time

NOTHING beats the sheer spectacle of a live theatrical performance. However, when those of us do not live within reasonable driving distance to take in a professional show

less than occasionally and scraping the \$100+ for a single ticket... WELL.... Fifty years ago or so many of the bigger shows would be given the big screen treatment at "Affordable prices." However, the popularity of the movie musical has all but gone by the wayside. There is the occasional offering... *Chicago* (good), *Evita* (ok, I suppose), and *The Phantom of the Opera* (not so ok).

It was announced today that a cinematic treatment of Schoenberg and Boublil's *Les Miserables* (really, is there any other?) is finally in the works. "In the works" insofar as the announcement that Hugh Jackman is attached to the project and a screenplay is being written. Wolverine as the "pup" Gavroche... I can see it now... with an Australian accent. Of course, I have heard that the musical has been in development for ten years or more and we got nothing more than a Liam Neeson starring flick that "is not the musical" and I have not seen. So, we will see if this comes to fruition.

Until then, the musical itself is coming to the area in November!

Yo, Adrian! NO, ADRIAN!

I KNOW that there have been VERY few musicals that have not been based on other source material. Even in the Golden Age of Broadway, creators such as Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, and their contemporaries found inspiration from other works in order to bring "the classics" to the stage. *The King and I*, *South Pacific*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Camelot* were all based on well established works that came before. Although I was not around when these masterpieces were first produced, it seems to me that they all made some sense and were meant to

transcend artistic genres.

That being said, there are times when (it seems to me) that things are better left alone. While it is only in the developmental stages, [Rocky: The Musical](#) is well on its way to becoming a full-blown reality. The collaborators of such shows as *Annie*, *Seussical*, and *Hairspray* along with Sylvester Stallone himself have already tabled a reading of the work (8 years in the making at Sly's request) with plans of mounting a production in Germany next year and a possible NYC debut as early as Spring 2013.

While the original series of movies do contain some musical elements (the brilliant original theme, "Eye of the Tiger," and the seemingly endless montages of *Rocky IV*), most of the music seems to have been placed in them for nothing more than selling a few albums and doing nothing to advance the plot. I suppose that the streetcorner crooners in the slums of Philadelphia could have a place in a musicalfied version.

However, I cannot see two men in a boxing ring beating the tar out of each other while singing and being taken relatively seriously. Suspension of disbelief **MUST** have its limits although a musical of Rocky Balboa would seem to ask you to do just that.

Another Wonder Gone

Ironical that I just posted about the defunct new Wonder Woman series. After 33 performances (and 31 preview performances), [Wonderland](#) wrapped its Broadway run May 15th. The new musical about a grown up Alice who yearns for a more adventure-filled life, sets out on a quest beneath the streets of New York City. There she meets a cast of familiar yet outrageously re-

imagined characters. Funny that with such a short run, the show had produced a cast album. I suppose that when your wife is [Linda Eder](#) who has a recording of some of the songs, it would be entirely possible. I wonder if somewhere out there is a cast recording of the most celebrated (celebrated but by far NOT the only) flop in Broadway history... *Carrie*.

Sad to say that I do not think Frank Wildhorn has had a long Broadway run since *Jekyll & Hyde*. Although J&H had a 4 year run, it still lost \$1.5 million. His *Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Dracula* also were not successful. I guess that being married to a diva is no guarantee of creative success. 00PS... according to another source the couple has been separated since 2004. So much for that theory.

Maybe the show was overshadowed by an endlessly publicized, overtly ridiculed, accident prone, re-imagined, back in preview mode, soon to open show. Hmmm.... wonder what that is?

Saturday In The Sticks

WOW! My first Saturday off in at least 2 months (I'm not counting the three weeks I was pretty well incapacitated... no fun!). Gloomy, wet, cold day that it was there were moments of enjoyment. Decided to tag along with Mom and my oldest niece to grocery shop and use my gift card to pick up a certain DVD that came out yesterday. As we parked at the grocery, I noticed a vehicle with a very recognizable license plate holder. I told Shelb "Guess who's here?" Always fun to run into your best friends (all 6 of them).

Tonight, Shelby and I went to see the musical version of the Adam Sandler/Drew Barrymore flick *The Wedding Singer*. Although the cast and crew were phenomenal, I would

definitely not have taken any of my nieces and nephews under the age of 15. I'm sure that the innuendo would have flown over their head but some of the language would be cause for concern.

The show was great fun and a great transport back to the age of excess with catch phrases, pop culture references of 1985, and the CLAPPER!!! YOU HAVE TO LOVE THE CLAPPER! And who doesn't love seeing the fake Rainbow Brite (Played by another one of my nieces... Alyssa Davis... and I thought she was only 7), Joan Jett, Cyndi Lauper, Brooke Shields, Punky Brewster, and I did spy a nerd who had the orange and black striped shirt and rainbow suspenders of a certain Orkan. Plus, a Princess Leia wannabe complete with a cinnabun hairdo. I wonder if the script called for the Princess Leia character; knowing the actress, she probably had some input.

The leads and ensemble were all wonderful but there were several standout scene-stealing cameos particularly the always engaging Tiff who brought the house down as Linda, Robbie's fiancée. Another pure delight was a fellow [tangenteer](#) who was ALMOST unrecognizable as Robbie's grandma. The rap she performed with the flamboyant George was a hoot! If I've said it one, I've said it a million times... lots of times a show is not all about the leads. Give a cameo or supporting role to the right thespian and they will steal the show. It just so happened that this show had more than one great cameo role ☐

I stopped at the entrance after the show long enough to congratulate Carol and say hi to Megan. My leg was getting tired and I did not want to fight the mob but the show was a TOTALLY TUBULAR!

As an added bonus, I even get NEXT Saturday off! Not going to complain since I will have a Saturday and Sunday off (provided that the store I work in continues to recognize the resurrection of our Savior).

Remember Your First Time

Yes, I very fondly remember my first time seeing Andrew Lloyd Webber's [*The Phantom of the Opera*](#). It was on a Saturday afternoon in October 1990 at the Auditorium Theatre at Roosevelt University (ok... so I had to check the Stagebill for the official venue name) in Chicago the day after our marching band performed it's halftime show featuring the music of the phenomenon... complete with Phantom masks and capes. Tonight, as the family gathered at one of the first high school productions ever produced, I was taken back to that day 20 years ago. In the row in front of me sat a woman who turned around and asked if I was one of Emily Curtis' students. I very proudly stated that indeed I was and still am. The woman (who was a dear friend) told me that Ma2 spoke very highly of me on several occasions. We both told how much we dearly miss her. I knew that I was in for a memorable, magical evening.

I do not believe that I have ever seen a professional production of any show before I saw a high school production of the same. It has been many years since I have seen Phantom on stage (the movie does not do the musical justice AT ALL) so there were some things that I did not remember. But everything about tonight's production was shockingly gorgeous.

The set design was phenomenal. My favorite piece was the bridge used during the "Don Juan Triumphant" scene. It honestly looked like it could have been used as the barricade in *Les Misérables*. The graveyard scene ("Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again") was dark and mysterious with just a faint glow of moonlight (but no fireballs thrown by the Phantom ☹).

I was also impressed with the illusion of the Phantom and Christine's journey to the lair beyond the lake.

The young thespians on stage when PHENOMENAL. The leads both began taking voice lessons a year ago in preparation for auditions and it certainly showed. The title character had an extraordinary range. I was on stage with the young man in my first Village Players production (*Meet Me in St. Louis*) and he has come A LONG WAY since then. Every time I have seen Phantom, I measure the quality of the production on one thing: the amount of goosebumps I get when he sings his signature song "Music of the Night." Needless to say, the high school JUNIOR nailed it!

The actress playing the role of Christine in ANY show must have a wickedly outrageous voice. The runs in tonight's delivery of "Think of Me" were crazy good.

I must say that my least favorite character in the show is the third leg of the triangle: Raoul, Vicomte de Changy. He always seems to me to be a whiner. But again, a fine performance.

NOW for the real stars of the show: Msrs. Firmin and Andre, the theatre owners. They are the comic relief that holds the show together and their timing as well as their voices were impeccable. The outrageous "Notes" and "Prima Donna" pieces in which there are like 50 melodies at one time (ok... not THAT many) were handled very nicely. In younger days, I would have so gone out for the big two roles; however, after a little high school show that I was in (not a post about my on stage experiences), I definitely know which roles I am so suited for.

If I had one complaint, it is what could not be done in this production. Do not go to be blown away by HUGE theatrical spectacle. Some of the big stage pieces simply are not possible on a stage and budget of a small school and most are there (just no fireballs). Yet, if any school in my little corner of the world could pull it off, it was this one at the most glorious setting we have to offer.

My 6 year old nephew's favorite scene: "the dummy who dropped from the ceiling on the noose." Ok, that was enough for him who slept through the last 10 minutes.

Yes, a small school CAN produce extraordinary things. Thank you to the lady in front of me for taking me back 20 years and making me remember how special my own "Angel of Music" is to me. Emily would have been ecstatic!

The Spider Or The Potter

Last week saw yet another delay in the [Spider-Man](#) musical opening. Not only another delay but a new creative team was brought in to take control of the astronomical catastrophe (ok... I had to leave that... I honestly thought it was a -y and not catastrophe... this coming from someone who misspelled p-a-j-a-m-a-s in the 6th grade spelling bee ☹). Nine years in the making and in previews for months! I'll say it again... sometimes it is best to leave things in the mediums they were meant to be. Comic books, cartoons, live action television (remember that?), movies... live theatre (?). By the time this mess is ever (IF ever) straightened out, it might be Spectacular to look at but will it mean anything beyond the \$65 million dollar+ price tag? In any case, opening night has been pushed back to sometime in the next decade (or is it this summer).

In other theatre news, Daniel Radcliffe is in previews for his singing and dancing debut in the 50th anniversary revival of the Frank Loesser classic, [How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying](#). The show itself may be extremely dated but I was fortunate enough to see the last Broadway revival in the mid 1990s. It was a fun show that I could see being done in

community theatres in my neck of the woods. Perhaps by the time the rights become available again, these theatres will not be so turned off from staging musicals more than once every two years or so ☐

Why would a 21 year old straight from completing one of the most lucrative film franchises in history, choose such an undertaking? As I understand it, the former boy wizard wanted a real challenge. No dance experience, little vocal training, so maybe it was the name (KIDDING... I'd rather see a 50 year old revival than a NEW show that has been stuck in a rut for half a year with no end in sight no matter the premise). Break a leg, Dan!

Over The Rainbow In A Different Oz

Tonight sees the opening of what sounds like a different production of [The Wizard of Oz](#). Produced by Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, the London premiere has all the elements of the classic 1939 movie however, it has added elements which (according to Sir Andrew) make it more suitable to the stage.

Added are 4 songs which give Glinda, The Wicked Witch of the West, and the Wizard a chance to use their singing chops.

Apparently, the Good Witch's short bit in Munchkinland does not count as a song. For the new songs, Lloyd Webber re-teamed with lyricist Tim Rice a partnership which dissolved 30 years ago after *Evita*.

Casting for Dorothy was done in what seems to be the Lord's new-found trademark: the televised talent show. He did it for Joseph, Maria in *The Sound of Music*, and now for Oz. I dunno

about this American Idol meets theatre concept.

A familiar name was cast in the title role. Michael Crawford (the original Phantom of Lloyd Webber's production) was number one on the list. I can actually picture Mr. Crawford in the roles of Professor Marvel and the Great Humbug. Wonder how many other roles he will be filling. [Taylhis](#), how many parts did Frank Morgan have in the movie?

This July, [Fountain City Festival](#) will be performing a version closer in production to the original movie. As soon as I get back on my feet... I really pray that it is soon... I look forward to helping to bring one of my favorite shows to the stage.