

Les Misérables

An audacious button-pusher with over-the-top songs like "Do You Hear the People Sing?" and "I Dreamed a Dream," producer Cameron Mackintosh's mega-hit, based on the Victor Hugo novel, still stands as the best of the big British commercial imports. \$20-\$85. Mon.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2. Opened: 3/12/87. • Imperial Theater, 249 W. 45th St. (212-239-6200).

★ The Lion King

Based on the popular Disney movie, this sublimely inventive production showcases some of the best experimental theater techniques of a generation, wrought with joyful mastery by experimental director extraordinaire Julie Taymor, and rewarded with a bouquet of Tonys in 1998. \$30-\$95. Wed.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 1 and 6:30. Opened: 11/13/97. • New Amsterdam Theater, 214 W. 42nd St. (212-307-4747).

★ Mamma Mia!

This season's feel-good hit is an unabashedly silly musical about a young bride-to-be and her single mom is scored with 22 shimmering disco tunes by Abba's Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus. Louise Pitre, Judy Kaye, Tina Maddigan, and Karen Mason star. Call for schedule. \$55-\$98.75. • Winter Garden Theater, 1634 Broadway, at 50th St. (212-563-5544).

★ Noises Off

Patti Lupone, Peter Gallagher, Richard Easton, and Faith Prince star in this lively revival of Michael Frayn's London hit, a slapstick farce about a touring theatrical troupe. \$40-\$75. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. • Brooks Atkinson Theater, 256 W. 47th St. (212-307-4100).

The Phantom of the Opera

Andrew Lloyd Webber's campy version of the macabre tale, given an opulent spin by director Hal Prince. \$20-\$85. Mon.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2. Opened: 1/26/88. • Majestic Theater, 247 W. 44th St. (212-239-6200).

★ The Producers

Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick produce the

ultimate "surefire flop," *Springtime for Hitler*, in Mel Brooks's triumphant new musical and Tony Award record-setter. Based on his Oscar-winning 1968 film, directed and choreographed with aplomb by Susan Stroman, this giddy romp is the hottest ticket in town. \$30-\$100. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Sat. and Sun. at 2, Sun. at 7:30. • St. James Theatre, 246 W. 44th St. (212-239-6200).

★ Proof

Jennifer Jason Leigh plays a chronically depressed young woman whose father, a famous mathematician, recently lost his mind and then his life. When Catherine's type-A sister rolls into town to bury him, a graduate student (the exceptional Josh Hamilton) finds a groundbreaking proof among her father's otherwise nonsensical papers and Catherine is jolted out of her near-catatonic state and into the confusing world around her. Justly rewarded with a Pulitzer and several Tonys, David Auburn's *Proof* is a virtuoso piece of writing. Daniel Sullivan's direction is impeccable. \$24-\$69. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. • Walter Kerr Theatre, 219 W. 48th St. (212-239-6200).

"QED"

Alan Alda returns in Peter Parnell's indulgent two-character drama about the quirky physicist Richard Feynman, which rated sellout crowds despite mixed reviews last fall. Sun. and Mon. at 8. 2/17-5/13. • Vivian Beaumont Theater, 150 W. 65th St. (212-239-6200).

Rent

The late Jonathan Larson's hauntingly scored, Pulitzer-winning reimagining of Puccini's *La Bohème* as lived by a gaggle of East Village hipsters at the peak of grunge and the AIDS epidemic. \$35-\$80. Mon., Tues., Thurs. at 8, Sat. at 2 and 8, Sun. at 2 and 7. Opened: 4/29/96. • Nederlander Theater, 208 W. 41st St. (212-307-4100).

The Tale of the Allergist's Wife

In this shlocky Manhattan comedy by downtown "gender illusionist" and camp playwright Charles

Busch, Tony Roberts and Valerie Harper play a hyper allergist and his frazzled self-improving wife, whose worlds are upended by the arrival of a globetrotting debutante (played by *Knots Landing* vet Michele Lee). \$30-\$70. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. • Barrymore Theatre, 243 W. 47th St. (212-239-6200).

Urinetown

A downtown hit, this weird musical, with book and lyrics by Greg Kotis and music and lyrics by Mark Hollman, is now a Broadway smash. The plot? In a corrupt city beset by a disaster of apocalyptic proportions, water is worth its weight in gold, and pedestrians are forced to comply with a pay-per-pee system. \$75-\$85. Mon., Wed.-Sat. at 8, Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3 and 7. • Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. (212-239-6200).

Off Broadway

Previews and Openings

Cirque Orchestra

An exuberant, aerial acrobatic take on the music of Rimsky-Korsakov, Barber, Rachmaninoff, Sibelius, and others. \$30-\$50. 2/20-2/23 at 8, 2/23 and 2/24 at 3. • City Center Theatre, 131 W. 55th St. (212-581-1212).

Four

Twentysomething playwright Christopher Shinn found success in a Worth Street production of this drama last year, and has been rewarded with this MTC transfer. Directed by Jeff Cohen, Shinn's drama tracks the lives of four ordinary folks who meet at a Hartford, Connecticut, July 4 celebration. \$45. Tues.-Sun. at 7:30, Sat. and Sun. at 3. In previews for a 2/19 opening. • MTC Stage 2 at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. (212-581-1212).

Necessary Targets

Based on interviews Eve Ensler (*Vagina Monologues*) conducted in Yugoslavia, the playwright's drama tracks two American women, a psychiatrist and a writer, who travel to Bosnia to help women refugees struggling with the aftermath of war. Shirley Knight and Diane Venora star; Michael Wilson directs. \$60. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Wed., Sat., and Sun. at 3. In previews for a 2/28 opening. • Variety Arts Theatre, 110 Third Ave. (212-239-6200).

Occupant

The very busy Edward Albee opens his new drama about Louise Nevelson, the iconoclastic artist known best for her environmental sculpture. The sensational Anne Bancroft plays the artist; Anthony Page directs. \$45-\$65. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. In previews for a 2/24 opening. • Signature Theatre, 555 W. 42nd St. (212-244-7529).

Surviving Grace

Ileana Douglas (*Ghost World*) and Doris Belack star in Trish Vradenburg's new play about a mother and daughter's fitful reconciliation. \$30-\$55. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Sun. at 7. Previews begin 2/21 for a 3/12 opening. • Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. (212-307-7171).

Now Playing

Are You Dave Gorman?

This surprisingly successful solo show by Dave Gorman is just part of the comedian's dogged effort to track down every other Dave Gorman in the world \$25-\$40. Wed.-Sat. at 8. • Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. (212-741-0391).

★ Berkoff Is Back

The frightening actor Steven Berkoff returns with a suitably dark suite of solo one-acts, including his creepy rendition of *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the masochistic story *Ador*, and *Dog*, a scary drama about an East-End who's more cruel than his pet pitbull. \$35-\$45. Wed.-Sat. at 8, Sun. at 3. • 45 Bleeker Theatre, 45 Bleeker St. (212-307-4100).

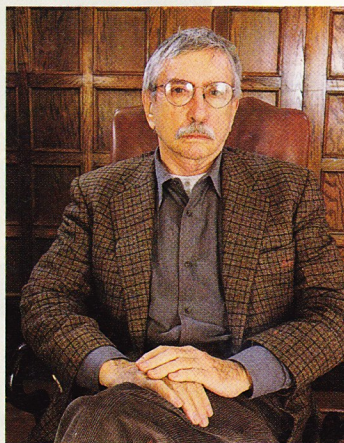
Blue Man Group: Tubes

Smart silliness, with toilet paper, neon-colored paint, cereal, etc. Appropriate for just about everyone—kids, adults, tourists, haters and lovers of performance art. \$55-\$65. Tues.-Thurs. at 8, Fri. at 7 and 10, Sat. at 4, 7,

Previews

Always On

Surrounded by forceful sculptures and odd antiques in his jaw-dropping TriBeCa loft, **Edward Albee** wonders if anyone would guess that one author was responsible for both of his new works. "People tell me I have a tone or a voice, but damned if I know what it is," he says, "except that my people tend to be articulate and tend to criticize each other constantly for using words improperly." In previews at the Golden Theatre, *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?*, Albee's first Broadway production since 1996's Tony-winning revival of *A Delicate Balance*, already has gossips buzzing. The drama follows an architect (Bill Pullman) who, at the pinnacle of success, confesses a shocking secret to his wife (Mercedes Ruehl) and son. Everyone's guessing that the revelation has something to do with the titular goat, but Albee pleads the Fifth. "Everyone's going to find out, not what the play is about but what happens during the course of the play, when the critics come to see it," he says. "That's soon enough." But he adds: "I'm trying to examine the pragmatic nature of our reality, the limits of our tolerance . . . things of that sort." On the subject of *Occupant*, in previews Off Broadway at the Signature Theater, Albee is more forthcoming. Anne Bancroft plays his longtime friend, the sculptor Louise Nevelson. Like Albee, she was alternately hated and adored by critics, criticized for her hauteur, and uncompromising in her work. "Louise was always on," Albee recalls of the flamboyant doyenne. "When a real Hollywood star enters a room, people's heads just automatically turn, without even having seen her," he says. "It was like that with Louise. Louise Berliawsky—that was her given name—was always creating Louise Nevelson." Though Albee and Nevelson were close, they never "sat around talking about aesthetics," Albee says. "I knew Sam Beckett and we never sat around discussing the theater. Louise and I talked about money and sex and . . ." He pauses, smiling, then politely adds: "And politics." (See "Broadway" and "Off Broadway.")



L.H.