

theater

Our Lady of Sligo... Yard Gal... Uncle Vanya

Opening

Stoppard in the Game of Love!

Early in his career and long before he script-doctored *Shakespeare in Love*, playwright Tom Stoppard was heralded as a formidable young genius and denounced as an inhuman brain-in-a-jar. While supporters marveled at the smarty-pants pyrotechnics of plays like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, critics wondered aloud throughout the late sixties and seventies if this writer might not have a heart. "As a matter of fact, there was a certain matter of justice in those comments," Stoppard admits. "I think my first plays were more dispassionate and more abstract." But after *The Real Thing* in 1982, he says, "people rather grudgingly retracted some of these accusations." Why? Well, instead of deconstructing *Hamlet* (*Rosencrantz*) or portraying the absurdist antics of acrobatic moral philosophers (*Jumpers*), the downright passionate *The Real Thing* explodes some myths about the inner lives of outwardly brilliant people. The "real thing" of this ferociously written play is, of course, that thing called love, and Henry (Stephen Dillane), the play's sarcastic protagonist, just happens to be an exceptionally witty and erudite playwright. Henry divorces his wife when he falls in love with a younger actress, Annie (Jennifer Ehle, pictured, with Dillane), who summarily dumps her overeager chump of a husband. As the play tracks Henry's life with Annie, the most insincere and ironic characters—especially Henry—somehow seem to be the most in touch with their feelings. In a way, Stoppard rips romance right out of the dopey clutches of Julia Roberts and Richard Gere and posts a valentine to the brainiacs. "Intellectuals are notorious for their untidy lives," Stoppard says; "A. E. Housman was in turmoil underneath." But what about Stoppard himself, who created a sensation when he left his wife for Felicity Kendal, the actress who originated the role of Annie in London? "I probably just lost my shyness as I got older," he demurs. But don't look for more moonstruck Bards. Stoppard explains, "I never subscribed to the theory that plays become better as they become more emotional." (See "Broadway.")

LOGAN HILL



Photograph by Ivan Kyncl.

Broadway

Previews and Openings

Dirty Blonde—Brash actress-author Claudia Shear stars in her new play about two Gotham singles who meet at the grave of Mae West, sampling delicious vignettes from the life of the woman who said, "I'm no angel, but I've spread my wings a bit." \$55-\$60. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Sat. and Wed. at 2, Sun. at 3. In previews for a 5/1 opening. *Helen Hayes Theatre*, 240 W. 44th St. (212-239-6200).

The Music Man—Choreographer Susan Stroman (*Contact*) opens her second Broadway show of the season, a revival of Meredith Wilson's giddy musical about a con artist who connives his way into the hearts of innocent Iowans. Starring Craig Bierko and Rebecca Luker. \$20-\$85. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. In previews for a 4/27 opening. *Neil Simon Theatre*, 250 W. 52nd St. (212-307-4100).

Taller Than a Dwarf—Parker Posey and Matthew Broderick star in a new comedy by Elaine May (*Power Plays*, *Death Defying Acts*). Alan Arkin directs. \$25-\$65. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. In previews for a 4/24 opening. *Longacre Theatre*, 220 W. 48th St. (212-239-6200).

Now Playing

Aida—The epic musical about the love affair between a Nubian slave and a cute Egyptian, with music by Elton John and lyrics by Tim Rice. Directed by Robert Falls with a book by Linda Woolverton and David Henry Hwang. Sets and costumes by Bob Crowley. \$25-\$70. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. *Palace Theatre*, 1554 Broadway, at 47th St. (212-307-4747).

Amadeus—Nearly two decades after its London and Broadway triumphs, Peter Shaffer's play returns, again directed by Sir Peter Hall. Michael Sheen purrs, hisses, and farts as Mozart; David Suchet plays his conniving nemesis, Salieri. \$25-\$75. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. *Music Box Theatre*, 239 W. 45th St. (212-239-6200).

Annie Get Your Gun—Bernadette Peters plays the sharp-tongued, sharpshootin' gal from Cincinnati who eclipses her lover. \$35-\$80. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. *Marquis Theatre*, 1535 Broadway, bet. 45th and 46th Sts. (212-307-4100).

Beauty and the Beast—Disney's beast is back (No, not the mouse). Andrea McArdle blanches and blushes as the fair maiden; Steve Blanchard roars and repents as the Beast. \$25-\$85. Wed.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 1 and 6:30. *Lunt-Fontanne Theatre*, 205 W. 46th St. (212-307-4747).

Cabaret—The Roundabout is to be roundly applauded for re-creating Sam Mendes's 1993 London production. Aided by Rob Marshall as co-director and choreographer, Mendes confirms his directorial reputation with the nightclub scenes. Shortcomings notwithstanding, this revival has enough to satisfy all but the most fastidious. (Simon: 3/30/98.) Now starring Susan Egan and Michael Hall. \$25-\$90. Tues.-Sat. at 8, Sat. at 2, Sun. at 2 and 7. Opened: 3/19/98. *Studio 54*, 254 W. 54th St. (212-239-6200).

Cats—Eight lives and counting. \$40-\$75. Mon.-Sat. at 8, Wed. and Sat. at 2, Sun. at 3. Opened: 10/7/82. Through 6/25. *Winter Garden Theater*, 1634 Broadway, at 50th St. (212-239-6200).

Chicago—It was a gamble to transfer the Encores! production of this musical to Broadway, but since it's about women who kill their men and the merce-