

# stage (cont.)

verse that gets oppressive quickly and awkward references to Shakespeare. It's all unnecessary to the story, which is in no need of bells and whistles to make it moving—nothing is added in theatricalizing the story, and what gets lost is the story that needs to be heard most. (Monica Westlin) Victory Gardens Biograph Theater, 2433 N. Lincoln, (773)871-3000. Through April 25.

## →Ragtime

Musical theater is such a collaborative art form that it is rare for all of the elements to be so perfectly aligned to make a show really work on every level. In the 1990s, that happened twice: with "Rent" and with "Ragtime." The brainchild of Canadian producer Garth Drabinsky who had just had a mammoth success restaging "Show Boat" on Broadway and across the world, Drabinsky wanted to mount a new, uniquely "American" musical (only in Canada) and sought the rights to E. L. Doctorow's popular novel. Doctorow, who had been burned when he allowed the book to be made into a 1981 Milos Forman film that reduced the threads of the novel to a single character and became a comeback vehicle for retired film star James Cagney, had learned his lesson and would only allow the adaptation if Doctorow himself were given full creative control over every aspect of the production, which to Drabinsky's everlasting credit, he gave. The carefully crafted end result was a show that in many ways surpassed Doctorow's book in its pure heart and emotional power, giving audiences an opportunity to actually feel the struggles, dreams, triumphs and tragedies of three diverse American families through a sensational Stephen Flaherty score that mirrors the music idioms of the early twentieth century. Chicago director Frank Galati's staging was so tied to the original show that few have been able to make "Ragtime" work without it, but on the other side of the spectrum, a tiny company such as Porchlight Music Theatre put together an intimate version free of trappings that worked wonderfully well. The Drury Lane approach is to smother the show in spectacle and apparently hope that its lack of attention to the most fundamental musical details will go unnoticed. For those whose primary interest in "Ragtime" is theatrical, there is much to be admired in director Rachel Rockwell's lavish take, by far the largest production ever mounted at the west suburban venue. With a cast of thirty-three and a pit orchestra of twenty-two, the hydraulic-lift effects certainly leave plenty of "ooohs" and "ahs" in their wake though it is worth noting that the computer projections were acting up at the performance I attended: during the climactic funeral scene, the audience was watching projections of computer menus. But what the new generation of the DeSantis family that has overseen enormous expansion at the venue since patriarch Tony DeSantis passed away doesn't seem to realize is that it is not enough to break the bank on smoke and mirrors. When you do a show such as "Ragtime," you need a music director who can actually lead a large ensemble to play that name-sake style of music—and many others of the early twentieth century—with crisp articulation, in rhythm and, above all, with its playful syncopations intact. Imagine a company putting on "Die Fledermaus" or "The Merry Widow" with all of the trimmings and forgetting to hire someone who can teach the performers how to execute a proper Viennese lilt and you have an idea of what a tedious experience sitting through this production is. Of course, also needed on the budget is a solid vocal coach. It was sad to see so many veteran

performers whose talents are well known here be reduced to having to reach for notes that came in consistently under pitch and under breath, or leads who were never taught that your emotional range need not be merely from x to z: there is a wide spectrum of emotions that this score communicates, but it was often as if we were experiencing a one-dimensional "Ragtime: The American Idol Edition." That might work for "Grease," but not for "Ragtime." (Dennis Polkow) Drury Lane Oakbrook, 100 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace, (630)530-0111. \$31-\$45. Through May 23.

## →Street Scene

Elmer Rice, nee Reizenstein, received the 1929 Pulitzer Prize for his realistic profile of inner-city tenement dwellers. Directors Laurence Bryan and Keely Haddad-Null graft grotesque elements to the occasionally creaky script to dramatize the banal horror of crushing poverty, with mixed results. The piece opens on a building's inhabitants exchanging weather complaints as the conversation devolves to speculation about Mrs. Maurrant's (Rebekka James) affair with the milkman (J.J. McDowell). Her daughter Rose (Melinda Ryba) fends off her married boss (Brian Peccia) while erstwhile would-be-lover Sam (Steve Wisegarver) fumes. The setup doesn't require the ghostly figures floating through the set, stopping the action and foreshadowing already-detailed disasters. James lacks the yearning for love and freedom the script is riddled with. Ryba and Wisegarver's naturalism is refreshing, but they don't nail the horror of the show's climax. Though the show's premiere was delayed, it still needs more time in the oven. (Lisa Buscani) The National Pastime Theater with Clock Productions, 4139 N. Broadway, (773)327-7077. Through April 25.

## →A True History of the Johnstown Flood

In an ambitious departure from the topical, highly contemporary milieu she's become known for (most recently evidenced in finest form with "The Crowd You're In With"), Rebecca Gilman's "A True History of the Johnstown Flood," now in its world premiere at the Goodman Theatre, strives, mostly successfully, to reveal layers of truths about the times we live in through the retrospective craft of a giant historic epic. A touring second-generation "first family of theater," the Baxters (Cliff Chamberlain as Richard, Heather Wood as Fanny and Stephen Louis Grush as James, all in fine turns) find their lives and careers intersecting with the vast wealth of the Lippincotts, represented in compelling embodiments of noblesse oblige by Janet Ulrich Brooks as the benevolent patron and Lucas Hall as her son, Walter. When the manmade mountain lake that provides recreation for the rich floods and destroys the working-class town of Johnstown below (in reality, killing more than 2,200 people in 1889, the most devastating disaster in U.S. history at the time), the play takes a definitive shift in tone. The humorous, airy comedy of manners that makes up the first act suddenly becomes a tragedy that overtly echoes the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Goodman commissioned this play, and in this production director Robert Falls is a collaborator of equal authority. (Brian Hieggelke) Goodman Theatre, 170 N. Dearborn, (312)443-3800. Through April 18.

## →Treat

David Schwimmer and Andy Bellin's piece about high-tech sexual assault isn't anything new; we've already seen the internet-predator angle mined to death on "Law and Order: SVU." But the stellar individual

## 5 SHOWS TO SEE NOW

### 1

#### A LIFE (Northlight)

Don't take it for granted

### 2

#### UNVEILED (Victory Gardens Fresh Squeezed)

Rohina Malik's one-woman rumination remounted

### 3

#### HEDWIG DANCES 25TH ANNIVERSARY (Dance Center of Columbia College)

This time, it's personal

### 4

#### BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (Broadway in Chicago)

Turn the kids onto theater

### 5

#### LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES (Remy Bumppo)

Um, leave the kids at home

performances rise above the script to give us a bleak picture of technology's abilities to unite and divide. Annie (Allison Torem) is a well-adjusted high schooler whose long-distance friendship with a boy her age turns serious and sexual. He insists on an in-person rendezvous, and Annie discovers her adolescent boyfriend is really a 35-year-old man. The encounter results in a family's fabric ripped apart at the seams as a young woman comes undone. Torem is an ingenue's ingénue; she invests her character with completely plausible vulnerability, yearning and discomf. Philip Smith's father is heartbreaking as he faces a daughter he doesn't know anymore in a situation he cannot control. The material's trite, but the performers give it new life. (Lisa Buscani) The Lookingglass Theatre Company, 821 N. Michigan, (312)337-0665. Through April 25.

## DANCE

## →Hedwig Dances

See Bar, Dance Center of Columbia College, 1306 S. Michigan, (312)369-8300. April 1-April 3, 8pm. \$24-\$28.

# film

## NEW

Clash of the Titans  
Hot Tub Time Machine  
The Last Song  
Mid-August Lunch  
The Secret of Kells  
To Die for Tano  
Vincere

## →RECOMMENDED

## NR = NOT REVIEWED

Selected film reviews appear below. To submit film listings e-mail calendar@newcity.com. Listings must be received two weeks prior to the publication date for the issue in which you want them to appear. We do not guarantee that all submitted listings will appear in print. For full reviews and expanded showtimes visit newcitychicago.com. Film times are based on information provided to us Tuesday evening. Changes occur; call ahead to confirm.

## The Bounty Hunter

Directed by Andy Tennant. Sexing up "Midnight Run," as bounty hunter Gerard Butler learns that his next assignment is ex-wife Jennifer Aniston, a reporter burrowing into a murder investigation. 110m. Anamorphic 2.40 widescreen. Webster Place

## →Chloe

"Chloe," Atom Egoyan's thirteenth feature, was intended as a directorial project for producer Ivan Reitman. But after working on a screenplay with screenwriter Erin Cressida Wilson ("Secretary"), the director of "Ghostbusters" decided the story might better suit fellow Canadian Atom Egoyan, whose "Exotica" he admired. Egoyan's dense, cool, yet luxuriantly imagined movies play tricks with time and perspective, but this script is linear. Catherine (Julianne Moore), a Toronto gynecologist, suspects her music-professor husband David (Liam Neeson) has been cheating on her, and she hires a young call girl (Amanda Seyfried) she encounters in a bar in the city's pricey, middle-aged Yorkville district to reveal how far he might go with flirtation. The greater flirtation in Wilson's juicy script is with absurdity, but what's on screen is the most compelling, even hypnotic Egoyan film in years. Directed by Atom Egoyan. 96m. (Ray Pride) Music Box

## City Island

Directed and written by Raymond De Felitta. Family comedy-drama set in a fishing community in the Bronx, with Andy Garcia, Julianna Margulies, Steven Strait, Dominik Garcia-Lorido, Ezra Miller, Emily Mortimer, Alan Arkin. NR. Landmark Century.

## Clash of the Titans

Directed by Louis Leterrier. See Film feature. 118m. Shown in widescreen and in 3-D. Showplace ICON, City North, Webster Place

## →45365

Dipping into a few months in the life of small-town Sidney, Ohio in Fall, "45365" is a luscious, impressionistic essay film, a dream-like patch of cinema vérité (without narration) that's more trance than nonfiction lockstep. The film's gentle intimacy and easy access to the town's citizens and routines may spring from the fact that producer-director-editor-brothers Bill Ross IV and Turner Ross grew up there. Their eyes, however, offer up near-rapturous visuals: this is one of the most beautiful-looking shot-on-high-definition films to come around in recent memory. If every native

son could do their patch of land and the weave of interconnection of friends and neighbors this kind of funny, tender, lyrical justice, we'd have all-American storytelling from sea to shining sea. I'd like to see more movies that are this generous and giving. Winner of the first Chaz & Roger Ebert Truer Than Fiction Award at the 2010 Independent Spirit Awards. 93m. (Ray Pride) Facets

## →The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo

"The Men Who Hate Women" is the blunt original title of the late Swedish writer Stieg Larsson's worldwide bestseller; its harsh portrait of that country's industry and welfare state earns it. But can a story about misogyny inadvertently traffic in it? As "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo," it's a barn-burner of a page-turner, the first of three novels Larsson left behind (films have been made of all three; the other two will be released this summer). The adaptation by director Niels Arden Oplev ("Portland") is an adroit compression of its angry themes and doesn't stint on the graphic material. (Its distributor is Chicago-based Music Box Films; see related story.) Financial journalist Mikael Blomkvist (Michael Nyqvist) has been convicted of libel and will be going to prison, which allows an aging industrialist from the fractious Vanger clan to hire him to investigate a forty-year-old mystery about a missing girl. Before he's hired, Lisbeth Salander (Noomi Rapace), a young investigator with epic hacker skills, investigates him. Their paths cross, and soon they are in league together in an increasingly epic search for a serial killer. The two-and-a-half-hour running time never feels leisurely, although three scenes involving rape and retribution involving Salander and an advocate assigned to her by the state go well into NC-17-level cruelty. (It's one of the key differences between page and screen, especially involving violence: you imagine only as much as you need to while reading.) While made for television, Oplev's visual style, from design to lighting to framing, has cinematic sweep (and the men's cardigan budget must have been daunting). While several plot strands are swept away, there are lingering glances and hints toward them which suggest the filmmakers thought most of their audience would be familiar with the novels. One bit of compression that takes the place of pages of exposition suggests "Blow-Up" mingled with the brief clip that exists of Anne Frank turning her head as seen in a window: it's the sort of creative solution that lands its own punch. 151m. (Ray Pride) Opens Friday. Landmark Century, Showplace ICON

## Greenberg

Ben Stiller plays Roger Greenberg as a jerk you might like, at times. Or you might like writer-director Noah Baumbach ("The Squid and the Whale," "Margot at the Wedding") for making Greenberg dislikable. What's not to like about "Greenberg" is Baumbach's way of satirizing his own bicoastal cohort in a story credited to wife Jennifer Jason Leigh (co-director of "The Anniversary Party"), who is also one of this film's producers. Uninsightful self-pity spoons with toothless self-loathing. After a stint in a mental hospital for a nervous breakdown, Greenberg house-sits for three weeks in West Hollywood for his brother taking his family to Vietnam on a business trip to open a hotel. Left behind is their German Shepherd Mahler and their personal assistant Florence Marr (Greta Gerwig, "Hannah