

20 years

I cannot believe it has been that long since I portrayed one Daniel Francis Hannigan in my high school senior year. This afternoon, I had the pleasure to sit and enjoy the final performance of an area company's production of "Annie." I was NOT disappointed. Several of my theatrical colleagues and friends had roles on stage at the glorious Huber. Crystal was remarkable as "Aggie" Hannigan. ALWAYS a powerhouse performance displaying the deliciousness of the marvelous character in song, movement, and action. It is very difficult to pick which "sister" I prefer.

Denver, Denver. WHAT A HOOT! He portrayed not only Drake (Warbucks' butler) but one of FDR's cabinet members and a dog catcher as well. Each character was entirely different in appearance, tone, and characterization. From an Irish brogue to the not-so-stiff English servant, he stole the spotlight in every scene he was in! AND YES, he can sing!

I have always been a huge fan of the Hooverville scene. The song which "Likes to Thank Herbert Hoover" for putting hundreds of former employed citizens on the streets is a really fun bit which I was a part of in my second go round. Mary and a few of my other friends doubled (or tripled) in this scene, as Warbucks' servants, and a few other cabinet members.

Finally, Annie herself was a delight. Her charisma on stage fit the role perfectly. Her singing and speaking voice held just the right amount of power, spunk, and naivete. For whatever reason, the production had a different actress stepping into the role both weekends.

I make it a point to never critique roles I have previously played (not that I am biased or anything) ☐

WELL DONE CAST AND CREW!!!

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).

A VERY PRODUCTIVE LESSON

It is getting very close... about a month and a half (of course, February is a VERY short month!!!!). However, I am very, VERY pleased with where I am at this point in the process. After all, I have never before embarked on an adventure quite like this... from infancy to finish, my OWN creation but I would be lying if I did not tell you that I am really excited! K told me that we are definitely where I need to be just going through each piece one by one over and over again. I see two of my list are more challenging than others for reasons that are very apparent to both of us! Definitely will be focusing on those this week.

I was thrilled by one of her comments today! It seems that her family was listening to one of the songs I will be performing (one of my top picks... one that HAD to be on the program). She informed me that my interpretation outshines the artist who performed the song in the OBC (Original Broadway Cast for those of you not in the know). Let me reiterate that this will be an extremely family-friendly show with no questionable songs or staging (I'll save that for my grand 20th spectacle). In fact, I would not be surprised if I incorporated a bit of audience interaction throughout. Not to worry, I would know who **NOT** to call upon. St. Patty's Day weekend... I have a spot to fill perhaps a nice Irish tune.

It seems that I have been a walking billboard for my terrific coach. Not one but two people have asked me how to get in

touch with her. My cousin, who is in a band, told me that she has been trying to find a good vocal teacher and was unaware that there was one in the immediate area.

In other production news, it seems that “the other me” has made quite an impression. The promotional photo for the theatre’s redux of *Escanaba in da Moonlight* features a gentleman who just happens to share names with me but bears little resemblance. Numerous people around the area have come up and asked me how the play was going. At times, I have forgotten what they were talking about and inform them that it is not me in the cast. I have worked on stage with J2 but not this time.

Coming Soon to the Great White Way

Seems like spring is the beginning of the new Broadway season. Guess they have to get in to hit that Tony deadline. In any case, I see a gaggle of revivals, hollywood turned stage productions (for better or worse), and one-man shows among the already established shows.

It appears that there is a new revolving door musical aiming to hit a certain demographic (in this case screaming adolescent females). Daniel Radcliffe ended his employ at the World Wide Wicket company back in early January. Darren Criss (from Glee) Succeeded him for a two week run. And now, Nick Jonas is in the Business until July. Hope that this does not become the next Chicago with every teenage heartthrob stepping into the role of J. Pierpont Finch. A good show should stand on its own. On a side bar, Radcliffe and Criss have more in

common than H2\$. Darren's production company (began at all places at the dreaded school up north) created the internet sensation "A Very Potter Musical."

Opening soon for a limited run is the newest entry in Disney's production juggernaut. *Newsies*, a little movie musical from the 80s that starred a young little-known actor named Christian Bale. I do not think it was a major hit but has legions of cult fans ☐

Ghost: The Musical. The less said the better. Sounds like a mess and I don't mean because of the famous clay scene.

In the new revival scene there is a play and a favorite musical about to hit NYC. Phillip Seymour Hoffman is going to fill Willy Loman's shoes along with Andrew Garfield (the *Amazing Spider-Man* not the musical the new reboot of the cinematic saga) in *Death of a Salesman*.

Now for the show that I have had my eye on ever since the news arrived. Lord Lloyd Webber's masterpiece is coming back! ~~*Starlight Express* that WONDERFUL engine that could will be skating back into the heart of theatre goers in March.~~ *Jesus Christ Superstar* enjoyed a new production in Canada last summer and is making its way to the Neil Simon Theatre in March. I just hope that this production is better than the 90s offering that was dreadful and they had the audacity to film it for all to see (not that the 1973 version was the work of genius but King Herod was much more interesting).

Finally... for a very limited run, the performing wunderkind known as William Shatner will be gracing the stage for the first time in 50 years in a one-man production all his own. I can only imagine...

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. MWHHAHAHAHA!

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 got 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 lives 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!

There's No Place Like The Merry Old Land Of Oz

Yesterday was quite the busy day. It began around 9AM as I went to the area chamber of commerce office to sell tickets for FCF's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Quite an experience (fun but at times busy). Answering phones, waiting on the line of theatergoers, marking charts, getting the tickets, running credit cards, and attempting to keep an accurate count of sold tickets was fun. Of course there were down times, but by 5PM, each of the 4 performances were really close to 300 with Friday night just one ticket shy of 400. I found it amazing that Thursday night's opening is the second strongest. Sunday afternoon is a typical slow day but Saturday night?! Ah well... it was only Tuesday.

After selling tickets, I had a few hours before I needed to be at the Arts and Ed building to sit and review said show. I must say that it was much easier to review Oz since it remains one of my perennial favorites than it was my first time doing a review for (Cr)OKLAHOMA! It certainly took less time... or maybe last night's show ended sooner. I must apologize for any omissions to the cast as I attempted to include everyone including the adorable Toto. At review time, the programs had not yet arrived and a full cast list was unavailable. However, most of it was available on the theatrical group's [website](#). So after completing my task, and forwarding it on to the President, my second review will soon be on the printed page, if not on the screens of cyberspace. Hopefully, it will appear before the show completes its one weekend schedule.

There's No Place Like The Merry Old Land Of Oz

by Jamy Shaffer

In 1900, Lyman Frank Baum published the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* having no idea the impact that the little children's book would have on the world. Twelve sequel novels, stage plays, and silent movies followed. However, it was the 1939 beloved classic motion picture starring Judy Garland that would catapult the tale to atmospheric proportions. This weekend only, under the very capable direction of Beth Schweitzer, Fountain City Festival presents the most faithful stage adaptation of the cherished film.

McKenzie Frazier leads the cast as Dorothy Gale, the young naïve farm girl who dreams of going "Over the Rainbow" and escaping the dull, lifeless Kansas prairie. Miss Frazer who is in her late teens does a fine job of portraying the young dreamer by use of subtle body gestures and a childlike voice that give Dorothy just the right mix of naivete and, at times, fear.

As in the movie, the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion each are characters from Dorothy's Kansas life recreated in more colorful, dramatic fashion. Brian Coon is exceptional as Hunk who, in Oz, becomes the man of straw with no brains. Coon's agility on stage is phenomenal as he falls down, picks himself up, and puts the stuffing back in.

Casey Wood delivers a dramatic Hickory/Tin Man. Even for a character with no heart, Wood does a fine job of portraying the emotions he lacks. His stiff movements on stage are wonderful as he stands as if posing for his statue.

The third friend Dorothy encounters along the Yellow Brick Road is hilarious slapstick at its finest. Adam Coon is brilliant as the Cowardly Lion. Even as Zeke, Coon is remarkable as he runs away in the face of danger. Once in the costume of the fearful king of the forest, he goes all out with his perfect comedic timing and fabulous stage presence.

Amy Vondeylen is hideously delicious as Miss Gulch/Wicked Witch of the West. Her over the top, extremely melodramatic, villainous portrayal is sure to draw hisses and catcalls from the audience.

Caprianna Parrish brings a delightful, airy quality in her portrayal of Glinda, the Good With of the North. Her costume, like many of the other characters' is almost a direct replica of the original film version.

The Great and Powerful Wizard of Oz himself is brought to fine life by Tom Schweitzer. His showman approach to the character is just the thing needed to portray the humbug who is a good man but a very bad wizard. Hopefully, this comes as no surprise to anyone.

Anyone who has ever seen Keith Day in action knows what a fine character actor he is. Mr. Day displays a great sense of warmth but befuddlement as Uncle Henry along side Sarah Schaper as Auntie Em. Later, he brings the same greatness to his role as the Guard at the Gates of the Emerald City.

What is Oz without the adorable munchkins? There will sure to be a collective sigh and laughter as Marlee Yoder, Katherine Seaman, Vivien Ewing, Hannah Goodrich, Kayla Arnold, Veronica Nichols, and Lizzy Canield portray the female variety. Austin Damrod, Cory Yosick, Jesse Short, Seth Short, Milo McRobbie, Logan Psurny, Mason Frazer, Mason Bassett, Wyatt Short, Keegan McCashen, and Micah McCashen play their male counterparts.

The three apple trees who seemed to have a larger on stage role than in the movie are played by Jeremy Scott, Jared Wigent, and Thomas Vandal.

Some of the Witch's Winkie guards ("O E O Yo Ah") are played by Cameron Lyons, Austin Teegarden, Mason Bassett, Wyatt Short, Evan Raub, and Jeremy Scott.

Other Emerald City Ozians are played by FCF stalwarts Ron and

Linda Jinks, Noelle Goodson, Sara Yosick, Nanci Frazer, Briana Gearhart, Megan Fry, Maddi Heisler, Kathleen Walsh, Remy Cousino, Emma McCashen, Chloe McCashen, Heather Teegarden, Edwina Phillips, Sandy Bowers, and Faith Stambaugh.

So... take your own journey along the Yellow Brick Road and go Over the Rainbow as FCF presents *The Wizard of Oz*. Thursday July 28th – Saturday July 30th at 7:30pm and Sunday July 31st at 2PM. Unlike years past, the show runs only one weekend at the Bryan Arts and Education Building. Tickets are \$10 each and may be purchased at the Bryan Chamber office or by calling 419-636-2247. Don't miss this cherished family-friendly show!

(Jamy Shaffer is a veteran community theater performer who has been involved in more shows in the Northwest Ohio region on and off stage than even he can count.)

The Sting of Rejection

Nope, didn't even make the callbacks. There was a message waiting when I got home the day after stating that I did not make the show. It's been a long time since I didn't make a show. This is not what it sounds like- in recent history I have only tried out for Oliver! and It's a Wonderful Life before Dracula. I didn't even try out for Jekyll & Hyde, only responded to a plea for more actors. Unfortunately along with a rejection comes a void that can't be filled, a void of never knowing why. Was something wrong with my audition? It was only a singing audition and I feel I sang just fine. The accompanist didn't always keep up- was that counted against me? I did a performance, not just the song. Maybe I should have stood there and just sang? Maybe my hair which I forgot to get cut bothered them? Maybe they used the "Will you be

willing to be in the ensemble/chorus” question as a weed-out tool- I said no because I would rather try out for Noah than be in the chorus- at my age I have this privilege, do I not? Did someone find this blog and see I would rather be in Noah? Was it even about me at all? I do know it is a relatively small cast for two groups- yes it is a joint production between two groups. Oh, well. I am now free to try out for Noah whenever those auditions happen, assuming they don't just pre-cast it since there is such a small cast. If I make the show I will know for sure not making Dracula was a God thing (someone was praying for me). Of course, considering the message of the Dracula story, it may just be a God thing no matter what happens.

Come to think of it, I was rejected more recently- when I did a general tryout for Metropolis last summer. I was never called back for anything. Well, that was professional theatre so it was expected. I do so wish I could just call and ask, but I know that would be improper, so I will just continue to wonder.

The Last is First

It just figures. The show I would prefer to be in starts its run first, so it would only be natural that its auditions would be first, right? Of course not. The runs are actually close, with the closing weekend of the one being the opening of the other. If you were to read into that statement you would undoubtedly conclude that no, I can't just do both shows. Not that I am in the mind to rehearse two shows at once anyway. Tried that, not my cup of tea. Not that I like tea mind you. So before I get off track, Dracula auditions are- guess what- an entire *month* before the start of

rehearsals. Interesting- I wonder why? Oh well, I went ahead and scheduled my audition time, which will be two weeks from tonight. On recommendation from a friend and fellow blogger, I will try out with Renfield as my primary focus. They don't mind singing a song from the show for the audition piece I'm told- what does that mean though? They prefer it and are trying to be aloof about it to see what I will choose to do? Or they would really rather I didn't? Well, I could start preparing The Master's Song, but since I will have an entire week where I can't practice it, I will probably do something from Jekyll & Hyde for two reasons- I know it well and it is by Frank Wildhorn just as Dracula is. I'm thinking about two different songs. Alive is a definite character piece, but the best place to start is after the instrumental interlude which skips any slower parts. Wait- there are no slower sections in that song... But- the end of the song goes way up just like the end of The Master's Song. The other song I was thinking of is I Need to Know. Not a character piece, and done by a somewhat sane Dr. Jekyll, but it does have a mix of slower and faster. In this song I would start with the second verse, so I wouldn't start with the *really* slow part. 32 bars would also end before the key change, so I couldn't really show off range. Still, it just seems like a better audition piece for some reason. Which to do?

And what to do if I do make the show, but in a smaller role? Quitting to be in another show would just kill any future with the group, so making this show in any capacity will certainly mean no to Noah. That show is, BTW, still a complete mystery. Four male parts, but at my age would I even be considered for Noah's sons? Of course, Noah was a ripe old 600 years old when the floods came, and his sons couldn't have been far behind. But still, it's likely there will be an age limit for them, so that would leave me with a chance for only one role. I just wish I could audition for that role first. Maybe the Dracula group will deliberate for several weeks giving time to audition and find out about a role in Noah, and

drop out before the role offer comes? Who knows? We'll see.

How To Succeed At The Tonys

Tonight (or last night) was the 65th presentation of The Antoinette Perry Award for Excellence in Theatre. Once again, Neil Patrick Harris shined as the host as he poked fun at himself, Spider-Man (30 seconds of jokes about the troubled musical), and battled with Hugh Jackman to see who would be the better host. Really in his element as an entertainer. Since I had to work until 9, I had to watch via the DVR an hour late.

Honestly, I was not overly impressed with the excerpts from the NEW musicals. Two based on movies ([Catch Me If You Can](#)... never saw the Hanks/Decrapio movie; and [Sister Act](#)... which surprisingly did not translate that well to the stage). [The Scottsboro Boys](#) is the now closed and soon to hit the road swan song of Kander and Ebb (who created *Cabaret* and *Chicago*). The winner of Best Musical, [The Book of Mormon](#), was co-created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone (known primarily for bringing "South Park" into our lives).

I was much more impressed by the two shows battling it out for Best Revival of a Musical. Daniel and company were very fun while performing "Brotherhood of Man" from *How to Succeed*... Congrats to John Larroquette on his win for Best Featured Role by an Actor in a Musical. Sutton Foster and her cast of the classic *Anything Goes* was the odds on favorite to snag the revival award and it did not disappoint. I am still amazed that Radcliffe was not nominated for his role. It does not make sense to blame Harry Potter itself when Jackman won for *The Boy from Oz* while he was still riding high as Wolverine in the *X Men* films.

Memorable moments:

- *Spider-Man* excerpt did not do a thing to endear it to me. Re-opens Tuesday. Julie Taymor is suing for royalties due to her after she was fired from the director's gig.
- I found bits of *The Book Of Mormon's* song, "I Believe," to sound like a mockery of "I Have Confidence" from *The Sound of Music*. What can we expect from the co-creators of "South Park?"
- Brooke Shields (soon to join the cast of *The Addam's Family*) got a big long BLEEEEEEEEEEP (or was it a long mute)
- Christie Brinkley (yet another to soon revolve into the endless cast of *Chicago*) looked like a deranged Barbie doll and sounded like a munchkin.
- "No audience members have been injured during a performance... YET!" (30 seconds of Spider-Man jabs)
- Whatever the (what can only be best described as) **THING** was that Whoopi had on her head.

So... while the year's crop of NEW musical highlights leave something lacking, the awards and revivals were entertaining.

And please...**KEEP THE SUPERHEROES WHERE THEY BELONG! IN THE COMICS, ANIMATED SERIES, OR MOVIES!**



Life Goes On

There's not a lot to write about in my life. I tend toward things remaining the same in my life, nothing really new that I haven't already mentioned in other writings (back when I used to write...). Still at the same job, doing the same thing, going to church, leading 4th and 5th grades, haven't been in a show since December, still never go out socializing, etc. As retrogaming me I did get two new products toward that end. Well, one has been ordered but not shipped yet as they never emailed me on it. That would be a small bluetooth game controller called the Zeemote that I understand actually works with my phone. You see, my phone has crippled bluetooth (oddly by HTC, not AT&T) that doesn't allow most game controllers to function. People have bought and used Wiimotes with Android, but any phones like mine that use HTC Sense cannot use this and other controllers. In fact the one I ordered won't work as a controller, but as a generic input device that replaces the touch keyboard. As such, it has to be enabled only when used, then turned off when done so the touch keyboard will work again. Oh, well. The other item I ordered and have been using is a Supercard DSTwo for my DSi. This allows me to play older games on the DS, though it lacks good Atari and Genesis emulators, and some emulators don't exist at all like Intellivision and Atari 5200/7800. Of course newer devices like Playstation, Saturn, N64 and later generations can't be reasonably emulated on the DS.

So, other things? I have my eye set on a musical production called Noah next fall (same group as Wonderful Life), or if not MoS will be doing Dracula the Musical, another co-production with another group like they just did for Jesus Christ Superstar. Six weekends- wow. I just went to see it

today- it actually wasn't that bad. I think they toned down the original to make it less disrespectful of our Lord and Savior, but there were still a few of those elements there. I suppose there is only so much one can do without starting to rewrite it. It's a little surprising though that they did anything at all, not being a Christian group. Do either of my readers happen to know if there are character roles in Dracula besides the title role? I fully expect that role to go to their resident lead. I suppose I am not a romantic lead type in any event, which is part of the role, in a way. Still, he is part character like Jekyll and Hyde (same writer by the way) so who knows? Maybe the lead will be busy with other things.

On a similar note, can anyone see me as Archibald in Secret Garden? That's a role I still want to do at some point if the show isn't completely dead. There's also Les Mis, but there is truly small hope in that show for the foreseeable future.