The new GERSHWIN musical comedy



Prince Edward Theatre

## new york notes

by Ruth Leon

y standard answer to the question, "Why aren't they writing great theatre scores any more?" has long been "They are, they're just writing them for Hollywood." The Alan Mencken/Howard Ashman score for The Little Mermaid heralded a new movement. Suddenly, the kind of music and songs that had long been associated with the Broadway stage, the songs

which expressed character, mood and plot in verse, chorus and bridge, weren't on a Broadway stage. They were coming out of the mouths of little computer-drawn people and animals a million figurative miles from the increasingly inhospitable palaces between West 41st and

West 53rd Streets.

Why? Just examine the fate of brand new musicals on Broadway in the past few years. The economics are terrifying, so terrifying that original musicals - The Goodbye Girl, Nick and Nora, The Red Shoes - have vanished minutes after their arrival, impossible to sustain with anything less than rave reviews. Even City of Angels, which got raves, didn't last long enough to put it into profit, so gigantic was the investment.

And the shows themselves weren't good enough, allowed out into the cold world too early like an undercooked meal, prematurely foisted on the diminishing audiences long before they were ready to be seen. Shows that deserve rave reviews have throughout theatrical history spent months on the road, being polished and honed, having the good songs improved and the bad songs jettisoned, and the "eleven o'clock songs", the ones that send you out into the night humming, written in a badly lit



hotel room at 3am. Out of town tryouts are imperative and they don't happen any more. The economics don't allow a pre-Broadway tour and the shows we've been seeing aren't worth sixty dollars a ticket from theatregoers determined to get value for money. These days, tours are what successful shows do after they close on Broadway to recoup the investors' money, not what new shows

do to prepare for Broadway.

So Mencken and Ashman turned away from the theatre, where they had had one big hit off-Broadway which never went uptown, to the movies where Disney, the once and future cartoon juggernaut, offered them the chance to work the way old time Broadway composers and lyricists did, for as long as they needed to make it right. The result was the best score in years, The Little Mermaid, a triumph of lyricism and daring.

Howard Ashman's tragic death from AIDs during the writing of the follow up hit, Beauty and the Beast was a terrible blow to the future of musicals and could have signalled its stillbirth, but Tim Rice stepped brilliantly into the partnership, completing Beauty with Mencken and going on to write Aladdin, one of the top-grossing movie musicals ever. I wonder whether the London theatre audience appreciated Tim Rice before he went off to the land where the earth trembles? Too long in the shadow of his former partner, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and too selfeffacing to be known for much in England beyond his amiable appearances on Radio Four cricket guizzes, he is the most incisive and literate lyricist Britain has produced since P.G. Wodehouse. When you can write lyrics of such

delicacy and wit, it must be a burden to be best known for *Don't Cry For Me*, *Argentina* even though I expect the money has come in handy.

Rice is a kingpin in this movement towards new and important scores. His employers, the Disney organisation, have just bought a dilapidated but gorgeous 1903 art nouveau theatre, the New Amsterdam, back in good old New York on 42nd Street slap bang in the middle of the Broadway theatre district. As part of a bid to clean up Times Square and reclaim it from the drug dealers and layabouts, the deal was cut with New York State and City government organisations as well as with the 42nd Street Development project. With a pot being stirred by politicians, civil servants, unions and property developers as well as the other theatre owners such as the Schuberts, the Nederlanders and Jujamcyn, it's a miracle they got it together at all.

But they did and it is, as you can imagine, a thoroughly welcome step from the point of view of the beleaguered theatrical community. Not only will it, as *Variety* points out, "bring one of the world's best known and most trusted brand names to the Broadway production community", it will also return to Broadway the

best of the musical theatre professionals who have strayed West Coastwards while offering live theatre from the old Ziegfeld house for the first time since 1937.

Disney is already committed to a live musical version of Beauty and the Beast, although, since it is now playing in Houston prior to New York (see what I mean about out of town tryouts?), the New Amsterdam won't be ready in time to receive it. Michael Eisner and Jeffrey Katzenberg who run Disney are planning to establish this beachhead on Broadway and to use their new East Coast prize (once the grime of fifty years has been scraped off at a cost of twenty-nine million dollars) both for live adaptations of Disney animated feature films and for original productions developed for the stage. Whoopee!

In the meantime, they are previewing their new cartoon feature, *The Lion King* and, by the time that is ready for theatrical production, it will fit very nicely back on Broadway. Now I don't want to seem ungrateful, but could we please have the same attention paid to some original shows with great scores that have real people in them rather than fish and beasties and lions?

## exhibitions

by Reginald E. Willson

The Spanish Arts Festival is one of the most spectacular and challenging festivals yet seen in this country. In London during March, April and early May, it

celebrates the rich and diverse arts and culture of Spain at some thirty different venues.

The ambitious programme includes sixteen exhibitions, twenty-three concerts, and about forty theatre and dance performances staged by fine performing arts companies.

Organised by the Spanish Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the European Arts Foundation it is funded by the Ministry and other Spanish official sources, the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Banco Santander.

This month we report on exhibitions of the work of three great Spanish artists, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, and Francisco Zurbarán. In our April issues there will be a special feature on the Goya exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts for which *Theatreprint* 

readers are offered a generously reduced entrance fee.

Up-to-date information on Festival events is available from a 24-hour recorded service by telephoning 0891 888 780.

Tickets for most events can be booked by telephoning the

Festival Box Office on 071 396 4777. Entrance to some Festival events is free.

## exhibitions

by Reginald E. Willson

he Spanish Art Festival was opened in London by an ambitious exhibition of the work of one of Spain's greatest artists. Its hosts, the Tate Gallery, promoted it as 'The Exhibition of the Year' which is perhaps a bit cheeky considering all the other major art shows scheduled for 1994, but the claim has much justification because *Picasso: Sculptor and Painter* is outstanding. The collection it presents is fascinating and unique, and its challenge to the conventional view that Picasso's sculpture is secondary to his painting gives it especial importance.

Since 1966 when he was persuaded to include a large number of hitherto unseen sculptures in his great retrospective exhibition held in Paris in that year there has been increasing interest in the sculptural side of his oeuvre, and an influential body of art historians now believe that Picasso's fame as the most innovative painter of the century has overshadowed his superb ability as a sculptor.

In his lifetime Picasso revolutionised the whole art form itself in terms of technique and subject matter. Many of the most radical forms of modern sculpture can be traced back to him. In his Cubist constructions of 1912-14 he introduced an entirely new method of making sculptures by assembling disparate materials such as cardboard,

paper, and plaster in a single work producing a kind of three-dimensional collage. The effects of such innovations have been far reaching.

The exhibition makes its challenge by firmly placing sculpture as the creative centre of Picasso's achievement and demonstrates the relationship with his paintings and drawings by grouping together key works that have close thematic and formal links. There are some 200 other works in the exhibition, paintings, sculptures, drawings and ceramics, many of which are on loan from Picasso's family, as well as from museums all over the world. Alongside famous masterpieces from the Museé Picasso, the Museé National d'Art Moderne in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, there are many little known works lent by private collectors.

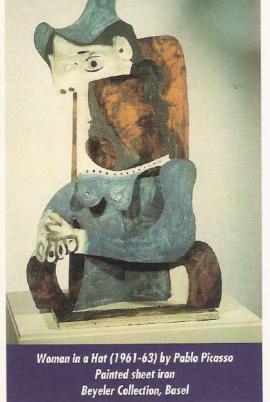
Particular emphasis is placed on the key works of the Rose and Cubist periods, the wire, iron and plaster creations of the 1920's and 1930's which are shown together with the paintings associated with them, the ready-made objects such as cycle seats and handlebars which Picasso often incorporated in his sculptures and the sheet metal works of the 1950's and 1960's. Many of these were made by Lionel

Preiger, the owner of a metal working factory in Vallauris in the south of France. Picasso met him in 1950 and a great collaboration began with Picasso sending Preiger a stream of cardboard and paper models to be made up in sheet metal for Picasso to paint.

Full of wit and inventiveness the significance of these painted sculptures lies in the way they play on the relationship between painting and sculpture and they express most forcibly Picasso's commitment to exploring the common ground between the two media. Picasso: Sculptor and Painter is on view at the Tate Gallery until 8 May 1994.

Admission is £5.00 with concessions at £3.00. The

fully illustrated catalogue costs £19.95.



The exhibition was organised by Dr John Golding, painter and art historian, and Elizabeth Cowling of Edinburgh University. It is sponsored by Ernst & Young, business and financial advisers. They are the second largest professional service in the world and their clients include many of the major companies in Britain, the USA and the Far East.