

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Call Me Sehba

Sehba Sarwar · Wednesday, April 19th, 2023

### “Call Me Sehba”

(an excerpt from a work-in-progress)

“Tell me the meaning of my name,” my siblings, cousins, and I clamor in Urdu—a language we reserve for elders and domestic help—when we meet Maliha Masi and learn that she is fluent in Arabic. We were left in the nanny’s care at my eldest aunt’s house in Karachi’s Guru Mandir neighborhood, a neighborhood name that pre-dates Partition when Karachi was home to a majority of Hindus. All of us know that our names have Arabic or Persian roots, and we have never met someone who has fluency in Arabic.

Maliha Masi flashes crooked teeth as she rocks back and forth on the swinging divan. Ten of us crowd around her, and one by one, a cousin presents a name to her as though offering a delicacy to the goddess of truth. She picks up the word in her palm and holds it like a silver ball. After deciphering, she tosses it back to its owner: “Your name—Farah? It means Joy of the Universe.”

A smile breaks out in my cousin’s face.

Maliha Masi reaches for another. “Ah, yours? Aisha. Your name is that of the prophet’s wife. Yes, that’s right. You like that?”

I muster up courage to proffer mine, arms outstretched, palms open: The name *Sehba*. Reveal its meaning and help me be proud, so at age ten, I can be glad that I forced my family to discard my nickname, Guriya—*doll*. Perfect for a newborn, my nickname was transformed to *cow* by my one-year-old sister who could not shape her mouth to utter Guriya. She said Guyya—*cow*. In that moment, the first ten years of my life are decided for me. Instead of being *doll*, I become *cow*. My real name, Sehba, is shelved for later; the nickname Guyya-cow sticks.

When I turn ten, I stop responding to anyone who refers to me as either cow or doll. “Call me Sehba,” I tell my family. “That is my real name.” Even then, I know Sehba is a difficult name to own.

Maliha Masi hears me and falls silent. She looks upward to utter a prayer in Arabic and crosses her index fingers from one cheek to the other in a no-no motion. “I cannot say your name, child,” she responds. She knows that my name means alcohol, forbidden to those who practice conservative Islam. She brushes imaginary crumbs off her white kurta and heaves her body off the swinging divan. Through the wet glimmer that curtains my eyes, I see her step around the opposite side of

the circle and retreat, her stray hair waving around her head like a spider's antennae.

"My name...it means...it means Wine, Wine of the Heavens!" I call out to her. The meaning sounds good. I repeat: "Yes, wine of the heavens."

Maliha Masi turns the corner and can no longer hear me. Around me, my cousins retie shoelaces. Evening has begun. They are ready to go outside to play running-catching or Simon Says.

Alone, I rock back and forth on the divan. When naming me, my father was aware that *Sehba* meant *wine*. He trusted that I would learn to wear my name, no matter what path I chose. Much later, I learn that "Sehba" is a nongendered name that has been adopted as a pseudonym by poets but is rarely given to babies at birth. Today, I claim the name and thank my father who passed away in 2009. He selected the name for its higher meaning, poetic intoxicant and inspiration. From the onset, he taught me how to resist.

(Featured image from [Pixabay](#))

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## Turning a Page: Choreographer to Co-Director, Jeffrey L. Page of *1776*

Ann Haskins · Sunday, April 16th, 2023

A revival of the Tony-award winning *1776* with an untraditional cast arrives on its national tour with performances at the Ahmanson Theater through May 7. The historical musical follows America's Founding Fathers during a sweltering Philadelphia summer when efforts led by Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin and John Adams massaged regional conflicts to crochet together compromises, some still toxic, to gain unanimous approval of the Declaration of Independence. Positive reviews from the national tour's stop in Chicago found the current casting even better than some of the Broadway cast.



The cast of *1776*. Photo by Joan Marcus

In a recent phone interview, the revival's choreographer and co-director Jeffrey L. Page took time from current directing and lecturing duties in Philadelphia to talk about his move from choreographer to co-director, the decision to cast a racially and ethnically diverse group of women, trans, and nonbinary actors as those Founding Fathers, as well as how the events that severed the 13 colonies' ties with England started a nation, left a lot of unfinished business that the country has yet to fully grapple with.



Jeffrey L. Page

Originally hired as associate director, a position that fine tunes but doesn't participate in the creative decision making, Page's wide-ranging background led to more creative responsibilities. His theatrical credentials as a dancer include the original Broadway cast of *Fela*, as a choreographer include the Broadway musical *Violet* with Sutton Foster, and as director include the musical *Memphis* in Japan. Page also has his foot firmly in the music world working with Beyoncé, Mariah Carey, and Jazmine Sullivan. The director Diane Paulus soon added choreographer to Page's duties, then his creative contributions led Paulus to ask Page to step up as a co-director. He agreed. They set to work in what Page described as a blend of cultural perspectives.

"With me as a Black man and Diane as a woman of Japanese descent, we had different views but found we worked in harmonious way," Page said.





Diane Paulus and Jeffrey L. Page, co-directors of *1776*. Photo courtesy of the artists

Both directors brought fresh eyes to the fifty year old show.

When she was asked to consider directing a new production of *1776*, she was unfamiliar with the musical, but curious, as she explained in a 2022 interview with the *The Observer*:

“I had done a revival of *Hair* on Broadway and knew that *1776* won over *Hair* for the 1969 Tony award for best musical. When I read *1776*, I read it with the knowledge that the producers were willing to embrace non-traditional casting. I was thinking about that approach, and I was knocked out of my chair with how relevant the words were, how powerful this subject matter was. Immediately, I felt that this should be revived.”



Liz Mikel as Benjamin Franklin, Nancy Anderson as Thomas Jefferson and Gisela Adisa as John Adams in *1776*. Photo by Joan Marcus

Page admits he also had no clue about *1776* when asked to join the project. Page had not been born when the original *1776* was on Broadway in 1969. The show has had few revivals and Page had not encountered the 1972 film version. As he studied the musical and the underlying history, he agreed with Paulus' insights about the musical's powerful and current relevance. First as choreographer and then as co-director, Page's efforts were aimed at developing that contemporary perspective.

"The founding of America was very different for Black people than the story the musical told. Once I started researching the musical and the events, I was interested in bringing my perspective to the table. The casting carries a different kind of commentary on where we came from as a country. Diane had already settled on the untraditional casting and we were both committed to finding the biggest and most fearless imagining of *1776*," Page recalled. "Diane set the direction we took. I brought the why and the how to make clear the framing of the story with this particular cast. Representation is important. If we don't understand how we fit into society, we don't understand or have a positive inclination to engage with society."

In the 1972 film, the final scene is the assembled white men of privilege signing the Declaration of Independence, the final pose dissolving into the iconic painting by John Trumbull.



The signing of the Declaration of Independence. Painting by John Trumbull

Page was struck by those who were missing from the painting. “The painting feeds into a persistent narrative in billboards, artwork, and commercials that carry the message that this is America beautiful and intelligent, and if you don’t look like this then you are not in America, not really part of America.”

From Page’s perspective the untraditional gender casting with diverse races and ethnicities follows in the footsteps of musical *Hamilton*. “The casting underscores how slavery was at least on the table, but also how women and their rights were not even in the room. The casting also is a reminder how many in America don’t look like the people in the painting.”

Page admits the untraditional cast asks an audience to join the cast of 27 women, trans, and non-binary actors of diverse race and ethnicity on a journey that evokes Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and those other Founding Fathers before they became statues on pedestals. Page eases the audience’s first steps on that journey with his choreographed opening where the cast literally step into the shoes of the Founding Fathers.

Before the orchestra plays the first note, Page uses movement to acclimate the 21st century audience both to the world of 1776 and the untraditional casting. The actors in contemporary street clothes stroll onstage in recognizably contemporary movements. Then the actors begin to pick up and don late 18<sup>th</sup> century shoes, wigs, breeches, and other clothing. The choreographed transition is gradual as the actors begin to move in the more formal manner of the period until the moment when the cast is what the choreographer describes as “embodying” their character as well as their costumes. In front of the audience, the actors become the movers and shakers of the 13 colonies at the 2nd Continental Congress and the audience meets them before they are founding fathers of anything except extended arguments and in agreement on few things beyond John Adams’ incessant calls for a Declaration of Independence are annoying and General George Washington is whining in his dispatches pleading for military arms and supplies.





The National Tour Cast of *1776*. Photo by Joan Marcus

Page describes his goal from that choreographed start to the finish of the show, was to have the show's narrative carried inside of the actors' bodies.

"As a choreographer and a black man, my legacy lives in my body in the way I walk, talk, move, dance. In the opening I was thinking about Bertoldt Brecht's concept of 'gestus' that combined the concepts of gesture and social meaning. In order to build a character, the first thing is to embody the character. Gesture and choreography have a blurred line meaning if I can embody, I can move, speak and act as the character," Page explained.



Liz Mikel as Benjamin Franklin in *1776*. Photo by Joan Marcus



Allowing the audience to see how the actors' posture and body movement evolves as they embody the character during the opening, starts to build a narrative that allows the inside to become legible in the body in moments that are not traditionally choreographed but seamless woven into the spoken text and the musical language.

After the Broadway opening in 2022, reviewers praised the choreographed opening but discussion of the casting and show's emphasis on the compromise on slavery dominated reviews. Page acknowledges that some reviewers were surprised to realize that the 1969 musical had slavery in center of the play.



Gisela Adisa as John Adams, Nancy Anderson as Thomas Jefferson, and Liz Mikel as Benjamin Franklin in *1776*. Photo by Joan Marcus

“When it opened in 1969 during the Vietnam War, the show was reviewed as a metaphor for that war and to ignite us to be better human beings,” Page explained. “Reviews at that time rarely mentioned that in resolving the economic, social and political conflicts, the final compromise on slavery, the lynchpin that finally garnered unanimous approval of the Declaration of Independence, also embedded slavery as a foundational institution of this country. These were men trying to make a new world, fallible and with all the stuff that makes them human, but as a country we are still living with the consequences.”

Originally scheduled for a mid-2020 opening, the show was among the many put on hold during the Covid-19 shutdowns. Events during the two year pandemic delay including the death of George Floyd, became part of the directors' thinking about the revival.

We have to reckon with the things that have been done or we'll never move forward,” Page concluded.

## A Woman's Sexuality

Briana Benitez-Mejia · Friday, April 14th, 2023

A woman's sexuality has been debated over for many generations, whether it be argued about in one's culture or in political affairs. A woman's autonomy eventually becomes a topic that is constantly argued over, creating many mishaps and traumatic events for women. The saying that a woman should save herself for marriage becomes a huge concept that many cultures partake in. I believe that a woman should have a right to her own body and have a say in political affairs that involve a woman's autonomy. However, this fact is not always plausible as many people force their way into having a say in a women's sexuality. A woman should have a healthy relationship with her body, to cherish it the way she wishes whether it be to stay pure or not. A woman should not be restricted with her body unless she fully believes in the idea of staying pure for marriage. I believe that a woman who has had sexual relations is not any less pure than a woman who hasn't had any sexual relations.

Purity is not even real—it's a concept that was formed by a person who wanted to restrict women with their bodies and frighten them about the consequences after she participates in these sexual actions. However, in my culture, which stems from El Salvador and Christianity, there are limits on a woman's body and how pure a woman should be. A body which should be praised and cherished for its beautiful qualities is instead belittled for its lack of purity and innocence.

The family I grew up with was the start of my toxic relationship with my body, whether they were ignorant to it or not. The body that should be cherished and praised for its beautiful qualities was ridiculed for the sake of the church. This can be portrayed by the church, in which my family members founded, that I use to go to when I was younger. This church partook in the concept that women should stay pure until marriage; however, it was taken to extreme levels, causing women to lose their independence and freedom. For instance, I remember when my mother was judged and scolded the first time she dyed her hair; this caused my mother to gradually follow the ways of the church, not wanting to be judged or scolded anymore.

This event was the beginning of her loss of independence and freedom within the church. This belief that the church expects women to follow can be seen as normal religious beliefs on the outside, but once someone takes a closer look, the corruptness within the church can be seen. The trust the people have in the church allows them to twist the words of God within the Bible, stating that women cannot do this or that because the Bible said so. The church requires women to limit themselves, from not being able to dye one's hair, to having to cover their bodies to drive off men. If any woman was to undergo these actions, she would be judged for the rest of her time there. They find this custom to be binding. For instance, if a woman were to have sexual relations before marriage, she will be seen as the product of sin and will always be seen as that for the rest of her time there. This tendency to see women as the product of sin stems from the belief that all women are traced back to Eve when she ate the fruit. This is another misuse of my church using the Bible to lessen a woman's freedom. This perspective has caused many women within my family to leave and escape the church to seek freedom and independence elsewhere. It has also emphasized how

corrupt the church is within my family.

The fact that the church can change what the Bible is portraying is unbelievable and heartbreaking. The cultural customs and traditions that are written in the Bible are manipulated for the church's benefit. The people who believe God and his words learn the wrong information because the church takes advantage of them, making them believe that this is what God wants. This illustrates why women suffer and must deal with their actions within the church I used to go to.

The bodies my sisters and I grew up in, the bodies we took care of, became the main problems within our daily lives.

In the early years of each our lives, our parents were influenced by the ideals of the corrupted church. There were days and nights where we hated our bodies and despised the fact that we were women and had to go through this problem. This created a toxic relationship with my body as I perceived it as something that is dreadful and disgusting. I later wished that I were born into a better world where I can be free and be able to be comfortable in my own skin.

However, with time, my parents were able to learn the words within the Bible and were able to differentiate the rights and wrongs within the church. Their new perspectives allowed my sisters and I to be more comfortable with our bodies and be glad that we were women. Their new opinions about the cultural aspect of waiting for marriage were changed as they removed themselves from the church. They believed that waiting to have sexual relations before marriage is still the best thing a woman should do. However, they saw this in an entirely different light.



International Women's Day in El Salvador.

My mother once said, "I want you and your sisters to give yourselves to someone who you will spend the rest of your life with. For both you and your partner, but also for God, so he can see how happy you are." My mother's words portray how virginity is seen as a precious gift, and how it must be protected. When my parents further explained this custom in a religious view, they illustrated how waiting is a moral thought process with God, that once you have sexual relations, you and that person become one. But if you decide to be with another man, it creates difficult obstacle you must overcome, creating a poor image of yourself to both your partner and God.

Nonetheless, within the article "Imperial Detritus and the Project of Modernity: Sexuality, Honor, and Power in the Bedroom and the courtroom in El Salvador, 1910-1960," written by Aldo V. Garcia-Guevara, the cultural aspects of women's sexuality are heightened and stricter. This



strictness combined with the government and the Church caused El Salvador to become one of the most rigorous places for women. Within El Salvador, one's honor and status were the most cherished aspects for Salvadoran families as it displayed their wealth. This is illustrated when the article comments on how "crimes of honor... have much greater standing in the courts" than a woman who was sexually abused (Garcia-Guevara 481). The cruelty behind this fact is unbelievable and it establishes the little amount of power a woman has and the little control she has over her own body. The amount of power the Church had over the government is why women were stuck and did not have any freedom or independence. The article presents the tragedies that women went through and discusses the past and how the Church has affected the government in past years. This is seen within the period 1910-1960, because men and women interacted to eventually get married. For instance, if a woman had sexual relations with a man who she was not married to, she could be prosecuted, and the man would be sent to jail for deflowering the woman. In El Salvador, the Catholic Church "controlled female production and reproduction," and they did this by restricting women with their bodies and enforcing the belief that women need to defend their honor, stay pure and stay a virgin (Garcia-Guevara 471).

This idea that women need to save themselves to honor themselves and their families creates in a woman a horrible image of her own body, adding to the hardships she already has with the government and Church. In addition, within El Salvador, many court cases surfaced because families in the country did not want to lose their social standing or honor. This led to women being prosecuted since they were always to blame for any sexual relations. Within the article, Garcia-Guevara states how a woman under the age of twelve who was raped would be saved and protected; however, when it comes to a woman over the age of thirteen, they were prosecuted and forced to marry the rapist (Garcia-Guevara 483).

The cultural belief that a woman must stay pure for marriage is something that is taken into great consideration, whether it be strictly addressed or not. This allows little girls to either be happy to wait until marriage or be disgusted and terrified of their own bodies. The Church's seems as if they are trying to control women rather than them showcasing God's true words and what He truly meant by them. Women should be comfortable with their own bodies and not be afraid of the consequences and trauma their bodies could give them. Girls should not be brought up thinking that their bodies are a disgrace, but something that should be cherished whichever way they choose. The cultural aspect behind a woman saving herself for marriage should not be as strict as it is, but rather something a woman could be proud of.

\*

### Work Cited

Garcia-Guevara, Aldo V. "Imperial Detritus and the Project of Modernity: Sexuality, Honor, and Power in the Bedroom and the Courtroom in El Salvador, 1910–1960." *Journal of World History*, vol. 28, no. 3/4, 2017, pp. 469–487. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26537619>.

(Featured ad images from *UN Women*)

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# Exam Coming Up? Here's How Doctors Evaluate Your Prostate

Our Friends · Friday, April 14th, 2023

The prostate gland plays a vital role in reproduction and is a walnut-sized organ that sits beneath the bladder. The urethra, the tube that ushers urine from the bladder out of the penis, also communicates with the prostate. In addition, the prostate gland has an opening to two seminal vesicles that sit atop the prostate.

This gland produces seminal fluid, the liquid part of ejaculation. Sperm created in the testis travels up the vas deferens and collects in the seminal vesicles. A complex nervous network stimulates the prostate; ultimately, the prostate contracts. After this happens, sperm enters the prostate, mixes with prosthetic fluid, and is forced out of the urethra during orgasm.

Located low in the male torso, the prostate gland is near the rectum. As a result, it is about a finger's length distance from the anus, making it readily available for a variety of noninvasive examination techniques.

## Digital Rectal Examination (DRE)

Men have dreaded the digital rectal exam for decades. Nevertheless, it has been part of the male routine physical examination since the early 20th century. Clinicians routinely use this procedure to assess various organ functions and conditions, not just the prostate.

### The Procedure

The patient should supply a urine sample for analysis before the examination. Prostate manipulation can express substances and bacteria into the urine contaminating the urine analysis (UA).

The clinician washes their hands and puts on an unsterile glove. The index finger is lubricated, usually with a jelly-like substance. After visually inspecting the perianal area, they gently and slowly insert the lubricated finger into the rectum.

Along the way to reaching the prostate, the clinician feels the walls of the rectum for irregularities. Once reaching the prostate, they will assess its size, symmetry, and tenderness. The clinician can only reach the bottom back side of the gland; however, it gives some information about the gland as a whole.

If the patient bears down when the examining finger is being inserted, like having a bowel movement, this action is called Valsalva. In that case, the anus opens more, and the examination may be less uncomfortable. Upon exiting, the examiner collects a small amount of stool on the glove for testing occult blood. He then performs a Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT), commonly known as a guaiac smear or Hemoccult test.

### The Problem With DRE

Many studies suggest that DRE has not demonstrated a significant increase in prostate cancer detection. In addition, rigorous examination of an infected prostate can lead to systemic

complications. However, while the test may be uncomfortable, it is not painful unless inflamed, infected, or otherwise diseased tissues along the way are sore, hemorrhoids, for example.

Consequently, due to the DRE's ineffective ability to detect cancer, it is not recommended as a cancer screening tool in men with less than a ten-year life expectancy. This recommendation is because, in older men, prostate cancer seems to grow much slower than when young men develop prostate cancer. However, that does not mean that a medical professional should not perform a DRE. There are all of the other things it checks for.

## Prostate Specific Antigen Test (PSA)

A PSA is a simple blood test usually performed at the same time as a yearly blood work screening. The PSA is a molecule produced by the lining of the prostate gland that elevates when cancer is present. The increased metabolic rate of growing malignancy stimulates PSA excretion.

The PSA is routinely a part of the two-part screening for prostate cancer in men along with the DRE. There are specific guidelines as to when routine PSAs should begin by age and risk.

- Men at higher risk (of African descent or family history of prostate cancer) should begin routine PSA screening at age 45.
- Men with “average risk” start at age 50.
- Men at “low risk” and a PSA less than 2 ng/ml at age 40 can be tested every two years.
- Men with a PSA of less than 2 ng/ml at age 60 can be tested every two years.

The PSA is not 100% effective in diagnosing prostate cancer, as several conditions can also be responsible for elevating the PSE, such as Prostatitis (infection) and certain other cancers. Seventy-five percent of men with an elevated PSA will not have prostate cancer. Conversely, one in seven men with prostate cancer will have a normal PSA.

## Ultrasound of the Prostate

An ultrasound of the prostate is also called a transrectal ultrasound. Ultrasound is a fascinating imaging technique using the frequency of a sound wave. Sound waves penetrate tissue, the rate at which a computer records. The sound waves move more slowly through denser tissue.

The technician inserts a small probe about the size of the finger in the DRE. This probe emits sound waves close to the prostate gland. The recorded images can show the size of the prostate gland and irregularities on the surface and within the gland. Ultrasound can also see blood vessels. A growing malignancy requires a good blood supply.

## Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)

MRI of the prostate is performed for various reasons when indicated by less invasive tests. MRI is used to diagnose prostate cancer and check for cancer spread. MRI also shows congenital issues, prostatitis, and benign enlarged hypertrophy (BPH).

Instead of a finger-sized rigid probe, some facilities use an endorectal coil. It is a thin wire covered with a balloon made of latex. Patients are typically screened for latex allergy beforehand.



## An Ounce of Prevention or a Pound of Cure

The prostate gland is an essential organ in men. It can be a source of great joy in its physiologic function in reproduction or cause pain and suffering from infection or cancer. And it can simply enlarge and cause problems with urinating.

Routine evaluation of the prostate gland can maximize outcomes by early detection. But, first, seek medical counsel for any changes you may notice. [Prostate 911](#) is a natural supplement that is also able to provide benefits to this gland. Then, when the exam comes up, you already know exactly how doctors will evaluate your prostate.

*Photo by EVG Kowaliewska: <https://www.pexels.com>*

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## Rafaella Daumas: Two Poems

Rafaella Daumas · Thursday, April 13th, 2023

### Yes, I Am Latina. And No, I Am Not Mexican

After Patricia Smith's "Skinhead"

They call me beaner, and I'm not Mexican.  
 Those screaming, broken letters,  
 Thrown at me in anger,  
 And I didn't even know what it meant.  
 So I laughed it off.  
 I look at my skin and I'm not brown,  
 I'm not caramel, or toffee, or *dulce de leche*.  
 I am a pale, pale white.  
 My veins, blue and green and purple,  
 Visible spiderwebs up my arms.  
 Am I Latina enough?

The face that moves in my mirror is pale and pink from the cold,  
 Button-nosed, freckled, green-brown eyes and thin lips.  
 I speak and no accent comes out.  
 "Notifications" and "cookies" give me away.  
 And then the looks come forth.  
 The fetishizing and the disgust and the curiosity.  
 Like I'm a white-passing zoo animal.  
 And yes, I speak Spanish.  
 And yes, I am Latina.

And no, I am not Mexican.

I sit here and I watch the news.  
 “Mexicans are stealing our jobs.”  
 “Illegals jump the wall and  
 Steal our women and our money.”  
 I sit here and the jokes begin.  
 “Oh, right! You’re an illegal!”  
 “I’ll get you deported. Ha, ha.”  
 I sit here and I laugh into the night.  
 I was born Latina enough.

It’s easy now to pretend I don’t care,  
 To hide my accent and blend,  
 To weave in and out of the stereotypes,  
 The images that are thrown at me,  
 Accusing me of not fitting into them,  
 Celebrating when I do.  
 As if I was made entirely for their entertainment.

I look in the mirror and see me  
 Crying over another job saying “NO,”  
 Screaming at my visa,  
 Ripping up the paperwork.  
 And I know I shouldn’t,  
 But I raise the finger anyways,  
 Because this should not be so goddamned hard.  
 And I am not another curiosity to be stared at.  
 And I am not just another stereotype.  
 And yes, I speak Spanish.  
 And yes, I am Latina.

And yes, I am goddamned fuckin’ beautiful:

The hoops, the curves, the accent, the crazy.

I was born Latina enough,

And I am NOT Mexican.

\*

## **& even women teach their sons to say “your body, my choice”**

After Danez Smith’s “& even the black guy’s profile reads ‘sorry, no black guys’”

imagine a rose, upon seeing a garden  
 full of roses, cuts others’ stems in  
 self-righteousness, prays some gardener will choose  
 them instead. imagine

a terrified pregnant girl, fear as if death  
 Himself was looming closer with the broken  
 coat hanger. she looks in the mirror and sees  
 that broken pregnant girl fading into her shadows.  
 she turns from the memory with a painted smile,  
 looking down at her little boy,  
 promising him the world  
 and neglecting hers.

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## A-Muse-Ment

Ann Haskins · Thursday, April 13th, 2023

A muse launches a festival in Lincoln Heights, contemporary dance in the Arts District and Santa Monica, new ballet in El Sereno, an Arab/Israeli confrontation in West LA, visitors from Belgium in Santa Monica, and Irish dance tours the desert, a peek at next week, plus more SoCal dance this week (April 14 to 20).

### *Live This Week*

#### The Bella the ball

The opening weekend of this year's three week **Los Angeles Dance Festival 2023** is dedicated to women leaders in LA dance, with a particular spotlight on Bella Lewitzky. Muse and lead dancer for the modern dance pioneer Lester Horton, Lewitzky went on to claim her own laurels as choreographer, teacher and artistic director of her eponymous company where she mentored and launched generations of dancers and dancemakers. The biographical documentary by Bridget Murnane screens Saturday with workshops by former company dancers offered throughout the weekend. Full opening week line up and the program for Weeks 2 and 3 at the website. Brockus Project Studios, 618 B Moulton Ave., Lincoln Heights; Sat.-Sun., April 15-16, 8 pm, Fri.-Sun., April 21-23, 8 pm, and Fri.-Sat., April 28-29, 8 pm, Sun., April 30, 6:30 pm, \$15. [Los Angeles Dance Festival](#).





Bella Lewitzky. Photo courtesy of the documentary film “Bella”

## How green is his ballet?

Led by choreographer Chasen Greenwood, **The Realm Company** brings its brand of contemporary ballet to the stage in *Synergetic*. Preview clips at the company website [The Realm Company](#) Performance at Stomping Ground, 5453 Alhambra Ave., El Sereno; Sat., April 15, 6 pm, \$50-\$200 [Red Riot Entertainment](#).



The Realm Company. Photo courtesy of the artists

## Encore!

Continuing its 20th season, **Backhausdance** reprises the program from its recent, highly praised Long Beach concert with works by choreographers Amanda Kay White, Ching Ching Wong, Tommie-Waheed Evans, and artistic director Jennifer Backhaus. L.A. Dance Project Studios, 2245 E. Washington Blvd., Arts District; Sat. April 15, 8 pm, \$30, \$20 students [Backhausdance](#).



Backhausdance. Photo by Shawna Sarnowski

## If it's Sunday, is it Belgium?

Two Brussels-based companies, **Chaliwaté Company** & **Focus Company** arrive on their first US tour, bringing *Dimanche (Sunday)*, a collaborative effort focused on the neglected need for climate change. BroadStage, 1310 11th St., Santa Monica; Thurs.-Sat., April 13-15, 7:30 pm, Sat.-Sun., April 15-16, 2 pm., \$40-\$60. [BroadStage](#).





Chaliwaté Company & Focus Company. Photo courtesy of the artists

## Dancing o' the Green

With its current generation of high-energy, high-stepping dancers, the award-winning Irish dance and music spectacle **Riverdance** marks its 25th anniversary with a celebratory tour that includes SoCal stops. McCallum Theatre, 7300 Fred Waring Dr. Pam Desert; Fri., April 14, 8 pm, Sat., April 15, 2 & 8 pm, Sun., April 16, 2 & 7:30 pm, \$55-\$125. [McCallum Theatre](#) Also at Dolby Theatre, Hollywood & Highland, 6801 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood. Wed.-Fri., April 19-21, 8 pm, Sat. April 22, 2 & 8pm, Sun., April 23, 1 & 6 pm, \$39-\$149. [Dolby Theatre](#).



Riverdance. Photo courtesy of the artists

## Can they just get along?

Combine dance with theater and pair an Israeli choreographer with an Arab dancer. It's the formula



for the provocatively titled *We Love Arabs*. The work from Israeli dancer/choreographer Hillel Kogan and Arab dancer Mourad Bouayad promises both light-hearted and serious considerations of peace and power struggles when an Israeli choreographer is required to create a duet with an Arab dancer. Théâtre Raymond Kabbaz, 10361 W. Pico Blvd., West LA; Thurs., April 20, 8 pm, \$30-\$40. [Théâtre Raymond Kabbaz](#).



Hillel Kogan and Mourad Bouayad. Photo by Gadi Dagon

### **What's your talent?**

Under the banner *Talent Show*, Sharon Lockhart and Ariel Osterweis have gathered CalArts faculty, professional alumni, and students performing short acts covering the spectrum from dance to song to music. REDCAT, Disney Hall, 631 W. 2nd, downtown; Fri., April 14, 8:30 pm, \$12, \$10 students. [REDCAT](#).



Ariel Osterweis. Photo courtesy of the artist

## Nobody puts granny in the corner

The latest from the contemporary ensemble **Donna Sternberg & Dancers** emerged from a series of workshops with seniors at Emeritus College. In *Still Alive*, the dancers and seniors explore elements of movement, drawing, writing, and other expressive forms to combat the marginalization of older adults. Emeritus College, 1227 2nd St, Santa Monica; Tues., April 18, 2 pm, free w/reservation at [Donna Sternberg & Dancers](#).



Donna Sternberg & Dancers. Photo courtesy of the artists

## Trying things out

The latest installment of the quarterly *Open Mic* series presented by **MashUp Contemporary Dance Company** offers eight to ten brief works or excerpts of new choreography. The event also offers a chance to chat with the creators. MASHuP Studios, 2934 Gilroy St., Frogtown; Sat., April 15, 7 pm, free. [Eventbrite](#).

## A Peek at Next Week

**Los Angeles Dance Festival 2023 Week 2** at Brockus Project Studios, 618 B Moulton Ave., Lincoln Heights; Fri.-Sun., April 21-23, 8 pm, and Fri.-Sat., April 28-29, 8 pm, Sun., April 30, 6:30 pm, \$15. [Los Angeles Dance Festival](#).

**American Contemporary Ballet** — *Homecoming* at ACB Studios, Two California Plaza, 350 S. Grand Ave., 28th Flr., downtown; Fri.-Sat., April 21-22, Thurs.-Sat., April 27-29, Sat.-Sun, May 4-5, 8 pm, \$70-\$110. [American Contemporary Ballet](#).

**Masters in Dance** — *Balinese Movement* with Emiko Saraswati Susilo. Santa Monica College, 1900 Pico Blvd., CPC 304/308, Santa Monica; Wed., April 26, 10:15 am, free (limited seating,

first come). [SMC](#).

## Of Note

**Swing that wheelchair** — Continuing its efforts to expand opportunities for disabled dancers, Marisa Hamamoto and her **Infinite Flow Dance** offer a free wheelchair swing dance workshop on Sat., April 22 from 12:15 to 3:15 pm at Atomic Ballroom, 17961 Sky Park Circle, Irvine. Info at [Infinite Flow Dance](#).

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## Hunter Hodkinson: “Ode To Foreskin”

Hunter Hodkinson · Monday, April 10th, 2023

### Ode To Foreskin

Where pus and poems hemorrhage  
is a day old baby

with ten fingers and toes  
nearly perfect,

little jaundice legs sprawled  
like a wishbone

snapped.

So much crying  
so much confusion

as my discarded foreskin floats in a metal tray  
like a tangerine peel in a rain puddle.

My dog growing up still had her dew claws.  
Mom said it's because she came from a

neglectful home.

I called them her Velociraptor claws,  
dangling, useless things that only

occasionally got caught on quilts  
and thread blankets.

Nothing about them reminded me of neglect.



*They're supposed to be snipped when  
they're babies she tells me*

*and they didn't crop her ears.*

What about docking cropping  
and snipping  
reminds us of care?

They cut the arms off a tree on my block.  
Only an occasional leaf fell from those branches.

It was so obedient.

I only peed on the doctors because  
it was my first second in the world...

I'm sorry... I'm sorry.

\*\*\*

(A new series featuring works from Friday Night Open poets at [Brooklyn Poets](#))

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## 7 Fun Things to Do On Your Family Vacation in Pigeon Forge

Our Friends · Monday, April 10th, 2023

Families mostly love Pigeon Forge. Its stunning landscape and adrenaline-fueled activities can keep all types of travelers happy. Whether you want to spend time in your cabin's hot tub, stroll through the Smoky Mountains, or race go-karts down a twisting track, there'll never be a dull moment here.

But when traveling with your family, you must demonstrate your best vacation planning skills to keep everyone happy. Trust us; grumpy faces suck the relaxation out of a getaway. To make your trip one to remember, here are the top fun things you should do in Pigeon Forge:

### 1. Visit the Titanic Museum

We all have a few unanswered questions about the ill-fated ship. So satisfy your curiosity at the Titanic Museum. Will you believe it if we tell you there are more than 400 artifacts? It's a fascinating place where you can explore galleries, learn more about the history of the Titanic, and even touch an iceberg. It's an attraction that everyone in the family will enjoy. If you have toddlers aged three and above, don't worry. They are welcome too.

## 2. Enjoy a Dinner Show

When you put together a hearty feast and an entertaining show, you get a night of laughter and great family fun. Pigeon Forge's [Hatfield and McCoy Feud Show](#) is just the right place for it. The feud between the two families is legendary – and you can experience it all in real life!

The show has a mix of singing, dancing, and side-splitting comedy. Also, the billycopter was added to the show to introduce some high-flying fun!

To top it all off, the food is served family style and it is all-you-can-eat. You will get to enjoy tasty dishes like fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and hot homemade bread. The show has a reputation for bringing families together – so it gets jam-packed. If you don't book your tickets in advance, you might miss out on this fantastic experience.

## 3. Take a Ride on the Great Smoky Mountain Wheel

How do you feel about a bit of romance in the air? Take a ride on the [Great Smoky Mountain Wheel](#). Standing 200 feet tall, this Ferris wheel offers some of the most breathtaking views of Pigeon Forge. It's the perfect way to end a day of adventure and fun.

Couples can enjoy quality time in one of the two private gondolas or ride it with family and friends. The views are breathtaking, especially at night when the city lights up.

If you're worried about the chilly temperatures, don't. The wheel is climate-controlled and extremely comfortable for everyone.

If you want to make the most of your ride, book it for sunset. You will want the time to slow down.

## 4. Experience Dollywood

You can't leave this quaint mountain town unless you've screamed your heart out at Dollywood, the most popular theme park in Pigeon Forge. It has everything.

Get ready for your heart to beat like never before on the Lightning Rod. It is the world's fastest wooden roller coaster, with a top speed of 73mph! If that isn't enough, buckle up and get set for more hair-raising excitement at Wild Eagle, Tennessee Tornado, and Daredevil Falls.

But Dollywood isn't all about rides; the theme park also offers some amazing eateries to pick from! From the classic and beloved Dippin' Dots to Aunt Granny's Restaurant, your taste buds will surely thank you.

If you plan your trip right, you can also enjoy one (or two) of the many [events and festivals](#) here.

## 5. Spend Some Time on The Island

If you're looking for a one-stop spot for entertainment, The Island in Pigeon Forge is the place. From shopping to dining and splendid attractions, this is the perfect spot for a family outing. You

can stroll down its winding pathways while admiring the trees.

If you want an ethereal experience, don't miss the dazzling dancing fountain! This cutting-edge attraction features fourteen exquisitely choreographed musical sequences and 89 water jets, creating a show that is out of this world. You can take in its grandeur anytime between 10 am and 11:30 pm. So, plan accordingly.

Take your kids for a fun-filled time at The Arcade City. They can shoot some hoops and hop over to 7D Dark Ride Adventure for zombie thrills! Afterward, you can all take part in an Escape Game that includes Hollywood-level twists and turns.

## 6. Hollywood Wax Museum

Bring your celebrity-studded dreams to life at the Hollywood Wax Museum. You can get up close and personal with some of your favorite actors, sports stars, music legends, and more. The props are free to use. You only have to bring your best paparazzi poses.

Take your time to explore and take pictures at the various interactive sets, from a haunted house to an outer-space mission.

There are more interactive experiences at the museum too. Make sure you check out the Castle of Chaos. It is a 5D experience like no other! You can also take your little ones to Hannah's Maze of Mirrors and let them be a part of an exciting quest.

## Final Thoughts

Pigeon Forge is the perfect destination to spend your family vacation, as you will get a mix of fun, adventure, and entertainment. However, before your tickets and load your car, make sure you know the details about the weather and tourist inflow. You don't want to be surrounded by a sea of people. We also recommend making all your bookings in advance. No hassle is a "bearable hassle" on a family vacation.

*Photo by Ivan Samkov: <https://www.pexels.com>*

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## Florence Weinberger: Two Poems

Florence Weinberger · Sunday, April 9th, 2023

## Whole Grains and Hard, Harmonious Ways

My mother knew heat, she'd hold her palm above the pot  
to gauge the force and virtue of the flame. In her wrist,  
the heft of black pepper, the troth of flour and eggs.  
She knew marrow and garlic, hard harmonious ways  
of healing, some days with sugar, some with bitter herbs.  
And lying, that, too, buying a blouse, washing it  
before wearing it so my father would think it was used  
but he was rarely fooled,  
he knew when her stew lacked character; he knew her.

Now that I no longer cook the way she taught me,  
leaving out fat, adding whole grains, foods  
she never understood, like kabocha squash and artichokes,  
I still have left what is probably in my DNA; the smallest taste  
is enough to implicate my nerves and all my senses.  
She also taught me how to serve.  
Pleasing a man is not always what it's for. While I add to the mix  
I take the measure of time.  
What's mine was my mother's first. How do I spend these final years?

\*

## Bishop's Lull

*All things loved are pursued and never caught:*  
a line I sponged from Dean Young for its frisson of rue.

Made me think of cats at first,  
then grown children who slip away, or the biggest fish

or sorrow, a kind of generic grief spill  
sifted and culled until it pinned the lover I caught and kept so long

because I could not decide if my love was immortal  
or would wither over the coming summer.

So it wasn't missing kids that gave me pause.  
It was Bishop's lull, before she unhooked the fish

the fish imperiled by the heat in her hands  
remorse coursing through her

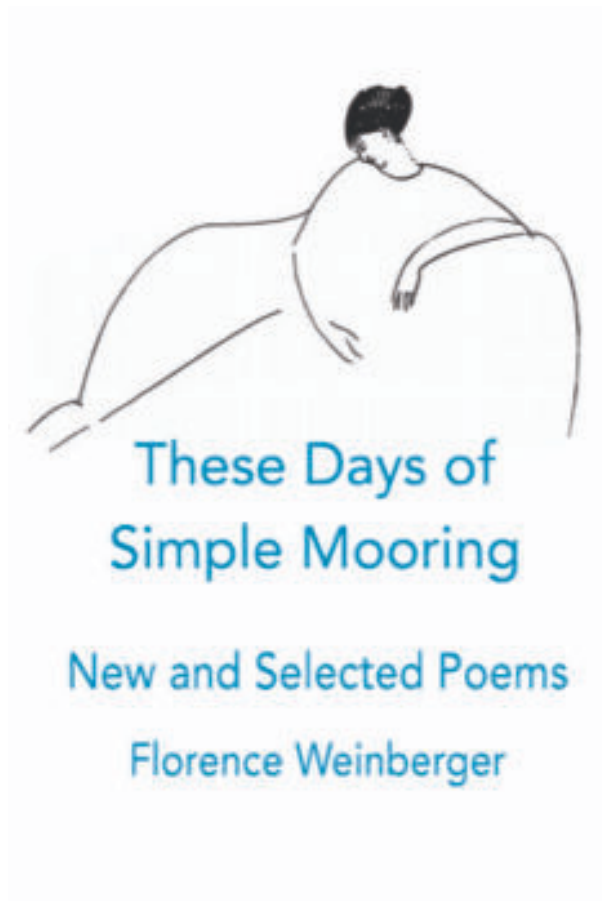
but sometimes the catch needs a longer pause, maybe  
decades, to unravel how much was love, how much was flak.

What I would have lost, had I let him go.

(Previously published in *SALT*)



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*These Days of Simple Mooring* by Florence Weinberger

**Purchase *These Days of Simple Mooring* by Florence Weinberger**

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## **Sweeney, *Cinderella*: Sondheim/Lloyd Webber Rematch**

David Sheward · Friday, April 7th, 2023

At the 1988 Tony Awards, the big battle was between shows composed by the two respective behemoths of the American and British musical theater: Stephen Sondheim's twist on fairy tales *Into the Woods* and Andrew Lloyd Webber's take on a horror classic *Phantom of the Opera*. Despite winning Best Book for James Lapine and Best Score for Sondheim, *Woods* lost the Best Musical prize to Lloyd Webber's more popular *Phantom* which is finally closing soon after a 35-year run. In an act of theatrical symmetry, Sondheim and Lloyd Webber are rematched with shows opening within days of each other. Only this time, Sondheim is the purveyor of ghoulish thrills with a revival of one of his greatest works, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* while Lloyd Webber is peddling updated folk tales with *Bad Cinderella*. This new *Sweeney* is probably the most perfect production of a Sondheim musical (well, maybe excluding the exquisite *Into the Woods* revival seen earlier this season) while *Bad Cinderella* is too aptly named.



Annaleigh Ashford and Josh Groban in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman

This *Sweeney* is truly frightening and funny while *Bad Cinderella* wants to be a campy hoot, but isn't even mildly amusing. Derived from a Victorian penny dreadful and stage melodrama about a murderous barber and a cannibalistic cook, *Sweeney* contains Sondheim's arguably finest score with rich, varied music and incredibly intricate lyrics.



Josh Groban, Annaleigh Ashford and the company of *Sweeney Todd*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman.

The 1979 production was the apex of the legendary songwriter's collaboration with super-director Harold Prince (who also staged *Phantom*). It was a gargantuan production, recreating the entire Industrial Revolution on the vast Gershwin Theater stage (then known as the Uris). This is the

fourth Broadway *Sweeney*, in addition to numerous operatic and concerts versions as well as an Off-Broadway immersive production with the entire small theater transformed into Mrs. Lovett's Pie Shop. While Thomas Kail's direction does not imitate Prince's, it does offer the same intense power and size. The staging is as fluid and seamless as the excellent job Kail did for *Hamilton*. Steven Hoggett's imaginative, frenetic choreography keeps the action moving in between the brilliant main scenes enacted by a dynamite ensemble including the most individualist chorus of any Broadway show now playing. Natasha Katz's noir-ish lighting makes Mimi Lein's spooky, drainage ditch of a set into a nightmare of murder and suspense.



Josh Groban and Annaleigh Ashford in *Sweeney Todd*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman

In the title role, Josh Groban, making only his second Broadway appearance after an admirable debut in *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812*, is much more than a pop heartthrob providing Broadway box-office bait. Bearded and looking like a bedraggled, menacing Abraham Lincoln, Groban captures Sweeney's devastated sorrow, creating a more relatable cutthroat than Len Cariou or Michael Cerveris who emphasized the character's maniacal blood-lust. Annaleigh Ashford is as funny as Angela Lansbury and as seductive as Patti LuPone, but in a different way. She wisely underplays the demonic practicality of Mrs. Lovett, surprisingly earning huge laughs for an amoral murderess's justification for popping more than pussycats into pies. She finds a small gesture, indicative of character, and subtly adds layers to book-writer Hugh Wheeler's heavily ironic dialogue (which is exactly the opposite of *Bad Cinderella* where everybody overplays every line). Watch as Ashford attempts an elegant genuflection when introduced to the vile Judge Turpin (fantastically evil Jamie Jackson). She curtsies terribly low on a staircase, but does not wish to rise and make herself higher than the socially elevated Turpin. So she slinks down the steps, nearly ending in a servile muddle at the bottom. That's only one of Ashford's many hilarious moments.



Jamie Jackson and John Rapson in *Sweeney Todd*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman

The supporting players are just as vivid. As mentioned above, Jamie Jackson is a hissable Turpin. Maria Bilbao conveys the neurotic fear of Johanna, Sweeney's long-lost daughter and the adoptive offspring and potential bride of Turpin (eeeww!). From her slight tics and twitches, it's believable this girl was raised by a predator. Gates Matarazzo of *Stranger Things* fame, is a tender, gullible, quick-witted Tobias. Ruthie Ann Miles has the perfect desperation and the crudeness for the Beggar Woman and John Rapson is a properly pompous Beadle Bamford. Jordan Fisher has a lovely voice for Anthony, the sailor who rescues Johanna, and Nicholas Christopher is a farcical Pirelli, a street mountebank challenging Sweeney's dominance as a barber. A terrifyingly terrific cast for a horrifyingly great *Sweeney Todd*.





Linedy Genao and the company of *Bad Cinderella*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman.

Unfortunately, *Bad Cinderella* is as disappointing as *Sweeney* is exciting. Originally billed as plain old *Cinderella* during its London run (which was interrupted by the COVID pandemic), this lowbrow parody of the beloved story purports to criticize a looks-based kingdom, but winds up being just as shallow as the society it critiques. The premise and the grade-school humor is thunderingly announced in the opening number, “Buns and Roses/Beauty Is Our Duty” (get it?) as the chorus struts about praising their loveliness. The women are teen goddesses out of *Legally Blonde*, while the men are shirtless hunks with bulging pecs (They are even referred to as The Hunks).



Linedy Genao and Jordan Dobson in *Bad Cinderella*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman.

Appearance is the highest currency in this burg and Cinderella is an outcast because she rejects these superficial values. But Linedy Genao is as much of a knockout as any of her castmates, even when dressed in punk fashion by Gabriela Tylesova whose imaginative, Disney-esque designs for the costumes and sets are the show's strongest elements. In addition, the prince of this tale, Sebastian, is supposed to be a plain milksop (this prince's older brother, a super-hunk, is missing after departing to slay a dragon.) Sebastian is a match for the allegedly dowdy Cinderella, but Jordan Dobson is as fetching as Genao. So the idea of an average pair triumphing over their brainless, gorgeous community is crushed by the casting.

As previously noted, Laurence Connor has directed everyone to play book writers Emerald Fennell and Alexis Scheer's lame jokes and David Zippel's simplistic lyrics way over the top from the opening. The actors have nowhere to go but further up as the evening progresses, belaboring the single joke of the show (everybody in the kingdom is a loud, good-looking jerk except the two leads). The sophomoric level of the script is something of a surprise since Fennell wrote the smart and sharp screenplay for the feminist revenge comedy *Promising Young Woman*. (Fennell is credited with Original Story and Book, while Scheer is listed as doing the "Book Adaptation.") As for Lloyd Webber's music, his signature swelling ballads are there (with Zippel supplying generic lyrics) reprised ad nauseum, as well as some bouncy fun tunes, which are also repeated throughout the evening.



Morgan Higgins and Sami Gayle in *Bad Cinderella*. Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman

Genao and Dobson display great pipes and have a sparkling chemistry. They make this tedious exercise bearable. Carolee Carmello and Grace McLean are wasted in what could have been hilarious Grand Diva roles as the Wicked Stepmother and the even more Wicked Queen. But their one-note roles wear thin after a scene or two. Ironically, the only character that really changes or grows is one of the Wicked Stepsisters, Marie. After being rejected at the ball, Marie sympathizes with Cinderella and advises her to battle for Sebastian. Morgan Higgins takes advantage of this development and creates a fully-rounded though still comically exaggerated creation. If only the rest of the show had followed suit, the audience could have had a happy ending.

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***Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street:*** Opened March 26 for an open run. Lunt-Fontanne Theater, 205 W. 46th St., NYC. Running time: two hours and 45 mins. including intermission. [ticketmaster.com](https://www.ticketmaster.com).

***Bad Cinderella:*** Opened March 23 for an open run. Imperial Theater, 249 W. 45th St., NYC. Running time: two hours and 25 mins. [telecharge.com](https://www.telecharge.com).

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