

STAGES: Weekly Theater Column

EXTENDED 'PUPPETRY' ADDS A NEW TWIST TO BACHELORETTE PARTIES

By Maureen Dezell, Globe Staff

If you've spotted a gaggle of giddy young women leading a blindfolded friend down Clarendon Street lately, you may not have thought: "They must be headed to the theater."

But bands of bachelorettes have been lining up this month at the Copley Theatre, where "Puppetry of the Penis" has become the revelry of choice for a surprising number of bridesmaids and brides-to-be.

"Puppetry of the Penis" has been playing to packed houses this month, says local producer Daniel Kells, in part because a live performance of the "ancient art of genital origami" offers a different twist on the traditional girls' night out.

"We have no fewer than five groups of bachelorettes at each performance," says Kells, who is managing the Boston run of the show. "The interesting thing is that everyone is very well represented," adds Kells. "We have a good number of gay men, and lesbians, curiosity-seekers, a party crowd, a drinking crowd, a loud-brazen-brash-and-there-to-have-a-good-time crowd."

Those crowds add up: "Puppetry of the Penis" has been extended through April 30. Tickets are available at the Copley Theatre box office in Copley Square, or through Ticketmaster: 617-931-2787; www.ticketmaster.com. No view from the Bridge

The Bridge Theatre's eagerly anticipated production of Ronan Noone's "The Gigolo Confessions of Baile Breag" has been canceled, according to the award-winning, critically acclaimed playwright.

The third play in Noone's Baile trilogy, "Gigolo Confessions" was to be directed by Rosemarie Ellis at Boston Playwrights' Theatre in June (the two predecessors are "The Lepers of Baile Baiste" and "The Blowin of Baile Gall").

"There were artistic differences," says Noone, explaining the cancellation. "But the play will have a future date this year." In the meantime, he adds, the Sagan Theatre Company will perform his 10-minute play "Amerika" at this year's Boston Theatre Marathon, April 15. Kuntz to New York

Actor, impresario, and writer John Kuntz's "Jump Rope," which premiered at the Boston Playwrights' Theatre last summer, appears headed for a New York production in late spring or summer.

"No one tells a playwright anything," says Kuntz, who says he isn't privy to details of the pending production.

New York theater sources say that plans are in the works to stage a recast "Jump Rope" at a 99-seat off-Broadway house later this year. Out west

The Williamstown Theatre Festival kicks off its 49th season on June 25 with a revival of "The Threepenny Opera" directed by Peter Hunt, and featuring Betty Buckley in the role of Pirate Jenny. Next up on the main stage is Michael Greif's revival of John Guare's "Landscape of the Body" (July 9-20). It will be followed by "Under Milk Wood," Dylan Thomas's single work for the stage, directed by Huntington Theatre Company resident director Darko Tresnjak (July 23-Aug. 3); Gregory Boyd's production of Tom Stoppard's "Travesties" (Aug. 6-17); and Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" (Aug. 20-24), directed by Christopher Hampton, with Mandy Patinkin in the title role.

Williamstown's 2003 Nikos Stage season will feature three new plays: "Big Bill," a world premiere from A. R. Gurney about the tennis star Bill Tilden (July 2-13); "Mother of Invention," by Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros, directed by Huntington artistic director Nicholas Martin (July 16-27); and "The Lake," by Frank D. Gilroy ("The Subject Was Roses") directed by Scott Ellis.

Aug. 12-17, Williamstown Theatre Festival will present the Chekhov Cycle, a special event that is to include readings of Anton Chekhov's four major plays, as well as an evening of love letters between Chekhov and the actress Olga Knipper. Those scheduled to participate include Williamstown regulars Olympia Dukakis, Blythe Danner, George Morfogen, Austin Pendleton, and Louis Zorich.

The Berkshire Theatre Festival takes the first bows of its 75th season on its main stage with "Enter Laughing," a play based on Carl Reiner's autobiographical coming-of-age novel, adapted for the stage by Joseph Stein (June 18-July 5). It will be followed by Timothy Findley's "The Stillborn Lover," directed by Martin Rabbett (July 9-26). Lanford Wilson's "Talley's Folly," directed by Anders Cato, runs July 30-Aug. 9, followed by "Peter Pan: The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up," a new version of J. M. Barrie's tale by John Caird and Trevor Nunn (Aug. 15-29).

BTF offerings at the Unicorn Theatre include "American Primitive: The Words of John and Abigail Adams" (May 24-June 7); "Nijinsky's Last Dance," by Norman Allen, with Jeremy Davidson as the primo ballerino (June 12-July 12); "The Who's 'Tommy' " (June 21-Aug. 2), and Stephen Sondheim's "Assassins" (Aug. 7-29).

For more WTF information, visit www.wtfestival.org, or call 413-597-3399.

The BTF box office (413-298-5536) opens June 1. For information before that, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. Unkind cuts

Quash those rumors that Broadway stage and recording star Chuck Wagner ("Into the Woods," "Beauty and the Beast") will perform the title role in the New Repertory Theatre's upcoming production of Stephen Sondheim's "Sweeney Todd."

"Chuck got another offer, and was never cast," said New Rep managing director Adam Zahler.

Wagner, says Zahler, was interested in spending the spring in Newton singing and wielding a straight-edge razor in part because his good friends Bob Zolli and Susan Arundale, the husband-wife team who run A to Z Theatrical Productions in Providence, were interested in performing with him in the show.

Arundale also got another offer, but Zolli will play the Beadle in "Sweeney," says Zahler.

Todd Alan Johnson, who appeared in "Aida" on Broadway and performed the role of Javert in the 1997 tour of "Les Miserables" that came to Boston's Colonial Theatre, will play the demon barber. Boston favorite Nancy Carroll ("Bailegangaire") plays Mrs. Lovett, and Leigh Barrett ("A Class Act") takes on the role of the beggar woman. "Sweeney Todd" opens for preview performances April 23; for tickets, call 617-332-1646, or visit tickets@newrep.org.

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NAMES & FACES

Boston's celeb complex: many stars, little glitter;

By Maureen Dezell, Globe Staff

It was opening night of the Boston production of "Rent," a certified New York sensation. Klieg lights lit the facade of the newly restored Shubert Theatre. Limos lined Tremont Street. The play's in-town publicity machine had promised bona-fide stars would be present, so local TV cameras were in position.

But Bostonians bearing coveted tickets to the premiere paid little attention to the lights or those they lit. And while Carol Burnett caused a small stir when she swept to her seat inside the theater, most of the audience paid more attention to their programs than to the star seated in their midst.

"Rent" night was just another night in Boston - the anti-celebrity city; a place where people shrug their shoulders at stardom, sizzle and pop.

"It's chic to shun celebrity in Boston," says money manager, novelist and social observer John Spooner. Indeed, most Bostonians think about stardom in much the same way the proverbial Boston lady thought about hats. "We have our hats," she said, when asked where local women bought theirs.

And we have our stars.

We have undisputed national celebrities who make their homes here: Steve Tyler of Aerosmith. Julia Child. Keith

Lockhart. Bobby Orr. Mo Vaughn.

We have local notables of national renown: Tracy Bonham. Dr. T. Berry Brazelton. David Mamet. Yo-Yo Ma. Seiji Ozawa. Dr. Alvin Poussaint. John Updike.

Boston, which occasionally - erroneously - compares itself to New York or Los Angeles, is not a world capital - except in classical music, medicine and matters of the mind.

The Hub is home to Joel Cohen, Sarah Caldwell, Phyllis Curtin, Virginia Eskin, John Harbison, Leon Kirchner, Tod Machover, Russell Sherman, Craig Smith and Benjamin Zander.

It's where top docs and researchers like Robert Coles, Max Essex, Jerry Groopman, Perri Klass and Bernard Lown choose to work and live.

A handful of the area's academic stars could light up any intellectual heaven: John Kenneth Galbraith; Henry Louis Gates Jr.; Carol Gilligan; Stephen Jay Gould; Marvin Minsky; Nicholas Negroponte; Michael Porter; Christopher Ricks; Helen Vendler; Edward O. Wilson; William Julius Wilson.

We have so many academic/intellectuals in Boston we've even got a category that includes those we love to hate: Alan Dershowitz. John Silber.

To be sure, classical musicians, researchers and academics are not the sort of celebrities who work all their lives to become well known, then wear dark sunglasses so they won't be recognized. Part of living in Boston is that most of us wouldn't know the most well-known among us if we sat next to them at the FleetCenter or Fenway Park.

Though we do know the players in those places. And some would argue that Boston's sports heroes - out-of-towners Ted Williams and Larry Bird; Drew Bledsoe, even Nancy Kerrigan - are the city's real stars.

In a city not known for its visual verve, local TV personalities are actually considered celebrities: Chet and Nat. Liz and Jack. Even Bob Lobel. Business leaders are barely known. Fidelity's Ned Johnson may have appeared on a recent cover of Time magazine, but he cuts a quiet, discreet figure in Boston.

These days, only a few Boston politicians possess what Christopher Lydon, host of WBUR's "The Connection," calls "celebritude - people who make heads turn with a sense there's really someone there." Lydon names two elected officials who have it: Ted Kennedy and Bill Weld.

We can't think of any others. Or many other head-turners, for that matter.

"For some reason it's considered bad form to be fabulous here," complains Seth Greenberg, nightlife entrepreneur and owner of the Paradise and M-80. The reason, in his opinion, is that Boston doesn't have a modeling industry, a film industry, a fashion industry or a major recording industry.

Nor does the Hub operate on a glamorous schedule. "It's not just because we're close to New York that we don't have those industries," Greenberg argues. "It's because the few clubs there are closed at 2, and you can't get anything to eat after 10 o'clock."

Bostonians routinely wring their hands over "losing" name artists - i.e., celebrities - to New York, blasting away at the Puritans for creating a culture that's anti-theater, anti-dance and anti-art. Yet a slew of New Yorkers travel to Cambridge to see Robert Brustein's American Repertory Theatre productions, and to Boston for Jeremy Alliger's Dance Umbrella and Bruce Marks' Boston Ballet. Peter Altman's Huntington shows have gone to Broadway. New York Times art reviewers venture here.

While Boston may not be as fertile a spawning ground for the visual arts as some would like, "We could match any place in the country for writers," contends entertainment lawyer Ike Williams of Palmer & Dodge.

Besides Nobel laureates Saul Bellow, Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott, Williams says, "Who've we got? Who haven't we got? Look at the best-seller lists: Doris Kearns Goodwin; Jonathan Kozol; Peter Gomes; Robin Cook; Robert Parker. This tells you something. Boston's got plenty of celebrity. It just doesn't like conspicuous display."

The Atlantic Monthly editor Jack Beatty, biographer of James Michael Curley, agrees. "There's always been an attitude in Boston that fame is based on merit - that we don't need the other stuff. Bostonians believe in plain living and high thinking - Emersonian sort of stuff. The irony, of course, is that Emerson was a celebrity."

Boston's Yankee culture was peevish about any sort of publicity, says Beatty. When the Irish came in droves to the city, the overall culture took on the Catholic restraint regarding display.

Other immigrant groups didn't see much to be gained from showing some cachet.

"You know the old saying 'Think Yiddish, dress British?'"

That's the story of Jews in Boston,' " says stockbroker Sheryl Marshall. "These days, I think the expression would be 'Think liberal, dress conservative.' You're looked at quite suspectly here if you dress conspicuously. When I think of the money that's made here and the way people dress, it's incredible. If this were Texas, women would be dripping with jewels. But people don't spend it on fashion in Boston. Maybe in their homes."

Celebrity in Boston: all in the head or in the home.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, 1. JULIA CHILD 2. JOHN UPDIKE 3. MO VAUGHN 4. STEVE TYLER 5. YO-YO MA 6. DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN 7. CAROL GILLIGAN 8. KEITH LOCKHART

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BYLINE: By Maureen Dezell, Globe Staff

Veteran Boston TV news anchor Jack Hynes called yesterday to point out that "Home Before Dark," the movie starring Katharine Ross that's now being shot in Newton, isn't the first "Home Before Dark" filmed in and around our fair city. In 1957, Mervyn LeRoy produced and directed a melodrama based on Eileen Bassing's novel starring Jean Simmons, Dan O'Herlihy and Efrem Zimbalist Jr. The movie, about a woman's battle with mental illness, was shot in Marblehead and Boston, according to Hynes. And he should know: He worked as an extra on the set. "LeRoy took me to lunch a few times and tried to talk me into coming to Hollywood," Hynes recalls. "But I decided to stay here."

A Tingle on line

Cambridge favorite son and comedian Jimmy Tingle is now a news commentator on MSNBC, the cable and on-line service that debuted this week. Tingle will be on line three days a

week, adding his views of the world to those of a variety of commentators, including Newsweek's Jonathan Alter. (Those who prefer Tingle live can catch his one-man show "Uncommon Sense" at the Norwood Theatre July 18-20.)

Merrimack changes Sheets

Big moves at the Merrimack Repertory Theatre this summer: Harriet Sheets, who most recently acted as production and operations manager of the Lowell-based company, has been named Merrimack's general manager. Director and actor David Zoffoli will become associate director of the theater, working closely with artistic director David Kent.

A royal camper

Princess Caroline of Monaco was spotted enjoying lunch with an unidentified companion at Jean Paul's Bistro in Blue Hill, Maine, on Sunday. Apparently the princess was delivering her son to a nearby summer camp.

'Kat' kin in town

Families tend to show for stage shows, but this visit is special. The granddaughter and great-great-granddaughter of "Krazy Kat" creator George Herriman are coming to town to see a Beau Jest Moving Theatre performance of the play based on the life of Herriman's Krazed Kat. Dee Cox, a sculptor in Tucson, and her 8-year-old granddaughter, Bridgette Cox, are visiting the Boston area and will see the show, which is being staged at the Lyric Stage theater, Friday.

Best and brightest II

With "In Retrospect," Robert S. McNamara's apology for the Vietnam War just out in paper from Random House, attention is likely to focus - if not fixate - on "The Living and the Dead," Paul Hendrickson's exploration of McNamara through the lives of four men and women who were swept up in that war. Hendrickson's book, due out in mid-September from Knopf, is getting a big buildup from the publisher and a major assist from David Halberstam, who's written a 5,000-word piece for the September Vanity Fair on Hendrickson's 12-year pursuit of the McNamara story.

It's Miller's time

Hold any 1996 Oscar talk until you see "The Crucible," says the Hollywood Reporter. That's the buzz from the

private screening held last week for some East Coast press, including The New York Times. In the words of one who was present, star Daniel Day-Lewis "absolutely blew everyone away." That positive reception to "The Crucible" and the arrival of Arthur Miller's newest play, "The Ride Down Mount Morgan," premiering this week at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, means we could very well be on the verge of a major Miller resurgence. The play opens tonight and runs through Sunday, with a cast headed by Michael Learned, F. Murray Abraham and Patricia Clarkson.

Duchess of denial

In some worlds, this might be called denial: The duchess of York spun a real-life fairy tale of magical marriages to princes in a talk to a group of New York children. About 150 youngsters, ages 6 to 13, peppered the recently divorced duchess yesterday about royal life. "I was lucky enough to marry a prince. Before I married a prince I was Sarah Ferguson," said the duchess, who gave the Duncan PAL center in Manhattan a batch of her "Budgie the Little Helicopter" books and an encyclopedia. Do you live in a castle? she was asked. "The queen lives in the castle," the duchess said. "She is very, very kind."

Singing for the sultan

Pop king Michael Jackson burst onstage under a rain of gold and white sparklers to sing, moonwalk and dance for the world's richest man and his subjects yesterday. Jackson entertained about 60,000 people in the tiny oil-rich kingdom of Brunei in a two-hour show sponsored by the state for the 50th birthday of its ruler, Sir Hassanal Bolkiah. According to Fortune magazine, Hassanal is worth \$ 40 billion, a figure he disputes.

Douglas' son gets the max

Eric Douglas, the youngest son of movie star Kirk Douglas, was sentenced yesterday to 30 days in prison for disrupting a flight from California to New Jersey earlier this year. Douglas, 37, also was ordered to pay a \$ 5,000 fine by US Magistrate Stanley Chesler. Both the jail term and the fine were the maximum permissible by law. Douglas pleaded guilty in June to disrupting a March 17 Continental Airlines flight. He let his dog out of its carrier, a violation of federal rules, ignored requests by the crew to cage the animal, was "loudly abusive" and threw rolled-up blankets at flight attendants, an FBI complaint said.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, GLOBE PHOTO/BILL POLO / A GOOD LOOK AT GUYS
- Partyers at "So Many Men, So Little Wallspace," an
exhibit of male-image photos at the Bernard Toale Gallery
on Newbury Street, pose last night at a preview of the
show, which opens Saturday. Sales from the show will
benefit the AIDS Action Committee. Pictured are (from left)
photographer Jim Fitts, Susan Kaplan, Nancy Kaplan-Belsky
and Bernard Toale.
es & Faces