

JACK MYERS *Entertainment Report*TM

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New Casino & Gaming Television Raising \$75 Million; Broadway Season Off to Disappointing Start; Plus: NY Yankees

By JACK MYERS
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OCTOBER 27, 2003 — The Broadway season is about to get off to a disappointing and shaky start. Among the big event plays set to premiere in the next several weeks, only "Wicked" will receive generally positive critical accolades, and even "Wicked" is unlikely to receive universal acclaim. As predicted in *Jack Myers Entertainment Report* (9/29/03), Hugh Jackman received positive reviews as "The Boy from Oz", but the Peter Allen biography left many critics, especially gay ones, cold. "Boy from Oz" opened October 16 at the Imperial Theater.

The highly touted "Taboo" is reported to be suf-

fering low morale from interference by lead producer Rosie O'Donnell. It's inevitable that any production in which Rosie is involved will be plagued, but the presence of Boy George may overcome Rosie's Steinbrenner-like inclinations. It opens November 13 at the Plymouth Theater.

This past weekend, I saw both "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" and "The Violet Hour," the new play by Richard Greenberg, author of last year's winner of the Tony for Best Play, "Take Me Out." Both were disappointments. Reviews are below, but first, in news breaking today, another new independent digital network is seeking to break through the industry logjam. □

Casino & Gaming Television Set to Raise \$75 Million for 2005 Launch

By JACK MYERS
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OCTOBER 27, 2003 — Is a new cable network more likely to succeed when it is being launched by investment bankers? Veteran television executive Nick Rhodes thinks so, and he has decided the new Casino & Gaming TV Network is as good a bet as his most recent venture successfully building Speedvision (now Speed Channel) and Outdoor Life. "Cable operators are looking to reduce costs, not add them," Rhodes points out, "requiring new networks to have enough capital for longevity and a sober business plan. We need to be prepared to grow the business slowly and prove subscriber interest and value to operators." The

full-time network is scheduled for launch in fourth quarter 2004.

CGTV is the brainchild of investment bankers Robert A. Carlsson and David Hawk, who connected the dots between the declining 21 to 34 year-old TV audience and their passion for casino gaming and entertainment. Rhodes believes the concentration of power in the hands of few programmers and distributors works to CGTV's advantage. "The current digital channel focus is on brand extensions from the large programming providers. Operators want independent content, and are open to working with programmers that bring original content that appeals to hard-to-please audiences. Operators are interested in

shoring up the digital environment and the most important audience for new media technologies is the 21 to 34 year old male." Rhodes adds that CGTV "is in a sweet spot for the digital world, offering exclusive content, VOD opportunities, and non-gambling interactive elements. Hawk, who is both an avid golfer and Las Vegas regular, conceived the network while watching the Golf Channel, realizing there are only 25 million golfers compared to 53 million Americans who visit a casino each year. Consumer spending in the casino and gaming industry now surpasses spending on movies, videos, DVDs, music and books combined, according to published data.

"We developed the network strategy before the recent success of poker competition on The Travel Channel and ESPN," Hawk commented in an interview with *Jack Myers Report*. "Tournaments and major events, including poker, blackjack, craps, (Continued on page 3)

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Reviews By Jack Myers

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

RATING: 3.5 JACKS

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OCTOBER 27, 2003 — The most highly anticipated revival in years, Tennessee William's "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" premieres next Sunday (November 2) at the Music Box Theater. Although Ashley Judd, Ned Beatty, and Jason Patric are receiving standing ovations nightly, I do not expect critics will be as enthusiastic. Judd's long monologues in Act I are elegantly presented and intense but they lack the inner seething, intent single mindedness, and conniving purity that Elizabeth Taylor brought to the movie role in 1958. Judd is even more beautiful than Taylor and is a perfect choice for the role of Maggie. She is still perfecting the involved and difficult monologues, and hopefully by opening night, the seething relationship between Maggie and Jason Patric's Brick will somehow generate more on stage fire.

Judd is excellent, Beatty is a commanding presence, a forceful and believable Big Daddy, but his performance cannot compare to Burl Ives' movie (and stage) original. Patric is passable, but his distorted facial expressions and shrill voice fail to convey Brick's self-hatred and total mental collapse. Comparing anyone to Paul Newman is simply unfair. The best performances are delivered by lesser supporting actors, most notably Amy Horn as Sister Woman Mae and Margo Martindale as Big Momma. Horn's performance is especially exceptional and both she and Martindale should be candidates for Best Supporting Actress nominations. (The original Broadway production ran for only 694 performances in 1955 and 1956, featuring Ives in the role of Big Daddy, Barbara Bel Geddes as Maggie, and Ben Gazzara as Brick.)

One of the major flaws in this revival of William's masterpiece is the focus on performances rather than the story. The depressing play confronts homosexuality, father/son relationships, husband/wife relationships, greed, manipulation, aging, power, and death. The constant yelling and unhappiness become overly oppressive and the lead performances fail to overcome the audience's natural instinct to distance ourselves from such unhappiness. At no point do we forget that we are watching performances by talented actors and become immersed in the story. At no point do we leave the Music Box Theater (and its extremely close and uncomfortable seating) to be transported to a 28,000 acre Southern plantation.

On the power of its brand and performers, "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" will do well at the box office, and will be positively reviewed by some. But I expect many critics will be disappointed and reviews will be mixed at best.

The Violet Hour

RATING: 2.0 JACKS

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OCTOBER 27, 2003 — I really expected to love "The Violet Hour," but after seeing it this weekend, I fear it may be the first major casualty of the young Broadway season after it premieres November 6 at the spectacular new Biltmore Theater. Unfortunately, the best thing I can report is that the Biltmore is a worthy addition to the Broadway scene. "The Violet Hour" is not. Two weeks into previews, female lead Jasmine Guy left the show unexpectedly last week after several disjointed performances during which she forgot her lines and, according to sources at the performances, often appeared to be in a prescription drug induced stupor. Her replacement is understudy Robin Miles, who is unfortunately miscast. Although Miles' performance is more than passable, there is little natural intensity between her and lead Robert Sean Leonard.

Miles' performance is far from the show's major concern. Tony Award winning playwright Richard Greenberg's has a wonderful way with words, which he attempts to prove with every line. His success with last year's Best Play "Take Me Out" appears to have gone to his head...and to his word processor. Greenberg is so in love with his words that he neglects the plot and characters. Until the very last line of the first act there is no clearly developed story. The full first act could have been compressed to ten minutes to allow more time for a relevant story to be developed. The characters are unsympathetic, the theme is undecipherable, and the story goes nowhere. If Greenberg's message is we can't change history even if we know it in advance, he could try to entertain us more and be less involved with the cleverness of his written words.

As usual, Leonard is tremendous, and this may be a star-making role for supporting actor Scott Foley. Mario Cantrone, well-known as Charlotte's gay friend in "Sex and the City," is exceptional, but his role is grossly underdeveloped and his performance is wasted on a character that has little point or relevance other than as a comic distraction and script nuance. Female supporting actress Dagmara Dominczyk further enhances her growing reputation and is also deserving of a more fully developed, relevant and sympathetic character.

Critics are eagerly anticipating Greenberg's second Broadway production, but very few are likely to be enthusiastic. □

NEXT WEEK'S REVIEWS:

"Nobody Don't Like Yogi" and "Fame"

Jack Myers Entertainment Report's entertainment rating system is based on a maximum of five JACKS and a minimum of zero JACKS. 0 = awful; 1 = pretty bad; 2 = okay but don't go out of your way to see it; 3 = reasonably good but not special; 4 = very good and worth paying attention to; 5 = exceptional. Opinions are based on my own likes, dislikes and preferences.

Casino & Gaming Television

(Continued from page 1)

roulette, and baccarat will be an important part of our network. There is no barrier to entry except prize money." Rhodes adds that no viewer transactions are anticipated, avoiding potential legal implications and restrictions. "Casino gaming is an enthusiast lifestyle," he points out. "Sixty-five to seventy percent of every dollar spent in the gaming industry is for activities other than gambling."

Seth Geiger, president of SmithGeiger Research, reports that the 21 to 34 year old male demographic is more likely to upgrade to digital cable and seek other interactive and VOD packages. "Thirty-one percent of overall subscribers and 69 percent of core gamers say CGTV would 'be an improvement' to their current cable service," Geiger advises. Cox Communications may be one of the first operators to embrace CGTV, since 40 percent of Las Vegas regulars are in a Cox system footprint.

Rhodes believes CGTV will offer a home for high quality instructional videos, big budget entertainment associated with casinos, variety programming, and recreational content. "Entertainment will be important to the success of the network. CGTV will also be the gold standard for information on sports and sports fantasy leagues. A Sports Book program will air Saturday and Sunday mornings, and will be focused on teams' performance against the 'spread' rather than the non-gambling focus of traditional sports programming. A robust companion website with play-along features will support and enhance the channel," Rhodes says.

No formal presentations are planned for the ad community until the network is fully funded to the \$75 million level and operator interest has been established. "At that point, we will approach the ad community with creative ideas for involvement," Rhodes advises. "We will provide opportunities for advertisers to get involved in the development and promotion of original content. Our young male audiences are core consumers of beverages, spirits, high-tech, apparel, autos, and financial services. Plus, the gaming audience tends to be professional and higher income."

Rhodes acknowledges that some advertisers may have reservations about placing commercials in gambling-related content, but "ultimately advertisers follow audiences. Young men have grown up with casino gaming as an accepted part

of the culture." According to Rhodes, there are Native American-owned casinos in 29 states and eleven other states with commercial casinos. The gross national product of the gaming industry is growing exponentially. Thirty-seven states have lotteries; forty have pari-mutual betting; and 46 states have charitable lotteries and gambling.

Hawk is working closely with several high wealth individuals who have a passion for gaming, as well as traditional investment firms, to raise the anticipated \$75 million in funding that he feels is necessary to assure operators the company can reach profitability without going beyond the first funding round. "It's an exciting venture for investors," he suggests. "The market has improved in the past several months and we are hearing no meaningful negative feedback from potential investors based on content issues." For more information, please contact davcominc@aol.com. □

NY Yankees Playoff MVP: Babe Ruth

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OCTOBER 27, 2003 — The Yankees' lack of on field intensity, their critical errors, and inability to produce clutch hits in key situations plagued the team throughout the year, and their collapse did not surprise loyal fans. Most die-hard Yankee fans were grateful the Red Sox blew one of their best opportunities in history to put the Babe to rest forever, and failed to reverse the curse. The Marlins' series was anti-climactic even though it was for the world championship. The Yankees probably didn't deserve to be in the Series in the first place, and if they were playing Oakland there's a good chance they would not even have been there. Even after all these years, the Babe was the Yankees' most valuable player in this playoff season.

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