



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Playbill for Porgy and Bess

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TURKEY HUNTING ON BROADWAY
by Suzie Kalter

"You have no idea of the kind of theatre we get in Philadelphia," a patron of the arts recently told Ken Howard. "In Philadelphia, we see everything."

That's because Philadelphia gets first look at the flops....before they're even flops. Just last season the Philadelphia audiences were treated to such spectacles as Home Sweet Homer and 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

There were others. Plenty of others, but they weren't as disastrous. They opened and closed and remained unremembered - usually to the relief of all involved.

There are all kinds of flops in the theatre - plays that close out of town, plays that close after one night, maybe even one act, plays that get great reviews but have very little box office and run for a few weeks or months but never make any money. The official definition of a success is a show that earns back its investment plus one dollar.

Joe Allen proprietor of the famous bistros of the same name, has a wall of his West 46 Street restaurant devoted to framed posters of plays that have failed. His original definition of a flop was a play that closed in a week and cost more than half a million dollars. He's now upping that figure to \$800 000 to keep abreast with the times. In between the dollar profit margin and the wall at Joe Allen's are a coterie of curious plays. Flora, The Red Menace has to be considered a flop because it only ran 23 performances, but it's a success historically because it launched Liza Minnelli. There are some plays producers call "schlep alongs" - the ones that do just okay at the box office and don't last too long, but cut an album, go on the road, may be produced in small theatres over the years and possibly get a movie or television deal. The Odd Couple was a schlep along: It only ran a few months on Broadway but went on to become a very successful movie and television series. A schlep along may some day break even.

An artistic success is a flop that will never break even and would have been a success only if everyone in the audience was an art director. There's usually a lot of prestige involved in a flop like this and, sometimes, a lot of publicity. Like Pacific Overtures.

A bomb is a flop that just can't make it...like Mack and Mabel, and a turkey is a flop that closes in one night, leaving behind a very expensive set...Home Sweet Homer.

A few shows play out of town for such a long time they can stand a mediocre reception in New York without closing immediately. Lorelei did terrific on the road and was able to sustain itself, and a large advertising campaign, despite critical option. Usually, when the show looks bad on (continued on next page)

[[boxed]
How to spot a turkey:



The author is also the director.

The poster does not resemble a Chagall.

The show has been on the road a long, long time.

The plot sounds unlikely. A musical version of The Diary of Anne Frank?

Opening night has been postponed at least once.

The papers are filled with articles about

- a) how "interesting" the concept is
- b) how wonderful the costumes are (datelined Detroit) and
- c) Jerry Robbins

A star on the Mike Douglas show (live from Philadelphia) talks about what a great new hit his/her play is going to be.

A vendor outside the theatre is selling stuffing.
[[/boxed]]

[[end page]]
[[start page]]

[[advertisement]]
[[image - black & white photograph of Catherine Deneuve with a bottle of Chanel N° 5 Perfume]]

Catherine Deneuve for Chanel

CHANEL N° 5
Perfume in the classic bottle 12.50 to 400., Perfume 9.50, Eau de Toilette 8.00 to 22.00, Eau de Cologne 6.00 to 27.50, and Spray Cologne 8.00.
[[/advertisement]]

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