Mainly on Directing: Gypsy, West Side Story, and Other Musicals (Borzoi Books) by Arthur Laurents

From Arthur Laurents, playwright, screenwriter, director—a mesmerizing book about theater, the art, the artist, the insider, the outsider—and the making of two of the greatest musicals of the American stage, West Side Story and Gypsy. It is a book profoundly enriched by the author's two loves, love for the theater and love for his partner of fifty-two years, Tom Hatcher, who shared and inspired every aspect of his life and his work.

Laurents writes about the musicals he directed, I Can Get It for You Wholesale, its producer David Merrick (the “Abominable Showman”), and its (very young) stars Barbra Streisand and Elliott Gould . . . He writes about Stephen Sondheim's Anyone Can Whistle, which starred Angela Lansbury and Lee Remick, marking the debut for each in musical theater. He summons up the challenges and surprises that came with the making of La Cage aux Folles, the first big Broadway musical that was gay and glad to be.

He writes in rich detail about his most recent production of Gypsy, how it began as an act of love, a love that spread through the entire company and resulted in a Gypsy unlike any other. And about his new bilingual production of West Side Story.

And he talks, as well, about the works of other directors—Fiddler on the Roof; Kiss Me, Kate; Spring Awakening; Street Scene; The Phantom of the Opera; LoveMusik; Sweeney Todd.
Moving, exhilarating, provocative—a portrait of an artist working with other artists; a unique close-up look at today’s American musical theater by a man who’s been at its red-hot center for more than five decades.

Features:
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My Personal Review:

A Passion for Musical Theater

Amos Lassen

Arthur Laurents is a legend of the Broadway theater. He is one of the directors whose name means box office magic and he gives us a memoir of his life in theater. The title is a bit misleading in that directing is only one of the issues that Laurents writes about. He gives us a detailed discussion of directing West Side Story and does the same to a lesser degree about Gypsy. He talks about the books for shows he wrote and he tells all. Nothing is too personal and he gives a lot of praise. This is a book of gossip about Broadway and it is fascinating. Laurents success was hard won and he readily hands out advice. He is frank and honest and warm.

This is a book about the art of Broadway by one of the artists who is an insider and an outsider. Laurents had two loves--Broadway and his partner (now deceased of 52 years) Tom Hatcher. He has directed some of the best of Broadway including Barbra Streisand, Angela Lansbury, Lee Remick and Elliott Gould. He has worked with Stephen Sondheim, Jerry Herman and Leonard Bernstein. He gives us a portrait of the artist who worked with other artists and he has been at the center of Broadway for more than fifty years.

Laurents is straight forward and he talks freely. We learn of trouble between him and Sondheim and we have his feelings about Sam Mendes. He talks about the theater with a passion that we do not usually hear and even though he holds nothing back, he also gives praise where it is due, He has reinvented his musicals and makes them ever fresh. The book is a fun read and if you love theater you will love this book.

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