

DANCE

Sid Smith reviews  
Jazz Dance World Festival.

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MUSIC AT RAVINIA

Reviews of Beethoven's 6th, 7th  
and Mahler's 6th symphonies.

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THEATER REVIEW

‘High School Musical’ earns extra credit

By Chris Jones  
Tribune theater critic

Within its tight but free-spending tween demographic, Disney's "High School Musical" is an eye-popping phenomenon. How big? At Wednesday night's chaotic national opening of the Disney stage-musical version in Chicago, Michelle Obama stood, kids in tow, at the back of a long line of fans trying to meet Monique Coleman, a young cast member from the original cable-TV movie, who'd been flown in for the occasion and found herself almost crushed by diminutive auto-

graph hunters prowling the LaSalle Bank Theatre.

None of the original cast from the movie are in this new touring stage version. Thank God. The absence of young stars with personal needs clearly helped director Jeff Calhoun deliver a pumped-up, good-time dance party of a kid-friendly, Broadway-style show that delivers enough excitement and spectacle to give people a reason to drop the big downtown bucks and yet does not soup up the original material out of all high school recognition. This stage-musical version is a whole lot better than the movie

and exceeds all reasonable expectations, given the source material.

Remarkably, Calhoun delivers sass and sizzle without killing the innocence of what's really not much more than a team-written, better-than-average "After School Special." That might not sound like a massive theatrical achievement, but there were a million ways to screw this up and Calhoun deftly avoided them all. His show is both enjoyably antic and quite sweet. And loud. And relentlessly affirmative.

Does this thing cross over to an adult audience? Not ex-

actly—a Sondheim-loving kind of theatergoer will think he's died and gone to hell for his many sins just as soon as he hears the little musical buttons that punctuate each scene around the lockers, cable-movie style. But American Girl doesn't cross over, and those dolls ain't crying.

If—like a highly experienced cast that's considerably older than most of them play—you're of drinking age, you may need to know that "High School Musical" is the romantic tale of sensitive jock Troy (John Jeff-



Photo for the Tribune by William A. Rice

Shaullanda LaCombe performs as Taylor McKessie.

PLEASE SEE MUSICAL, PAGE 2

To spoil  
or not to spoil?



"Final Harry Potter Book Blasted For Containing Spoilers," said a headline on [www.theonion.com](http://www.theonion.com), the Web site of the popular parody newspaper, a week after "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows" hit the streets.

Good satire always holds a grain of truth. The book's release stirred up bitter argument over when it's fair to run reviews and risk revealing details from the conclusion to the seven-volume Potter saga. That the Potter books are a cultural phenomenon is indisputable:

SO IS A BOOK 7 REVIEW NEWS — OR IS IT A SPOILER?

STAFF REPORTER NARA  
SCHOENBERG SAYS:

YES

THE BOOK IS NEWS;  
GET THE REVIEW IN PRINT

Is the new Harry Potter book any good?

The answer to that question was news in the days leading up to the official publication of "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows," and we should have been able to read about it in our daily newspapers.

That's not what happened. The vast majority of U.S. papers refrained from running reviews before the July 21 publication date, despite the fact that pirated copies were available on the Internet and at least one bookstore was selling the book.

The impulse behind the suppression of widely available information may well have been a noble one. Newspapers took pity on the millions of devoted Potter fans, many of them children, who didn't want a jot of plot before they read the book themselves.

But a funny thing happened on the way to self-censorship. Those of us who care about our nation's biggest cultural events were deprived, for days, of legitimate news.

A staggering 8.3 million copies of the book were sold in the first 24 hours of the U.S. release, or 5,000 books a minute. Children stayed up past midnight to get the book, and lines snaked around bookstores from Maine to California.

If you accept that any cultural event can rise to the level of news, then this one surely did. And if there's no immediate practical harm to waiting for a verdict on the book, there's no great virtue in suspending the free flow of information—a bedrock of democracy—for such a highly subjective reason.

As for the notion that even the most circumspect review, accompanied by appropriate warnings, could ruin the joy of reading "Deathly Hallows," I just don't buy it.

As 11-year-old Nick Barile recently wrote in a letter to The New York Times, "If you don't want to know the ending, don't read the review!"

In a democracy, that's what we do.

STAFF REPORTER  
EMILY NUNN SAYS:

NO

KEEP MUM  
AND SERVE THE READERS

For some time now, I have been privy to information about Osama Bin Laden. But I have refused to reveal this because I fear it might ruin the joy and surprise that schoolchildren everywhere would experience if they were allowed to discover Bin Laden's secrets for themselves.

That sounds insane. I meant, of course, to say "Harry Potter" rather than "Osama Bin Laden." My mistake.

Curiously, some of my colleagues believe I'd be committing journalistic treachery either way I phrased it.

They claim that the Tribune had a responsibility to publish Harry's story in our pages the minute the final book in the historic series was released.

"It's news!" they said. "We're a newspaper!"

To which I say: Settle down.

Certainly, by publishing this "scoop" we could have said we'd done what newspapers are supposed to do and called it a day.

Instead, we did the right thing, the thoughtful thing, the generous thing.

It may seem like a luxury to step back when everyone else is barreling ahead, but it's an opportunity newspapers keep failing to seize in the Internet age, when the idea of what constitutes news is often inspired by the mere desire to say, "We got there first."

Newspapers are supposed to serve readers, and we'd better be interested in cultivating new ones. So when millions (and millions) of readers are begging not to have the plot of a cultural phenomenon revealed to them (and reading as fast as possible to finish it before the spoilers get to them), why not listen?

So why not protect the lovers of books who live for the kind of utter engagement you get only from really reading (rather than skimming), waiting for a story to reveal itself while also helping it to unfold.

Depriving readers of that opportunity is about as out of touch with an audience as a newspaper can get.



AP photo by Bizuayehu Tesfaye

"I also liked the white planter swan, which actually sold better than the flamingo (above)," says Don Featherstone. "But no one ever writes about the plastic swan."

‘I always hated  
the wire legs’

At 50-year mark, lawn ornament creator talks flamingo

By Ken Wysocky | Special to the Tribune

A T FIRST BLUSH, you wouldn't peg the pink plastic flamingo as the Lawn Ornament Most Likely to Become a Quinquagenarian.

Consider the spindly wire legs. A bright-pink body against a green lawn. That unblinking, deer-in-the-headlights look. In short, a perfect target in a perpetual open season.

Yet here we are, raising a glass of pink champagne to this pop culture icon, toasting its 50th anniversary.

The flamingo's survival is gratifying to Don Featherstone, 71, the man who created what he later dubbed *phoenicopteris ruber plasticus*. Now a resident of Fitchburg, Mass., Featherstone had nine years of fine arts training under his belt when Union

Products, a plastic molding company in Leominster, hired him in 1957 to design three-dimensional lawn ornaments.

That may seem akin to a concert pianist playing "Chopsticks." But Featherstone, who retired seven years ago as president of Union Products, loved sculpting and had no desire to become a starving artist. And half a century later, his patented piece de resistance has racked up sales of more than 20 million units—and counting (see sidebar, Page 2).

Featherstone fondly recalls the flamingos' heyday, when everything from ovens to Cadillacs came in pink, and flamingos were all the rage as the unofficial symbol of tropical Florida, just emerging as an uber funland. What better way for newly affluent suburbanites to revel in Florida's exotic

PLEASE SEE FLAMINGOS, PAGE 2

60-SECOND ESSAY

Obituaries  
as cultural  
barometers

By Julia Keller  
Tribune cultural critic

In ancient times, an important death was announced by the solemn tolling of a great bell lodged high in the steeple of a stone church, with wonder and awe trailing in the wake of the somber and plangent sounds. These days, a death is more likely to be heralded by a cell phone ring tone featuring a tinny version of "Play That Funky Music."

And so it was that I learned of Bill Walsh's death. Friends called late Monday, informing me of the football coach's passing. They called because they knew I admired Walsh, a dapper and elegant individual who rose above the sport's grunting hordes, and because knowing someone's preferences amid



Ingmar Bergman



Tom Snyder



Bill Walsh

The trio of celebrity obituaries this week showed how much we are defined by the deaths to which we are drawn.

the famous is one of the prime directives of friendship. Whom we mourn is an instant index of our passions, our earnest curiosities; it's a shortcut to getting a fix on our souls.

Tuesday's paper carried notice of an odd trio of notable deaths: Walsh; director Ingmar Bergman; and talk-show host Tom Snyder. Three men who excelled in utterly different fields: sports, film, gab. To see them grouped in the lower-right hand corner of the Tribune's front page, a sort of boxed-set of obituaries, was to realize just how much we are defined by the deaths to which we are drawn. Death comes to all, but not all deaths matter to all people.

Reading about the dead is one of the great pleasures of life. Not just for the reason sometimes put forward—the gentle relief felt by the living when contemplating the deceased—but because obituaries so beautifully tidy up all the messiness, all the loose ends and funny detours and unfinished business.

Gridiron genius or finicky filmmaker or nocturnal conversationalist: The paths of glory lead but to the grave, but along the way, they also wind past an accounting of what we admire and prize. You are what you grieve.

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