

“Ethan McSweeney seems to have a Midas touch. It’s not that the plays he directs turn into gold but they do sail across the footlights with a vibrant, magnetic sheen... The wunderkind director who made his Broadway debut before some directors finish graduate school, is earning plaudits for a flurry of new productions...Throughout his career, McSweeney has moved from classics to contemporary dramas to premieres with ease...His scrupulous attention to the melding of design, pacing, and performance and facility with which he presents them, feels crisp, vibrant, and cinematic.”

Jaime Kleiman, *American Theatre*

“McSweeney is revealing himself to be the kind of directorial prodigy we read about in biographies of such auteurs as Robert Wilson and Peter Sellers. Except that he does not impose a vision or conceit on a play; he amplifies themes in the work.”

Rohan Preston, Minneapolis *Star Tribune*

“McSweeney is not only one of our most successful theatre directors, but equally one of our most important, and for a man who zoomed a few years ago past 40, he continues to sport the aura of a modern Boy Wonder — an Orson Welles with much more in his future than commercials for Paul Masson ... It’s not just that he is — as Peter Marks characterized him in his Washington Post review of *The Tempest* — a “classical imagist,” although he does possess that rare mixture of deep affinity for text and a fanciful eye. He has proven to be fluid in his choices, negotiating between the classical and the edgy-new. For every classic, in other words, he can stage an edgy (Kate Fodor’s *100 Saints You Should Know*), or something highly edgy (Jason Grote’s *1001*), or else versions of plays so edgy they’re standing almost on a ledge (Noah Haidle’s *Mr. Marmalade*).”

The Clyde Fitch Report

“McSweeney...has pursued such an eclectic career as a director that he himself is hard to figure out...Creating his own path seems characteristic of the man. “I don’t tend to do well with well-trod systems,” he agrees...McSweeney has maintained a peripatetic and inquisitive career... [which] seems to illustrate the creative potential of being unsettled...he can always be an outside eye.”

Peter Crawley, *The Irish Times*

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THE TEMPEST

Shakespeare Theatre Company • December 2014 - January 2015

Sets: Lee Savage • Costumes: Jennifer Moeller • Lights: Christopher Akerlind •
Original Music: Jennifer Geiring • Sound: Nevin Steinberg • Puppets: James Ortiz

"Ethan McSweeney, whose strength as a classical imagist has been on display in the past ... here offers a wise and alluring take on Shakespeare, a *Tempest* of white-sand

beaches under a haze-shrouded sun, of gods as monumental puppets manipulated by billowy sprites."

Peter Marks, *The Washington Post*

"A brilliant new vision of the play ... director Ethan McSweeney masterfully blends the plot lines together ... this *Tempest* locates the drama in a stunning verbal and visual simplicity ... [in] a refreshingly new way."

Barbara Mackay, *Theatermania*

"McSweeney's productions at Shakespeare Theatre Company have become must-see events. From *The Persians*, through *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and now *The Tempest* [his] work is by turns ambitious, showy, electrifying and spectacular. His attentive wonderworks refresh the appeal of Shakespeare's work while retaining the fidelity and beauty of the language."

Roy Maurer, *DC Theatre Scene*

"McSweeney offers audiences a visually rich, complex *Tempest* that has its share of magical moments, but which at its core is unvarnished by sentiment ... [his] gift as a director is to leave room for those of us who see Shakespeare's world (like our own) as a great deal more complex."

Andrew White, *Broadwayworld*

"A high-water mark ... beautifully realized by Ethan McSweeney, the show is a powerful reminder of the reasons to go to the theatre in the first place."

Landon Randolph, *DCist*

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A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

The Shakespeare Theater • November 2012 – January 2013

Sets: Lee Savage • Costumes: Jennifer Moeller • Lights: Tyler Micolescu • Sound: Fitz Patton • Movement: Peter Pucci

5 Helen Hayes Award Nominations including Best Production, Best Direction, Best Scenic Design

"McSweeney, who has become artistic director Michael Kahn's go-to guy for visual panache (a beautiful *The Persians*) ... stages the initial beckoning of the fairies...with breathtaking cleverness: the flickering on of a ghost light on a bare stage ... the entrance of Oberon is just as enchanting: A door slides open, revealing Campbell in matinee-idol profile, set off by the whiteout of a blizzard."

Peter Marks, *The Washington Post*

"What elevates the show above so many others, however, is McSweeney's boundless creativity in dealing with the fairies and his deft hand with the rude mechanicals. Lee Savage's set is deceptively simple, [allowing] Puck and company to appear, disappear, and leap in the air, as if by, well, magic...But this thoughtful, relatively risky take on a familiar classic is well worth experiencing."

Sophie Gilbert, *Washingtonian*

“Director Ethan McSweeney uses a decrepit theater as the setting for his scintillating production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Washington's Shakespeare Theatre Company, with the twist that the fairies are just as enamored with stagecraft as the mortals are with theater...**McSweeney demonstrates an easy confidence with the play on many levels, proving himself just as adept with the pageantry of the fairies' court as he is with the slapstick during the play-within-a-play.**”

Susan Berlin, Talkin' Broadway

“The Shakespeare Theatre Company has turned McSweeney loose to traffic in the magic of the theatre that weaves its potent spell in Sidney Harman Hall. **From the opening scene in the court of Athens – circa late 1940s – to the final tableau's fairy farewell, McSweeney's production evokes fantasy and wonder** ... When we see the world of the supernatural meld with the world of the ruined playhouse, the magic of Shakespeare's contrived world and McSweeney's production find welcome companions ... there is no leftover prop or tattered costume the fairies won't take on as a found treasure ... **In a production with many delights, director McSweeney's finest achievement was his casting of the mechanicals.**”

Jeffrey Walker, DC Theatre Scene

“Whether you are a seasoned expert to Shakespeare or fresh newbie to his works, Shakespeare Theatre Company's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is divinely entertaining and a magnificent show to see.”

Grace Kim, DC Metro Theatre Arts

“What the production really seems to remind you of is **a circus, a carnival, a sideshow, and bits of the most excessive parts of operas that don't involve music** ... it's theater and show business in all of its guises. It is, too, **a dream we can swim in** ... Puck suggests that “we have but slumbered here, while these visions did appear.” Fat chance of that. **This *Midsummer* may feel like a dream, but it's a vivid dream we won't soon forget.**

Gary Tischler, *The Georgetowner*

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MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Shakespeare Theatre Company • December 2011 – January 2012

Sets: Lee Savage • Costumes: Clint Ramos • Lights: Tyler Micoleau • Sound: Steven Cahill • Choreography: Marcos Santos

Winner of 2 Helen Hayes Awards: Best Scenic Design and Best Supporting Actor

“Under Ethan McSweeney's assured direction, the **Beatrice and Benedick of Kathryn Meisle and Derek Smith** achieve the goal that eludes some incarnations of this oft-seen work: **the notion that this couple, Elizabethan forerunners of Noel Coward's Amanda and Elyot... are predestined mates of the wits as well as the soul** ... With the polish of this high-end comic couple — and at the play's opposite end, the surefire lunacy

of its low-comedy pairing of the addle-pated watchmen Dogberry (Ted van Griethuysen) and Verges (that rascally scene-stealer, Floyd King) — the company’s new “Much Ado” has lots of good things going for it ... McSweeney’s handling of this comedy’s buoyant plotting is visually and even conceptually superior ... **the very specific location and time is Cuba in the 1930s, a setting that retains the sun-baked sensuality of Shakespeare’s Messina gives the director, composer Steven Cahill and choreographer Marcos Santana opportunities for a few conga-drumming, hip-bouncing fiestas. It also provides set designer Lee Savage with the inspiration for a gorgeous set — the central, open space of Leonato’s hacienda, complete with a weather-worn garden statue of Cupid.**”

Peter Marks, *The Washington Post*

“Ethan McSweeney’s current production is set in 1930s Cuba, which adds all the warmth of an exotic locale to a suitably religious and complex social hierarchy. Given what happens to poor Hero, one almost expects the female characters in Much Ado to be wearing burqas by act four, but since a production set in Kabul might be excessive, McSweeney’s choice is a clever one. **Given that this is feel-good holiday fare, McSweeney’s success in balancing the play’s romantic comedy with its less-sunny elements is even more commendable.** This production’s appeal undeniably stems from its performances, which are almost universally strong, although Clint Ramos’s costumes and Savage’s set make it a visual treat, too (Ramos frequently dresses all the women in pink, in a not-too-subtle jab at the battle of the sexes). But as the wire-crossed lovers, Meisle and Smith deserve credit for conjuring an utterly believable romance. Their chemistry, even as enemies, is obvious, and it’s the sense of optimism their relationship offers that really makes Much Ado such a pleasing spectacle. Given how poorly the idealized romances fare, it’s heartening to believe in lovers who were frenemies first.”

Sophie Gilbert, *Washingtonian Magazine*

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THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Shakespeare Theater Company • June – August, 2011

Sets: Andrew Lieberman • Costumes: Jennifer Moeller • Lights: Marcus Doshi • Sound:
Steven Cahill • Choreography: Karma Camp

“Technically brilliant, well-acted, full of small insights and pleasures both large and small ... [Merchant is} **a visual feast; every corner of Harman Hall’s capacious stage is alive with information, and sumptuously rich.**”

Tim Treanor, DC Theatre Scene

“McSweeney highlights those divisions by moving the action from 16th-century Venice to 1920s New York City, a place where there was a neighborhood for every ethnicity, cultural lines reflected in geographical boundaries...**the transfer works wonderfully. The jazz-age trappings, noir-ish lighting and street level smoke and fog, and a backdrop of speakeasies and organized crime give the proceedings an undercurrent of menace that gives a dark edge to the humor.**”

Ian Buckwalter, The DCist

“The approach makes Portia pretty unattractive, and it’s a credit to Coffey and her director that they don’t try to soften her edges by making her flighty or offhand ... With so many characters ranging from insensitive to reprehensible, comedy’s no more or less appropriate than it is in, say, South Park ... [which] is a workable if not a particularly ingratiating approach at Sidney Harman Hall, where designer Andrew Lieberman centers a massive industrial-steel setting on a stage-dominating staircase that suggests upward mobility.”

Bob Mondello, *Washington City Paper*

“McSweeney nails the big picture, but gives equal weight to the quiet moments. There’s so much rich interplay in this production it’s hard to know where to look ... One of the chief joys of director Ethan McSweeney’s sprawling production now playing at the Shakespeare Theatre Company is the restoration of Antonio as the merchant of Venice. **Derek Smith’s economical portrayal, containing the character’s melancholy and self-loathing within the cool veneer of commerce and charisma, is revelatory ...** the second exposure of the soul beneath that touched me most was Shylock’s reaction to friend Tubal’s recounting of Jessica’s betrayal, the selling of her mother’s ring to gain a monkey. Nelson’s anguish is so simple yet searing it reminds one that these are lines most potent in Shakespeare, the prose that goes right to the heart of it – “I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.” There are things one does not part with for gain, and here McSweeney punctuates the humanity of Shylock.”

Jenn Larsen, *We Love DC*

“Mark Nelson's Shylock is quite unlike any I have ever seen. Better, perhaps, than the others because he makes this complex character so human ... his demeanor is more than sympathetic. And yet, as he sharpens his knife, to get his "pound of flesh" in the manner of a barber, he is to be feared greatly.”

Susan Davidson, *Curtain Up*

“This production succeeds in laying out the casual cruelty among all the characters. “
Susan Berlin, *Talkin’ Broadway*

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THE PERSIANS

by Aeschylus, new version by Ellen McLaughlin

The Shakespeare Theatre Company, Washington DC • March-May, 2006
& National Actors Theater, NYC • May-June, 2003

“Director Ethan McSweeney cuts a stunning path to this turning point of ‘The Persians.’ At the back of the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s stage, Erin Gann’s Xerxes , the callow king, materializes. As he begins to walk forward a fine spray of scarlet sand rains down on him ... **It’s a potent moment in McSweeney’s acutely theatrical take on this 2,500-year-old play. The evening that results is elegiac, somber, [and]**

invigorated by several actors of particular finesse, vivid turns of phrase, and some inspired bits of staging.”

Peter Marks, *The Washington Post*

“Triumphant! McSweeney packs plenty of spectacle in both the show’s physical aspects and the forthright potency of Aeschylus’s descriptions of the carnage of war; they contain a harrowing beauty that grips the senses.”

Jayne Blanchard, *The Washington Times*

“When a playwright’s message is dire, it’s useful to have a few theatrical miracles to back it up, and Ethan McSweeney’s breathtaking mounting of *The Persians* has plenty. There’s the stagewide cyclorama that lets the director blast Western literature’s oldest surviving play into orbit, Google Earth–style, just as it’s getting under way; the beach of red sand that morphs from a lush Persian carpet into a sea of gore; the mirrored wall of lights that seems simply utilitarian until it’s time to bake the play’s warmongers in disgrace; **and the startling, climactic rain of blood that rattles whatever part of a playgoer’s psyche Aeschylus hasn’t already rattled with words that echo across more than two millennia of human folly.** McSweeney orchestrates a rush of images that are alternately majestic (the queen’s arrival) and worthy of a horror film (red sand dripping like blood through her fingers)...Still, the director and his performers have created one moment of fiercely personal tension at the play’s climax. It comes when Xerxes kneels in disgrace before his mother and she starts to reach out toward him. **For a long, wrenching moment, it’s not clear whether she’s reaching out in fury at the pain he’s caused or in compassion for the pain he’s in, and after so much declaimed agony, so much breath-catching imagery, this private moment catches the audience up short. The director prolongs the suspense for an extra couple of beats and—as the sheer emotional rawness expands to fill the auditorium—almost seems to point the way to the more intimate theater we know today.”**

Bob Mondello, *Washington City Paper*

“Excellent! A terrific and rare piece of theater.”

Donald Lyons, *The New York Post*

“Timely... Relevant... Heart-wrenching ... Terrifying ... a true classic. We see the present and the future right there, inside the past. Ellen McLaughlin serves and uses “*The Persians*” with true power and grace. She is well served by the lean, stark production. Aeschylus emphasized that the gods shaped our fates. Ms McLaughlin concentrates on our own actions. Goaded by pride and greed, we invite the fate and nature to do their worst, the gods are not to blame. **Director Ethan McSweeney makes each detail embody this theme.”**

Margo Jefferson, *The New York Times*

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ION

by Euripides, translated by David Lan
Shakespeare Theatre Company, March-May 2009

Sets Rachel Hauck • Lights Tyler Micoleau • Costumes Rachel Myers • Music Michael Roth

“Maybe the gods really are crazy. In Shakespeare Theatre Company's sprightly new staging of Euripides' "Ion," Apollo messes things up but good for a mortal royal family, despoiling the queen, deceiving her husband and keeping an heir in the dark about his lineage. **Director Ethan McSweeney, who showed in his arresting 2006 production of Aeschylus's "The Persians" a knack for the visual starkness of Greek tragedy, now takes on a work from antiquity of lighter spirit...** courtesy of canny set designer Rachel Hauck, the stage of Sidney Harman Hall has been evocatively transformed into the craggy cliff top on which Apollo's temple rests. Time seems to stand still at this higher altitude. While we're welcomed outside the giant temple doors by Aubrey Deeker's classically gilded Hermes -- who majestically descends from the ceiling on a train of red fabric -- the site is invaded by five sassy actresses playing the chorus. **They're dressed not in the sort of outfits you find on Greek statues, but rather those you might see in the lobby of the Athens Marriott...the cheeky sensibility offers an appealing postmodern varnish, typified by the appearance at play's end of winged goddess Athene, who with great panache floats down from the clouds.** As embodied by the delightful Colleen Delany, Athene seems intended to elicit giggles rather than shivers. At one point, she gazes out at us and offers a tiny shrug, as if to say: "What the heck do I know? I'm only a deity."

Peter Marks, *The Washington Post*

“★★★★...Fresh. Bright. Fun. Not the words usually associated with Greek tragedy. Yet the Shakespeare Theatre Company's staging of Euripides' "Ion," under the joyful direction of Ethan McSweeney, is more sunny than sorrow-struck. Those who associate Greek drama with much rending of togas and keening over butchered kin may find themselves caught charmingly off-guard by such light touches as the Chorus portrayed as a gaggle of nosy and tongue-wagging girl tourists — and a *deus ex machina* appearance by the majestically winged goddess Athena, who happily bangs a tambourine like a Hellenic member of the Partridge Family during the musical finale. "Ion" deals with the themes of identity and belonging. And for all its nimbleness, it is a mature work that questions authority as well as the infallibility of the gods we worship ... **There is something Obamaesque about Mr. Chappelle's charismatic and poised turn as Ion. Both are men who came from nowhere to become the leaders of great nations.** According to Greek legend, Ion is the ancestor of all Athenians. Like the new president, he stands at the advent of something new and asks the people to believe in him. But wait, there's more: a happy ending. "Ion" concludes not with a pileup of bloodstained bodies, but with the catharsis of laughter, song and reunited families. **This modern staging of a 2,500-year-old play provides a Parthenon of pleasures in a mere 90 minutes.”**

Jayne Blanchard, *The Washington Times*

“Euripides would love the Shakespeare Theatre Company's production of his "Ion," a passionate drama that finally resolves into a comedy... The success of this production is largely due to David Lan's fresh, contemporary adaptation, which retains

all the complexity of Euripides' original. **Director Ethan McSweeney has created a fanciful blend of the ancient and modern.** His chorus is a clutch of tourists, circa 2009, who sing Michael Roth's delightful original music ... Rachel Hauck's set is simple and effective: three huge columns on a raised, circular marble floor. The costumes, by Rachel Myers, are deliciously imaginative, particularly Hermes' golden outfits and Athena's gossamer gown and sturdy silver wings... **Washington is fortunate to have a production of "Ion," which is rarely produced. It is doubly fortunate to have this first-rate production, which reveals Euripides' sophistication and wit so clearly.**"

Barbara Mackay, *The Washington Examiner*

"It is always good news when Ethan McSweeney returns to direct here. He is, after all, the former Associate Director of the company whose last outings were the sparkling *Major Barbara* for which he has been nominated for a Helen Hayes Award and the smashing production of Aeschylus' *The Persians*, which lingers in memory even three years later. Just as with the earlier production of a rarely performed ancient play, **his touch is marked by an effort to make a play from millennia past work as well for a contemporary audience as its original may have for audiences now long dead.** Again with Euripides' tale of possibly prevaricating deities, **McSweeney makes an ancient tale both entertaining and edifying for a modern audience while using some nifty modern stagecraft to make his points.** He has a fresh adaptation of the 2,500 year old play which studiously avoids stuffiness and once again uses visually impressive techniques to both provide the background information the audience needs and wrap it all up at the end - and the absolute final treat - a top-40s style pop song (yes, doo-wop in a Greek classic!). Drawing from the Shakespeare Theatre Company's treasure trove of regulars, McSweeney has the likes of Sam Tsoutsouvas for the would-be-father Xuthus, Floyd King for an old servant and adds newcomers of note in the key roles of Ion and his mother... **The real find, however, is Keith Eric Chappelle. It seemed such a stretch to say that McSweeney hit on something when he cast a young Barack Obama look-alike as Ion** who has such great things ahead of him, until I noticed that among young Chappelle's credits in New York was the role of Barack in something called *Obama Drama*. **Whether intentional or not, as our town is enthused over our new President, there is a resonance to this casting that imbues the production with a contemporary hopefulness."**

Brad Hathaway, *Potomac Stages*

"It is easy to understand, in this sprightly adaptation by David Lan so well staged by Ethan McSweeney, that the stakes are nothing less than the fate of the human soul ... It helps that McSweeney has an all-star cast... [but] **the best part of the show is unquestionably the chorus:** Rebecca Baxter, Lise Bruneau, Kate Debelack, Laiona Michelle and Patricia Santomasso. The traditional Greek chorus speaks the prescribed verses in unison but this chorus *sings* those verses, in gorgeous five-part harmony to Michael Roth's beautiful music, accompanied principally by a fabulous cellist, Caleb Jones. It is McSweeney's conceit that the chorus - handmaidens all to Creusa - come to Delphi as modern tourists, with iPods, suntan oil and cameras. **They each establish their own (strikingly modern) personas, but when they first raise their voices to**

sing Euripides' profoundly moving verses on children and childlessness, they immediately universalize their characters, and become the human race."

Tim Treanor, DC Theatre Scene

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DANGEROUS LIAISONS

by Christopher Hampton

Stratford Shakespeare Festival • August-October, 2010

Sets & Costumes: Santo Loquasto • Lights: Robert Thomson • Sound: Michael Roth

"★★★★... Stylish, intelligent and funny ...Sex has never been a big commodity at Stratford, but that situation definitely changed on Thursday night when *Dangerous Liaisons* opened at the Festival Theatre...Ethan McSweeney's production of this slice of late 18th century French sensual intrigue is not only impeccably stylish, acerbically intelligent and mordantly funny, but it packs a truly erotic kick that is very welcome indeed ... Technically, the show is Stratford at its best. Santo Loquasto creates a chilling world of metallic elegance, which respects the original period, but still gives everything a soulless modern edge. His costumes make everyone look eminently seduceable and the lighting of Robert Thomson knows when to blast us with cold white light, or dazzle us with rock 'n' roll primary colours...**McSweeney**, for someone who has never directed on the Festival stage before, **shows an astonishing command of how to make that mystic space work.** His direction is **clear, precise, pointed, always showing us what we need to see**, or – in the case of his detailed scene changes that involve the servants – showing us things we never expected to see as well. **This is world-class theatre and we should be thrilled to have it on our doorstep."**

Richard Ouzounian, *The Toronto Star*

"Deliciously engaging ... to say the festival season goes out with a luxurious and seductive bang is an understatement. And it's all deliciously depraved enjoyment for cast and audience alike. Directed by Ethan McSweeney in an impressive Stratford debut, [Dangerous Liaisons] assembles some of the festival's stars in Seana McKenna, Tom McCamus and Martha Henry...witnessing McKenna and McCamus verbally joust on stage brings the script to life before our very eyes — language transformed into action, literature transformed into life in all its sordid glory. McSweeney adds a touch of contemporary musical theatre flair with refrains from a harpsichord giving way to driving electric guitar riffs – it works in marvelously jarring way..the juxtaposition of 18th century opulence and modern theatrical artifice is [further] achieved through the contrast between a magnificent crystal chandelier, complete with real candles, and banks of stage lights and a monumental stainless steel door as a backdrop. The production is not only stylish, thanks in large part to designer Santo Loquasto, but is **one of the most unabashedly sexy productions ever staged at Stratford."**

Robert Reid, *The Record*

"Dangerously irresistible... In an impressive Stratford debut, director Ethan McSweeney stages these wicked games on a chessboard set designed by Santo Loquasto.

In between the scenes, **he's choreographed what seems like a whole second shadow play between the various maids and servants who roll the sets on and off.** It shows who's really in charge – soon, it'll be the *ancien régime's* heads they'll be rolling off. The scene changes take place to a soundtrack of harpsichord mixed with squealing electric guitar and are lit by Robert Thomson like a rock concert, linking this sexually licentious world to the decadence of more recent decades. As the tightly wound Tourvel, Topham loosens her corseted conscience only inch by inch – and **the slow seduction only makes it all the hotter.** It's indeed impressive that she stays upright as long as she does, because she and McCamus have some **truly sensational chemistry**... Michael Therriault gets the second biggest laughs of the night as an inexperienced suitor, sheepishly caught with his pants down. The biggest one goes to Martha Henry as Valmont's eccentric older aunt sharing her hairstyle and a communion wafer with her lapdog.”

J Kelly Nestruck, *The Globe and Mail*

“★★★★★ ... Impressively directed by Ethan McSweeney and lavishly designed by Santo Loquasto, this is a compelling production [with] impressive performances throughout from a blue-blooded supporting cast — the venerable Martha Henry, the always impressive Yanna McIntosh and the evergreen Michael Therriault joining Jillard and Topham in an all but flawless ensemble — it belongs, in the end, to McCamus and McKenna ... **And well it should, for rarely have these two worked better, either separately or as a team.** “

John Coulborn, *The Toronto Sun*

“Sexual evil stalks Stratford stage... This final production of Stratford's 2010 season is also **one of its best...** director Ethan McSweeney has seen the exciting possibilities of the Festival Theatre's famous thrust stage for exploiting the hothouse intimacy of the play and of drawing the audience into its embrace... **McSweeney, obviously excited by this space, makes outstanding use of it in mounting his exquisitely detailed dissection of the manners, mores and monstrosity of a culture soon to be felled by the revolution.**”

Jaimie Portman, *The Vancouver Sun*

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AN IDEAL HUSBAND

by Oscar Wilde

The Gate Theatre • March – May 2014

Sets: Francis O'Connor • Costumes: Peter O'Brien • Lights: Sinead McKenna • Sound:

Denis Clohessy

Irish Times Award nomination for Best Costumes

“★★★★★”

Irish Times on Sunday

“In Ethan McSweeney's wonderfully vivacious production, the sparkle never flags and there's an almost perfect balance between the play's lightness of tone and its

serious import ... There are brilliantly observed performances throughout, even as minor a character as Phipps – the ‘ideal butler’ – played with delightful comic precision by Simon Coury ... Peter O’Brien’s costumes offer material equivalents to the production’s scintillating wit. In tandem with Francis O’Connor’s deftly designed and beautifully versatile set, a kind of reflective glasshouse suggestive of a hall of mirrors, **we have an ideal production of Wilde’s thought-provoking comedy**”

John McKeown, *The Irish Independent*

“Appearances are deceptive in Oscar Wilde’s 1895 melodrama ... it follows that director Ethan McSweeney’s new production for the Gate should open with ironic blast of *Rule Britannia!* before recognizing a more fragile world of surfaces ... Francis O’Connor’s encircling mirrored walls (an appropriate showroom for Peter O’Brien’s sumptuous costumes) suggest a society high on self-regard and somehow perilously short on reflection ... [Rea’s] Lord Goring is allowed a nimble physicality where others are mired in Victorian stiffness. **When Wilde’s mechanical plotting begins to creak under incriminating letters, fortuitous discoveries and unmasking contrivances, McSweeney and Rea decide to match that artificiality with slapstick. It works surprisingly well, as befits a ‘thoroughly modern intellect.’”**

Peter Crawley, *Irish Times*

“★★★★, Wilde’s 1895 play may have a faint whiff of the passé about it, yet it remains doggedly modern. Its dissection of public morality ... is hugely relevant to our own age of political corruption while its interrogation of the illusory nature of ‘character’ is mercilessly amusing ... **All four leads put in keen and nuanced turns, with Rea unearthing a pleasant vulnerability in Goring.”**

Padraic Killeen, *Irish Examiner*

“Like a precursor to ‘House of Cards’ ... director Ethan McSweeney mines the text for its comic potential and, in ably exploring the ways in which the Victorian world shies away from its own reflection, he also holds a mirror up to our own.”

Daragh Reddin, *Metro Herald*

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ROMEO AND JULIET

by William Shakespeare

The Guthrie Theatre • March-May, 2004

“A symphony! Director Ethan McSweeney’s Guthrie Theater credits range from the revelatory (‘Gross Indecency’) to the sublime (last year’s breathtaking ‘Six Degrees of Separation’). With ‘Romeo and **Juliet**’ **the young visionary displays similar imagination and ambition.**”

Rohan Preston, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“OUTSTANDING! McSweeney has placed the action in a mysterious place, a simultaneously dilapidated and glamorous construction site/abandoned movie theater, and he and the designers have created **a hip, temporal salad.**”

Dylan Hicks, *City Pages*

“McSweeney’s ambitious and intelligent production moves seamlessly between low comedy and high tragedy ... [he] creates stage images that illuminate Shakespeare’s language and open up the text for a contemporary audience ... Set and costume designer Mark Wendland’s visual vocabulary for the show is incredible. The set looks like Ground Zero: a stage of wooden planking surrounded by ‘ashes;’ three stories of metal scaffolding and plastic sheeting extending back stage; a gothic cathedral-like tower becomes the balcony, marriage bed, and tomb; old theater seats live upstage and amongst the ashes. [The] production ... brilliantly evokes the sense of devastation, destruction, and dread that’s become our universal screensaver over the last few years; it also reminds us that passionate love can transform this bitter landscape into one of reconciliation and renewal.”

Michelle Pett, *Talkin’ Broadway*

“McSweeney’s brooding production is perhaps the most daring of recent Shakespearean ventures at the Guthrie...[he] returns some of the daring that Dowling’s crowd-pleasing productions too often lack; that he does so with a play that inevitably draws crowds suggests that we may at last be seeing a successful marriage between box office savvy and theatrical experimentation. **McSweeney’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’ calls attention to itself as an act of theater; it demands that we consider how tragedy is constructed – onstage and off.”**

Douglas E. Green, *The Shakespeare Quarterly*

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A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

by Tennessee Williams

Gate Theatre • July – September 2013

Sets: Lee Savage • Lights: Paul Keogan • Costumes: Joan O’Clery • Sound: Denis Clohessy

Winner of the Irish Times Theatre Award for Best Director

Best Leading Actress (Lia Williams)

Best Supporting Actress (Catherine Walker)

Nominated for three additional awards including Best Production, Best Scenic Design, and Best Supporting Actor

“★★★★” *Sunday Times*

“★★★★” *Evening Herald*

“★★★★” *Irish Mail on Sunday*

“★★★★” *Metro Herald*

“★★★★” *Sunday Business Post*

“★★★★” *Irish Daily Mail*

“Ethan McSweeney’s gripping production at the Gate Theatre, however, is a model of effective restraint ... what is really at stake in McSweeney’s production is not just desire but two different ways of seeing the world, as Blanche’s idealism is gradually eroded by Stanley’s realism ... there isn’t a moment when it is less than compelling. In this fine production “an hour isn’t just an hour, but a little piece of eternity”.

Sara Keating, *The Irish Times*

“No detail is too small in this excellent production directed by Ethan McSweeney, making his directorial debut at The Gate, and what a way to begin... **You will be hard pressed to find a piece of theatre as good as this anywhere, anyplace ...** To use that old cliché, **if you only see one play this year, make sure it's this one.** You will not be disappointed, as you realize that this is the stuff of theatrical excellence. You will want to see it again. I do.”

Red Curtain Review

“It’s easy to make the mistake that Blanche is nothing but a pathetic, man-eating, manipulative, soulless siren, yet despite all that, and more — her childish horror of ageing, and her ready acknowledgment that more often than not, she plays fast and loose with the truth —the depth of her decline is pure abjection, and is correctly **put centre stage in this production, beautifully** orchestrated by director Ethan McSweeney. ‘Orchestrated’ because here, **Williams’ dangerous text is approached as a symphony ... That first silence is a revelation: the mark of a director who knows how to pace the beats of a play,** and since we are in for the long haul – three hours and a bit – **we are, thankfully, in calm, confident, creative hands.** This idea of playing on the musicality of the text, of emphasising its rhythms and movements, is further extrapolated through the use of live songs performed by vocalist Esosa Ighodaro and Conor Sheil on clarinet. Nominally employed to cover what could have been pace-destroying scene changes, the music enlivens and underscores the atmosphere. We are in a very specific place...comprised of the mournfully hopeful elegies of gospel and soul.”

Susan Conley, *Irish Theatre Magazine*

“American director Ethan McSweeney, whose début at the Gate the play is, manages to beautifully orchestrate the classic play without losing any of its depth and fascination. ... ***A Streetcar Named Desire* is without a doubt one of the highlights, if not the most spectacular play, of this year’s theatre season in Dublin. Ethan McSweeney’s reputation as one of theatre’s brightest stars is founded as he created a must-see play.”**

Claire Fastner, *The Journalist*

“American director Ethan McSweeney subtly rebalances its characterizations and shifting sympathies: instead of extreme polarization between the lead characters of Stanley Kowalski, his pregnant wife, Stella, and her visiting sister, Blanche DuBois, we are shown a more complex and affecting picture. “

Helen Meany, *The Guardian*

“The Gate production is intriguing chiefly for the way in which Walker and Williams complicate the received images and soften the contrasts. **The drama they create is not**

one of stark opposites but one of intertwined and interdependent personalities ... Indeed, one of the many admirable things about Ethan McSweeney's excellent current production at the Gate Theatre in Dublin is the intelligent manner in which Garrett Lombard as Stanley stays out of the way. He is, as Stanley must be, a powerful physical presence and a domineering bully. But his performance sets its own proper limits. Lombard does not seek to occupy too much psychological or emotional space. Stanley is what he is: an almost parodic expression of primitive maleness."

Fintan O'Toole, *The Irish Times*

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MAJOR BARBARA

by George Bernard Shaw

The Shakespeare Theatre Company, Washington DC • February - March 2008

Sets: Jim Noone • Lights: Robert Wierzel • Costumes: Robert Perdziola • Sound: David Maddox

Winner of Helen Hayes Awards for Best Scenic Design (James Noone) and Best Supporting Actor (Ted van Griethuysen)

"McSweeney guides his meticulously chosen cast through the mazes of Shaw's debates over the social responsibilities of the privileged vs. the pious as if the actors had been hired for their skills both in elocution and mischief-making. When Shaw's tenaciously argumentative works are handled by particular craftsmen who possess a flair for his eyebrow-raising satire as well as his rhetorical pugilism, Shaw can be an out-and-out "up." That, fortunately, is how Ethan McSweeney's posh production comes across in the company's Harman Center for the Arts."

Peter Marks, *Washington Post*

"George Bernard Shaw liked to skewer 'em now and again, so it's fitting that director Ethan McSweeney is doing pretty much the same with the opening gambit in his sleek, smart staging of Major Barbara. Wouldn't do to spoil the effect, so let's just say that with a single gesture (you'll want to watch those title-card projections), McSweeney deftly, wittily disarms audiences who might be stressing about a long evening in the company of the old blowhard's overwrought, overwritten speeches...Minutes later comes the discovery—delightful surprise—that the drawing room of Lady Britomart Undershaft (sublime Helen Carey) has been commandeered by a swarm of Oscar Wilde's best and brittle-est Thank god for a director and a cast who remember that Shaw's stern sociopolitical lectures come with plenty of laugh lines. **The repartee is rousing, the satire sharp, and really, any director who can get four separate laughs out of four separate exits, not to mention a belly laugh out of a bit with a throw pillow—in a Shaw play?—is unmistakably on his game."**

Trey Graham, *Washington City Paper*

"McSweeney has a keen sense of timing and keeps the production moving, pushing past stumbling blocks that could easily derail a less experienced and committed director. He handles all three acts which require three completely different sets with one intermission, clocking the production in at 2 hours 30 minutes-no easy feat.

Furthermore, McSweeney is not afraid of poking laughter into what could be interminable moments and usually finds a spark of light-hearted fun in even the most dreadfully deadened situations. Such talents are particularly useful here because despite Shaw's wit and repartee, he can still get bogged down hammering his various points. McSweeney's light touch helps in those tough spots."

Debbie Jackson, *DC Theatre Scene*

"The Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington has created a production of *Major Barbara* that is **sumptuous in both its cast and its staging. The vividly appointed sets, designed by James Noone, and Robert Perdziola's cleverly detailed costumes are no more dazzling than the performances marshaled by director Ethan McSweeney...** The skillful cast, demonstrating great ease with speeches that could sound like position papers in lesser hands, bring out the lasting truth in the arguments."

Susan Berlin, *Talking Broadway*

"**Director Ethan McSweeney fortunately understands that there is fun to be had with Shaw's challenging discourse -- and that the most successful sermons do not sound like sermonizing.** As a result, not only is the clash that Shaw creates between idealism and realism fully explored, but the human story of people who are seeking a path toward reconciliation is also to be found. Superbly aided by posh sets and elegantly detailed costumes, **this production is both eye candy and brain food rolled into one clever morsel.**"

Michael Toscano, *Theatermania*

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ARMS AND THE MAN

By George Bernard Shaw

Guthrie Theatre • March-April 2011

Sets: Walt Spangler • Costumes: Murell Horton • Lights: Robert Wierzel • Sound:
Richard Woodbury

"**The comedic firepower onstage at the Guthrie Theater in *Arms and the Man* could blow the roof off the big blue building:** Peter Michael Goetz, Jim Lichtscheidl, Michael Shantz—all ridiculously draped with period military costuming and armed with the wit of George Bernard Shaw ... Director Ethan McSweeney, who led a memorably modern take on *Romeo & Juliet* at the Guthrie a few years back, is the guy to call when you've unearthed an artifact you need updated. **Here, he injects contemporary expressions and hilarious interlude the way a jazz drummer works around the edges of phrasing (the clever faux intermission between the first and second acts, in which the actors break the fourth wall to dance and clown for the audience, is particularly inspired).**"

Tim Gihring, *Minnesota Monthly*

"**Ethan McSweeney's production stretches the natural farce in Shaw's spoof of war and social class [but] holds the proper tension between Lichtscheidl's well-articulated Bluntschli and the whole Bulgarian gaggle of softheaded bourgeoisie ...** the exaggeration is just right, as when Nakasone's Raina swoons onto a fainting couch after being forced to tell a lie. McSweeney and set designer Walt Spangler have created

an appealing container. The proscenium is turned into a Tyrolean jewel box with miniature toy soldiers arrayed along the stage front. As the curtain rises, Raina Petkoff's bedroom sits in the midst of a starry night and snowcapped mountains.”

Graydon Royce, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“This production, directed by Ethan McSweeney, hits the script's cartoonishness hard, building elaborate bits of business around foolish actions ...and so it is that the whole cast has fun. “

Max Sparber, *Minn Post*

“**Director Ethan McSweeney ups the “fun” quotient ... the slapstick serves the play nicely and in the hands of the as-always first rate Guthrie cast, it works ... The design is marvelous. Walt Spangler’s set bursts with color, fractured walls, enormous paper flowers, angry bulls heads. Even more color is provided by Murell Horton’s excellent costumes, Robert Wierzel’s lighting and Richard Woodbury’s sound ... the designers provide a feast for the eyes.**”

John Olive, *How Was the Show*

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A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

by Brian Friel, after Turgenev

The Gate Theatre • July – September 2015

Sets: Francis O’Connor • Costumes: Peter O’Brien • Lights: Sinead McKenna • Sound:
Denis Clohessy

“**Mesmerizing ... it's rare you leave a theatre unsure whether to laugh or cry - or both.** From raucous laughter to tears, comedy to tragedy, passion to toxic jealousy and deception, the entertaining play also somehow manages to be an in-depth study of the complexity of relationships and the roller coaster ride of emotion that is love ... **The standout performance of the show is Aislin McGuckin as the demanding, passionate, selfish, cunning and deeply unhappy Natalya. She is spell-binding as she acts out the part of a dissatisfied, self-obsessed and jealous woman on the brink of a breakdown ... Friel squeezes A Month in the Country into just over two hours of superb theatre and each and every member of this stellar cast plays a blinder.** “

Alana Fearon, *Daily Mirror*

“**Love is a game with uncertain rules and ruinous consequences in Brian Friel’s delicately amusing and elegiac version of Turgenev’s play.** Passions run high on the Islayev estate ... they brood, multiply, and finally erupt. To this end, Francis O’Connor’s intriguing set collapses the interior and exterior spaces, multiplying the proscenium of the Gate into a series of retreating frames, he turns the theatre into a hall of mirrors, allowing trees to break up through the floorboards ... this wilderness is ready to reclaim us. **Director Ethan McSweeney maintains a stately pace for a drama a romantic and linguistic entanglements, one that smuggles the radical energy of passion into a distinctly Irish wordplay.** All around ... love is a form of madness: a “catastrophe” that makes “the unreasonable perfectly reasonable.” It even sends both Natalya and

Michel skittering into tormented, split-psyche monologues, unable to reconcile their public and private selves.”

Peter Crawley, *The Irish Times*

“Turgenev’s play preceded Chekhov’s great works by half a century, but in Friel’s hands the two become contemporaries ... The play is, in a sense, daringly superficial, its very superficiality a comment on the milieu we are watching. It hints at a terrifying void beneath the rigid social hierarchies and customs ... Director Ethan McSweeney keeps Friel’s sense of unbearable lightness ... **Francis O’Connor’s set, mixing trees with interior settings, hints at the breakdown of the system that has preserved the estate, ensuring its return to wilderness.**”

Alan O’Riordan, *Irish Examiner*

“★★★★... A memorable production ... Mark O’Regan adds another fine understated performance to his list of recent comic work, getting the tone just right for the dodgy doctor with the bad jokes, almost making Shpigelsky likeable, especially in his wooing of the family friend Lizaveta ... **The most powerful dramatic moments of the evening were provided by Nick Dunning** as Natalya’s husband in the scene in which his eyes are opened to the emotionally dead world he has provided for his wife. His transformation from a well-meaning man unaware of his situation to one faced with the truth about his life and family is a formidable piece of acting.”

Michael Moffatt, *The Irish Mail on Sunday*

“Perfect Gate material ... Mark O’Regan does a brilliant job as the joker Doctor Schigelsky ... Caiomhe O’Malley as young Vera goes on a wonderful journey from giggly kid to mature young woman after the smack of betrayal. She becomes the centre of the play. Francis O’Connor’s set is a triumph ... Costumes by Peter O’Brien are supremely elegant.”

Katy Hayes, *The Irish Independent*

“Enchanting ... While Turgenev’s play is usually described as a comedy of manners, Friel has focused on passion as obsession. It is Natalya’s (a striking Aislin McGuckin) love for the younger man that drives the play’s emotion. An arresting cast is bolstered by beautiful costumes, and set and Ethan McSweeney’s calm direction.”

Eithne Shortall, *The Sunday Times*