

# The Dallas Morning News

December 29, 2009

## Year in Review: Theater

by LAWSON TAITTE

The Dallas Theater Center dominated theatrical news this year, the first that artistic director Kevin Moriarty planned completely for the company. It moved into its new digs, the Wylie Theatre, with a blast of bubble-gum Shakespeare – and mourned the death of founder Paul Baker. Moriarty concentrates on Shakespeare, musicals and new plays. You'd think he was planning all the other area theater companies' schedules as well. The three categories pretty much define what we see. Other world masterpieces from the past? Nada. Nichts. Rien.

Families had lots of offerings, from the Dallas Children's Theater to Plano's new Pfamily Arts. Almost all Dallas Summer Musicals shows aimed their sights at kids, and even the Theater Center did a world-premiere family musical. Let's hope all this effort is building audiences for the future.

1. **Katherine Owens of Undermain Theatre directed two of the year's three best productions, *The Black Monk* and *Port Twilight, or the History of Science*.** Let's single out David Rabe's adaptation of a Chekhov short story, the most moving and most magical theatrical experience of 2009. Every detail of *The Black Monk*, from John Arnone's spare yet romantic set to the acting in the smallest role, was perfect.
2. **Kevin Moriarty's inaugural Dallas Theater Center show at the Wylie Theatre, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, enchanted – and pulled in crowds that usually don't go to the theater.** The production showed off many of the possibilities of Rem Koolhaas' "theater machine" of a building. Other grand Shakespeare was around as well – a lyrical *Twelfth Night* at Trinity Shakespeare Festival, a rollicking *Merry Wives of Windsor, TX* at Shakespeare Dallas and an audacious *Titus Andronicus* at Kitchen Dog Theater.
3. ***Funny Girl* at Lyric Stage was my favorite musical of 2009, thanks to Kristin Dausch's *Fanny Brice* and the rest of the terrific cast.** But if you insisted on subbing Lyric's *The King and I*, with its restored orchestrations, or *The Road to Qatar*, the most entertaining premiere in the company's history, I wouldn't quibble.

4. **Farce can be high art, as Circle Theatre's *Incorruptible* demonstrated.** Director Robin Armstrong choreographed the funny business with an imaginative hand.
5. ***Lost in the Stars* at Theatre Three and *Grey Gardens* at WaterTower Theatre both proved you can make a great but difficult piece of musical theater work,** even if the performer in the central role acts it better than he or she sings it. But only if everything else about the show is spot on.
6. **Stage West's *The Seafarer* brought two of our best actors, Matthew Stephen Tompkins and Chuck Huber, back to the stage after long hiatuses.** But Jerry Russell stole the show as a poker-playing devil.
7. **Old favorites beat out newer work among touring musicals.** The farewell tour of *Rent* and the Lincoln Center *South Pacific* were both sublime.
8. **Finally, the late August Wilson's masterpiece, *Seven Guitars*, made it to North Texas.** African American Repertory Theater's version did it miraculous justice. Another important piece by a great black writer, *The Bluest Eye*, was the best thing Ed Jones has done since taking over Fort Worth's Jubilee Theatre.
9. **David Lozano and Raul Trevino's *Crystal City 1969* was the most interesting world premiere.** Jeffrey Schmidt's *The Old Woman* for the Drama Club at the Festival of Independent Theatres was a close runner-up. Lozano and Schmidt staged them imaginatively, too. It's great that the best stuff came from local playwrights.
10. **Contemporary Theatre of Dallas has mostly given us excellent revivals, sometimes of chestnuts, sometimes of rarer material.** Its area premiere of David Lindsay-Abaire's Pulitzer Prize winner, *Rabbit Hole*, proved it could excel in plays new to Dallas, as well.