

Shows that shake, rattle and roll

SINGAPORE

Asian theater group brings British musicals to intimate local venues

BY SONIA KOLESNIKOV-JESSOP

“From a Jack to a King,” by the Olivier Award-winning British director and writer Bob Carlton, had its premiere as a late night show at the Bubble Theatre in London in 1982, and a successful run in the West End in 1992. Now the rock ‘n’ roll musical loosely based on Shakespeare’s Macbeth is getting a second wind in Asia with a new touring production directed by Matt Devitt.

The jukebox musical is to run at Jubilee Hall, the theater at the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, on May 5-9, before showing at the Hilton Kuala Lumpur on May 12-14 and at the Millennium Hilton Bangkok on May 20-22. Each performance will be as dinner theater, a format pioneered in Asia in the 1970s and ‘80s by Derek Nimmo, the late British actor who established the now-defunct touring company, British Airways Playhouse.

“Dinner theater was hugely successful in Asia in the ‘80s. I actually met my husband at one of Nimmo’s productions in Kuala Lumpur back in 1988,” said Cecilia Leong-Faulkner, the director of British Theater Playhouse, the Singapore-based company that is behind the Asian production of “From a Jack to a King.” Her husband, John Faulkner, was at the time performing in Alan Ayckbourn’s “Bedroom Farce” and Mrs. Leong-Faulkner was working with American Express, one of the show’s sponsors.

The couple set up British Theatre Playhouse in 2004 to fill what they perceived was a need for dinner theater after Nimmo died in 1999 and his company was shut down. Their first production at the Shangri-La Hotel, Mr. Ayckbourn’s “How The Other Half Loves,” was a sell-out, and they followed with Oscar Wilde’s “The Importance Of Being Earnest,” Ray Cooney’s “Funny Money” and Noël Coward’s “Private Lives” presented appropriately enough at the Raffles Hotel, where Coward regularly stayed.

While Nimmo’s productions had largely attracted an expatriate crowd, Mrs. Leong-Faulkner pointed out that the theater now attracts as many locals as expatriates. “In fact, in Kuala Lumpur attendance is probably more skewed toward a local audience,” she said.

Instead of buying pre-packaged shows, British Theater Playhouse produces its own. “We choose the show, obtain the rights and then appoint a director, cast, designer and technical team,” she said. But because it is a nonsubsid-



A scene from a 2007 British production of “From a Jack to a King,” a musical take on Shakespeare by the playwright Bob Carlton.

British Theater Playhouse favors musical comedies with box-office track records.

ized production company, selecting plays with a box-office track record is paramount. Since 2008, the producers have opted to stage small, intimate musicals with an emphasis on comedy “because they are easier to tour” for multi-language audiences.

“From a Jack to a King” is first and foremost a rock ‘n’ roll musical and that, we feel, should have a wide appeal in the region,” Mrs. Leong-Faulkner said. “We first heard about the production when two of our cast members from ‘Blonde Bombshells of 1943,’ the last show we put on, suggested it and that led to a meeting with Bob Carlton in London.”

In this show, Mr. Carlton has transported Macbeth into 1960s Soho section of London as an aspiring rock ‘n’ roll star ready to do anything to get to the

top. The show features popular music from the ‘50s and ‘60s, including numbers like “Leader of the Pack,” “Tell Laura I Love Her,” “I Put a Spell on You,” and “Shakin’ All Over.”

“The story line is a parody of Shakespeare’s ‘Macbeth,’ but I have misquoted from many of his plays. You could call the show Shakespeare’s Greatest Hits Volume 1,” Mr. Carlton responded in an e-mail, adding, “I stole the story from Shakespeare, but Shakespeare had stolen the story from Holinshed’s Chronicles, so I don’t think Shakespeare would have minded.”

Over the years and many different productions, Mr. Carlton added new characters and tinkered with the dialogue, including a few cultural references to events of the time.

“The show has always evolved for various reasons. When we were in the West End, the union rightly asked for understudies so, rather than have people waiting in the dressing room, Bob rewrote the play and included the three witches, that weren’t in the origi-

nal production and were now played by the understudies. And gradually over the years, the witches have become more important,” said Mr. Devitt, who also directed that production.

“During the national tour, another character was introduced that remains today, a kind of Philip Marlowe character called Joe MacDuff,” he said. The production planned for Raffles will be a scaled-down version to fit the hotel’s smaller set. “But I don’t think that’s a disadvantage at all, because it keeps everything much more focused, as it did in the very first production in 1982,” he said.

The Singapore production will make passing reference to a recent concert by Tom Jones, which had to be canceled twice because of the singer’s throat problem. “It used to be Jerry Lee Lewis,” Mr. Devitt said. “I’m sure we’ll find something relevant for the other locations where we perform.”

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From a comic’s pages, big guns and secrets

The Losers. Directed by Sylvain White.

BY MANOHLA DARGIS

Remember “The Dirty Dozen”? Well, apparently Hollywood does.

“The Losers,” yet another movie about a team (more B than A) of grunting smart alecks with big guns and cool toys, isn’t the kind of flick you can call

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exactly new. The manufacturer’s date might be relatively recent, but almost all the ideas and moves are definitely older than the likable cast members. About the only thing that distinguishes this iteration from those of yore is that the violence is more explicit, the edits are faster, and no one has a stogie stuck in his kisser, or, from the looks of the swishing, herky-jerky cinematography, a tripod attached to a camera.

Even the title of this movie — which opens in the United States, and parts of Europe and Asia between now and September — isn’t new, recalling a 1970 action adventure about some motorcycle bikers recruited for a military mission in Southeast Asia. It was released as “The Losers” aka “Nam’s Angels,” and at least one poster made its inspirations explicit with the tag line, “It’s the ‘Dirty Bunch’ on Wheels!” The other movie getting the nod in that ad is, of course, Sam Peckinpah’s 1969 classic, “The Wild Bunch,” which the critic Richard Schickel called “the first masterpiece in the new tradition of ‘the dirty Western.’” From the mid-1960s to early ‘70s, ostensible losers redeemed themselves through camaraderie and violence in dirty Westerns (“The Professionals”) and dirty war movies (“Kelly’s Heroes”), as Vietnam and antiwar protests raged.

It seems unlikely that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have much to do with this new(ish) “Losers” and more to do with the anti-government posturing familiar from movies of this type. Still, it’s worth noting that the original group became a regular feature in 1970, tucked in another comic, “Our Fighting Forces.” Published by DC Comics, “The Losers” were World War II combatants who were resurrected in 2004 for the DC imprint Vertigo, this time as a Special Forces unit burned by the C.I.A. The premise of the reborn comic and the movie is neatly described on Vertigo’s Web site: The Losers “served as the covert bloody hand of America until they stumbled across a C.I.A. secret they couldn’t ignore.”

The covert bloody hand is represented here by Max (Jason Patric, deeply self-amused), a silky monster who likes

to wear an American flag pin on the lapel of his pin-striped suit and, from the power he wields, appears to be running the entire country. The director Sylvain White (“Stomp the Yard”) repeatedly zeroes in on that flag pin, which, depending on how you dunk your tea bag, suggests patriotism run amok or government power run amok. However you tilt, there is no denying the durability of a story involving a group of rugged individualists who join forces in bloody brotherhood to fight for right, or at least for your big-screen entertainment.

The more or less well-bathed and neatly shaved near half-dozen in “The Losers” are played by Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Chris Evans, Idris Elba, Columbus Short and Oscar Jaenada. They have goofy names (Pooch and Cougar) and various specialties (computers and knives), and when the movie opens, they’re joking around, playing cards and flashing their big, bigger weapons



From left, Zoë Saldana, Chris Evans, Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Columbus Short, Idris Elba and Oscar Jaenada in “The Losers.”

at one another like men with serious size issues. They’re not the only ones eager to show off. Rejecting the strong graphic look of the comic, Mr. White clutters up his images with zippy camera moves, which makes you watch even when your mind strays.

Written by Peter Berg and James Vanderbilt, the screenplay has more words per scene than the comic includes on a given page, but the cynicism and blood sport are pretty much the same. Also recycled from the comic is the lone she-wolf, Aisha (Zoë Saldana), one of those supervisors who can lock and load without blinking a mascaraed eyelash (or putting her flowing hair up in a ponytail). She’s supremely ridiculous, but like the rest of the cast, she’s nice to look at, whether she’s tightening her legs around Morgan’s neck or flying through a fusillade in her underwear, her image reflected in a shard of flying glass that, like the rest of this movie, is gone before you know it.

ONLINE: CLIPS FROM THE MOVIE
A trailer and selected excerpts from “The Losers.” global.nytimes.com/movies

PEOPLE

► **SANDRA BULLOCK** has filed for divorce from her husband, **JESSE JAMES**, and is adopting a baby boy as a single parent, People.com reported Wednesday. “Yes, I have filed for divorce,” the actress said. “I’m sad and I am scared.” Shortly after Ms. Bullock, 45, won the Oscar for best actress last month for her role in “The Blind Side,” a cheating scandal broke with several women claiming to have had affairs with Mr. James, 41. Meanwhile, Ms. Bullock told People that she has adopted **LOUIS BARDO BULLOCK**, a 3-month-old boy born in New Orleans.

“He’s just perfect, I can’t even describe him any other way,” she said. Ms. Bullock and Mr. James began the adoption process four years ago and brought Louis home in January but decided to keep the news to themselves until after the Oscars. Ms. Bullock says she is now finalizing the adoption as a single parent.



SANDRA BULLOCK, MATT DAMON AND LUCIANA BARROSO, FABIO LUISI

► The Metropolitan Opera, hobbled by the ailments of its maestro, **JAMES LEVINE**, 66, has appointed a principal guest conductor, only the second in its recent history. He is **FABIO LUISI**, an Italian who has worked for much of his career in Germany and Austria and has been an increasing presence at the Met since he made his debut in 2005 in Verdi’s “Don Carlo.” Mr. Luisi, 51, had stepped in to replace Mr. Levine in performances of Puccini’s “Tosca” this month and in the brief run of Berg’s “Lulu,” which opens May 8. (For the full article by Daniel J. Wakin, go to global.nytimes.com/music)

► **MATT DAMON**, 39, and his wife, **LUCIANA BARROSO**, 34, are set to have a fourth child in the autumn, People.com reported. The couple already has three daughters: **ALEXIA**, 11, from Ms. Barroso’s previous marriage, **ISABELLA**, 3, and **GIA**, 20 months.

► The British fashion designer **ALEXANDER MCQUEEN** hanged himself after taking a mixture of cocaine, tranquilizers and sleeping pills, the inquest into his death concluded. According to the BBC, the London inquest was told that the fashion designer was under pressure from work

and was “overwhelmed with grief” at the death of his mother, **JOYCE**. The 40-year-old was found dead in his house in London on Feb. 11, the day before his mother’s funeral. (REUTERS)

► The U.S. publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux said that it would release a book of **MARILYN MONROE**’s personal correspondence, called “Fragments,” in October, containing rare photographs of Monroe as well as reproductions of her typewritten and handwritten letters. **COURTNEY HODELL**, an executive editor at Farrar, Straus and Giroux, said Monroe’s writing included notes on the roles she was working on; exhortations to herself to become a better actress; notes from her readings about Italian Renaissance art; and a recipe for stuffing.

► The Museum of Modern Art said that its retrospective on **TIM BURTON**, the film-

maker of “Edward Scissorhands” and “Alice in Wonderland,” drew the third-highest attendance of any exhibition in the museum’s history. During the run of the New York show, which opened on Nov. 22, 2009, and closed on Monday, 810,500 visitors went to see artifacts like **SARAH JESSICA PARKER**’s severed head from the movie “Mars Attacks!” The exhibition will move to the Australian Center for the Moving Image in Melbourne from June 24 through Oct. 10 and to Toronto from Nov. 26 through April 17, 2011.

► The New Zealand Herald reported that Auckland Airport had increased its security on Wednesday in anticipation of a visit from the teenage singer **JUSTIN BIEBER**. A local high school, the Diocesan School for Girls, also had to contend with a rumor that Mr. Bieber, 16, would be performing there — a bit of gossip that school officials had to inform their students was false. Mr. Bieber’s visit to New Zealand came one day after a planned appearance at Sydney Harbour in Australia had to be canceled because of a surge in the crowd of waiting fans, which led to eight girls being hospitalized.

PHOTOGRAPHS: AFP, EPA, EPA

For compulsive hoarders, the clutter’s the thing

Stuff. Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things. By Randy O. Frost and Gail Steketee. 290 pages. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. \$27.

BY PETER D. KRAMER

Working with a patient he calls Debra, a compulsive hoarder, the psychologist Randy O. Frost tried an experiment. He proposed sending Debra a postcard, blank but for the name and address. Her assignment was to throw it away.

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Days later, Debra complained that she had not had enough time with the card. She described the stamp and the postmark. When she finally let go, she pictured the card in the trash. Later, she confessed she had cheated by writing down everything about the card she could remember, then saving the notes.

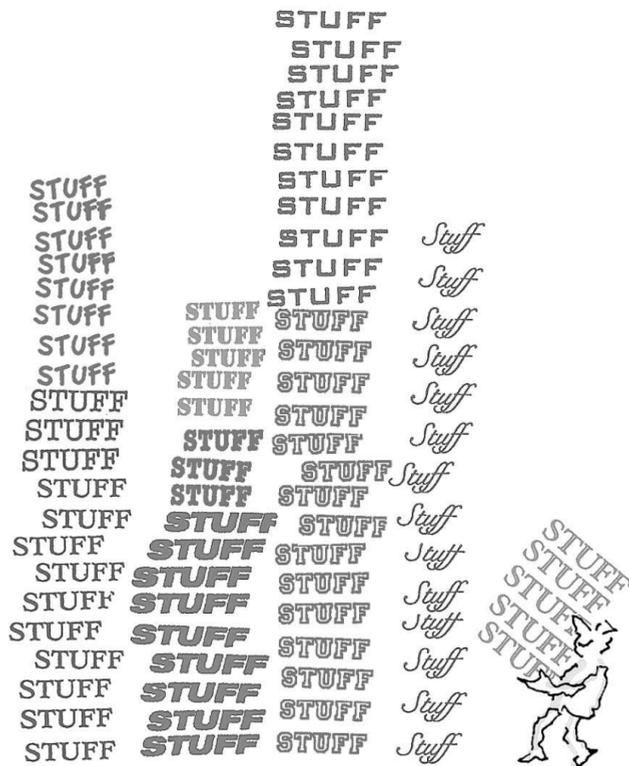
In “Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things,” Mr. Frost, a professor at Smith College, and Gail Steketee, a professor and dean of the school of social work at Boston University, invite us graciously into territory that might otherwise make us squirm.

They have spent nearly 20 years working with hoarders, sometimes in settings where tunnels lead through trash and roaches roam freely. The authors introduce collectors who acquire through shopping, Dumpster diving and stealing. The resulting assemblages encompass broken machines and living things (cats and dogs, mostly).

People justify hoarding as curating and recycling, deeming odd objects beautiful and useful. Sometimes they act as if history were at stake. Andy Warhol, “straddling the border between eccentricity and pathology,” the authors write, would periodically sweep everything — cash, artwork, apple cores — off his desk and into a cardboard box. He stored hundreds of these “time capsules.”

To characterize hoarding, the professors select what they call a “prototype” case involving a woman named Irene. Irene’s home is filled with seemingly random items: newspapers, children’s games, empty cereal boxes. The mess has driven Irene’s husband from the house, and she worries he will seek custody of their children, including a daughter whose dust allergies make it hard for her to live there.

To Mr. Frost and Ms. Steketee, patients like Irene demand a new understanding of hoarders. Past experts have depicted them as isolated and paranoid — deprived in childhood and now un-



R.O. BLEICHMAN

able to discard worthless junk even when it bears no sentimental value. But Irene’s parents were comfortable financially. She has many friends. She treasures each item she owns and anticipates putting it to future use.

Hoarding has been linked to obsessive-compulsive disorder and its variants, and Irene, who displays contamination fears, probably meets criteria for O.C.D. But studies show the genetics of hoarding differ from the genetics of obsessing.

And while obsessiveness is painful, Irene finds enjoyment in acquiring and revisiting her holdings. It is this pleasure in objects (think of Debra and the postcard) that distinguishes hoarding, in the authors’ view. They suggest that hoarders may “inherit an intense perceptual sensitivity to visual details,” and speculate about “a special form of creativity and an appreciation for the aesthetics of everyday things.” This upbeat account of hoarding’s

basis has a humane ring: hoarders are discerning. But then, Irene can be indiscriminate, according every possession equal worth, whether it is a newspaper clipping or a photograph of her daughter.

Mr. Frost and Ms. Steketee are too thoughtful to give a simple account of what drives Irene. Possessions help her preserve her identity and relive past events. The objects make her feel safe and allow her to express caring. Newspaper clippings point outward, speaking to Irene of opportunities in the wider world. Irene is depressed; collecting promises relief. Irene displays perfectionism and indecisiveness, character traits that have been linked to hoarding. When there are so many motivations, no single one seems central.

Hoarding can also arise in connection with senility, injuries to the brain’s frontal lobes and Prader-Willi syndrome, a genetic disorder whose symptoms may include low intelligence. Ideally, any

theory that ascribes a special sensibility to hoarders would need to take account of patients whose thought processes are impaired. And as the authors demonstrate, there is no end to competing explanations of how hoarding arises.

The “terror management theory” holds that collecting mitigates fears of death, via the fashioning of a form of immortality. The “compensation theory” postulates that objects can provide reassurance of self-worth.

Certainly, collecting is a common human activity. One hoard, 1,100 seal impressions on clay from the Fertile Crescent, has survived 25 centuries. As many as 90 percent of children collect something, the authors report, and two-thirds of U.S. households include a collector.

What separates pastime from disorder? The professors rely on distress and impairment, criteria that psychiatry employs to delineate diagnoses. But some of the subjects Mr. Frost and Ms. Steketee discuss function well enough.

As their examples multiply, hoarding comes to seem an ever more diffuse concept. A majority of the subjects the authors study are clinically depressed. Mr. Frost and Ms. Steketee believe that hoarding causes the mood disorder.

Working in different terrain, I see patients who complain first of depression. Twice, I’ve treated women who lived amid clutter because they could not discard the detritus of daily life, be it magazines or pay slips. I had no success with the filled rooms. But both times we made progress with the depression, and both times the patient moved. In the new house, each managed to keep up with the flow of paper.

If Mr. Frost and Ms. Steketee have difficulty constructing a coherent new vision of compulsive hoarding, it is because they are too observant and too dedicated to the relief of suffering to make a complex phenomenon simple. They are collectors in their own right, stocking a cabinet of curiosities with intimate stories and evocative theories.

To those who need to understand hoarders, perhaps in their own family, “Stuff” offers perspective. For general readers, it is likely to provide useful stimulus for examining how we form and justify our own attachments to objects.

Peter D. Kramer, a psychiatrist, is the author of “Against Depression” and, most recently, “Freud: Inventor of the Modern Mind.”

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