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A Fall Theater Season of Infinite Variety

By MICHAEL SOMMERS



Ethan Lipton & His Orchestra will perform "No Place to Go," at Two River Theater.

WORLD premieres, audience favorites, fresh Off Broadway hits and a Shakespearean drama, along with a mix of recent, familiar and uncommon works, are arriving this fall at New Jersey's professional theaters.

As they have for some years now, the shows will go on against a backdrop of budget-consciousness. While many companies report that they are achieving their subscription goals — and, in some cases, better-than-usual ticket sales — concerns about maintaining current operations exist, since funding for the arts from corporations and foundations generally has been diminishing in recent years. "I think that every theater has tightened their belts as much as they can," said David Saint, the artistic director of the George Street Playhouse.

Some companies, like the Paper Mill Playhouse, are seeking greater support from individual donors. The New Jersey Repertory Company is reducing its playing schedule from six to five weeks. The McCarter Theater Center's first show will be shared with Lincoln Center Theater.

That co-production, perhaps the most prominent attraction of the season, is the McCarter's world premiere of "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike," by Christopher Durang. Under Nicholas Martin's direction, Sigourney Weaver, David Hyde Pierce and Kristine Nielsen head the company in a modern-day romp that sets familiar Chekhov characters in comical circumstances (through Oct. 14). The New York-based troupe Elevator Repair Service follows with its international tour of "The Select (The Sun Also Rises)," a 10-actor incarnation of Ernest Hemingway's novel (Oct. 26 to Nov. 4).

Two premieres are scheduled at the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick. Lewis Black, a curmudgeonly presence on "The Daily Show With Jon Stewart," is the author of "One Slight Hitch," a 2011 comedy about an unhinged Ohio family during the Reagan era that stars Mark Linn-Baker in its New Jersey debut (Oct. 2 to 28). Next comes the world premiere of Joe DiPietro's "Clever Little Lies," a contemporary look at fidelity, starring Marlo Thomas (Nov. 27 to Dec. 23).

Not every theater will offer new works. "We choose our season largely in response to what our patrons tell us," said Mark S. Hoebee, the producing artistic director of the Paper Mill Playhouse. "Lately they are interested in seeing shows that they already know." Accordingly, Paper Mill is mounting its third production of "A Chorus Line," which will be directed by Mitzi Hamilton, one of the dancers upon whose personal stories the musical is based (Oct. 3 to 28), followed by "The Sound of Music," last staged there in 2003 (Nov. 23 to Dec. 30).

At the Two River Theater Company, the playwright Suzan-Lori Parks is directing her "Topdog/Underdog," a disturbing two-character study in sibling rivalry that won a Pulitzer Prize in 2002 (through Sept. 30). The Red Bank theater then imports the 2012 Obie Award-winning "No Place to Go," a witty musical reverie about losing one's job, performed by its creator, Ethan Lipton, and his band (Oct. 6 to Nov. 4). Shakespeare's history play "Henry V" is being staged by Michael Sexton, the artistic director of the prestigious Shakespeare Society (Oct. 20 to Nov. 11).

At the Shakespeare Theater of New Jersey, a 13-member ensemble portrays more than 30 characters in "Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist," an adaptation of the novel, written by Neil Bartlett (Sept. 12 to Oct. 7). In staging the musical "Man of La Mancha" (Oct. 17 to Nov. 18), Bonnie J. Monte, the company's artistic director, plans to emphasize the Don Quixote story's roots in the 16th century. Next comes "Trelawny of the 'Wells,'" Sir Arthur Wing Pinero's affectionate 1899 look at provincial theater folk (Dec. 5 to 30).

The New Jersey Repertory Company continues to produce new works at its 60-seat venue in Long Branch, where Gino DiIorio's "Release Point" continues through Sept. 23. A dark romance, Sharr White's "Annapurna" deals with a dying, cowboylike poet who gets an unexpected visit from his ex-wife (Oct. 11 to Nov. 18). A world premiere, Laurel Ollstein's "Esther's Moustache" is a four-character comedy about a successful but anxious comic strip artist whose sexy cartoon alter ego starts to give her advice (Dec. 13 to Jan. 13).

In Morris Township, the Bickford Theater is staging "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow — An Evening of Sondheim," a 1983 revue of Stephen Sondheim's words and music (Sept. 20 to Oct. 14), followed by the New Jersey premiere of "The Last Romance," Joe DiPietro's bittersweet comedy about a frisky octogenarian who encounters a well-to-do widow in a dog park in Hoboken (Nov. 15 to Dec. 2).

Centenary Stage Company is readying a pair of perennials for its main stage season in Hackettstown: the Agatha Christie thriller "The Mousetrap" (Oct. 5 to 21) and "The Wizard of Oz" (Nov. 23 to Dec. 9).

Apart from holiday events, most other companies are preparing single productions for the fall.

Relocated from South Orange, the Dreamcatcher Repertory Theater inaugurates its larger quarters at the Oakes Center in Summit with "The Neighborhood," a new musical about suburban life written by Laura Ekstrand, the company's artistic director, and composed by Joseph Zawila (Sept. 28 to Oct. 14). Another group with a new performance space, the Theater Project, now at the Burgdorff Center for the Performing Arts in Maplewood, presents "The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler," by Jeff Whitty, who wrote the book for the musical "Avenue Q" (Sept. 20 to Oct. 7).

In West Orange, Luna Stage is presenting "Vita and Virginia," Eileen Atkins's 1992 dramatization of the letters and diaries of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf (Sept. 27 to Oct. 28). In New Brunswick, the Crossroads Theater Company has "Knock Me a Kiss," Charles Smith's fictional look at a troubled marriage during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, starring André De Shields as the civil rights activist and author W. E. B. Du Bois (Oct. 25 to Nov. 11). In Teaneck, the Garage Theater Group produces Deb Margolin's "Imagining Madoff," a 2010 drama that posits a Bernie Madoff striving to justify his actions to one of his victims (Oct. 25 to Nov. 11).

A solo play from Off Broadway about the actor Zero Mostel, as written and portrayed by Jim Brochu, "Zero Hour" marks the first production from the American Theater Group (Oct. 3 to 21),

a new company in residence at the 199-seat theater of Hamilton Stage, which opens later this month as an adjunct facility to the Union County Performing Arts Center in Rahway.

Also in Union County, Premiere Stages at Kean University presents “Farragut North,” Beau Willimon’s behind-the-scenes 2008 drama about intrigues among election campaign workers (through Sept. 23).

The Passage Theater Company in Trenton offers the world premiere of “Blessed Are,” Jessica Bedford’s drama about a former convict who returns to his hometown after a 10-year absence (Oct. 18 to Nov. 4).

The East Lynne Theater Company in Cape May resurrects “It Pays to Advertise,” a Broadway farce from 1914 by Roi Cooper Megrue and Walter C. Hackett that satirizes corporate business practices (Sept. 19 to Oct. 13). Meanwhile, the nearby Cape May Stage will have three shows at its 1853-vintage playhouse this fall. “Time Stands Still” is Donald Margulies’s recent Broadway drama about a photojournalist reassessing her life (Sept. 12 to Oct. 13). “The Belle of Amherst” is William Luce’s one-woman depiction of Emily Dickinson, starring Barbara Dana (Oct. 17 to 27). “Poe, Times Two” is writer-performer Greg Oliver Bodine’s interpretations of “The Cask of Amontillado” and “The Black Cat” (Oct. 31 to Nov. 16).

On Long Beach Island, the Surfflight Theater in Beach Haven is running the musical “Once Upon a Time in New Jersey” through Sept. 15. Arriving after that show are such familiar works as “Steel Magnolias” (Sept. 19 to Oct. 7), “I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change” (Oct. 10 to 21) and “Barefoot in the Park” (Oct. 24 to Nov. 4).