

# ASBURY PARK PRESS

## Theater: What's on stage in April?

TOM CHESEK, CORRESPONDENT

Plan to catch “**Of Mice and Men**” at Holmdel Theatre Company, which continues for five more performances (through April 8) at the troupe’s Duncan Smith Theater. The rustic converted farm building on the grounds of Holmdel High School makes an appropriate setting for this American tragedy, adapted by Noble laureate John Steinbeck from his own classic novel of two migrant workers whose big dreams run up against the realities of life on the fringes of modern society. Michael Kroll, a comedy specialist who’s stretched out into dramatic territory in recent seasons, directs a cast top-lined by Dave Duncan and Brian Craig as buddies George and Lenny. Tickets (\$25, with discounts for seniors and students) can be reserved at [www.holmdeltheatrecompany.org](http://www.holmdeltheatrecompany.org).

As the Shore area’s longest running theatrical troupe, the Monmouth Players chose a script by the great Noel Coward for their maiden production, way back in 1953. Here in their 2017 “Season of Classics,” the Players revisit the Coward canon with a new staging of “**Private Lives**,” the master’s elegantly acid-tipped comedy of a divorced couple thrown together again by circumstance (and adjoining hotel rooms) when on holiday with their respective new lovers. Opening at 8:15 p.m. Saturday, April 1, the show continues through April 9 inside the beautifully renovated Navesink Arts Center (the former Navesink Library) in Middletown Township. Ticket reservations (\$20, with discounts for seniors, students and veterans), show dates and directions can be obtained by calling 732-291-9211 or by visiting [monmouthplayers.net](http://monmouthplayers.net).

Another favorite playwright of community troupes, Dame Agatha Christie, is represented ably by Freehold’s Center Players with “**Murder on the Nile**,” a 1944 “Christie twister” that saw the author taking considerable liberties from her novel “Death on the Nile” — tossing out the familiar sleuth Hercule Poirot and swapping out several of the supporting characters. Aficionados of old-school “drawing room” style whodunits can have sporting fun comparing the book and play, as co-directors Zach Berman and Bernice Garfield-Szita take on the show that opens April 21 at the Center Playhouse. Tickets (\$24) plus full schedule details can be found at [www.centerplayers.org](http://www.centerplayers.org).

Thanks to an extended run, audiences have two more chances (at 2 and 8 p.m. on Saturday, April 1) to catch the acclaimed production of “**In the Heights**,” the Tony-winning musical by “Hamilton” creator Lin-Manuel Miranda (and Quiara Alegria Hudes) that’s now on stage at the Axelrod Performing Arts Center in Ocean Township. Luis Salgado, a cast member and co-choreographer of the original Broadway engagement, directs the show for which available tickets (\$25 to \$36) can be found at [www.axelrodartscenter.com](http://www.axelrodartscenter.com).

On April 23, the APAC auditorium welcomes the award-winning cabaret artist Andrea Marcovicci in a revival of her 1996 show “**I Am Anne Frank.**”

The actress-singer is joined by a children’s ensemble and chamber orchestra in this 3 p.m. tribute to the world-famous diarist and her fellow victims and survivors of the Holocaust, which features a new original prologue written by the show’s lyricist Enid Futterman. Tickets (\$36; senior and student discounts) at [www.axelrodartscenter.com](http://www.axelrodartscenter.com).

Still on stage at the Spring Lake Community House in the lead-up to Easter, the biblically inspired Stephen Schwartz songfest “**Godspell**” continues with shows at 7:30 p.m. March 31, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 1, 7:30 p.m. April 7, and 2 and 7:30 p.m. April 8. Reserve tickets (\$30 adults; senior, student and child discounts) at [springlaketheatre.com](http://springlaketheatre.com).

One of the truly great singer-songwriters of the early rock era lives again, when Manasquan’s Algonquin Arts Theatre hosts “**The Buddy Holly Story**” for two weekends beginning Saturday, April 1. Jared Mancuso channels the look, life and lasting legacy of the bespectacled Buddy in the show written by Alan Janes; he’s supported by such local luminaries as Lynne Truex and Jan Topoleski in the show that runs eight performances through April 9. Tickets (\$29 to \$36, with discounts for seniors and students) and full schedule details can be found at 732-528-9211 or [algonquinarts.org](http://algonquinarts.org).

Following the professional touring production of “**Menopause: The Musical**” (3 and 8 p.m. Saturday, April 1), Red Bank-based Phoenix Productions, the resident semipro theatrical company of the Count Basie Theatre, inaugurates another new season of spectacular musical entertainments on the Basie’s Asbury Park Press stage, with a timely take on Disney’s “**Beauty and the Beast.**” Adapting the Oscar-nominated animated feature (and adding new songs by Alan Menken and Tim Rice to the film’s hit score by Menken and Howard Ashman), the tale of misfit heroine Belle (Lauren Sodono) and the misunderstood local monster (Michael McEntee) opens at 8 p.m. April 29, continuing with a mix of matinee and evening performances through May 7. Get full schedule details and tickets (\$22 to \$32) by calling the Basie box office at 732-842-9000 or visiting [countbasietheatre.org](http://countbasietheatre.org).

Over at Ocean Grove’s Jersey Shore Arts Center (the old Neptune High School), La Strada Ensemble Theater — the collective of playwrights and performers under the artistic direction of Toms River author A.J. Ciccotelli — continues its busy season of original plays with “**Crazy Love Part 2: A Festival of Passion.**” A recent addition to the La Strada schedule, it’s an all new collection of seven one-act shorts by locally based writers, centered along that thin line between love and hate, and presenting three performances between tonight and Sunday.

Then take it to the upstairs Herbst Theatre at the JSAC on April 7 when 106.7 Lite FM radio personality Christine Nagy teams with actor-author Peter Trabucco in “**Not Curing Cancer,**” a satirical dark comedy (set in the world of Big Pharma and too-big-for-their-own-good charities) by Chicago playwright Gerry Ringwald. Performances are at 8 p.m. April 7, with a 2 p.m. matinee April 9, followed by a Q&A with the playwright. Tickets for either show (\$18; senior and student discounts) can be reserved by visiting [www.lastradaensemble.org](http://www.lastradaensemble.org) or calling 732-455-2748.

Murder is on the menu when “**The Real Degenerate Housewives of NJ**” invade The Grange Playhouse in Howell for an interactive one-night stand at 7:30 p.m. April 8 that offers a buffet dinner, DJ music, door prizes and “tons of fun playing various characters and helping to solve the crime” Reserve dinner/show seating (\$40) by calling 732-768-2709.

The teaching profession comes in for a ribbing this April, as Atlantic Highlands dessert theater First Avenue Playhouse serves up John Twomey’s “**All My Raisins in the Son,**” an ensemble comedy set in a “Teacher’s Lounge” (its original title). Leslie Hochman directs an all-female cast in the show that plays Fridays and Saturdays through the month at 8:30 p.m. (with a 2 p.m. Sunday matinee TBA). Reservations (\$22) can be had by calling 732-291-7552 or visiting [www.firstavenueplayhouse.org](http://www.firstavenueplayhouse.org).

Over on the Shore’s professional stages, the James Hindman drama “**Multiple Family Dwelling**” continues Thursdays through Sundays until April 9 at New Jersey Repertory Company in Long Branch. Call 732-229-3166 or visiting [njrep.org](http://njrep.org) for schedule details and tickets (\$45). Continuing a policy of spotlighting new works by Latino playwrights, Red Bank’s Two River Theater premieres “**The Women of Padilla,**” an ensemble portrait (directed by Obie winner Ken Rus Schmoll) of eight women whose husbands are off fighting a seemingly never-ending war. The play by Tony Meneses goes up in previews April 8 and opens April 14. There will be a free reading of the script in Spanish on April 17. Call 732-345-1400 or visit [www.tworivertheater.org](http://www.tworivertheater.org) to reserve tickets.