

through a series of well-observed examples that draw on structured and sustained refusals to perform eating and to face the threat of death as life comes to be questioned as a matter of law. Through this Anderson questions the balance of power that allows the 'benefit tube' to disguise the external surface of the body as a shroud for internal decomposition.

FIONA BANNON

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*Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, Stacy Wolf, ed.*

**The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical**  
New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 470 p.  
£95.00.

ISBN: 978-019-538594-6.

Over the past two decades the groundbreaking work of scholars like Stacy Wolf and Raymond Knapp has demonstrated that the American musical is a genre worthy of serious critical attention, and Oxford University Press, largely thanks to entrepreneurial editor Norman Hirschy, has been a leader in publishing much of the best new research on the topic. Still, in many academic departments musical theatre studies remain on the edges of scholarly respectability – tolerated perhaps, but rarely taught as core curriculum.

*The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, edited by Wolf, Knapp, and Mitchell Morris, and overseen at the Press by Hirschy, will, I hope, help to end the field's marginalization. The book definitively proves that the study of musical theatre is not the eccentric hobby of a few nonconformist tenured professors but an emerging field populated by a brilliant and diverse group of scholars. The *Handbook* assembles a set of twenty-nine essays by what a musical theatre producer might call 'a dream cast' of scholars from an array of disciplines to produce a volume that is comprehensive and accessible enough to serve as a primer to introduce the uninitiated to current debates within the community and to assign to students as part of a course in the history and theory of the genre.

It is, I suspect, this latter use that will account for most of the book's sales. A feature likely to be especially helpful to students is the integration of 'multimedia' examples that may be accessed on the publisher's companion website. This approach, employed by editor Raymond Knapp in his earlier books on the topic, remains an ingenious one for discussing a multimodal genre in print; however, one wonders why the Press has not yet released the book to either the Kindle or Nook stores as an 'enhanced' ebook with actual hyperlinks. Still, this is a small quibble. *The Oxford Handbook's* uniformly strong essays by music, dance, theatre, and film scholars provide as thorough an introduction to the history, form,

practice, and reception of the genre as one could reasonably desire. Instructors in musical theatre history and theory have long needed both a good anthology of primary texts and an introductory textbook that accounts for the wide variety of disciplinary and critical approaches of scholars in the field. We are still waiting for the former, but *The Oxford Handbook*, at long last, meets the latter need.

DOUG RESIDE

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*TACE, National Theatre Museum of Slovenia*

**Occupying Spaces: Experimental Theatre in Central Europe, 1950–2010**

Ljubljana: Slovenski Gledaliski Muzei, 2010.

592 p. €35.00.

ISBN: 978-961-6860-01-7.

This book is one of the outcomes of the international TACE project, involving the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. This international, three-year project was created by five Central European theatre institutions and the publication has been created as a result of numerous, insightful observations by theorists and practitioners of the theatre – designers, critics, dramaturgs, researchers, and theatre-makers. As the title suggests, this publication concerns experimental theatre between 1950 and 2010 with a special focus on the spaces occupied by these theatres, or more specifically, as the introduction puts it, 'the "occupying" of non-theatrical spaces, thus urbanizing and socializing them'.

This publication fills a significant gap and also provides an unprecedented study of the function, role, and changes in theatre space in the non-institutional theatres operating in five countries of the region. The authors represent a variety of artistic and technical fields, increasing the value of the assembled studies, and providing a thorough overview of the changes and transformations of the period in terms of theatre space, art, society, and culture. The departure of theatre from 'the building' is given the broadest of contexts. If an escape from the box of bourgeois theatre was an underlying goal for many artists, it represented not only a scenic or an architectural agenda, but also spoke of public cultural, social, and political changes. It signified new artistic and aesthetic explorations, which involved rebellion against 'the regime' and against censorship, and the opening up of new areas of subject matter.

The articles which make up this volume provide a picture of changes in the experimental theatre of Central Europe ranging from the fight against regimes to experiments with theatre space – and sometimes its complete rejection. The authors base their writings on specific examples of groups working in this area and descriptions of

the performances which resulted. The book contains both factual information and interpretative material, providing a range of important perspectives, historical, theoretical, and analytical.

The information is assembled and presented clearly and, as well as the wide variety of work described, there are useful textual excerpts, lists of artists, and bibliography. Photographs and illustrations at the end of each chapter are a further contribution to the richness of material. I would recommend this study to writers, to performance theoreticians, to students of theatre space, to researchers, and to those with a wider cultural perspective – to all those, in short, who believe that theatre is a place for the creation of new forms and the design of new ways of thinking and of social action.

MAGDALENA GRENDA

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Mark Leipacher

**Catching the Light: Sam Mendes and Simon Russell Beale**

London: Oberon Books, 2011. 155 p. £14.99.

ISBN: 978-1-84002-969-7.

Contemporary theatre audiences and scholars will be familiar with director Sam Mendes and actor Simon Russell Beale. Mark Leipacher is not alone in recognizing that these artists, notwithstanding considerable independent achievements, have developed some of their most exceptional stage work together. His book is a celebration of this creative partnership, comprising (to date) eight productions over a period of more than twenty years. Drawing predominantly on primary source material – video archives and extensive correspondence with each of his subjects – the author explores defining moments of rehearsal and performance, offering insights into the working methods of a creative relationship founded on trust and mutual respect.

The writing is engaging and empathetic, shaping pathways between extended observations from Beale and Mendes which grant privileged access to both practitioners. However, by the author's own admission, this study provides glimpses of an intriguing collaboration between a gifted actor and director rather than giving a comprehensive account of either's process. The most substantial part of the book deals with the joint productions of Mendes and Beale. These are discussed chronologically in a succession of short chapters, each prefaced with production credits and an enthusiastic review extract. Leipacher assumes a familiarity with the plays – six by Shakespeare, two by Chekhov – which could restrict appreciation of his material for some readers, although the clarity of his structure will be attractive to students researching a specific text.

Repetition between chapters indicates awareness of *Catching the Light's* potential as a selective resource, and the book may be more satisfying used in this way than as a through-read. For students or early-career actors and directors, the observations of Beale and Mendes illuminate possibilities for original interpretation without compromising the playwright's intention. However, the delineation of Mendes's progressively ensemble-orientated approach to rehearsals is to some extent undermined by the exclusivity of Leipacher's attention to one performer: while appreciation of a close actor/director relationship is enhanced, consideration of any likely contribution from other cast members in shaping key performance decisions is minimal. At times this focus seems to limit dramatic exploration unhelpfully, particularly in the case of the Chekhovian texts. Overall though, this is an accessible read which casts light on particular moments of inspiration in collaboration and textual interpretation and will be enjoyed greatly by admirers of a partnership described by Kevin Spacey in his foreword as 'extraordinary'.

ALICE BARTLETT