

# DANCING AROUND

Jesse Green explains why *Billy Elliot* the musical will be the most politically charged show of the Broadway season



The huge advance sale for the Broadway incarnation of *Billy Elliot*, opening this month, is probably fueled by ticket buyers who remember the 2000 movie as a feel-good coming-of-age drama about an English boy from mining country and his dream of being a dancer. Or maybe they've heard the raves from London, where the musical, with its Elton John score, is still running after three years. What they're surely not expecting is the gut-punching, violent, politically explicit experience that surrounds all those things. *Billy Elliot* the musical is a socialist fist in a Broadway glove.

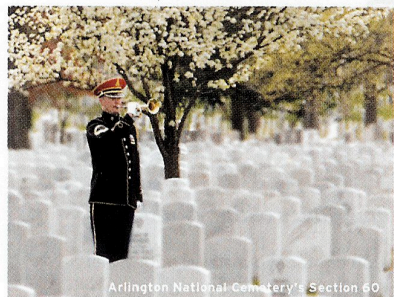
Partly that's because the show is an hour longer than the movie, restoring much context that was cut during the editing of the

film. And partly that's because seeing miners and police riot onstage (or, for that matter, a boy drum out his frustration in tap shoes) is a far more visceral experience than seeing it spliced together on film. That makes the intersection of the two stories (Billy's artistic emergence, the miners' crushing defeat at the hands of Margaret Thatcher) more painfully ironic; instead of agitprop, you get the compromise of people whose values don't align. "Our socialist heroes are the ones trying to stop Billy from dancing," says Lee Hall, who wrote the screenplay and now the musical's book. "He's able to go to his big audition only because he gets money from a scab. Every cliché is met with a complication."

Advance chatter has focused on whether a show set among working-class Brits circa 1984 will be comprehensible to a 2008 Broadway audience, but musicals from *Oklahoma!* to *Oliver!* have always taken us to unfamiliar places where people talk funny. And as Hall—who grew up in that "brusque, salty culture" and sees the story as a "fantasy autobiography"—points out, the material is highly topical for Americans facing hard times and a possibly paradigm-altering election. That's even truer now that it's a musical, which by its lead-and-chorus nature highlights the interaction of individuals and communities. "It's about something more difficult than escaping," Hall says. "It's about whether one person can change the mind of the masses." Onstage, and for better or worse in many political movements, they often do.

# MUST-SEE TV

HBO continues its revelatory war coverage with its latest documentary about fallen U.S. soldiers and their grieving families



Arlington National Cemetery's Section 60

While the media is consumed with election mania, filmmakers Jon Alpert and Matthew O'Neill refuse, once again, to let us forget

the plight of U.S. troops stationed in Iraq. They partnered with HBO on the Peabody-winning documentary *Baghdad ER* in 2006, then

turned out another with last year's *Alive Day Memories: Home from Iraq*, a series of 10 interviews with injured servicemen and women executive produced by James Gandolfini. They now complete the trilogy with the ultimate coda, *Section 60: Arlington National Cemetery*, airing in October. The hour-long documentary—an almost unbearably intimate view of fallen soldiers' families as they visit their loved ones' graves in the five-acre tract

designated for those killed in Iraq and Afghanistan—pays homage to the quiet grind of loss and the rituals of graveside visitation. And as we watch these moments unfold—a father napping alongside his son's grave; the developing community of 25-year-old widows and grieving, middle-aged mothers—it reminds us, politics aside, of the irreversible consequences many of us will never know. —Hilary Elkins

# SHE'S WITH ME

In Melissa Hellstern's *Getting Along Famously: A Celebration of Friendship*, out this fall, we learn which iconic leading ladies leaned on each other... most of the time. —JULIE VADNAL



**BFF:**  
**AUDREY HEPBURN AND SOPHIA LOREN**

**HOW THEY MET:** In 1955, Loren's husband produced the big-screen version of *War and Peace*. Hepburn and her husband, Mel Ferrer, were cast as the leads.

**BONDED OVER:** Husband-free pasta dinner parties; smoking cigarettes; Scotch

**REMINDS US OF:** Penélope Cruz and Salma Hayek



**CATFIGHT MOMENT (MEOW!):** Hepburn: "I'll admit that I'm not as well-stacked as Sophia Loren...but there is more to sex appeal than just measurements."



**BFF:**  
**LAUREN BACALL AND KATHARINE HEPBURN**

**HOW THEY MET:** On the set of *The African Queen*, starring Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart. He insisted that his wife, Bacall, join him on location in Africa.

**BONDED OVER:** Surviving the harsh conditions in Africa; their amours, Bogart and Spencer Tracy, were also buds

**REMINDS US OF:** Victoria Beckham and Katie Holmes



**CATFIGHT MOMENT (MEOW!):** Hepburn, after Bacall asked her to be her son's godmother: "Why on earth me? I don't even like children."



**BFF:**  
**LUCILLE BALL AND VIVIAN VANCE**

**HOW THEY MET:** On the set of *I Love Lucy* in 1951, Ball told Vance she wasn't "dumpy" enough to play Ethel.

**BONDED OVER:** Vivian squashing Lucy's epic on-set temper tantrums by making her laugh

**REMINDS US OF:** Tina Fey and Amy Poehler



**CATFIGHT MOMENT (MEOW!):** Reportedly, Vivian had to be 20 pounds heavier than her costar. "On summer vacations she came back svelter," Ball once said. "I kidded her, 'You've got two weeks to get fat and sloppy again.'"

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