

Side Show

By Robert W. Cabell

Side Show is one of the most stylish shows to hit Broadway in a decade. Full of heartaches and thrills, seedy illusions revealed, all scattered amongst real life horrors that for a short while blossom into their own haunting beauty. At the heart of this show, two actresses, dazzling in their portrayal(s) of the conjoined Hilton twins, Daisy and Violet, are now forced to deal with something the real Hilton sisters never were: the pain of separation. From each other and the show. Though the critics roared - the crowds stayed away. At a cozy corner table in the village eatery *Pennyfeathers*, I talked with Alice Ripley (Violet Hilton), *Side Show* costar, about the show and its future. Is there a chance that *Side Show* really will come back? "There's a really good chance. The situation has just been so emotional, it literally has flipped day to day." Why did it lose so much money? "We played to half houses for the majority of the run until we got the closing notice and then the cast decided to take control. I was out at

the TKTS ticket lines every day, before every show, telling people to come see us, and the house was packed. Not just packed, but packed with people who were getting the show, being transformed by it. We were finally performing to the audience we had waited for. Getting these amazing standing ovations. A lot of times we couldn't get them to sit down, and after a while I didn't want them to. But before that, those half houses, that was why they lost money. If our nut is so much a week and we aren't making it every week it adds up fast. What was your favorite moment in the show? "'I Will Never Leave You'. That moment was like my touchstone." I understand that they switched you two. That historically Violet was on the left? "Yes they did. Since Daisy starts almost everything that is sung or thought by them they wanted Daisy to be on the left because it's the strongest visual position." Robert Longbottom had done *Pageant*, a one joke musical, with fine use of bad taste. Going from that to *Side Show* was a huge leap.

"Bobby is brilliant. Every now and then you work with a director who has an enormous vision. The precision of our movement and the way our characters become distinguished from each other all comes from him. He has a tremendous sense of style, though some people wanted a bigger bang for their buck. They have gotten used to seeing exploding pinball machines and giant chandeliers." What was it like seeing the real Hilton sisters in those films? "It was hard to watch *Freaks*, since I cry at Kodak commercials, because they were all real freaks. Even though it was not a great movie, the emotional content was so real, so raw. And in *Chained for Life*, it was just a sketch story to have a reason to see the Hilton sisters. Have you and Emily developed a special closeness doing this kind of role? "We definitely have a bond that I don't have with any other person that isn't my sister. But we don't need to spend time with each other outside the theatre. At the end of the day, I have had my butt up against her for a couple of

hours, I'm ready to have it up against somebody else." Were you with the show from the beginning? "I did the third workshop. Emily was with it from the beginning. The most difficult part of the show was learning to dance together, and stay together. How did the two of you work out all that movement? They way you just come together and stayed that way the whole time? "We started with a corset-type thing, like two mini-skirts Velcroed together. I carry a lot of the emotional life of my body in my hips. It was like an instant path of emotional vulnerability that we found together. It all developed very organically. Which is the way I like to work." Did you find that you became sensitized to each other's voices? It seemed like in your solo sections, your voices changed into something more individual, but when you sang together it became a blended sound? "There were specific moments in the show that we were asked to blend. To have straight tone at the same time or vibrato at the same time, but like the

movement, after a while it became second nature." One of the most powerful moments in the show, was when Jake (Norm Lewis) professes his love to Violet and she is afraid of what people will say because he's black, and he says, "If I can see past your affliction, why can't you see past mine?" "Yes. And in those days, that's what some people thought being black was. I always fantasize that later in life, Violet looks back and says, 'that's the only man in my life who ever really loved me'." How was it playing a role that was sort of an Ingenue opposite another woman as your leading man? "It really is a love story between two women and that's what I think makes it so powerful. I can't think of another show that has that. It's enough for me to want to give up ever other job opportunity and play it for the rest of my life and be the Carol Channing of *Side Show*. I am so in love with this show."

By Dan Baillie

I was charmed not only by the production of *Side Show*, but also the two actors who were

The Pain of Separation

challenged with creating Daisy and Violet Hilton. When we decided to interview Emily Skinner and Alice Ripley, I immediately said I wanted to interview Emily. We met at the always wonderful West Bank Cafe on 42nd Street. What is the status of the show? "We were definitely going to be coming back, then our director pulled out, but has since returned. If it does reopen it will be around April 13." Did you know Alice prior to the show? "We met during the workshop of the show last summer at the Richard Rodgers. I had already been cast as Daisy and they were trying to find someone who could work with me. As soon as Alice walked into the room, boom, that was it." What was it like to have to create your space and character with another actor? "It was the most liberating experience I've ever had as an actress. When someone is with you all the time, not only are you totally supportive in a physical and emotional way, you don't feel as vulnerable, so you can be more vulnerable."

Continued on page 60