

AH, WILDERNESS

Raging Hormones

Cabell: ★★

Baillie: ★★★★★

Vivian Beaumont Theater, 150 West 56th Street

Eugene O'Neill's only comedy is a Ma & Pa show starring Craig T. Nelson and Debra Monk with Sam Trammell as their second eldest son, Richard. The story takes place over the July 4th weekend when Richard receives a 'Dear John' letter from his beloved Mildred and goes into a major teen-age funk.

Cabell: The show is in three acts and the first is too long.

Baillie: Robert, it's just that in a world of action movies and special effect theatrics it's a real treat to enjoy the sedate pace and power of O'Neill's dialogue.

C: The whole show reminded me of watching old home videos. Nelson and Monk looked so much like my family, it was scary. And my younger brother is named Richard too.

B: How nice for you Robert, but that's exactly O'Neill's magic! To show us ourselves, with and without faults.

C: I think Craig T. Nelson stole the show as Nat Miller, the local newspaper owner and father of four. He was very loving and compassionate and his comic flair for internal fussing drives each scene, weaving a subliminal web of paternal love and devotion.

B: Especially in the birds and bees scene. My question was, could Mr. Nelson break his TV persona? Within moments of his entrance, he did. He was flawless. He captured the essence of a man caught between the ideals and morals of the time and love for his family, yet he did not steal the show.

C: Debra Monk was a delight. Her fussy, oh-so-proper, no-nonsense Mom with the marshmallow center was the perfect foil for Mr. Nelson. Sam Trammell as the troubled second son Richard tread a fine line between tragically endearing and painfully bright, keeping his nervy high



My question was, could Mr. Nelson break his TV persona within moments of his entrance?

anxiety with the maximum comedic results.

B: Monk is one of our most versatile actresses: everything she touches is charmed. For you, it was Nelson. For me, Trammell was the surprise of the night. He was brilliant, fresh, and honest in his naiveté.

C: Jenn Thompson plays Belle, a small town lady of the night who liquors up Richard for a wild and defiant evening.

B: ... the "candy girl" with whom Richard has his first contact with sex and booze.

C: Thompson's Belle was acerbic and jaded with that certain something extra that made her fascinating to watch.

B: Agreed. Tracy Middendorf as 'good-girl' Muriel, the object of Richard's hormonal adoration, only appeared in the last act, yet she equaled the build up of the first two and delivered a fine performance.

C: Dylan Chalfy as Arthur the self-proclaimed "sophisticated" older brother is charmingly pompous and ostentatious.

B: As usual the character actors add depth to the evening. Leo Burmeister and Leslie Lyles (Sid and Lily) are close to perfection as the on again/off again couple. Daniel Sullivan's direction and use of text is flawless.

C: The sets by Thomas Lynch and lighting by Peter Kaczorowski are lush and sweeping.

B: For me the sets were suitable but Dunya Ramicova dresses the ensemble in period perfection.

C: It's a well produced, so-so show elevated beyond its text by a fine cast and strong direction.

B: Robert had a hard time staying awake. I was enthralled.

GOLDEN CHILD

24-Karat Play

Cabell & Baillie: ★★★★★

An exotic period-piece about the conflict between a modern-thinking Chinese businessman who converts to Christianity and the shattering consequences it brings to his three (count them: three) wives.

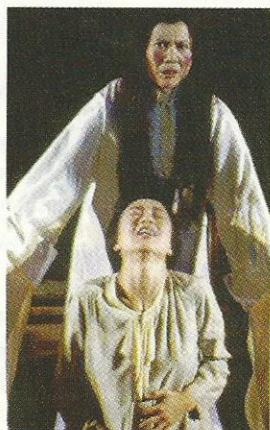
Cabell: Directed by the legendary James Lapine, *Golden Child* is a beautiful, but imperfect play.

Baillie: Award-winning playwright David Henry Hwang strikes gold as he expertly injects poignant humor into what it means to be Chinese.

C: Like Chinese food, you like it but you're not sure what it is. The strongest impression in the show is the beautiful oriental imagery of ancestral afterlife.

B: Randall Duk Kim was captivating as the wealthy tea merchant, Eng Tieng-Bin, caught between worlds.

C: Julyana Soelistyo is a standout among a cast of powerful performances. With a flip of her hand, she transforms instantaneously from an ancient ghost into a 12-year-old girl.



Like Chinese food, you like it but you're not sure what it is.

B: Remarkably, it is Julyana's Broadway debut. As the *Golden Child* she giggles, cries, has her feet unbound, tries on western shoes, and crawls around the stage with such profound innocence it is hard to believe that this adult actress is not a child. She is amazing.

C: John Horton's Reverend Anthony Baines is warm and charming on one hand, resolutely ruthless on the other. Tsai Chin's performance is incandescent as the opiate-clouded, traditionalist "First Wife".

B: Stunning Kim Miyori is cunning as the Second Wife (think Alexis Carrington-Colby) and Ming-Na Wen is exquisite as the Third Wife, the real love of Tieng-Bin, (think Krystle Carrington). Debuting Ming-Na Wen is a very welcome addition to the New York theatre. These wives make *The Women* look like Girl Scouts!

C: The play itself is not as gripping and powerful as Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. The story lines are dispersed and the modern day beginning and ending underdeveloped, but the total effect is stunning.

B: *Golden Child* is a 24-karat play, with nothing but golden performances. ■