

TRAVEL

How to make the most of the Great White Way

BY CINDI COOK
SPECIAL WRITER

Planning a great evening at the theater would make even the most seasoned chorus girl swoon. The Great White Way is experiencing a boom it hasn't seen in years, with 20 Broadway shows now listed and 11 soon to appear. Shows like "Cats" and "The Phantom of the Opera" (each with runs of over a decade) continue to play to sold out houses and lines continue to form nightly outside of "Les Miserables."

So how do you get to Broadway? It will take more than a plane ticket, or a song in your heart. Since Times Square can be daunting for even the most native of New Yorkers, let alone those from out of town, auditioning all your options will give you a star-studded evening.

Just the ticket

Only Lady Luck or the Leading Lady can land tickets to some shows. Tele-charge and Ticketmaster, those blessed creations of theater producers, are the most convenient methods of purchase. Friendly operators are there 24 hours a day, every day, to take orders (credit cards only) for the shows they handle. Performances are Tuesday through Sunday evenings, with matinees on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays (Monday being "dark"). The hitch: nominal service and handling charges ranging from \$4.25 to \$9 are added to ticket

prices which can range from \$55 to \$80.

Tele-charge (212-239-6200/800-432-7250 or 800-223-7505; HYPERLINK <http://www.telecharge.com> handle 20 Broadway and 34 Off-Broadway shows. Tickets are mailed if placed within 10 days of the performance, held otherwise. Ticketmaster (212-307-4550/7171; www.ticketmaster.com) oversees ticket ordering for 11 Broadway shows and eight Off-Broadway shows. Unfortunately, there are no refunds or exchanges.

Other routes are The Broadway Line, an automated phone service with detailed information on purchasing, show dates and times, and TKTS, the booth in Duffy Square, just north of Times Square, and at 2 World Trade Center (212-768-1818 for information on both). TKTS offers shows at a discounted price for that day's or evening's performance only—often at half off. Sorry, only cash and travelers checks accepted and they're not open Sunday.

The best shows

New York Theater is at its pinnacle right now. In a recent New York Times "On Stage and Off," columnist Rick Lyman states, "There are 38 Broadway theaters and every one is booked. Solid." The choices, it seems, are bigger than the last casting call for "A Chorus Line." There are revivals "The Sound of

Music," "Cabaret," and soon "Annie Get Your Gun"; there are plays about old New York "Ragtime" and now New York "Rent." There are plays about animals "The Lion King" and something beyond animal "Beauty and the Beast"; there are plays from movies "Footloose." There is pure dance: "Fosse" and pure song, "Smokey Joe's Cafe"; there are felines "Cats" and phantoms "The Phantom of the Opera"; British imports "Art" and down and dirty American originals "Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk." Too many to mention and more on the way. Look for reviews in The New York Times, The New Yorker, and Playbill magazines.

Dinner for two or more

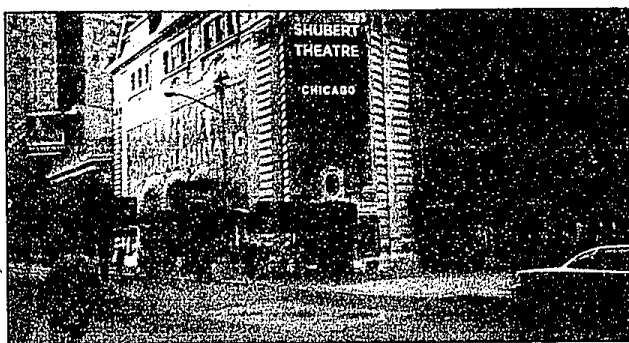
Steps from the stage door lie a myriad of restaurants. Choz Josephine, named for ex-pat cabaret lovely Josephine Baker at 414 West 42nd Street (212-594-1925) dishes up diverse French Bistro fare.

Fill your pasta bowl and your stomach at Carmine's, 200 West 44th Street (212-221-3800). Extremely popular since its opening six years ago, Carmine's traditional family-style fare (lots of food on big plates) are more suitable for groups, but one or two dishes will satisfy you, your dinner companion and your doggie bags.

To see Gotham in all its glory, try The View, atop the Midtown Marquis (1535 Broadway, 212-704-8900). This restaurant is not for the easily queasy; as you dine, it rotates (slowly). Keep looking out the window, though; you might be able to see Maple Avenue if you look closely enough.

If nothing but a New York steakhouse will do, there are plenty. One of the best is Gallagher's, on West 62 Street, just off Broadway (212-245-5338). You know you're in business when a freezer full of meat stares you in the face upon entry. The portions aren't skimpy nor the prices. Slabs of filet mignon and swordfish, creamed spinach, and football-size baked potatoes with all the trimmings make it worth every penny.

Wherever you go, inform your waiter of your showtime, especially if the establishment is in the theater district. Busiest dining times are 6-8 p.m. Do not



Great White Way: The Shubert Theatre is one of the many famous theaters along the streets on and just off Broadway.

leave too little time to get to the theater; As the clock inches closer to showtime, taxis will start to disappear and your patience. Chances are you might not be sat (or sat late) if you arrive after the curtain goes up. House rules aside, it's also mighty disturbing to your fellow theatergoers. A wise choice: early dinner in a distant neighborhood Soho or Greenwich Village. You'll avoid crowds and make a clean getaway.

Apres theater joints

One spot exudes cabaret more than any other: the Algonquin Hotel (59 West 44th Street, 212-840-6500). The hallowed halls have been privy to the biggest names in show biz John and Ethel Barrymore, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. (who spent his honeymoon there), and Dorothy Parker, George S. Kaufmann, famed members of the legendary Algonquin Round Table. Catch Andrea Marcovici and the like in the cozy Kok Room.

Cafe Carlyle in the Carlyle Hotel (35 East 76th Street, entrance on Madison between 76th and 77th Streets, 212-744-1600) is an exquisite spot. Legend Bobby Short holds court for two long seasons, with Karen Akers, Dixie Carter and Julie Wilson also gracing the stage. Budget conscious travelers beware: there is a \$35 cover

charge just for stepping inside.

The best guides

It was no surprise that my mother, theater maven and veteran of 30 years of Birmingham community theater, brought to my attention probably the most comprehensive guide to New York theater: Applause: New York's Guide to the Performing Arts. This slim volume lists it all. It opens with a map of the theater district and lists music, theater, dance, opera, jazz and cabaret, children's events, environmental and performance art, festivals and seasonal events, and free events. One almost need look no further; it is that great.

If you're interested in seating only, the folks at Tele-charge offer Stubs, a 5-by-7 publication that provides seating charts for all Broadway theaters, Off-Broadway theaters. The cost is \$9.95 (plus shipping and handling and applicable sales tax), but you need not order tickets to purchase it. Stubs is also available in most major bookstores. Tele-charge also offers free pamphlets with details on the shows

they service.

Time Out New York is another super source, with an all-inclusive entertainment guide and I mean all theater, restaurants, cabaret, symphony you name it, it's in there (they are also on line at HYPERLINK <http://citysearch-nyc.iccn.net/timeoutny2/> <http://citysearch-nyc.iccn.net/timeoutny2/>). The ever-intrepid New York magazine (located at HYPERLINK <http://www.newyorkmag.com>) also contains tons of information

Cindi Cook is originally from Birmingham and is now living in New York City.

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formerly of
Birmingham,
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