



Nothing Like a Dame: Conversations with the Great Women of Musical Theater

Eddie Shapiro (Editor)

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In *Nothing Like a Dame*, theater journalist Eddie Shapiro opens a jewelry box full of glittering surprises, through in-depth conversations with twenty leading women of Broadway. He carefully selected Tony Award-winning stars who have spent the majority of their careers in theater, leaving aside those who have moved on or occasionally drop back in. The women he interviewed spent endless hours with him, discussing their careers, offering insights into the iconic shows, changes on Broadway over the last century, and the art (and thrill) of taking the stage night after night. Chita Rivera describes the experience of starring in musicals in each of the last seven decades; Audra McDonald gives her thoughts on the work that went into the five Tony Awards she won before turning forty-one; and Carol Channing reflects on how she has revisited the same starring role generation after generation, and its effects on her career. Here too is Sutton Foster, who contemplates her breakout success in an age when stars working predominately in theater are increasingly rare. Each of these conversations is guided by Shapiro's expert knowledge of these women's careers, Broadway lore, and the details of famous (and infamous) musicals. He also includes dozens of photographs of these players in their best-known roles.

This fascinating collection reveals the artistic genius and human experience of the women who have made Broadway musicals more popular than ever -- a must for anyone who loves the theater.

Nothing Like a Dame: Conversations with the Great Women of Musical Theater Details

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Christopher says

The interviews in this collection are fascinating and will either be revelatory for those who only sporadically check in with theater gossip (like myself) or old hat (but still entertaining) for those who really dig theater history. Patti Lupone's cheer is characteristically hilarious and outrageous. I read this on a weekend beach vacation and it was perfect.

Anne Libera says

Fascinating interviews with female stars of musical theater- not necessarily anything new here but catnip for a former musical theater kid like me.

Danielle says

This book is a compilation of interviews with twenty leading ladies of Broadway. Shapiro spends an extensive amount of time interviewing each woman and the book is composed of his short observations about their interviews followed by edited transcripts of the interviews. Interview subjects include such Broadway luminaries as Carol Channing, Angela Lansbury, Patti Lupone, Chita Rivera, Audra McDonald, Kristin Chenoweth, Idina Menzel, and Sutton Foster among others. If you are into the theatre this is an excellent and fascinating book. Shapiro basically organized the chapters by the age of the actress which gave an interesting continuity to trends in the theatre and the way the actresses think about working on Broadway. Most if not all of the older actresses expressed opinions that young people weren't dedicated enough to their roles and overwhelmingly decried the personal days Broadway actors now receive. It was also great to hear the women talk about the shows they've been in and their experiences behind the scenes as well as their feelings on each other. If you like Broadway theatre I highly recommend this book.

Gary the Bookworm says

June is busting out all over...for MEEEEEEEE! (Theater buffs should get the allusions.) First came Father's Day, then another birthday, both in the same week. I decided that this book would be my special present to myself. I've been smitten by all things Broadway since my mother took me to see Mary Martin and Robert Preston in a long-forgotten musical, *I Do! I Do!*, which is about a married couple who celebrate their love by singing to each other in bed. The most memorable song is titled "Our Cup Runneth Over." It may sound corny, but I was watching Nellie Forbush AND *The Music Man*...I'd done my homework.

Eddie Shapiro, another theater "enthusiast" has done something miraculous. He has compiled in-depth interviews with twenty-one Broadway babes-he calls them dames. What they share, besides at least one Tony and many subsequent nominations, is a career-defining commitment to THE THEATER. I've only scratched the surface, but he's confirmed many of my preconceived prejudices: Carol Channing is hilarious, Angela

Lansbury is gracious, Betty Buckley is a conflicted genius, and Patti LuPone is a world-class BITCH! I also discovered Debra Monk. They all have fascinating stories...and a few scores to settle. They've overcome disappointments, but triumphed in ways that make their performances soar. Many have found work in films and TV, but their stage work is what matters most... to them, and to their devoted fans. To echo Martin and Preston: MY cup runneth over...with love!

Joan says

I don't know a whole lot about theater, but I did a lot of theater growing up and that was kind of more my scene than say movies, which I watch a lot more now. I only read the interviews of women that I knew, like Bebe Neurith and Sutton Foster. I wish I got to the theater more, but it is expensive. I liked how a lot of them just fell into it. Grew up taking dance and theater classes and just worked their way up. They just kind of were in love with theater all their life and got noticed. That seems like the way it should be in all the arts. Sometimes movies seem so overblown and they're usually not very good, while usually, theater has better odds against it in terms of being good or not because it seems like a lot more went into it than into some movies.

Cole says

The interviews all come across as a little too linear and polished, but I'm thankful to have this book as a resource and a way in to the minds of these artists. It's great to see all these women in the context of one another.

Donald Butchko says

Before I delve into my reservations, I want to make clear that, for Musical Theater/Broadway enthusiasts, this book is an essential read. But then, based on the description, said enthusiasts probably know that. It is a once-in-a-lifetime compilation of interviews with just about every Tony Winning Leading Lady you can think of (except Bernadette Peters), compiled from five years of conversation. Author Eddie Shapiro seems to have a genuinely fine rapport with all of the subjects featured in the book, and the herculean effort it must have taken to secure their consent and time is to be applauded. Great effort was made to cover new ground, as opposed to just rehashing things die-hard fans already know, and most of the interviews succeed in expanding my understanding of--and appreciation for--their subjects. But as much as Shapiro seems to pride himself on the thoroughness of the interviews, and though he always tries to "set the scene" in which each conversation takes place, these interviews seem to exist in a world without context.

In his introduction, Shapiro says he spent "hours" with each of the actresses interviewed, oftentimes meeting multiple times over the course of several years. (The months and years of the meetings are listed at the beginning of each chapter). But these discussions, which Shapiro consistently describes as "loose" and "casual", are always presented in the book as a single, linear, concise conversation. How does the former become the latter? How many different bits of conversation go into one precise answer? The clearest example is the interview with Sutton Foster which is culled from three meetings over a four year span. And yet the interview makes no attempt to clarify this passage of time. Is Foster talking about Shrek while it is in its out of town tryout, 10 months after opening, or two years after it closed? When she jokes that she's only

ever dated actors, is that as a married woman or a divorcee (both are possible given the time span of the interviews)?

Shapiro also presents these interviews in an information void. He frequently refers to Debra Monk's Emmy, but at no point sees fit to tell the reader that she won for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series in 1999. He'll say to Vicki Clark, "and then you did Cabaret", without mentioning that she played Fraulein Kost, only letting the information be revealed by Clark a few pages later. Nor does the grey-box containing an arbitrary list of acting credits that accompanies each interview ever contain the roles each woman played but instead lists only the show titles, years, and Tony wins or nominations. He'll launch into lengthy discussions an actress' experience in a truly obscure musical (not-even-on-wikipedia titles I've never heard of like "Song of Singapore" or "Time and Again"), without a single sentence to explain the show to an un-enlightened reader (i.e. almost everyone). Even the most informed Broadway fanatic will need a web browser to make it through these interviews.

Eddie Shapiro clearly did something to merit the trust and confidence of the women interviewed in this book; I just wish he had done likewise for the readers.

Barbara says

If you're a Broadway fan, or just like some of these fabulous ladies, you'll love this book. Eddie Shapiro sits down with some of Broadway's biggest names: Carol Channing, Patti LuPone, Chita Rivera, Angela Lansbury, Audra McDonald, Idina Menzel...the list goes on. Each interview was thoughtful and in depth - I really felt like a fly on the wall. I appreciated each woman's honesty and it's incredible to read that these women have so much insecurity! Few of them believe they've completely deserved what they've gotten, and most feel like one day they may wake up and find out it was all a dream.

Boy let me tell you though, this book really does illustrate how "making it" is pure luck. Even some of the women acknowledged there are definitely performers out there who deserve Broadway just as much as them but they aren't given the time or attention. It's a really right place at the right time kind of business. However, each one of these women clearly have earned their spotlight and all the raves that go along with it. It's refreshing to see how real these women are in spite of all the glory.

Now I really want to go to a Broadway show - there's nothing better!

Gasuski Suski says

This is a great read for those who want to do Broadway. Being a Broadway star is lots of hard work and many auditions where you never get a call back. I loved all the famous theater personalities that were interviewed. You must persevere in show business. Donna McKechnie (A Chorus Line) is my favorite because I just saw her perform not to long ago to honor Marvin Hamlisch. Betty Buckley, Sutton Foster, Patti Lapone and so many more.

Richard says

This collection of interviews with Broadway's living leading ladies is perfect for a theatre geek like me. In fact, it may go farther in depth than interests me. Fortunately you can skim your way to the parts that interest you. A fascinating history of Broadway over the last 60 years!

Robert says

A very enjoyable set of interviews with most of the great ladies of the Broadway stage. (OK, Bernadette, what happened?) From Elaine Stritch to Laura Benanti, these women talk openly and honestly about their careers, fears, and joys. The interviewer keeps the discussions moving without imposing his own opinions or agenda.

Prue Reid says

A must-read for anyone who cares about the actresses behind all the great roles on Broadway, I bought it for Kristin Chenoweth but I found each and every interview to be a fascinating portrait of an intelligent and strong woman, often with tales of struggles relevant to any female career.

Kate says

For those of you who don't know me, I love and I mean love anything and everything that relates to Broadway. Probably if I could, I would go and see a Broadway show every weekend. Money, distance and time prevents that from actually happening. I love going to theaters and learning the history and seeing pictures of all the famous actors and actresses who performed at that theater. Angela Lansbury, Chita Rivera, Carol Channing, Audra McDonald and Betty Buckley, Kristin Chenoweth are some of the actresses that Shapiro interviewed. Author Eddie Shapiro interviewed these wonderful ladies along with others and just got to know their successes and struggles in the industry. Three stars that I have always loved and enjoyed reading more about were Carol Channing, Chita Rivera and Betty Buckley.

Carol Channing, you hear the name and you automatic are drawn to the theater. This 5'9" of a woman with a deep and unique voice is Broadway. Starting from her first Broadway show of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949) to her last show of *Hello Dolly* in 1995. In the book, she talks about her love of the theater and the environment of the theater. Diversity, is important to Carol and the theater, you have all walks of life on a stage. Channing also though does touch on issues like being in the theater world so much, she lost touch with her only son and was never the mom that was there for him. She mentions her one husband taking her money but somehow, somehow she always seemed to manage. For a woman of 90 something, she has had her share of ups and downs, but the theater was always a place she could escape and forget about reality for awhile. I read her autobiography book titled *Just Lucky I Guess*, it was a hoot.

When it comes to being at the right place at the right time, Chita Rivera knows it all to well. In the book, she talks about her not really wanting to do theater but it just came to her. Her one love was dancing and that lead to tryouts, that lead to Broadway and that lead her to where she is today. Also, she gives a lot of credit

to fellow performers who helped her along the way such as Bob Fosse, his wife Gwen Verdon (another great Broadway performer), Jerome Robbins Leonard Bernstein and so on. She mentions her disappointment of not being in the movie version of *Bye, Bye Birdie* but was thrilled to have been in the play (1960) with Dick Van Dyke and Paul Lynn (both who went onto the movie version). A wonderful person who has an outstanding Resume of dancing and the theater.

Parents always want the best for their children and that was not exception in the case of Broadway star Betty Buckley. This Texan gal had parents who were on opposite ends to her career in theater. Her mother being a singer and dancer herself, encouraged her daughter's dreams. Her father on the other hand, believe those who did showiness were seen as unclean and loose women. Her father eventually gave in and accepted his daughter's profession. Being a huge fan of Andrew Lloyd Webber, I have a ton of Buckley's cds. It's hard to say who sings "Memory" from *Cats* better, her or Elaine Paige.

All and all a wonderful book for those of us who enjoy Broadway and learning more about the stars on the stage.

David says

Excerpt from my review at TalkinBroadway.com:

Subtitled "Conversations with the Great Women of Musical Theater," Shapiro's book delivers exactly what the title promises: interviews with (mostly) above-the-title stars, presented as straightforward Q&As. While there are only a couple of notable omissions (Bernadette Peters being the most obvious), the book makes no attempt to be encyclopedic. In fact, in his introduction, Shapiro acknowledges that many of these women have written their own memoirs (or, in the case of Elaine Stritch and Chita Rivera, performed in autobiographical Broadway shows) and, rather than attempt to retell the same stories, he hoped to complement and expand upon what they've already offered about themselves. Given that approach, this book might not be the most accessible to casual theatergoers. If shows like *Call Me Madam* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* or names like Graciela Daniele and Gwen Verdon send you running to Google, you may find the reading experience challenging.

Shapiro occasionally relies on simplistic, formulaic questions, and you may get tired of "What was it like working on show x?" and "How do you feel about all the press events surrounding the Tony Awards?" While this produces the occasional dud (Elaine Stritch's chapter reads like she's actively avoiding answering questions), in the best interviews, these become springboards for surprisingly frank discussions of the joys and challenges of being a working actress. That may be the biggest revelation of the book as a whole: even actresses like Chita Rivera, who can't help but acknowledge the indelible mark she's made on the history of Broadway, see themselves first and foremost as working actors. And the most depressing part of that revelation is how much each woman still has to hustle to keep working, not only for the love of the theater, but to pay the bills. Legendary status doesn't come with a pension plan.

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Donna Wilson says

I love a celebrity autobiography, and for the Broadway aficionado, this was the mother lode! The author interviewed a plethora of Broadway divas, and the book was chock full of fascinating behind-the-scenes anecdotes and a glimpse of the stars' true personalities.

I've always found it interesting that celebrity authors let a little of their "ugly" side peak through when dishing on their lives, and it was so true in this case. While ostensibly touting their triumphs, some of the actresses who seem charming and warm on the stage actually harbored jealousy, resentment, and huge egos on the inside - I guess that's why they're great actresses. Surprisingly, other women (I'm thinking of Bebe Neuwirth) who usually play cold, bitchy women were actually sweet, self-effacing and generous with praise for their peers.

The author interviews older "classic" stars like Angela Lansbury and Chita Rivera, as well as today's Broadway babies (Kristen Chenoweth, Sutton Foster, Idina Menzel), and quite a few in between. A must-read for the theater buff!
