

THEATER

Pillowman Reinvents Broadway Thrills

By Iris Wiener

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There was a buzz in the air on June 5 at the 2005 Tony Awards as many of the guests could be heard proclaiming the past Broadway season to be "the year of the play." Although *The Pillowman* didn't walk away with a lot of trophies that night (out of six nominations, the play was honored with two wins in Scenic and Lighting Design categories), no other productions hit quite the same level of captivating profundity. Martin McDonagh's play is one of the most engaging theatre experiences on Broadway. It pulls at one's sense of morality as a violent battle between a heart-warming and heart-wrenching tale unfolds.

The Pillowman is a stimulating, funny new dramedy about a fiction writer in a totalitarian state who is interrogated about the gruesome content of his short stories, and their similarities to a number of bizarre incidents occurring in his town. The investigation leads to the unveiling of an intricate web of truths so disturbingly honest that we come to show compassion toward those behind the injustices.

The first of penman Katurian's tales is delivered to a dumbfounded house: "The father, as we have established, treats the little girl badly, and one day the girl gets some apples and carves some little men out of these apples, all little fingers, little eyes, little toes, and she gives them to her father but she says to him they're not to be eaten, they're to be kept as a memento of when his only little daughter was young, and naturally the pig of a father swallows a bunch of these apple men whole, just to spite her, and they have razor blades in them, and he dies in agony."

Billy Crudup astounds us in his Tony nominated performance as Katurian, whose love for a thought-provoking tale is delivered with concrete sincerity. Crudup challenges us to find fault in his character's passion as he pleads for a social understanding. His incredible range is illustrated in Katurian's anguish over a mentally challenged brother's wrongdoings, his love for his brother, and his desperation to make his world a fair one.

Jeff Goldblum and Zeljko Ivanek play Tupolski and Ariel (respectively), the detectives looking for the person responsible for the 'copycat' crimes. Their warped version of 'good cop/bad cop' is hysterical, an irony that goes no-



Photo By Joan Marcus/Courtesy *The Pillowman*

Billy Crudup (sitting) plays the part of Katurian in *The Pillowman*, the tale of a fiction writer (Crudup) who is interrogated by detectives Ariel (Zeljko Ivanek, center) and Tupolski (Jeff Goldblum) about the gruesome content of his short stories and their similarity to a string of recent events.

pealing would do a disservice to readers looking to be surprised, but the few minutes in which we are able to share in his relationship with his brother are sensationally driven. Michael Stuhlbarg's Drama Desk Award and Tony nomination for this role were well-earned.

Never once dull or unimaginative, the most enchanting aspect of the play comes with the cooperative hand be-

life. Director John Crowley utilizes the stage and blackish light to our advantage, constantly moving the actors with great flourish and motive.

The pillowman himself will forever be a lingering notion in one's mind after having seen this startling production. The central character of a story written by Katurian, he resembles the idea of a figure making an attempt to set

turning material. The lauded actors define the art of timing in their interrogation of Katurian in line after line of brilliant diatribe. Goldblum seems right at home on the New York stage, his towering frame a demanding presence for both his fellow actors and his audience.

The most controversial aspect of *The Pillowman* comes with the introduction of Michal, Katurian's mentally challenged brother. To say to what effect this character is ap-

decrease in ticket sales for plays is their alleged lacking in the theatrics and spectacle that are reminiscent of the big musicals. But *The Pillowman* re-invents theatrics and spectacle for its own purpose, proving this theory to be old news. The looming set is the only aspect of the play

best fit to upstage Goldblum's height. A dark cavity of morbid secrets and shame, the walls literally encapsulate the hurt that permeates Katurian's stories, as well as his own

some he may resemble a political figure; to others, a version of their own conflicted psyche. Either way, the symbolic nature of his presence and the conflicted relationships surrounding him on-stage are unarguably the best reasons to visit Broadway this summer.

To purchase tickets to *The Pillowman*, visit Telecharge.com/pillowman, or call (800) 432-7250.