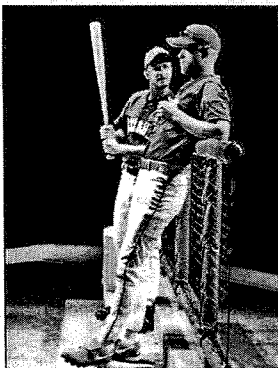


THEATER REVIEW

'Back' looks at baseball's foul territory



Adam (Nick Mills, left) and Kent (Brendan Griffin) have a heart-to-heart in "Back Back Back." *Craig Schwartz*

By James Hebert
THEATER CRITIC

One of the most terrifying side effects of performance-enhancing substances, besides the organ damage and rage episodes and problem complexions, is the way their use has led to uncontrollable fits of clichés that end in the phrase "on steroids."

You know the kind. A Hummer is an SUV *on steroids*. A grande macchiato latte is a cuppa joe *on steroids*. Arnold Schwarzenegger is a politician *on steroids* (although that one might be meant more literally). That sort of thing.

"Back Back Back" is a play about steroids, but it's not a play about steroids. If Itamar Moses' understated, intimately scaled work about the great

DETAILS

"Back Back Back"

Old Globe Theatre

When: Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 7 p.m.; Thursdays-Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7 p.m. Through Oct. 26.

Where: Arena Stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium, Balboa Park.

Tickets: \$42-\$59

Phone: (619) 234-5623

Online: TheOldGlobe.org

American pastime is muscled up on anything, it's on major-league infusions of talk. This is baseball on therapy.

Moses' timing is certainly good. The Mitchell Report on steroids in the sport was re-

SEE 'Back,' E6

► 'BACK'

CONTINUED FROM E1

The three men are a group of game talkers

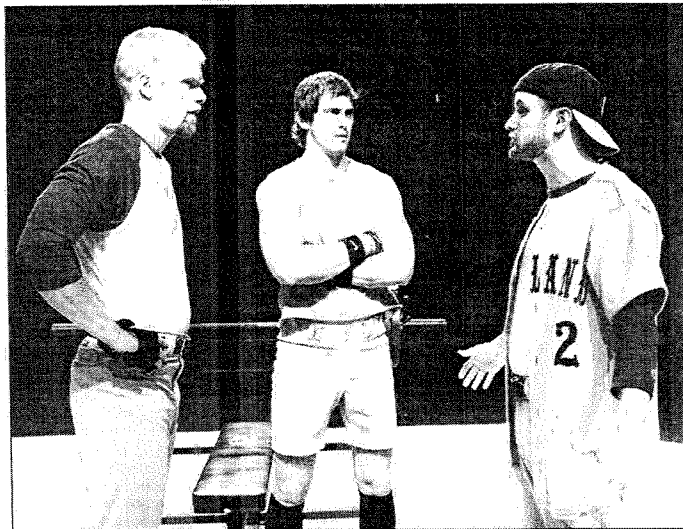
leased just last winter, and memories still linger of presumed juice maven Barry Bonds swatting his 756th asterisk last year to break Hank Aaron's career homer record.

But while Moses' play feeds off the lurid history of the sport's steroid scandal, it also uses that sorry development to delve into bigger issues: how we define what's fair and what's cheating, where a code of honor begins and ends, who gets to decide what's the right choice for an individual.

To appreciate the play, you need only know three basic things about baseball: 1) A game has nine innings; 2) Each game begins with the national anthem; 3) Jose Canseco is a cheating weasel whom the glorious Boston Red Sox in particular never should've signed. (Of course, some of that might be subjective.)

Canseco is never actually mentioned in the three-actor play, but rest assured, he's there. The character Raul (Joaquin Perez-Campbell) is clearly meant as a stand-in for the great slugger (and even greater buffoon), right down to the tell-all book he eventually writes about his "roid exploits."

Part of the fun of "Back Back Back" is in ID'ing the inspirations behind the other characters — the conflicted superstar Kent (Brendan Griffin) and the scrappy but insecure Adam (Nick Mills.) One big hint: These two, both teammates of Raul's on the Oakland A's, fol-



Kent (Brendan Griffin), Raul (Joaquin Perez-Campbell) and Adam (Nick Mills) may talk a little too much in the Globe's "Back Back Back," which opened Thursday. *Craig Schwartz photo*

lowed him in successive years as American League rookies of the year.

For the play, those ties to real-life players are like pine tar to a baseball bat, helping Moses' narrative and its sometimes airy philosophical ponderings keep stuck to the down-and-dirty world of the sport.

Moses and his director, Davis McCallum, also boost that cause with an ingenious structural conceit: "Back Back Back" is a nine-act play. Each "inning" takes place in a different time period, spelled out on a scoreboard mounted above the Arena Stage's bleacher-esque seating.

The show really does begin

with the national anthem, and after an initial scene with Kent talking to reporters at the 1984 Olympics, it jumps ahead to when the three players meet on the 1988 A's. They are about to go back to back to back as the A.L.'s top rookies, on a team destined to win back to back to back pennants. Perez-Campbell makes the most of a meaty role (in Canseco's case, the prime cut was always pure ham), strutting and puffing out his chest between bouts of pumping iron. He's got a little Stalлоне going on, and his cornic posturing boosts the play's strong humor quotient.

Griffin, meanwhile, has a good, subtle feel for the more reserved Kent, who eyes Raul

with a blend of wariness, condescension and envy.

While Mills is funny and convincing as the wide-eyed, nervous-stomached newcomer, his character ends up benched for a good portion of the play. Adam serves as something of the conscience of the tale, but there's a vague feeling that Moses isn't sure quite what to do with him as tension builds between the titans Kent and Raul.

Nearly all the action takes place in locker rooms and offices, which, though done for obvious practical reasons, can't help but bleed some excitement from the saga. Lee Savage's simple set design is workable enough, though the basic template looks more like a

There are a few smaller distractions, including musical cues that don't always match their time periods, and some baseball-uniform oddities.

huge pool table than a baseball diamond.

These three teammates are about the chattiest athletes you're likely to run across, but the emotional tone among them tends to be as consistent as a rookie pitcher's strike zone. Arguments flare, then sometimes slump inexplicably into jokes or buddy bonding.

There are a few smaller distractions, including musical cues that don't always match their time periods, and some baseball-uniform oddities. (Did the A's ever wear caps emblazoned with a capital "O"?) These look as though they're intended for the Oregon Ducks.)

Still, Moses — who took "The Four of Us" from the Globe to an off-Broadway run last year and is the theater's playwright in residence — has the stuff of a solid and thoughtful play here, with lots of inside baseball (in the true sense of the phrase) for diehard fans. There's even a seventh-inning stretch.

Maybe more emphasis on action, and some trimming of the talk, would help make "Back Back Back" feel a bit less like a debate. On steroids.

James Hebert: (619) 293-2040; jim.hebert@uniontrib.com

New play looks at steroids in baseball

ANNE MARIE WELSH
FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

Raul's a baseball star taunting teammate Kent in the Oakland A's weight room before the opening game of the 1988 World Series. But "Back Back Back," a thoughtful, well-acted new comedy at the Old Globe, is no documentary drama about the steroids-in-sports scandal.

Instead, playwright Itamar Moses has done what theater does better than documentary: He's created the speculative backstory of three guys caught up in the urge to inject the juice and pump the iron without ever mentioning the drug-that-dare-not-speak-its-name.

Still, you don't have to be a stats-spewing fan of America's favorite pastime to see that Raul and Kent are based on Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire. They play for the Oakland A's in the mid-'80s. They're potential superstars and friendly rivals, these ambitious long-ball hitters. And like Canseco, the bullying Raul considers himself master of dosing and hiding the doping he shares with his pal.

There's a third guy on board, a nervous Nellie of a rookie named (allegorically, it seems), Adam. The new man serves mostly as a foil to the others and a red herring for the audience. Jittery and sick to his stomach when he joins his teammates, Adam's nerves might be a symptom of steroid abuse. But no, it's just woman troubles on the eve of a game that could earn the clueless infielder Rookie of the Year votes.

The title's a pun. These three will be back to back to back Rookie of the Year winners for the A's. And Raul and Kent are the kind of home-run kings who get the announcers yelling "back, back, back" as their hard-hit balls fly into the stands and the record books.

Set mostly in locker rooms and front offices and subtly paced by director Davis McCallum, "Back Back Back" shares the competitive all-guy set-up of Moses' impressive earlier plays seen in

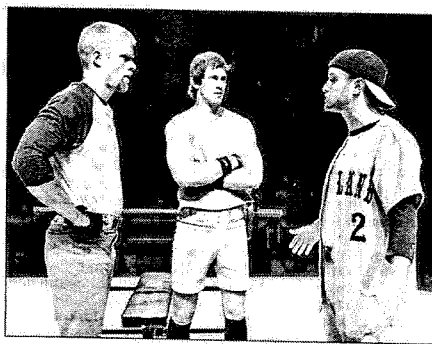


PHOTO COURTESY OF CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Brendan Griffin, Joaquin Perez-Campbell and Nick Mills in the Old Globe production of "Back Back Back."

REVIEW

"Back Back Back"

When: 7 p.m., Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m., Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays; through Oct. 28

Where: The Old Globe at Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park, San Diego

Tickets: \$14-\$26

Info: (619) 234-5623

Web: theoldglobe.org

Southern California. But "Back Back Back" lacks the structural interest of Moses' adventurous intellectual farce "Bach at Leipzig," about the also-rans to Johann Sebastian Bach, or of the deftly organized "The Four of Us," his previous Globe world premiere, which went on to a successful run off-Broadway.

The new play unfolds simply and linearly, its nine-acting structure displayed on cleverly designed "scoreboards" on facing walls of the arena stage at the James S. Copley Auditorium. Otherwise, Lee Savage's scenic design is serviceable, if spartan.

The show opens with Kent (Brendan Griffin) charming the press in the non-medalist baseball event at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. It hopscoches through the decades to a day in 2005 in an anteroom of the U.S. Capitol. There, Kent and Raul meet again before testifying before Congress.

Raul has published his unabashed tell-all about steroid use in the sport, and Kent, always under control, goes all hypocritically moral on the former teammate whose envious motives are a mystery to no one but himself.

Griffin's awfully good in the less showy role of Kent, a clean-cut, articulate manipulator who matures but doesn't change across the arc of the play. He's going to go out

there and try to elude the U.S. senators, to bob and weave and be as evasive and engaging as he was with the press corps at the beginning.

Nothing is overstated in Griffin's portrayal. And though his character's a self-rationalizing narcissist, the actor makes Kent's moments of protectiveness toward Adam and his love of the sport believable. His big confrontations — with Adam at the All-Star game and with Raul on the Hill — build tension in low-key, slow-burn sequences that feel authentic.

As Raul, Joaquin Perez-Campbell channels Sylvester Stallone. He's consistently entertaining, despite his nearly one-note approach to this inchoate and morally blunt mass of contradictory impulses.

Nick Mills has less to play with as Adam, but he manages to layer a few contradictions into the underwritten character, a guy who judges Kent lacking integrity in one scene and lets him off the hook the next.

Moses' script sags a bit about a third of the way through, when the dialogue meanders and loses focus. But otherwise, with director McCallum sympathetically tuned to the chopped rhythms and baseball patois enlivening Moses' writing, "Back Back Back" leaves you wondering how many besides Barry Bonds — including winking managers and greedy owners — should have that notorious asterisk next to their records.

Posted: Mon., Sep. 29, 2008, 4:56pm PT

Back Back Back

(James S. Copley Auditorium; 246 seats; \$59 top)

By BOB VERINI

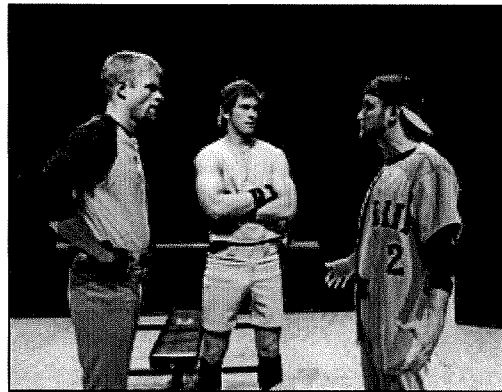
An Old Globe presentation of a play in one act by Itamar Moses. Directed by Davis McCallum.

Kent - Brendan Griffin

Adam - Nick Mills

Raul - Joaquin Perez-Campbell

Itamar Moses rifles baseball's lockers for drugs and thematic resonance in "Back Back Back," a play whose nine scenes or "innings" (with a stretch in the seventh) merit some of the charges often directed at the national pastime itself. Steroids semi-documentary is stiff and logy, a few moments of action separated by enough stretches of tedium to prompt spectators to start the wave or keep a beach ball aloft. Flat effort premiering at the Old Globe won't do much to move its author toward the big leagues.



Brendan Griffin, left, Joaquin Perez-Campbell and Nick Mills are baseball players caught up in a drug scandal in 'Back Back Back.'

To populate his exploration of pro sports' most nagging recent scandal, the precocious scribe of "Bach at Leipzig" and "The Four of Us" audaciously represents an Oakland A's trio of consecutive American League rookies of the year, including two of the foremost alleged or self-confessed "juicers" of them all.

Despite name changes, no one will fail to see Mark McGwire in Kent (Brendan Griffin), the confident red-headed slugger and team leader, or Jose Canseco in Raul (Joaquin Perez-Campbell), the egotistical, foul-mouthed bad boy. Third leg is Adam (Nick Mills), stand-in for Walt Weiss, whose relative anonymity and noninvolvement in doping are used as plot points. (Chronology, teams and proper names are otherwise true-to-life.)

Play's 20-year span begins as Kent persuades Raul not to initiate rookie Adam into their unique regimen of weight training and bathroom-applied "pregame vitamins." Traded to different teams

over time, the guys keep crossing paths in offices, dugouts or congressional anterooms, the specter of performance enhancers always present.

Yet the S-word itself is never uttered.

"Back Back Back" really cares little about juice or juicers per se. Its thesps never carry themselves as bulked-up, super-acne'd titans, nor do they seem to shrink when usage has ended (costumer Christal Weatherly might've helped there). And there are no delicious moments of "roid rage," no high-octane tantrums amidst mostly polite interactions.

What gets the scribe juiced is the opportunity to wax eloquent on issues of fair play, the nature of excellence and the sportsmanship ethic. (Surely that's why Moses settled on these two: McGwire the gifted extemporaneous speaker, and Canseco the tell-all memoirist.)

Raul sees no problem in proselytizing for chemical assistance as "the only way to make it fair" once free agency killed off team spirit, with every jock for himself. Meanwhile, Kent's very being quivers at the prospect of cheating, but he's not above begging for performance enhancement at the prospect of breaking the home run record.

Characters' propensity for explicitly working out Moses' musings gives "Back Back Back" its contrived air. Surely the real guys didn't see themselves as metaphors for America's success-at-any-price mentality.

The contemplation they're forced to utter is stilted; there's an even more pronounced artificiality when they turn to mundane matters. Relationships fail to ring true physically as helmer Davis McCallum blurs the difference between whispered exchanges and expansive, room-filling announcements.

Mills does best as the representative of innocence and decency, while Griffin seems hamstrung in pinning a coherent personality on Kent, as if McGwire were in attendance and no one wanted to offend him. Meanwhile, Perez-Campbell needs to find some rhythmic and volume variety lest Raul remain unwelcome by the end of the interminable second inning, which drags on long after all three actors have struck out.

A wisp of suspense and dramatic interest finally sneaks in when the Feds show interest and mutual suspicions fester. But did Weiss, or anyone else, really wire up to entrap a superstar at an All-Star Game batting practice? During "Back Back Back," we may not always know what we're supposed to believe, but we're usually pretty sure what we can't.

Sets, Lee Savage; costumes, Christal Weatherly; lighting, Russell Champa; sound, Paul Peterson; projections, Shawn Sagady; stage manager, Tracy Skoczelas. Opened Sept. 25, 2008. Reviewed Sept. 27. Runs through Oct. 26. Running time: 1 HOUR, 40 MIN.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

October 1, 2008

THEATER REVIEW

Still need to pump it up a bit

In 'Back Back Back,' rising young writer Itamar Moses finds a potent topic (steroid use) but underplays it.

By CHARLES McNULTY
Times Theater Critic

SAN DIEGO — Stepping up to the plate and hitting one out of the park is the consummate American fantasy. Our entire system is built on such a dream — from schnook to big cheese with one swing of the bat.

This obsession with home runs, and the pharmaceutical lengths to which players will go to rack up fat numbers, is the subject of Itamar Moses' "Back Back Back." Directed by Davis McCallum, this Old Globe world premiere offers a fresh encounter with a playwright who cartwheeled into national view a few years ago with the Stoppardesque "Bach at Leipzig," followed by the tamer though more carefully observed "The Four of Us."

Neither play was a runaway success, but both demonstrated tantalizing promise. "Back Back Back," however, might get Moses sent to the minor leagues for a tune-up.

The title mimics the roar of baseball announcers when a batter sends one soaring over the fence. That fiendish excitement, however, is rarely captured by the play itself.

Structured as a series of ethically revealing moments in the up-and-down careers of three major leaguers, the work attempts to capture their compromises with one another —

and their own consciences — as steroids become a larger and larger locker room reality.

As a jock ventriloquist, Moses doesn't always find the right voice. One minute a character mutters like his IQ is in the double digits, the next he sounds as though he's just finished law school. The slips in diction suggest Moses is still getting to know these men.

An even bigger problem is the way scenes start and stop abruptly, leaving us scrambling to fill in details that aren't so interesting to begin with. Moses' habit of cutting off the action before it has the chance to significantly progress proves to be as frustrating as watching a game in which inning after inning men are left stranded on base.

Raul (Joaquin Perez-Campbell), the not-very-bright slugger (think José Canseco, several sizes smaller), and Kent (Brendan Griffin), the golden boy who knows how to speak in full sentences (imagine Ron Howard as an Ivy League athlete), come from different sides of the tracks, but they share a few things in common. Both are prized for their exceptional potential, and both have taken to injecting themselves with banned substances to realize it.

Adam (Nick Mills), the new guy on the team, is another rising talent who has a chance of following in Raul and Kent's rookie-of-the-year footsteps. But not as cocky as the others, Adam is content to be an also-ran among all-stars. At the start of his first World Series game, all he can obsess about is the girlfriend who just dumped him.



CRAIG SCHWARTZ *The Old Globe*
BATTER UP: Nick Mills, left, and Brendan Griffin.

Kent hates not living up to his own standards and wants to protect Adam from Raul's influence. Raul, who's already resentful of Kent's superiority, doesn't appreciate the holier-than-thou attitude. He may be less idealistic, but at least he doesn't put up an honors student facade. Moses builds his drama on these not-so-earth-shattering distinctions.

Scoreboard updates track the leaps in time as the plot moves forward. If only we had a reason to care about the characters' relationships, which are more or less reduced to a single issue. To call them friends would be a bit of a stretch. They're merely the personification of a topical concern Moses is determined to spin a play out of.

Steroid use could have served as an incisive metaphor for contemporary America. If you think about the current financial crisis, in which Wall

Street pirates trashed the ground rules of capitalism for the sake of their own multi-million-dollar condos, or the deceit politicians routinely resort to for votes, you can't help wishing that Moses had made more meaningful connections between what's happening inside and outside the sport.

Perhaps a better-acted production would have demonstrated the acuity of Moses' tight focus. But right now the riffs and arias that Moses feeds his characters seem like playwriting exercises detached from an urgently held vision. The monotonously abstract staging certainly doesn't help, but it would take a Herculean directorial intervention to lift this material.

When it comes to America's favorite pastime, the devil is always camped out in a box seat munching on a hot dog, as "Damn Yankees" revealed half a century ago. Moses doesn't have much more to add to this story, but maybe in his next outing he'll be able to string together something more impressive than a series of psychological bunts.

charles.mcNulty@latimes.com

"Back Back Back," *Old Globe Arena Theatre*, James S. Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park, San Diego. 7 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 8 p.m. Thursdays-Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends Oct. 26. \$53-\$59. (619) 23-GLOBE or www.TheOldGlobe.org. Running time, 1 hour, 40 minutes.

SAN DIEGO READER

October 2, 2008

CALENDAR

Juiced

The twitches and rooster-neck jerks are a pure match for the right fielder.

From 1986 to 1988, the Oakland Athletics had back-to-back-to-back Rookies of the Year: Jose Canseco, Mark McGwire, and Walt Weiss. Under ex-lawyer Tony La Russa's management, the team looked set for a generation.

On November 15, 1988, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act was signed into law. It prohibited the distribution, possession, and use of controlled substances in the workplace.

Ten years after the act was passed, McGwire hit 70 home runs for the St. Louis Cardinals. He bopped 58 the year before, and people began to wonder how. The umps made the strike zone tighter, he told reporters, and he saw better pitches. New, retro-look ballparks had smaller dimensions, and expansion teams had weak pitching staffs. Plus, he added, one in every four or five balls used in a game was probably "juiced" — i.e., tricked up to clear the fences and revitalize baseball's sagging ratings.

Though he denied it, McGwire was also juiced. He'd been taking anabolic steroid injections for years. McGwire and Canseco, who got McGwire hooked, became the "Bash Brothers," leading the A's to victory in the 1989 World Series. And, hey (many rationalized at the time), if baseball could juice the ball to inflate a hitter's stats, why shouldn't players follow suit?

Itamar Moses's *Back Back Back* traces a mini-history of the steroid scandal — without ever using the word. Locker rooms and dugout steps, strewn with the hulls of sunflower seeds, become

a world of euphemisms. Players take "pregame vitamins" and "blow up" their muscles. Raul (Canseco) and Kent (McGwire) debate whether or not to bring Adam (Weiss) into "it." Anyone who doesn't do it, they contend, plays "with a handicap." And Weiss, a good-fielding, banjo-hitting second baseman, could bulk up his earnings.

The three players chat, discuss, harangue. They hold press conferences (Kent even tells Adam how to do one well). The 100-minute, intermissionless play has nine scenes (each an inning), a seventh-inning stretch, and some after-game batting practice. Throughout, Raul, Kent, and Adam keep talking. Some of the dialogue is crisp jock-gab. One of the funniest bits: as Adam and Kent get reacquainted during a home-run derby, Barry "Mr. Juice" Bonds pounds ball after ball into the stratosphere.

But often the characters shrink. They become sides in a debate about steroid use (is it cheating or fulfilling one's potential?). As in the TV show *CSI*, they explain things the others already know.

Back Back Back covers all the steroid-use bases: sure, Bonds and the others have chemically induced statistics, and it is cheating, given the rules of the game. But where to draw the line? Should we ban from the hall of fame every pro athlete who ever took an upper or a "greenie"? That would thin them out. Moses could also tag the hypocrisy of sportswriters who wax sanctimonious about drug

REVIEW

JEFF SMITH



Brendan Griffin, Nick Mills, Joaquin Perez-Campbell in *Back Back Back*

Back Back Back, by Itamar Moses
Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park

Directed by Davis McCallum; cast: Brendan Griffin, Joaquin Perez-Campbell, Nick Mills; scenic design, Lee Savage; costumes, Christal Weatherly; lighting, Russell H. Champa; sound, Paul Peterson

Playing through October 26; Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday at 7:00 p.m. Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m. Matinee Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. 619-234-5623.

abuse. How many of them, on deadline, resort to controlled substances to enhance their performance?

The story's got the potential for a Greek tragedy about fallen heroes in a hubris-breeding culture. And people unfamiliar with the specifics may see a tale of aspirations, betrayal, and the unimaginable

pressures to play baseball, day in and day out, like a god.

But for those who know the story, *Back Back's* just a talky retelling of McGwire's mammoth denial and Canseco's rat-finking in two books, *Juiced* and *Vindicated* (in the latter, he says all athletes should bulk up). And neither McGwire nor

Canseco is anywhere as verbal as Kent or Raul.

The story might be more effective if Moses freed it from the players' biographies and actual historical events. He would have to do less explaining (backstory clogs the script). And he could open up the play's confined structure and demythologize on a mythical level. What comes through most of all: Moses's profound wrestling with his own disillusionment about the game.

Back Back Back gets the facts straight, but the Old Globe production sometimes doesn't. The set's a baseball diamond: Astro-turf surrounding a wicker-like infield. But whether they're playing for Oakland (whose cap has an A, not an O), St. Louis, or the National League all-stars, the boys wear the most pristine uniforms in horsehider history. Now, they don't have to sloven up like Manny R., but the actors should scuff them some, at least, for authenticity's sake.

They have few chances to soil the uni's on stage. In a play about a professional activity, Moses doesn't offer many chances for physicality. Director Davis McCallum blocks his actors well, but they mostly stand around. Though they don't look as if they're "filled with water" (as one character says about players on steroids), Brendan Griffin (Kent), Nick Mills (Adam), and Joaquin Perez-Campbell (Raul) perform ably. Even before you realize that Perez-Campbell's playing Canseco, the twitches and rooster-neck jerks are a pure match for the right-fielder off whose noggin a ball once careened for a home run — a feat ESPN recently voted as the number-one baseball blooper of all time. ■

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'Back Back Back' at The Old Globe's arena stage

[Insert sport metaphor here]
 By Jennifer Chung Klam
 Posted on Sep 28 2008
 Last updated Sep 28 2008



Plays about sports don't have to be just for sports junkies. Add some drama, a little humor, universal themes and off-the-field tension, and you can pull in even the most sports-averse.

Itamar Moses' "Back Back Back," now in a world premiere production at The Old Globe, is probably one for the fans. The look at baseball's steroid-era – roughly 1988 to 2005 – is territory fresh and familiar enough for those with just a passing interest in baseball. But aficionados aside, the play lacks sufficient dramatic tension and thematic universality.

OK, so you don't have to be a baseball nerd to figure out that Raul is a stand-in for Jose Conseco, who wrote a tell-all account of his own steroid use and that of fellow players. One of the guys he ratted out included homerun record-breaker Mark McGuire, represented here by the character Kent. As for Adam, the third character in this three-hander, a hint at his real-life counterpart is in the title. Conseco, McGuire and Walt Weiss won back to back to back American League Rookie of the Year awards in '86-'88 (hurray for Google!).

Actors Joaquin Perez-Campbell, Brendan Griffin and Nick Mills play out the brutal but jocular type of relationships you'd expect oversized boys who are both teammates and competitors to have, shop talk one moment and puerile the next. The play follows their characters through career ups and downs, and where their divergent views on steroid use take them.

For Raul, the bad-boy player and proud juicer, it leads to a career plateau and a string of on-field embarrassments. Perez-Campbell gives the role plenty of meathead humor and a twitchy bravado, though he seems more Italian Stallion than Cuban.

Griffin is up to the more difficult task of playing the wavering Kent, whose turmoil over steroid use is ultimately outmatched by its star-making results. Kent winds up defending himself in a Congressional hearing on the subject of steroid use in sports. Well, not defending himself per se, but rather staunchly avoiding the subject: "I'm not here to talk about the past. I'm here to be positive about this subject" (the "subject" presumably being baseball, not steroids). This part – and the quote – is also true to life.

Adam is meant to provide moral ballast to the two heavyweight dopers. In the play's second inning (you knew the play would be divided into nine scenes, right?), he's a talented yet insecure rookie who looks up to Kent as a role model, and Mills plays Adam with uneasy newbie charm. But Adam's absence from much of the play renders his anti-steroids stance, feelings of betrayal and defense of Kent less persuasive.

Lee Savage, who provided the picture perfect boxing ring set for the Globe's "In This Corner" earlier this year, creates a plain baseball diamond set (with the help of Russell H. Champa's lighting design) in the temporary arena stage at the San Diego Museum of Art.

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in the temporary arena stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's Copley Auditorium. Since the scenes tend to take place in locker rooms and managers' offices, it's a serviceable set — in the same way motor motel carpeting is practical — if underwhelming. More effective are the digital scoreboards that light up the date and locale at the start of each inning.

Though baseball stats may be returning from their stratospheric heights, the fallout from the steroids scandals continues. The Mitchell Report, released last year, covered the history of illegal substances in baseball and named names. And in March, Barry Bonds goes to trial on charges that he lied about doping in a 2003 grand jury testimony.

For a play that's about steroids, the word isn't uttered once. The characters speak in coded conversations and overt euphemisms like "pre-game vitamins" as the play examines the morality of steroid use and, more importantly, the effect such performance-enhancing substances had on the heart and soul of the game. Moses compares the scandals to the World Series fix in 1919 and the baseball strike of 1994.

"Back Back Back" tackles all this history and more, with a foray into the topic of free agency, with language full of insider lingo and statistics. For the uninitiated, a glossary and timeline of events is included in the program. It's an intriguing peek inside the locker room during a pivotal moment in the so-called American pastime, but it doesn't quite add up to the stuff of dramatic theater. The talky play could use an injection itself—of action and palpable tension.

Dates : Tues.-Sun. through Oct. 26
Organization : The Old Globe
Phone : (619) 234-5623
Production Type : Play
Region : Balboa Park
URL : www.oldglobe.org
Venue : Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

About the author: Jennifer Chung Klam is an editor at The Daily Transcript and a freelance arts and culture writer. More by this author.

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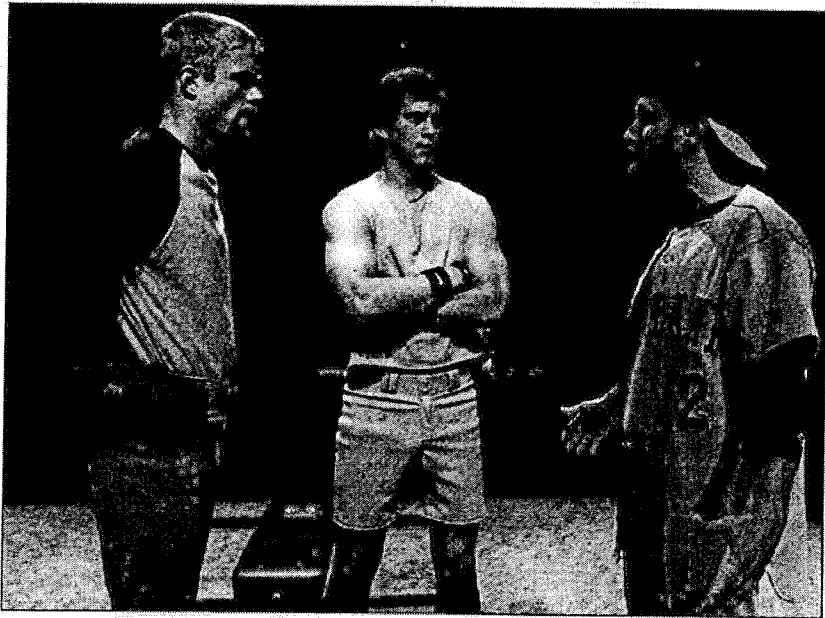
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GAY & LESBIAN TIMES

October 2, 2008



Brendan Griffin as 'Kent,' Joaquin Perez-Campbell as 'Raul' and Nick Mills as 'Adam' in The Old Globe's production of 'Back Back Back,' by Itamar Moses, directed by Davis McCallum, playing in the Globe's Arena Theatre at the San Diego Museum of Art.

hand might be whether to try to get Adam to join the club.

Then again, it might be something else entirely. I couldn't tell. *Back Back Back* is talk talk talk, 90 minutes of f-word punctuated by less than fascinating gab about issues in the sport such as free agency and owner collusion. By far the most engaging is Kent's advice on how to deal with the press.

Steroids are mentioned obliquely, in a way that seems incongruous and frankly unlikely, given the frank and "fuck"-laden tone of the general conversation. Though I suppose Moses intends this as a consideration of fairness and cheating, it does not come across that way to me.

Berkeley native and Giants fan Moses probably echoes the feeling of many a fan saddened by the knowledge that the people most tainted by the steroid scandal in baseball were his childhood heroes. But exactly what he is trying to tell us about that in *Back Back Back* remains obscure.

Old Globe Theatre's production of *Back Back Back* plays through Oct. 26 at the Arena Stage at Copley Auditorium. Shows Tuesday, Wednesday and Sunday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. For more information, including a link to the theater's web site, visit www.gaylesbiantimes.com/links.

'Back Back Back'

I'm sure there's a point to be made about doping in sports (and specifically steroid use by baseball players), but playwright Itamar Moses never gets around to it in his one-act *Back Back Back*. The Old Globe Theatre's production of Moses' most recent play is at Arena Stage at Copley Auditorium through Oct. 26, directed by Davis McCallum.

Moses takes three rookies – Raul (Joaquin Perez-Campbell), Kent (Brendan Griffin) and Adam (Nick Mills) from the 1984 U.S. Olympic team (which lost the gold medal to Japan) to the 2005 Congressional hearings on steroids in baseball.

Raul (with a lower east side accent so thick you could trip over it) is willing to do what it takes to make it to the majors. If lifting weights and taking steroids will do it, he's there.

Tall, blond Kent, the only one of the three who looks like he might play a sport, is also a user. The question at

Performance winks at steroids in baseball

ANNE MARIE WELSH
FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

Raul's a baseball star taunting teammate Kent in the Oakland A's weight room before the opening game of the 1988 World Series. But "Back Back Back," a thoughtful, well-acted new comedy at the Old Globe, is no documentary drama about the steroids-in-sports scandal.

Instead, playwright Itamar Moses has done what theater does better than documentary: He's created the speculative backstory of three guys caught up in the urge to inject the juice and pump the iron without ever mentioning the drug-that-dare-not-speak-its name.

Still, you don't have to be a stats-spewing fan of America's favorite pastime to see that Raul and Kent are based on Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire. They play for the Oakland A's in the mid-'80s. They're potential superstars and friendly rivals, these ambitious long-ball hitters. And like Canseco, the bullying Raul considers himself master of dosing and hiding the doping he shares with his pal.

There's a third guy on board, a nervous Nellie of a rookie named (allegorically, it seems), Adam. The new man serves mostly as a foil to the others and a red herring for the audience. Jittery and sick to his stomach

REVIEW

'Back Back Back'

When: 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; through Oct. 25
Where: The Old Globe at Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park, San Diego
Tickets: \$44-\$66
Phone: (619) 234-5623
Web: theoldglobe.org

when he joins his teammates, Adam's nerves might be a symptom of steroid abuse. But no, it's just woman troubles on the eve of a game that could earn the clueless infielder Rookie of the Year votes.

The title's a pun. These three will be back to back to back Rookie of the Year winners for the A's. And Raul and Kent are the kind of home-run kings who get the announcers yelling "back, back, back" as their hard-hit balls fly into the stands and the record books.

Set mostly in locker rooms and front offices and subtly paced by director Davis McCallum, "Back Back Back" shares the competitive all-guy set-up of Moses' impressive earlier plays seen in Southern California. But "Back Back Back" lacks the structural interest of Moses' adventurous intellectual farce "Bach at Leipzig," about the also-rans to Johann Sebastian Bach, or of the deftly organized "The Four of Us," his previous



"Back Back Back" is told in a nine-inning structure.

Globe world premiere, which went on to a successful run off-Broadway.

The new play unfolds simply and linearly, its nine-inning structure displayed on cleverly designed "scoreboards" on facing walls of the arena stage at the James S. Copley Auditorium. Otherwise, Lee Savage's scenic design is serviceable, if spartan.

The show opens with Kent (Brendan Griffin) charming the press in the non-medalist baseball event at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. It hopscoches through the decades to a day in

2005 in an anteroom of the U.S. Capitol. There, Kent and Raul meet again before testifying before Congress.

Raul has published his unabashed tell-all about steroid use in the sport, and Kent, always under control, goes all hypocritically moral on the former teammate whose envious motives are a mystery to no one but himself.

Griffin's awfully good in the less showy role of Kent, a clean-cut, articulate manipulator who matures but doesn't change across the arc of the play. He's going to go out there and try to

elude the U.S. senators, to bob and weave and be as evasive and engaging as he was with the press corps at the beginning.

Nothing is overstated in Griffin's portrayal. And though his character's a self-rationalizing narcissist, the actor makes Kent's moments of protectiveness toward Adam and his love of the sport believable. His big confrontations — with Adam at the All-Star game and with Raul on the Hill — build tension in low-key, slow-burn sequences that feel authentic.

As Raul, Joaquin Perez-Campbell channels Sylvester Stallone. He's consistently entertaining, despite his nearly one-note approach to this inchoate and morally blurt mass of contradictory impulses.

Nick Mills has less to play with as Adam, but he manages to layer a few contradictions into the underwritten character, a guy who judges Kent lacking integrity in one scene and lets him off the hook the next.

Moses' script sags a bit about a third of the way through, when the dialogue meanders and loses focus. But otherwise, with director McCallum sympathetically tuned to the chopped rhythms and baseball patois enlivening Moses' writing, "Back Back Back" leaves you wondering how many besides Barry Bonds should have that notorious asterisk next to their records.



Old Globe Cast Set for *Back Back Back*, New Baseball Play by Itamar Moses

By Kenneth Jones
August 28, 2008

Brendan Griffin, Joaquin Perez-Campbell and Nick Mills are the three ball players at the center of The Old Globe's fall world premiere of *Back Back Back* — about America's favorite pastime in the age of steroid use — by Globe playwright-in-residence Itamar Moses.

Davis McCallum directs the new play by the author of *The Four of Us* and *Bach at Leipzig*, to run Sept. 19-Oct. 26 on the arena stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium. Opening is Sept. 25.

Old Globe calls the play a "funny yet insightful new work about the careers of three major players making their way in the world of professional baseball — a world too competitive to rely only on raw talent. The play examines how each individual deals with the stress of keeping up their stats while balancing their personal and professional lives. Moses...takes audiences inside the locker room to witness how these teammates face each other and do battle — for their careers, their legacies, and the future of America's favorite pastime."

Moses' *The Four of Us* had its world premiere at the Globe in 2007. It won the San Diego Critics' Circle Best New Play Award.

"While still in the early stages of his career, Itamar Moses has clearly demonstrated tremendous talent along with a willingness to tackle complex ideas in his plays," stated Globe executive producer Lou Spisto. "By appointing Itamar as our newest playwright-in-residence, the Globe has been able to give this award-winning writer the space and time to develop his work, and these exciting residencies can assist playwrights in creating important works for theatres across America, while helping the Globe to establish a core group of playwrights who consider the Globe an artistic home base."

The creative team includes Lee Savage (scenic design), Christal Weatherly (costume design), Russell Champa (lighting design), Paul Peterson (sound design) and Tracy Skoczelas (stage manager).

Back Back Back was recently awarded an Edgerton Foundation 2008 New American Plays Award. The funding supports an extension of the rehearsal period to help achieve a stronger first production, "thereby increasing the chances of a continued life for the plays."

Moses' *Yellowjackets* begins a world premiere run Aug. 29 at Berkeley Rep in California.

McCallum directed *The Belle's Stratagem* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, *Unbound: The Journals of Fanny Kemble* at the Prospect Theatre Company, Jeffrey Hatcher's adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw* at The Acting Company, Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* at the New York Stage & Film, *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Georgia Shakespeare Festival, *Landscape of the Body* for NYU's Graduate Acting Program, *Twelfth Night* for Shenandoah Shakespeare, Noah Haidle's *The Dakota Project* at HERE, and Chuck Mee's *Big Love* for Princeton University, where he is a member of the theatre faculty.

Tickets are available by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the Globe Box Office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park, in San Diego, CA.

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Steroids and Stereotypes

BASEBALL, ITAMAR MOSES SAYS, is “quintessentially American.” Accordingly, he considers *Back Back Back*, his new play about steroid use in the diamond sport, also an allegory. “It’s about wanting everything but having it cost nothing,” he says. “We want to have heroes and want them to be pure. Being human, of course, they’re not.”

Back, set in the 1990s, concerns three players trying to decide whether to use steroids. “It’s a potent dramatic situation,” says the playwright, “because there’s no easy answer or right choice.” As subsequent investigations showed, steroid use in baseball—which hadn’t banned such drugs—became especially prevalent in the years after 1994 as the national pastime struggled to regain public favor after a long strike that canceled the World Series.

“Everyone was sort of complicit,” Moses says, and so many players and teams believed they had to “juice” to remain competitive. “But ‘Everyone is doing it’ isn’t a sound ethical argument.” His script’s three players represent the spectrum of thought about the question.



Brandan Griffin, Nick Mills and Joaquin Perez-Campbell in *Back Back Back*

CRIG SCHWARTZ

He felt particularly affected by the steroid controversy because he’s “passionate about baseball” and his favorite team is the San Francisco Giants. On that team, as fans know well, was Barry Bonds, probably the most famous—and most talented—player tainted by the steroid scandal. As the unsavory revelations expanded, Moses says with a laugh, he decided to regard the Giants as just “a good friend in an abusive relationship.”

In February 2007, the Old Globe premiered Moses’ last work, *The Four of Us*. It won the San Diego Theatre

Critics Circle’s Craig Noel Award as outstanding new play and went on to be produced around the country, including off-Broadway. This June, Moses was named a Globe playwright-in-residence.

Back (September 19–October 26) is the second production in the temporary arena stage in the San Diego Museum of Art’s Copley Auditorium. The “black box,” in-the-round space is similar to, and a worthy substitute for, the razed Cassius Carter. Best of all, the chairs provide more comfort than those cramped Carter seats. When the Globe’s new theater is ready in 2010, the auditorium will be restored.

TOBACCO ROAD was a phenomenon in the 1930s, first as a controversial Erskine Caldwell novel, then as an equally contentious play, adapted by Jack Kirkland. The latter was trashed by critics but praised by audiences so much that it ran from 1933 to 1941, setting a Broadway-run record that lasted for decades. (It’s still ranked 15th.)

Yet while the novel became an American classic, the play practically disappeared from stages. Reasons are obvious. It requires a large cast, and the story is dark, involving a destitute and desperate family of Georgia sharecroppers scraping to survive in the Depression. It—like other Caldwell works spotlighting race, class and gender issues—provoked widespread censure for its harsh portrayal of Southern life, including graphic sexuality and violence. That, plus its mordant humor, elicited accusations of stereotyping Southerners as ignorant hillbillies.

Clearly, it’s a major challenge to a director, and one that David Schweizer had long wanted to tackle. He suggested it to his pal, La Jolla Playhouse artistic director Christopher Ashley, who liked the idea and put *Tobacco Road* on his first Playhouse schedule (September 30–October 26, Mandell Weiss Forum).

“It tickles me,” Schweizer says, “that this famous old American play, which is radical and provocative, has been presented so few times.” Still, he recognizes that “the audaciousness of it” means that “it’s a lot for audiences to handle.” The sad, often crude story—he describes it as “poignant, almost Gothic”—deals with questionable morality, social and sexual, that often offends. Consequently, as in the final years of the Broadway run and the 1941 *Tobacco Road* film, it gets played mostly for laughs.

Some stage revivals, wrestling with the script’s 1930s-era crudity and cruelty, have attempted to update it. But Schweizer plans to use the original script “as written in the period, with maybe some cuts.” Thus, he hopes, its underlying message of survival among the poor will resonate as strongly today. ■



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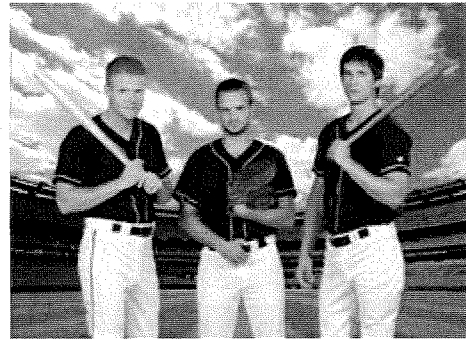
Full Cast, Creative Team Set for *Back, Back, Back* at the Old Globe Theatre

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By: [Tristan Fuge](#) · Aug 28, 2008 · San Diego

The full cast and creative team have been set for the Old Globe Theatre production of Itamar Moses' *Back, Back, Back*, September 19-October 26, with Davis McCallum directing.

The play is about the careers of three major players making their way in the world of professional baseball, a world too competitive to rely only on raw talent. The cast will feature Brendan Griffin as Kent, Joaquin Perez-Campbell as Raul, and Nick Mills as Adam.



Brendan Griffin, Nick Mills, and Joaquin Perez-Campbell in *Back, Back, Back*
(© Craig Schwartz)

The creative team will include Russell Champa (lighting design), Paul Peterson (sound design), Lee Savage (scenic design), and Christal Weatherly (costume design).

For more information, call 619-234-5623 or visit theoldglobe.org.

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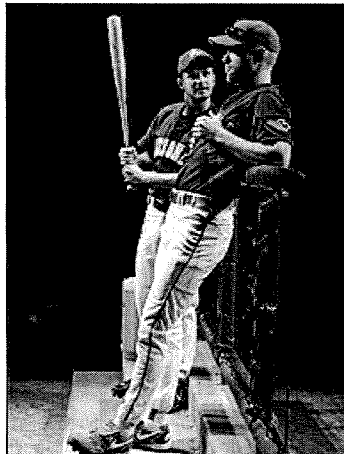
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Batter Up! Moses' Baseball Play, Back Back Back, Opens at The Old Globe Sept. 25

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By *Kenneth Jones*
25 Sep 2008



Back Back Back's Nick Mills and Brendan Griffin
photo by Craig Schwartz
Leipzig.

The national pastime gets a pulse-taking by The Old Globe in San Diego with the world premiere of Itamar Moses' *Back Back Back*, about three baseball players in the age of steroid use. The production opens Sept. 25 after previews from Sept. 19.

Brendan Griffin, Joaquin Perez-Campbell and Nick Mills are the athletes at the center of the play, which continues to Oct. 26 on the arena stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium.

*
Moses is a Globe playwright-in-residence. Davis McCallum directs the new play by the author of *The Four of Us* and *Bach at*

Old Globe calls the play a "funny yet insightful new work about the careers of three major players making their way in the world of professional baseball — a world too competitive to rely only on raw talent. The play examines how each individual deals with the stress of keeping up their stats while balancing their personal and professional lives. Moses...takes audiences inside the locker room to witness how these teammates face each other and do battle — for their careers, their legacies, and the future of America's favorite pastime."

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important works for theatres across America, while helping the Globe to establish a core group of playwrights who consider the Globe an artistic home base."

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Manhattan Theatre Club will present its own production of *Back Back Back* starting Oct. 30 at New York City Center Stage II. Daniel Aukin will direct.

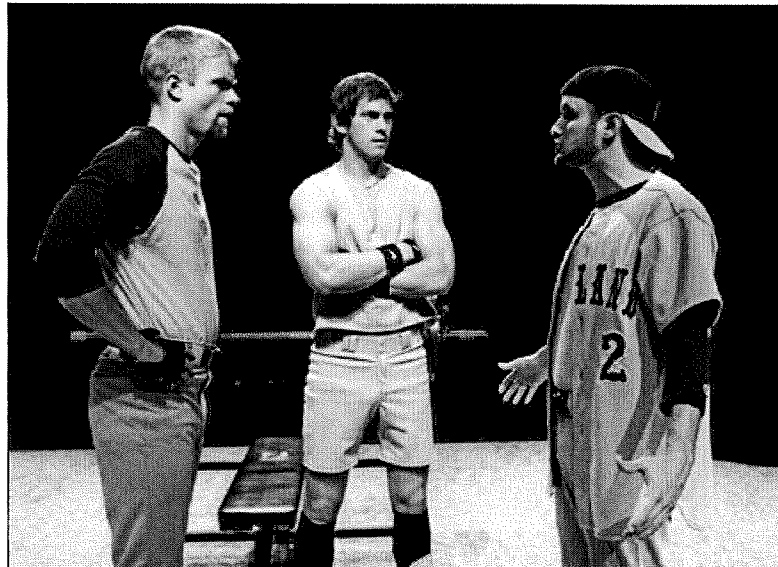
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Moses' *Yellowjackets* began a world premiere run Aug. 29 at Berkeley Rep in California.

Tickets are available by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the Globe Box Office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park, in San Diego, CA.

*

Also presented at The Old Globe this month is a new production of the comedy *The Women* by Clare Booth Luce.



Brendan Griffin, Joaquin Perez-Campbell and Nick Mills in *Back Back Back*
photo by Craig Schwartz

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LET THE GAMES BEGIN

ITAMAR MOSES'S TEXTUAL ACROBATICS TAKE AIM AT THE UNSAYABLE

BY MARK BLANKENSHIP

THEY'VE BEEN FLIRTY^{for ages,} but this year, Itamar Moses and the American theatre are finally going steady.

Moses's star began rising in earnest in the 2002–03 season, when Florida Stage of Manalapan and Ithaca, N.Y.'s Hangar Theatre both produced his high-concept comedy-of-manners *Bach at Leipzig* and Portland Center Stage of Oregon premiered his *Outrage*, a philosophical drama that juggles historical eras. Constant productions and commissions have followed, keeping Moses's name in the theatre press. He's even had a taste of tabloid notoriety, since scandal-minded reporters insisted his subsequent play *The Four of Us*, about the vagaries of friendship, was a swipe at a famous friend.

But that's all prologue to this season, when the 31-year-old writer boasts no fewer than five different plays—two of them brand new—on the production schedules of U.S. theatres.

One of the debuts is *Yellowjackets*, a drama that charts the academic, economic and racial divides at Berkeley High School in California, where Moses himself was a student in the early '90s. (Though a Berkeley native, he now lives in Brooklyn.) The play runs through Oct. 12 at Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Meanwhile, through Oct. 26, San Diego's Old Globe is premiering Moses's baseball-themed drama *Back Back Back*. A treatise on everything from steroid use in pro sports to the contradictions of American ideals, the play will also run this season at Manhattan Theatre Club (beginning Oct. 30) and Dallas Theater Center (this spring). And New York City's Flea Theater offers a collection of Moses's short plays, *But You Will Get Used to It*, in February '09.

Add his lengthening slate of upcoming projects—like a musical adaptation of Jonathan Lethem's novel *The Fortress of Solitude*—and it's clear this is Moses's moment. "There's a coming-of-age party on a national scale," says Tony Taccone, artistic director of Berkeley Rep and an unabashed Moses admirer. "For Itamar, the transformation from 'emerging writer' to 'established writer' is complete."

Of course, Moses's ramped-up visibility didn't just happen. It was borne on his writing, which has stimulated (and sometimes polarized) artists, audiences and critics across the country.

If nothing else, you can count on an Itamar Moses play to be well constructed. "He has an incredible sense of dramatic architecture," says Taccone, who helmed *Yellowjackets*. "It seems like many playwrights are driven by poetic or imagistic motors, and it's rare for them to pay a lot of attention to plot these days. But Itamar does."

In a bit of professional foreshadowing, Moses applied to graduate schools with the 10-actor opus *Outrage*, which involves overlapping stories about Brecht, Socrates, Galileo and a contemporary college student. "Someone told me grad schools are more likely to forgive failures of craft in the face of ambition," the writer recalls. "So I wrote the most outrageous play I could think of. Really, it's a big mess."



BRENNAN CAVANAUGH

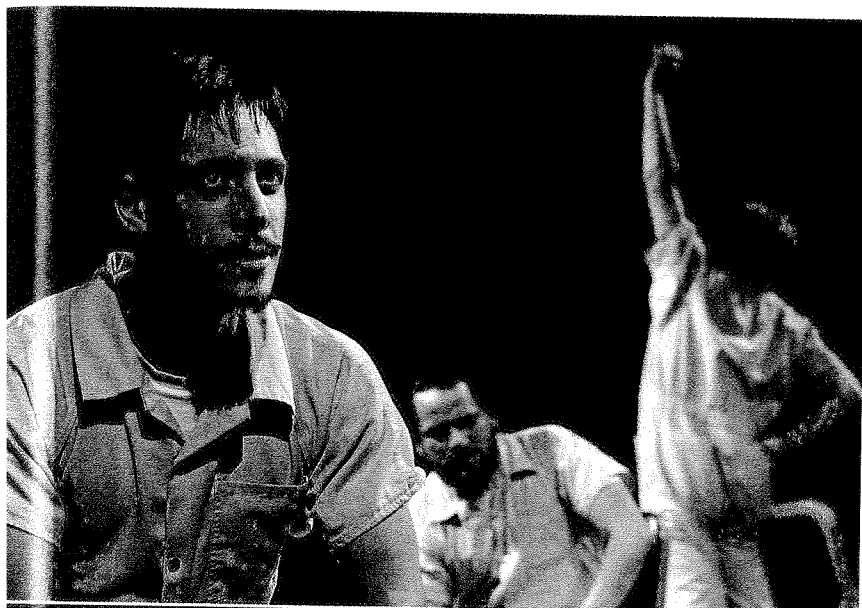
But as messy as it is, *Outrage* got Moses into New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where he earned his MFA in dramatic writing in 2002. Soon enough, he was refining his structural impulses and channeling them into intriguingly self-conscious dramatic forms.

Bach at Leipzig, for example, which has played throughout the country, is rooted in a true story about 18th-century musicians, including Johann Sebastian Bach, competing for the organist's job at Thomaskirche in Leipzig. Moses tweaks the facts so that every competing organist is named either Johann or Georg, and he models scenes after the musical structure of a fugue.

Meanwhile, it initially seems like *The Four of Us*, which debuted at Manhattan Theatre Club this past spring under Pam MacKinnon's

American Theater Company—notorious criminals like Timothy McVeigh, Ted Kaczynski and Ramzi Yousef are housed at a super-maximum federal prison, where a well-meaning attorney accidentally facilitates havoc, amid some subtly coincidental occurrences: She tells a joke to the warden, only to have a prisoner tell it to her; she makes a snappy retort that's echoed later in a wildly different context. These moments are like sly winks from the playwright, reminding us he has a master plan.

Moses, whose dark stubble and slightly-tousled hair conjure the archetype of a young writer, says he's been working on *Celebrity Row* for years, and the play has drastically changed. "In early drafts, there were all these sprawling back-story scenes, where we saw each



From left, Ariel Shafir, Jesse J. Perez and Ebbe Roe Smith in *Celebrity Row* at Oregon's Portland Center Stage in 2006.



Brian Vaughn in *Bach at Leipzig* at Milwaukee Repertory Theater in 2005.

direction, is about two modern-day writer friends, David and Benjamin, whose relationship is strained after Benjamin publishes a successful novel. But in the final scenes, we realize we've been watching the play that David wrote about his friendship—and a *coup de theatre* even introduces two new actors so that David and Benjamin seem to be watching "David" and "Benjamin" from the wings.

These plays have given their author a reputation for brainy antics. In his review of *The Four of Us*, *Variety* critic Sam Thielman called Moses "a structural acrobat" who "never met a meta-narrative he didn't like."

But the "structural acrobat" label may not stick. Moses's newer plays are inventive, but their formal conceits are far more subdued. Take *Yellowjackets*, which seems like straight-ahead realism, telling relatable stories about an ethnically diverse, socially tumultuous high school. Some audiences may not even notice that a few scenes repeat themselves.

Early in the first act, for instance, a black teenager and his older brother discuss Berkeley's musical legacy, which leads to a crack about Guns N' Roses. A few scenes later, two white kids have essentially the same conversation, down to the Guns N' Roses joke.

THERE'S A SIMILAR PATTERN IN *CELEBRITY ROW*, A fantasia whose conceit stems from character, not plot. In the play—which packed houses at Portland Center Stage in its 2006 premiere, under Chris Coleman's direction, and runs Oct. 20–Nov. 9 at Chicago's

of these criminals outside the prison with the people in their lives," he says. "As I worked on it, I realized that the things I wanted to say about American domestic and foreign policy didn't actually require scenes of, you know, Timothy McVeigh fighting in the Gulf War. Having him take on the role of the foot soldier among those guys in prison somehow says it much more elegantly."

But while he knows his writing is changing, Moses isn't sure why. "From one perspective," he says, "I may have been writing in that overt way because less had happened to me. I had fewer stories to tell, but I wanted to make the stakes high. So maybe I was looking for ways to make deeper connections happen through the element of craft. Maybe now I see how to do essentially the same thing in a way that's less overt. It's becoming clearer to me that the more you focus on something really small, the more it can stand in for something emotionally enormous or theatrically enormous."

That statement about his craft—thoughtful, frank and ambivalent—is like a microcosm of the message in Moses's plays. For all their dramaturgical differences, almost all of them present a massive, perhaps unsolvable cultural problem and then examine it from multiple points of view.

That's what makes the twist in *The Four of Us* more than



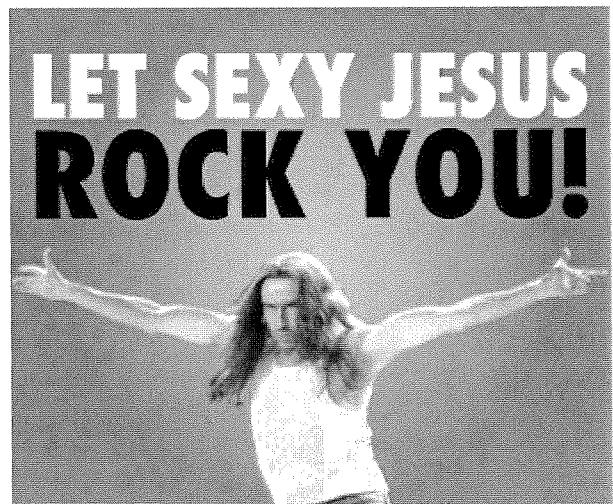
Old Globe Presents World Premiere of Itmar Moses' 'Back Back Back'

[Back to the Article](#)

by BWV News Desk



The Tony Award-winning Old Globe presents the world premiere of *Back Back Back*, by Globe Playwright-in-Residence Itmar Moses (*The Four of Us*, *Bach at Leipzig*), directed by Davis McCallum, to run in the Globe's Arena Stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium



September 19 - October 26 (press opening: Thursday, September 25 at 8pm). Tickets are available by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the Globe Box Office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

Before the headlines blazed with sporting steroid scandals comes Itmar Moses' funny yet insightful new work about the careers of three major players making their way in the world of professional baseball - a world too competitive to rely only on raw talent. The play examines how each individual deals with the stress of keeping up their stats while balancing their personal and professional lives. Moses - whose play, *The Four of Us*, had its world premiere at the Globe last year, winning the San Diego Critics' Circle "Best New Play" Award - brings the Globe another world-premiere production that takes audiences inside the locker room to witness how these teammates face each other and do battle - for their careers, their legacies, and the future of America's favorite pastime.

"While still in the early stages of his career, Itmar Moses has clearly demonstrated tremendous talent along with a willingness to tackle complex ideas in his plays," said Globe Executive Producer Lou Spisto. "By appointing Itmar as our newest Playwright-in-Residence, the Globe has been able to give this award-winning writer the space and time to develop his work, and these exciting residencies can assist playwrights in creating important works for theatres across America, while helping the Globe to establish a core group of playwrights who consider the Globe an artistic home base."

The cast of *Back Back Back* includes Brendan Griffin (HBO's *Generation Kill*) as "Kent," Joaquin Perez-Campbell as "Raul" and Nick Mills as "Adam." The creative team includes Davis

McCallum, director; Lee Savage, scenic design; Christal Weatherly, costume design; Russell Champa, lighting design; Paul Peterson, sound design; Tracy Skoczelas, stage manager.

Last June, Itamar Moses was named the newest participant in the Theatre's Playwright-in-Residence program. The program was launched in April, 2006 as part of the Globe's ongoing efforts to deepen its relationships with playwrights, support the development of new work, as well as expand its artistic offerings. The program involves a 12-18 month residency, during which the playwright will work at the Globe during six two-week periods to develop new projects. Throughout the process, the Globe will assemble actors as needed for in-house readings of the works in progress. Past playwrights include Howard Korder (*Sea of Tranquility*) and Amy Freed (*Restoration Comedy*).

Back Back Back was recently awarded an Edgerton Foundation 2008 New American Plays Award. The funding supports an extension of the rehearsal period to help achieve a stronger first production, thereby increasing the chances of a continued life for the plays. For additional information about The Edgerton Awards, please visit the Theatre Communications Group's website at www.tcg.org.

Itamar Moses is the author of *The Four of Us* (world premiere produced at the Globe in 2007; winner of the San Diego Critics Circle Award for Outstanding New Play), *Outrage*, *Bach at Leipzig*, *Celebrity Row*, *Yellowjackets*, and *Completeness*, and various short plays and one-acts. His work has appeared off-Broadway and elsewhere in New York, at regional theatres across the country and in Canada, and has been published by Faber & Faber, Heinemann Press, Playscripts Inc., and Vintage. He has received new play commissions from The McCarter Theater, Playwrights Horizons, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The Wilma Theater, and Manhattan Theatre Club. Itamar holds an MFA in Dramatic Writing from NYU and has taught playwriting at Yale and NYU. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild, MCC Playwrights Coalition, Naked Angels Writers Group, and is a New York Theatre Workshop Usual Suspect.

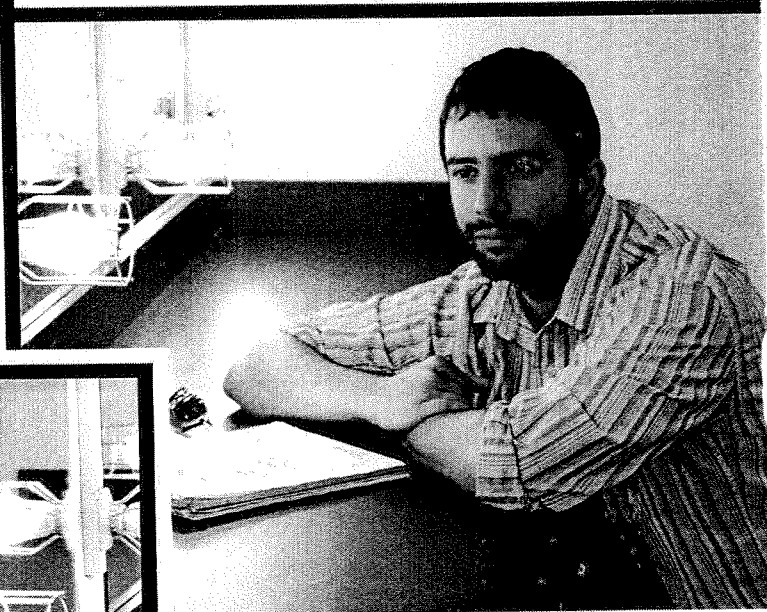
Davis McCallum's credits include *The Belle's Stratagem* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, *Unbound: The Journals of Fanny Kemble* at the Prospect Theatre Company, Jeffrey Hatcher's adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw* at The Acting Company, Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* at the New York Stage & Film, *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Georgia Shakespeare Festival, *Landscape of the Body* for NYU's Graduate Acting Program, *Twelfth Night* for Shenandoah Shakespeare, Noah Haidle's *The Dakota Project* at HERE, and Chuck Mee's *Big Love* for Princeton University, where he is a member of the theater faculty. In 2003, he was the Killian Directing Fellow at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where he directed Adam Bock's *The Thugs*. He is a Drama League Directing Fellow and a member of the Lincoln Center Directors' Lab. McCallum trained at LAMDA and studied at Princeton and Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar.

Photo Credit Walter McBride/Retna Ltd.

THE RADAR CULTURE

BY KERSTEN WEHDE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUZY POLING

ALL STAR: The Berkeley-raised, NYU-bred playwright Itamar Moses sketches out his newest play about baseball players and the drug they love.



FOUL PLAY

*The Old Globe's new playwright-in-residence bats a thousand with the world premiere of **Back Back Back**, a drama delving into baseball's XXL scandal*

With a residency at one of America's most renowned regional theaters, a much-anticipated world premiere and a leading role in a lit feud sparked by *Vanity Fair*, 31-year-old Itamar Moses has a career that playwrights twice his age could envy. But in spite of all the "budding genius" talk—which has increased since he was named the Old Globe's newest playwright-in-residence—the New Yorker is taking the hype in stride.

"When you try to keep in mind some abstract external audience, wondering what theatergoers will like, it just leads to work that's vague and confused," says Moses, who was raised in Berkeley and educated at Yale and NYU. "It's always nice to have these external affirmations. The trap is to think that they automatically make your new work better, when in fact you have to work just as hard."

The program? Moses will work at the Globe for six two-week periods over the next 12-18 months, and the theater will hire actors to read his works

in progress. His predecessors? Pulitzer-finalists Amy Freed and Howard Korder. "There's an intern who scatters rose petals in front of me everywhere I walk," he jokes.

Moses is no stranger to the Globe. Last year's two-man play—ironically named *The Four of Us*—earned him notoriety in the blogosphere, most notably on *VanityFair.com*. The play explored a friendship that's splintered by one character's success and the other's ensuing envy. *VF* noted the characters were likely based on Moses and his novelist pal Jonathan Safran Foer, and declared a literary feud. Both writers, of course, deny any spat.

On Sept. 19, he's sure to spark some real controversy at the Globe with the world premiere of *Back Back Back*. The 90-minute, intermission-less play follows three baseball players as they assess their careers and legacies under the shadow of the steroid era. Moses, a San Francisco Giants fan from way back ("My loyalty, if complicated by events over the last few years, remains," he says), had the idea for the play after the 2005 congressional hearings about rampant steroid abuse in Major League Baseball. The people most tainted by the scandal were his childhood heroes.

"The creepiest thing I came across was the fact that steroids eliminate recovery time—you don't get sore," Moses says. "But pain as the result of doing something difficult is how we learn. When you eliminate the pain cost, there's a kernel of moral and spiritual corruption there. It's a quintessentially American paradox that as fans, we want our superheroes to achieve superhuman things, but we want them to be human." ■

Back Back Back, September 19-October 26 at the Old Globe, Balboa Park, 619.23.GLOBE, www.theoldglobe.org.

CALENDAR

Tuesday, July 1, 2008

FINALLY

At the Old Globe: Itamar Moses, whose play, "Back Back Back," about steroid use and baseball premieres Sept. 19 to Oct. 26 at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, has been named the theater's newest playwright-in-residence, joining past participants Howard Korder and Amy Freed.


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THE FOOTLIGHTS: FALL THEATER PREVIEW

Sep 17, 2008, 03:42 PM | by Jason Clark

Categories: Katie Holmes and Tom Cruise, Stage/Theater, The Footlights



The hot weather is supposed to be behind us (damn you, global warming!) and chillier nights should play host to the new wave of shows. And while it would be utterly loco of me to include *everything* between now and early December, I figured it would be a good idea to give you some choice highlights, both in and out of the Big Apple, of the upcoming theater season.

EQUUS

Direct from London, here comes the heartwarming tale of a boy (Daniel Radcliffe), horsies, and how he likes to blind said horsies. Buzz is deafening. And you can even nab

onstage seats to get a better view of Harry Potter, uh, up close and personal. (Broadhurst Theatre on Broadway, in previews, opens 9/25, www.telecharge.com)

FIFTY WORDS

Playwright Michael Weller is busy this season (he also has *Beast* at New York Theater Workshop right now), but any play with both Norbert Leo Butz and Elizabeth Marvel(ous, always), playing a couple immersed in marital woes, gets the edge. (Lucille Lortel Theatre Off Broadway, in previews, opens 9/28, <http://www.mcdtheater.org/tickets.html>)

TURN OF THE CENTURY

Nine-time Tony winner Tommy Tune directing Jeff Daniels (who finally gets to showcase his musician skills) and Rachel York (Victor/Victoria) in an American Songbook-laced (Irving Berlin, Rodgers & Hart) musical from the writers of *Jersey Boys*? Count me in. (Goodman Theatre in Chicago, begins 9/19, <http://www.goodmantheatre.org>)

ALL MY SONS

Yeah, yeah...Katie Holmes is in this and anti-Scientists are already picketing the theater. But why is everyone ignoring the fact that John Lithgow, Dianne Wiest, and Patrick Wilson are in this as well and this is a kick-ass Arthur Miller play? (Schoenfeld Theatre on Broadway, begins 9/18, opens 10/16, <http://www.telecharge.com>)

BACK BACK BACK

Itamar Moses is a very cool young playwright (*The Four of Us*) and this clubhouse-set tale of three ball players sounds like another home run. (Sorry, had to.) And this pic might make it interesting for the ladies and gay gents too. (The Old Globe in San Diego, begins 9/19, <http://www.theoldglobe.org/tickets/>)

BLACK WATCH

I kicked myself right in the keister for missing this Scottish Army drama when it played last fall. I won't make the same mistake again. (St. Ann's Warehouse Off Broadway, plays 10/9 to 11/30, http://www.stannswarehouse.org/buy_tickets.php)

ROCK OF AGES

Okay, this will be either be a unintentionally hilarious piece o'crap or prime mullet good times, but either way, this Constantine Maroulis-led rock jukebox fest -- featuring the tunes of Bon Jovi, Styx, Journey, and Whitesnake, among many -- should be a hoot. And they'd better have "Mr. Roboto" in it. (New World Stages Off Broadway, previews begin 9/30, opens 10/10, <http://www.telecharge.com>)

BILLY ELLIOT

There's a reason Elton John has been razed in both *The Drowsy Chaperone* and *Gutenberg! The*

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

September 18, NIGHT & DAY

'Romeo and Juliet' Romeo's pal Mercutio is pivotal in sealing the doom of Shakespeare's tragic couple, and director Richard Seer has found a memorable Mr. M in Owiso Odera. But the actor is about the most sparkling part of this otherwise unremarkable, even routine staging. One issue is that the initial spark between the two lovers could be quicker to become an all-consuming fire. Heather Wood's Juliet, though, is ravishing, determined and sure-footed. *Lowell Davies Festival Theatre at The Old Globe Theatre, 1363 Old Globe Way. Through Sept. 28. 619-234-5623, theoldglobe.org. \$29-\$64. (Hebert)*

RUNNING

'Back Back Back' The story of three professional baseball hopefuls takes you behind the scenes into the locker room as they face off over their careers and the future of baseball. *Old Globe Arena Stage at James S. Copley Auditorium at San Diego Museum of Art, 1450 El Prado, Balboa Park. Previews Sept. 19. 619-234-5623, theoldglobe.org. \$43-\$59.*

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

October 13, 2008

OUTTA LEFT FIELD

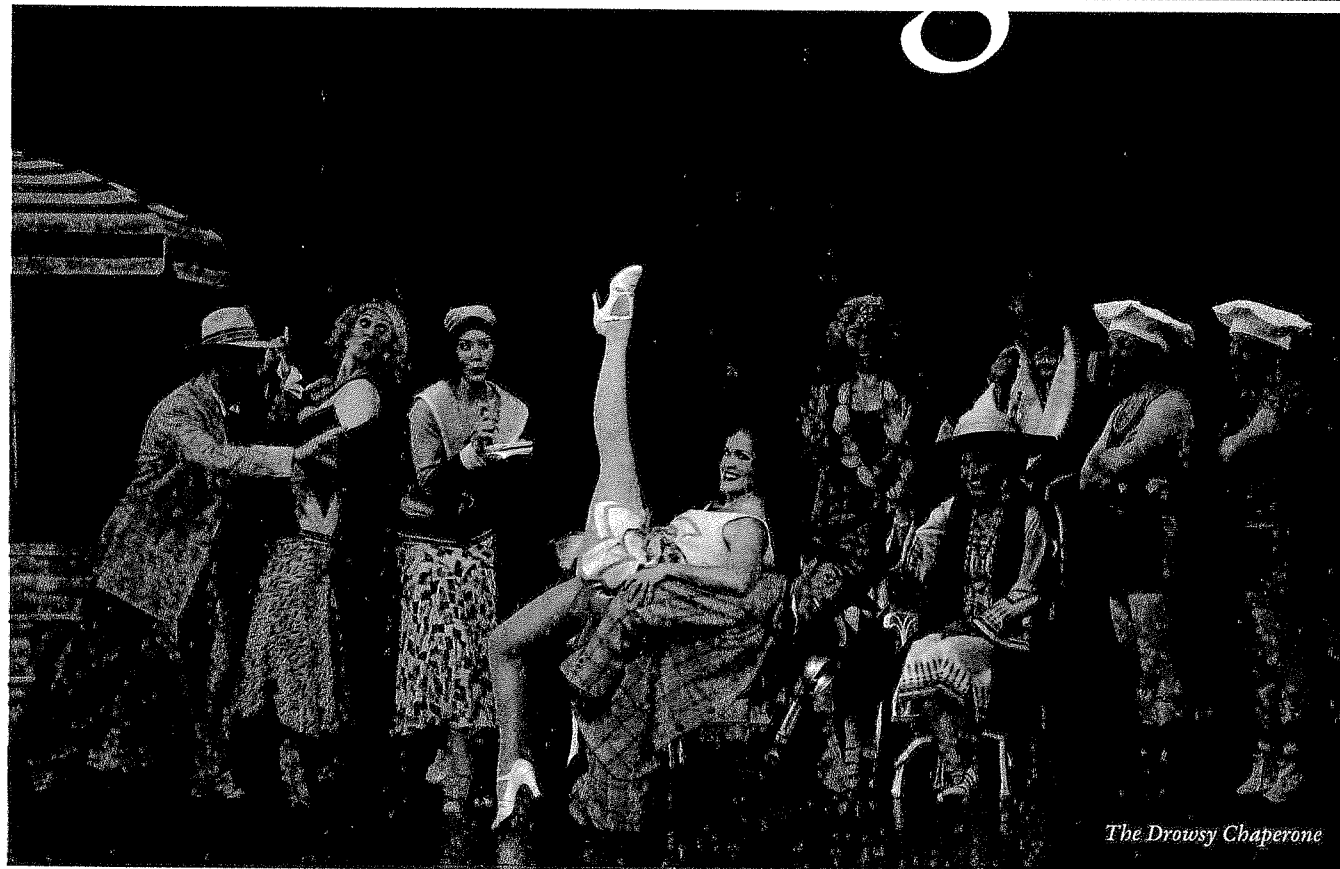
"Back Back Back" is almost certainly the only nine-inning play running on a stage at the moment. It's also probably the only production you'll run across that features a vendor hawking cotton candy (during the show's "seventh-inning stretch," no less). The Itamar Moses play, now getting its world premiere at the Old Globe, happens to be about baseball – more specifically, the issue of steroids. The cotton candy turns out to be about as authentic as "roid users" stats, but the show has some winning moments. "Back Back Back" runs through Oct. 26; Information: (619) 234-5623 or TheOldGlobe.org.



"Back Back Back" at Old Globe.
Craig Schwartz

EVENTS + EXHIBITS + PERFORMANCES

in the wings



The Drowsy Chaperone

stage

THIS MONTH IN THEATER: Closing its Shakespeare festival Sept. 28, the Old Globe next offers **Back back back**, a steroids-in-baseball story by resident playwright Itamar Moses (Sept. 19-Oct. 26) and Clare Boothe Luce's **The Women** (Sept. 13-Oct. 26), billed as a '30s-era *Sex and the City*. Musical comedy **The Drowsy Chaperone** arrives courtesy Broadway/San Diego (Sept. 23-28), while Cygnet's **Dying City** concerns a war widow's surprise encounter with her brother-in-law (Sept. 18-Oct. 26). On Coronado, Lamb's has **The Light in the Piazza** (Sept. 18-Nov. 2), about a mother-daughter duo journeying through Italy. The Playhouse's **Memphis** closes Sept. 28 as the world premiere of Charles Busch's **The Third Story** takes the Mandell Weiss Stage (Sept. 16-Oct. 19), and resident theater Mo'olelo presents the aphasia-themed **Night Sky** in the Studio Theatre through Sept. 21 (see p. 42). Finally, Delicia Turner Sonnenberg directs **The Good Body**, another femme-fueled work by Eve Ensler (of *Vagina Monologues* fame), at the Rep (Sept. 6-28).

THE BOTTOM LINE

October 10, 2008

BACK BACK BACK

AT THE OLD
GLOBE

The Tony Award-winning Old Globe presents the world premiere of *Back Back Back* by Itamar Moses (*The Four of Us*, *Bach at Leipzig*), directed by Davis McCallum, appearing in the Globe's arena stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium through October 26.

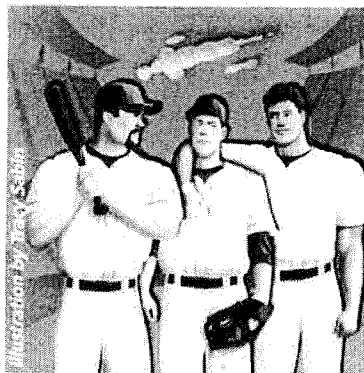
Before the headlines blazed with sporting steroid scandals comes Itamar Moses' funny yet insightful new work about the careers of three major players making their way in the world of professional baseball—a world too competitive to rely only on raw talent. The play examines how each individual deals with the stress of keeping up their stats while balancing their personal and professional lives. The play takes audiences inside the locker room to witness the how these teammates face each other and do battle—for their careers, their legacies and the future of America's favorite pastime.

The cast of *Back Back Back* includes Brendan Griffin (HBO's *Generation Kill*) as "Kent," Joaquin Perez-Campbell as "Raul" and Nick Mills as "Adam." The creative team includes Davis McCallum, director; Lee Savage, scenic design; Christal Weatherly, costume design; Russell Champa, lighting design; Paul Peterson, sound design; Tracy Skoczelas, stage manager.

If You Go—*BACK BACK BACK*, by Itamar Moses, through October 26, Old Globe Arena Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego; Tickets are available by calling 619.23.GLOBE, online at TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the Globe Box Office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

Show Time *continued from page 81*

a world too competitive to rely solely on raw talent, resulting in an explosive and riveting story, hailing from acclaimed writer Itamar Moses. Call for ticket prices.

**The Drowsy Chaperone**

September 23-28, San Diego Civic Theatre

This fairly new musical comedy has been showered with Tony Awards since opening on Broadway a couple of years ago. The storyline begins when a die-hard theater fan plays his favorite cast album of a 1928 musical about an early Broadway starlet looking to find her true love. The musical suddenly springs to life in the fan's living room, ushering in troupes of chorus girls and tap-dancing guys in vintage costumes, all giving way to a pair of comedic lovers. \$18 to \$79.

Candide

September 26, 27 & 28 and October 2, 4 & 5, Birch North Park Theatre

Based on the satirical novella of the same name by French philosopher Voltaire, and originally debuting on Broadway, this Lyric Opera production celebrates a courtship between Candide and Cunegonde as they sing out their differing opinions on marriage. The couple becomes separated when war breaks out in their country of Westphalia, only to meet up again in Paris before sailing off to the New World with a band of pilgrims. \$30 to \$50.

Tobacco Road

September 30 through October 26, La Jolla Playhouse's Mandell Weiss Forum

First dramatized for the stage in 1934, **Tobacco Road** ran on Broadway for more than seven years, shocking audiences with its abrasive humor and lewd overtones. The story, set in Georgia, depicts a family of impoverished tenant farmers estranged by industrialization. In a desperate endgame that is darkly humorous, the family members' lives are forever changed, resulting in a final act of love that outshines the miseries of their lives. \$29 to \$62.

TIME

by Frank Sabatini, Jr

The Third Story

September 16 through October 19, La Jolla Playhouse's Sheds and Hughes Potiker Theatre

An out-of-work screenwriter from Hollywood's Golden Age solicits her son to collaborate on a movie script. Their combined imaginations result in a zany mishmash of far-out characters designed to give audiences a humorous sense of life's foibles and victories. Playwright Charles Busch stars in the production, playing three of the female characters. \$29 to \$62.

Back Back Back

September 19 through October 26, Old Globe Arena at James S. Copley Auditorium

A dramatic look into the world of professional baseball unravels as three men battle out their careers and legacies from behind the scenes. The aspiring players discover

continued on page 82

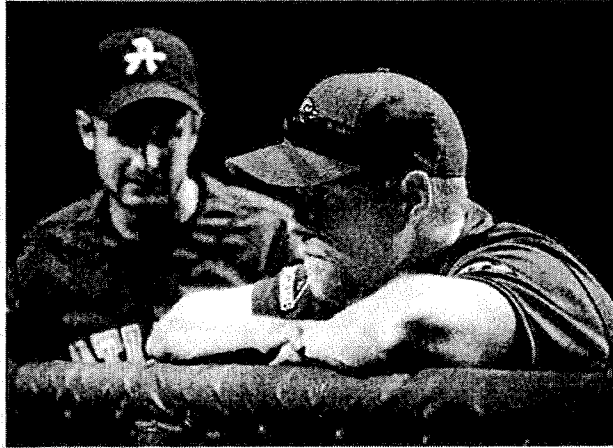
www.tismag.com

FALL 2008 • LIVINGINSTYLE 81

NEWS CHIEFTAN

October 9, 2008

ENTERTAINMENT CALENDAR



RIPPED FROM THE (SPORTS) HEADLINES — Nick Mills as 'Adam' and Brendan Griffin as 'Kent' in The Old Globe's production of 'Back Back Back' which makes drama out of professional baseball's steroid scandal. The Itamar Moses play is at the Globe's Arena Theatre at the San Diego Museum of Art through Oct. 26. For details, go to www.theoldglobe.org.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ