



WHISPER HOUSE



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REVIEWS



GHOST TALES: Holly Brook, right, a lead vocalist with David Poe, is accompanied by a seven-member band at the Old Globe. DON BARTLETT/Los Angeles Times

THEATER REVIEW

Spectral delivery

The musical 'Whisper House' offers ghosts, war and poetic ambiguity.

CHARLES McNULTY THEATER CRITIC REPORTING FROM SAN DIEGO >>> When the two singing ghosts of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's new indie-spirited chamber musical "Whisper House" deliver the opening number, "Better to Be Dead," the show tips its hand that it has no intention of playing by conventional rules. ¶ A morbid fixation on the grave, after all, isn't part of the core Rodgers & Hammerstein curriculum that helped shape this country's musical comedy sensibility for more than half a century. And moodiness — one of the qualities that distinguished the groundbreaking Tony-winning score for "Spring Awakening" that Sheik wrote with Steven Sater — isn't the emotional fallback for an art form that would rather be slap-happy or sappy than slunk in melancholy or ennui. ¶ But it's the start of a new year and, if you go along with the math, a new decade. And "Whisper House," receiving its world premiere at the Old Globe in a darkly enchanting production directed by Peter Askin, shines a dim but discernible black light into the future. ¶ Sheik's meditative, sometimes wallowing grooves won't be to everyone's taste, and Jarrow's book has some sketchy construction. But the show, a hybrid [See 'Whisper,' Page D8]

'Whisper House' is intimate, unique and charming

['Whisper,' from Page D1] alt-rock concert-psychological ghost story, has a revivifying freshness, and for once the cliché of "haunting" can be employed with impunity. I'll record in my diary that, theatrically speaking, 2010 started in San Diego with this occult charmer.

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It's 1942, and the Second World War has reached America's Eastern shores with German U-boats doing their best to undermine Atlantic shipping. Lilly (Mare Winningham), the crusty proprietor of the lighthouse, which her family has run for generations, has taken in the 11-year-old son of her brother, whose fighter plane was shot down over the Pacific.

Christopher (A.J. Foggiano)



DON BARTLETT/LOS ANGELES TIMES

CHAMBER MUSICAL: Lead ghosts Holly Brook and David Poe sing in the lighthouse during "Whisper House."

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which moves between supernatural and historical realms, hinges on the treatment of American citizens whose ancestry could be traced to the Axis powers. Charles (Ted Koch), the friendly local sheriff, informs Lilly that Yasuhiro will no longer be able to work in what has now been designated "a high-security area."

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'Whisper House'

Where: The Old Globe, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park, San Diego

When: 7 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends Feb. 21.

Price: \$36 to \$89

Contact: (619) 234-5623 or www.theOldGlobe.org

Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

mann), who blusters onto the scene with a farcical incompetence that turns increasingly bullying. Meanwhile, those troublesome ghosts, always looking for an opportunity to extract revenge, hope they can use this latest development to impose some additional suffering on Lilly, whose drunken father caused their untimely shipwreck by failing to light the lighthouse one night.

Jarrow is more interested in the personal than the political dimensions of his tale, which could have easily become a simplistic allegory about 21st century terror-rattled America. Instead, he focuses on the relationships of loners who are inspired to reach beyond their

imprisoning solitude at a moment of spiraling crisis.

The dramatic shorthand of the musical, however, threatens to turn the characters into mere characteristics: Lilly is curmudgeonly, Christopher is willful and Yasuhiro is foreign. They're all endowed with other qualities, but their dominant traits are writ so large that the overall effect is somewhat one-dimensional.

What Jarrow and Sheik handle exceptionally well is the ambiguity of the situation. "Whisper House" keeps us uncertain about how this yarn is going to unfold. Just as Christopher is ever vigilant about what may be lurking in the dark, the audience can't help being on edge about what's really endangering these isolated lives.

Sheik's music keeps the pace simmering (rather than racing to a full boil), and his and Jarrow's lyrics patiently (detractors might say tortuously) indulge states of minds. But I found myself swept up in the obsessive circularity of the songs.

Although the later stages of the show get a bit pop psychological, the resolution moved me more deeply than I anticipated. Different sensibilities may be left cold, but it's hard to imagine anyone not admiring Askin's magnificently inte-

grated staging, gracefully enlivened by dance director Wesley Fata.

Michael Schweikardt's set conjures a very specific locale while maintaining a transparent theatricality. This is accomplished with the aid of Matthew Richards' impressive palette of lighting, Dan Moses Schreier's eerie soundscape, Jenny Manis' wide-ranging yet stylistically coherent costumes and Aaron Rhyme's ingenious projections, which broaden the show's visual élan.

The figures created by the ensemble are sharp and distinctive — perhaps too much so at times. This was obviously a deliberate choice, but I would be curious to see whether a more pliant approach from the cast would enhance our investment in their characters' longings. Still, the vividness of the acting shouldn't be diminished, and the lyrical presences of Poe and Brook are, to my mind, unimprovable.

"Whisper House" moves perilously yet thrillingly to its own unique beat. What excites me about the musical is the way it reaches for poetry. In an age of shamelessly commercial blockbusters, this is every bit as noteworthy as a return from the dead.

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Theater review: 'Whisper House' at San Diego's Old Globe

January 24, 2010 | 4:41 pm



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-- Charles McNulty
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“Whisper House,” The Old Globe, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park, San Diego. 7 p.m. Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays-Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends Feb. 21. \$36-\$89. (619) 234-5623. Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

Photos: Top: Holly Brook and David Poe. Bottom: Kevin Hoffmann, Mare Winningham and Ted Kõch. Credit: Don Bartletti / Los Angeles Times

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Regional

Whisper House

(Old Globe, San Diego, Calif.; 577 seats; \$89 top)

By BOB VERINI

An Old Globe presentation of a musical in one act with music and lyrics by Duncan Sheik, and book and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow. Directed by Peter Askin. Dance director, Wesley Fata; musical director, Jason Hart.

Lilly - Mare Winningham
Yasuhiro - Arthur Acuna
Christopher - A.J. Foggiano
Lt. Rando - Kevin Hoffmann
Charles - Ted Koch
Ghosts - David Poe, Holly Brook



'Whisper House'

Composer Duncan Sheik's voice, which entered the world of stage tuners with a roar in 2004's "Spring Awakening," is reduced to a whisper in "Whisper House," the somnolent chamber musical now world premiering at the Old Globe. Sheik's sophomore slump doesn't mean his vastly popular, Tony-winning debut was a fluke. But it does suggest he needs to peg his distinctive repertoire to a stronger story than the anemic narrative penned by collaborator Kyle Jarrow.

The premise -- a young boy unwillingly plopped into a crusty female relative's home during WWII -- is amusingly the same as that of Neil Simon's "Lost in Yonkers," now playing next door in the Old Globe's newly renovated arena space. But whereas Simon's Grandma Kurnitz is genuinely terrifying, with humor and tension swirling around her, New England lighthouse keeper Miss Lilly (Mare Winningham) is drawn as a sluggishly one-dimensional curmudgeon whose detachment from the world at large seems to suit her fine.

Awaiting mom's recovery from a breakdown after dad's South Pacific death, nephew Christopher (A.J. Foggiano) is understandably alarmed when Lilly's Japanese employee Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuna) starts poking around with a camera a mere three months after Pearl Harbor. More unnervingly, Christopher is the only one who can see the lighthouse's two ghosts (David Poe, Holly Brook), though thesp's blandness requires us to take his terror on faith.

Clad by Jenny Mannis in a top hat for him and bustier for her, Poe and Brook come across like Riff Raff and Magenta in "The Rocky Horror Show" minus the fun. Assigned 99% of the singing burden, these spectral survivors of a 1912 yacht disaster breathily deliver a string of ballads in Sheik's signature mournful, near-rhymed ("broke on arrival / took off in style"; "storms do strike / keep up the fight") vein.

As capably performed by Jason Hart and his upstage combo, there's delicacy and melodic richness in the score's mockery of human folly and assurances that it's "Better to Be Dead." But there's considerable monotony as well, mostly because the ghosts show no particular reason to express themselves as they do. They're little more than emcees, with minimal investment in the goings-on.

One yearns for something akin to a hard-driving anthem a la "The Bitch of Living" or "Totally Fucked" from Sheik's first show, but this musical palette is all chilly blue, emo without high emotion. These lackadaisical ghosts seem in no more hurry to be released from their vaguely defined bondage than the living characters are driven to make anything happen.



As with rock 'n' roll's intrusion on the 19th century in "Spring Awakening," you either go with the absence of period melody and rhythm or you don't. But why take the trouble to set a tuner in the first months of WWII if not to tap into the era's urgency, energy, panic and, yes, exhilaration?



Instead, helmer Peter Askin sets his cast sleepwalking as if already war-weary, his staging lacking lightness or pacing variety. Meanwhile, toying with stock coming-of-age and brotherhood themes, librettist Jarrow contributes flavorless dialogue heavy on the exposition. Plot points are telegraphed and delivered with Western Union efficiency but not effect.




Michael Schweikardt's three-tiered lighthouse interior is impressive but confusingly cluttered, and Matthew Richards' lighting overdoes the fog effects and gloomy haze. Surprisingly, the towering beam of light is barely evident, with Jarrow's plotting requiring it to be untheatrically extinguished at the climax.

Even an 11th-hour U-boat attack isn't enough to raise "Whisper House" out of its torpor.

Sets: Michael Schweikardt; costumes: Jenny Mannis; lighting: Matthew Richards; sound: Dan Moses Schriber

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THEATER REVIEW

Globe's 'Whisper House' a haunting, tuneful tale

By James Hebert
THEATER CRITIC

Forgive the ghosts of "Whisper House" for seeming a little mopey. These cursed spirits have been outsourced; the humans they're supposed to be spooking have already haunted themselves.

That's part of the charm — and part of the point — of Duncan Sheik's delicate, droll theatrical tone poem, the composer's first stage piece since his boundary-flouting Broadway hit "Spring Awakening."

In the Old Globe's gently arresting world premiere of the work — a "play with music" whose story is by Kyle Jarrow — a lonely Maine lighthouse plays host to a trio of lost souls circa World War II who definitely need a beacon of some sort.

Two of them — the middle-aged lighthouse keeper Lilly (Mare Winningham) and her Japanese-immigrant helper Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña) — are so taciturn, so deadly repressed that they risk being toe-tagged, like the unfortunate yellow-fever victim in the "Whisper House" song who winds up being inadvertently buried alive.

Compared with the hard-rocking "Spring Awakening," the pace and personality of this new show is something more like winter oblivion. There are long, almost seance-like silences in some of the narrative scenes weaved between the piece's dozen musical numbers.

Even when the nine-member ghost band — led by singers and phantoms-in-chief Holly Brook and David Poe — strikes up Sheik's score, the songs can be so wispy and ethereal that it seems the whole of "Whisper House" might drift away like the imitation fog wafting off the set.

And yet there are so many elements elegantly holding director Peter Askin's restrained and lyrical staging together.



There's the lighthouse, a place perched on the boundary of two worlds, a kind of way station (or purgatory) both for the ghosts who never finished their business in life, and the living who haven't figured out what their purpose is.

The weathered surfaces and rusted towering spiral stairs of Michael Schweikardt's dramatic cutaway set emphasize the porous boundaries between the humans' refuge and the great beyond (the ocean or otherwise); given the ghostly content,

his lighthouse is aptly skeletal.

There are also the parallel stories of love and longing between the unnamed ghosts portrayed by Poe and Brook, and two (maybe three) of the living. And not only do the ghosts come from a different plane of existence, they also come from a boat — one that sank just offshore with all hands on Halloween night 1912, which explains why the phantom band (which stays onstage for the whole show) and its two singers keep haunting the place.

Acuña brings a quietly soulful feel to Yasuhiro, who's accused of being a spy amid wartime paranoia, a subtle political subtext to "Whisper House." The game Hoffmann brings a little comic relief as the lieutenant, and Ted Koch is also good as the good-hearted but mistrustful sheriff.

The young Foggiano, a relative newcomer to the role of Christopher (he took over the role during previews), still seemed to be perfecting the rhythm of the piece on Thursday's opening night, but showed flashes of natural humor. His character's intuition also showcases an admirable facet of Jarrow's script: It gives kids credit for being wiser than adults might believe.



Kevin Hoffman plays a disturbed Coast Guard lieutenant, and David Poe and Holly Brook are singing ghosts in "Whisper House," now playing at the Old Globe Theatre in Balboa Park.

Sean M. Haffey / Union-Tribune

Threaded through it all in Jarrow's subtly affecting story is the tension between fear and security, between clinging to what's known and taking a chance on someone or something new. That's embodied most in 10-year-old Christopher (A.J. Foggiano), who has been dropped on the doorstep of Lilly, his aunt, after his aviator father died in the war and his mother subsequently had a breakdown.

He's suspicious and distrustful, and is goaded along in those sentiments by the ghosts, who wouldn't mind a little company in their misery. Their very existence feeds off his fears, although Sheik and Jarrow bend the play's metaphysical rules a bit; the spooks don't necessarily exist for anyone but Christopher, yet they still sometimes manage to mess with the heads of the other characters anyway — most amusingly when they make a pompous Coast Guard lieutenant (Kevin Hoffmann) dance.

Sheik's atmospheric music is a natural fit for all this, full of mordant humor ("The Tale of Solomon Snell," about that

prematurely interred unfortunate) and some more raw, brooding sentiments ("Better to Be Dead," in which the jealous ghosts catalog all their living counterparts' shortcomings.)

A number like "And Now We Sing," with Brook's gorgeously sad vocal, seems the very definition of wistful; its mournful mix of horns and woodwinds shows off the considerable talents of musical director and keyboardist Jason Hart's top-hatted band.

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DETAILS

"Whisper House"

The 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 Feb. 21.

Where: 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park

Tickets: \$36-\$89

Phone: (619) 234-5623

Online: TheOldGlobe.org

The spare visual sense of "Whisper House" gets a lift from Aaron Rhyne's inventive projections, featuring diaphanous, white-silhouetted ghosts, swaths of roiled ocean and columns of marching soldiers. They bring a dreamlike sense that feeds into the show's otherworldly ethos.

There's also some kind of weird comfort in seeing the sulky spirits of "Whisper House." For all their ghostly grandstanding about the living being better off dead, they seem awfully eager to get back in the game.

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

Globe's 'Whisper House' a haunting, tuneful tale

By [James Hebert](#), UNION-TRIBUNE THEATER CRITIC

Saturday, January 23, 2010 at 12:04 a.m.



Sean M. Haffey / Union-Tribune

[David Poe](#) and Holly Brook are singing ghosts in "Whisper House," now playing at the Old Globe Theatre in Balboa Park.



Photo by Sean M. Haffey - Union-Tribune

Kevin Hoffman plays a disturbed Coast Guard lieutenant.

DETAILS

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Phone: (619) 234-5623

Online: TheOldGlobe.org

Forgive the ghosts of “Whisper House” for seeming a little mopey. These cursed spirits have been outsourced; the humans they’re supposed to be spooking have already haunted themselves.

That’s part of the charm — and part of the point — of Duncan Sheik’s delicate, droll theatrical tone poem, the composer’s first stage piece since his boundary-flouting Broadway hit “[Spring Awakening](#).”

In the Old Globe’s gently arresting world premiere of the work — a “play with music” whose story is by [Kyle Jarrow](#) — a lonely [Maine](#) lighthouse plays host to a trio of lost souls circa [World War II](#) who definitely need a beacon of some sort.

Two of them — the middle-aged lighthouse keeper Lilly ([Mare Winningham](#)) and her Japanese-immigrant helper Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña) — are so taciturn, so deadly repressed that they risk being toe-tagged, like the unfortunate yellow-fever victim in the “Whisper House” song who winds up being inadvertently buried alive.

Compared with the hard-rocking “Spring Awakening,” the pace and personality of this new show is something more like winter oblivion. There are long, almost seance-like silences in some of the narrative scenes weaved between the piece’s dozen musical numbers.

Even when the nine-member ghost band — led by singers and phantoms-in-chief Holly Brook and David Poe — strikes up Sheik’s score, the songs can be so wispy and ethereal that it seems the whole of “Whisper House” might drift away like the imitation fog wafting off the set.

And yet there are so many elements elegantly holding director Peter Askin's restrained and lyrical staging together.

There's the lighthouse, a place perched on the boundary of two worlds, a kind of way station (or purgatory) both for the ghosts who never finished their business in life, and the living who haven't figured out what their purpose is.

The weathered surfaces and rusted towering spiral stairs of Michael Schweikardt's dramatic cutaway set emphasize the porous boundaries between the humans' refuge and the great beyond (the ocean or otherwise); given the ghostly content, his lighthouse is aptly skeletal.

There are also the parallel stories of love and longing between the unnamed ghosts portrayed by Poe and Brook, and two (maybe three) of the living. And not only do the ghosts come from a different plane of existence, they also come from a boat — one that sank just offshore with all hands on [Halloween](#) night 1912, which explains why the phantom band (which stays onstage for the whole show) and its two singers keep haunting the place.

Threaded through it all in Jarrow's subtly affecting story is the tension between fear and security, between clinging to what's known and taking a chance on someone or something new. That's embodied most in 10-year-old Christopher (A.J. Foggiano), who has been dropped on the doorstep of Lilly, his aunt, after his aviator father died in the war and his mother subsequently had a breakdown.

He's suspicious and distrustful, and is goaded along in those sentiments by the ghosts, who wouldn't mind a little company in their misery. Their very existence feeds off his fears, although Sheik and Jarrow bend the play's metaphysical rules a bit; the spooks don't necessarily exist for anyone but Christopher, yet they still sometimes manage to mess with the heads of the other characters anyway — most amusingly when they make a pompous Coast Guard lieutenant (Kevin Hoffmann) dance.

Sheik's atmospheric music is a natural fit for all this, full of mordant humor ("The Tale of Solomon Snell," about that prematurely interred unfortunate) and some more raw, brooding sentiments ("Better to Be Dead," in which the jealous ghosts catalog all their living counterparts' shortcomings.)

A number like "And Now We Sing," with Brook's gorgeously sad vocal, seems the very definition of wistful; its mournful mix of horns and woodwinds shows off the considerable talents of musical director and keyboardist Jason Hart's top-hatted band.

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(maybe slower than the story warrants), although her flashes of warmth toward Christopher add depth to the narrative.

Acuña brings a quietly soulful feel to Yasuhiro, who's accused of being a spy amid wartime paranoia, a subtle political subtext to "Whisper House." The game Hoffmann brings a little comic relief as the lieutenant, and Ted Koch is also good as the good-hearted but mistrustful sheriff.

The young Foggiano, a relative newcomer to the role of Christopher (he took over the role during previews), still seemed to be perfecting the rhythm of the piece on Thursday's opening night, but showed flashes of natural humor. His character's intuition also showcases an admirable facet of Jarrow's script: It gives kids credit for being wiser than adults might believe.

The spare visual sense of "Whisper House" gets a lift from Aaron Rhyne's inventive projections, featuring diaphanous, white-silhouetted ghosts, swaths of roiled ocean and columns of marching soldiers. They bring a dreamlike sense that feeds into the show's otherworldly ethos.

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A CurtainUp Los Angeles Review *Whisper House*

By [Evan Henerson](#)

[With Additional Thoughts by New York to San Diego Transplanted Critic Jenny Sandman](#)

*Things are broke and way past mending.
Don't look now, the world is ending
— "You've Really Gone and Done it Now."*



David Poe and Holly Brooks
(Photo: Craig Schwartz)

Every entity, living or deceased, youthful or wizened, American or alien is better off dead. So croon a pair of rockin' ghosts as *Whisper House*, the gloomy and spooky new musical by Duncan Sheik gets underway. Given that our singers are themselves specters, they might be a little biased.

A kind of coming-of-age tale set at a haunted lighthouse during World War II, *Whisper House* is not quite as relentlessly misery-inducing as Sheik's first musical, *Spring Awakening*. It also lacks *Awakening's* gas-meets-match kineticism and charisma. Those hormonal German prep schoolers may have been spiraling into oblivion, but they were going down hard. There was a kind of nihilistic thrill at realizing you were, as Melchior Gabor discovered, "Totally F**ked." With *Whisper House* Sheik writes his own lyrics and is working with a different librettist (Kyle Jarrow, also a

co-lyricist), and a new director in Peter Askin.

The piece is plenty moody and atmospheric and, in its world premiere at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, occasionally even a bit fright inducing. Visuals can go a long way when you've got a creepy enough set, eerie booms and crashes (courtesy of Dan Moses Schreier's sound design) and enough dry ice to fog the place down.

Narratively speaking, Jarrow's book is wafer thin. Our 11 year old hero makes his quickie journey into adulthood while his spinster aunt is learning to let her dried-out heart throb with love and compassion in the fewer than 90 minutes Askin takes to bring the whole thing home. And as we're wondering whether the aforementioned kid and auntie will survive the War and their own demons, more entertainment-minded audience members might well be saying, "Fine, fine, but let's get back to those ghosts striking up their wraithlike band." But the two ghosts, you see, do the only singing and what they sing largely represents the inner feelings of young Christopher (A.J. Foggiano) who has been sent to live at the Maine lighthouse operated by his aunt Lily (Mare Winningham). Christopher's father, a fighter pilot, has been killed in action, and the boy's mom has suffered a breakdown. Mom has promised to send for Christopher by telegram in a month or so, and, from Christopher's perspective, that cable can't come too soon.

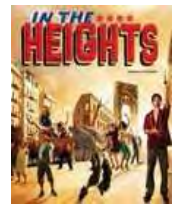
Lilly, a practical but emotionless woman, has little or no experience with kids. She's the last choice to rear a boy, and she knows it. Christopher, meanwhile, believes her Japanese houseman Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuna) might be an enemy spy, so he does some snooping of his own. With talk of U-boats being spotted in nearby waters, the local sheriff (Ted Koch) puts Lilly on alert that she may have to douse the light and send Yasuhiro away (potentially to an internment camp). Lilly scoffs that her worker is no threat. As for the lighthouse, "It's dangerous to put out the light." Indeed it is. The last time that happened, a yacht carrying revelers from a masquerade ball hit the rocks. And now the lighthouse has ghosts.

Ashen faced and dressed in formal wear, our two ghosts resemble zombies or vampires more than spirits. They roam up and down the staircases and ladders of Michael Schweikardt's tri level set, playing instruments, occasionally oversalting Lilly's oatmeal and leading (or misleading) Christopher into hasty decisions. David Poe is gaunt and terrifying, suggesting a sneering malevolence even though his ghostly motives seem largely benign. The very presence of Holly Brook, with her fishnets and corset, should be enough to send Christopher hurtling into puberty.

Both performers cut arresting figures, and they handle Sheik's moody melodies (Brook is the featured female singer on Sheik's *Whisper House* concept CD). The heavy guitar strains and bass line should resonate with people who appreciated both Sheik's *Spring Awakening* score and with fans of his pop output. A creepy number like "The Tale of Solomon Snell" finds a place here as does the beautiful ballad "Earthbound Starlight."



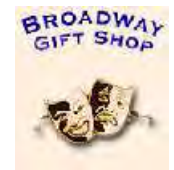
South Pacific



In the Heights



Playbill Broadway Yearbook



Winningham's Miss Lilly and Acuna's Yasuhiro both deliver appropriate doses of dignity and strength in the midst of what would be a pretty wretched situation for their characters. It seems strange that Winningham, a former Brat-Packer, has reached the age where she's playing mothers of grown children (as she did in La Jolla Playhouse's *Bonnie & Clyde*). She doesn't overplay Lilly's iciness nor does she over-saccharine the inevitable coming together of aunt and boy. Though *Whisper House* doesn't call on her to sing, Winningham is, herself, a recording artist and skilled singer.

Foggiano's is another credible performance. In his hands, Christopher is neither too brash nor too grown up. A bit more fear at the bumps in the night (to say nothing of aircraft fire) might be in order. The central conceit of Jarrow's script, of course, suggests that the world is a terrifying place whether you're out on a vulnerable beach or in the, ahem!, safe haven of a lighthouse. When once helpful ghosts wear out their usefulness, you may simply have to send them away and look to your own devices to get through. In other words, Christopher picked a devil of a time to have to grow up. All of this is, as noted, rather superficially played, but Poe and Brook's ghosts and the music of Duncan Sheik, make this evening at the very least an entertaining one.

Whisper House

Music and lyrics by Duncan Sheik

Book and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow Directed by Peter Askin

Cast: David Poe (Ghost), Holly Brook (Ghost), Mare Winningham (Lilly), Arthur Acuna (Yasuhiro), A.J. Foggiano (Christopher), Ted Koch (Charles, the Sheriff), Kevin Hoffmann (Lieutenant Rando)

Stage Manager: Richard Costabile

Set Design: Michael Schweikardt

Costume Design: Jenny Mannis

Lighting Design: Matthew Richards

Sound Design: Dan Moses Schreier

Musical Director/Keyboards: Jason Hart

Running Time: 1 hour 30 minutes with no intermission

Song List: Better to Be Dead, We're Here to Tell You, (Part 1), We're Here to Tell You (Part 2), And Now We Sing,

The Tale of Solomon Snell, Earthbound Starlight, Play Your Part, You've Really Gone and Done it Now, How it

Feels, I Don't Believe in You, Better to be Dead, Take a Bow.

Old Globe Theatre, 1363 Old Globe Way, San Diego. (619) 234-5623, www.Theoldglobe.org

From Jan. 13 to Feb. 21

Tue-Sat. @ 8pm, Sat. @ 2 pm., Sun @ 2 pm and 7 pm.

Reviewed by Evan Henerson, based on Jan. 22nd performance.

Additional Thoughts by Jenny Sandman

Almost five months ago, I moved myself from New York to San Diego. During my decade in New York, I saw (and reviewed) thousands of plays. In my heyday I was reviewing three or four plays a week, and that's not counting the ones I saw that I wasn't reviewing. Now that I'm settled in I'm starting to explore the California theater scene.

Last night I went to my first play in San Diego at the Old Globe: Duncan Sheik's *Whisper House*. This being the Duncan Sheik, of *Spring Awakening* fame, it was a bit strange to be watching off-Broadway type theater so far off-Broadway. And quite different.

In New York, I saw all manner of plays and playhouses. I viewed shows on Broadway and at BAM, packed to the gills; I sat in leaky basements in the East Village where I was one of three audience members. I've seen plays in cars (yes, in cars), in churches, in the subway, in apartments, in parks, in the street, and in innumerable basements. More often than not, I was watching theater in a repurposed space. I've sat on folding chairs, backless benches, church pews, boxes, floor mats, and the grass. Comfortable seating was a luxury, as was a coat check. Occasionally there was a folding table set up where I could purchase \$6 beer or box wine.

Now, I didn't always live in New York. I've seen plenty of community and regional theatre, so it's not like the concept of free parking at the theater is completely unheard-of. But after my years in New York it's quite a novelty to discover that . The Old Globe has free parking. Lots of it. And a valet. It was nice to drive to the theater without worrying about missing plays because of subway snafus (It happened). The Old Globe also has a year-round outdoor pub. Let me just restate that—year-round. Outdoors.

As for the theaters. . . cushy seats and wide aisles with no chance for my knees to hit the back of the seat in front of me. Best of all, I didn't have to swing back out into the aisle and perform a couple of advanced yoga moves in order to cross my legs.

The last play I saw in New York was *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, an incredibly subversive and hilarious musical. It played at a black box space about the size of three corner offices. Not one audience member was over 40, and there couldn't have been seating for more than 50 people, tops. If I remember correctly, it was about 45 degrees outside.

Fast forward several months to San Diego, 70 degree weather and *Whisper House*. It's also a subversive musical, by a guy who made his name in New York. But it's debut is in an enormous, and beautiful 600 seat venue. My seat had a cushion, and ample leg room. Granted, when I saw *Spring Awakening* on Broadway, the weather was lovely and it turns out that Duncan Sheik plays well on both coasts. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

It helped that I was viewing a familiar name. It's clear that Duncan Sheik is becoming a force to be reckoned with and while *Whisper House* is stylistically very different from *Spring Awakening*, it has Sheik's characteristic musical insouciance.

While my new colleague Evan Henerson wasn't thrilled with the show, it was perfect for my own personal re-entry into the theater world. I agree with much of Evan's review. The book IS pretty thin—but atmospherically, I found the evening was exceptional. The play's soundtrack is very nearly a cross between The Killers and a moody James Bond theme song. The lighting and fog usage is eerie and mournful without being overwrought. Performances were excellent and the set architecturally interesting. I was pleased to see that the audience was happily mixed, unlike New York where older people predominate at the big Broadway shows and the Off and Off-Off Broadway theaters I frequented tended to be strictly well under forty.

Now that I've settled in, I'm looking forward to checking out the entire Southern California theatre scene. Stay tuned!

—original review by

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- I disagree with the review of Whisper House
- The review made me eager to see Whisper House

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SAN DIEGO

Regional Reviews by Bill Eadie

Whisper House

Old Globe Theatre

Duncan Sheik first received attention as an indie rocker, but he became well known in the theatre community for composing music for Broadway's *Spring Awakening* that was character-driven, advanced the story, and, most of all, artfully caught the timeless angst of adolescence. Now Mr. Sheik and his writing partner, Kyle Jarrow, are back with a wisp of a ghost story titled *Whisper House*, making its world premiere through February 21 at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego. Again, the music is atmospheric, character-driven and artful, but this time there's no adolescent energy to make it interesting.



The cast of *Whisper House*

And that's too bad, because there is much to admire about *Whisper House*. The story is set in a New England lighthouse during World War II. The lighthouse is run by Miss Lilly (Mare Winningham) and the hired hand she calls Mr. Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña). Miss Lilly is reluctantly receiving her nephew, Christopher (A. J. Foggiano), who has come to stay with his only living relative because his father has died fighting in the Pacific and his mother has been hospitalized from her grief. Christopher, too, is grieving and is anxious for a father figure in his life. One stops by, in the form of Charles the sheriff (Ted Kõch), who tells Christopher ghost stories and shares Christopher's hatred and distrust of "Japs" such as Yasuhiro.

One of the stories explains a memorial plaque that Christopher had already found on the attached to the light itself. A boat on a party cruise ran aground and sank because Christopher's grandfather had forgotten to turn on the light. On the boat was a band, including two singers who had just made plans to marry. The singers (David Poe and Holly Brook) were said to haunt the lighthouse seeking retribution for their deaths. Christopher understood this story immediately, because he had been confronted by these singers, though no one else in the household sensed their presence.

Unfortunately, nothing much happens after the story is set up. The war impedes (in the form of a Coast Guard officer, played by Kevin Hoffmann), bringing suspicion on Mr. Yasuhiro; some small-scale revelations are made, and the ghosts pursue their desire for retribution to a predictable end.

Audiences coming to *Whisper House* with the expectation that they are seeing a Broadway-aspiring musical will be disappointed. Mr. Sheik has called it more of a play with music, and I'd agree. But, that's a problem, because once established, the characters, outside of Christopher, remain relatively static. Even Christopher is something of a cipher, and Mr. Jarrow's book hasn't traced his psychological journey adequately. The problem has been compounded by Mr. Foggiano's replacement of Eric Brent Zutty during the show's preview week. Mr. Foggiano, a local actor who recently appeared in the Globe's production of *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* is an engaging performer, and he showed little hesitation with his lines and blocking. But he also hasn't had much opportunity to find his character's nuances.

Problems might also be traced to the fact that the music was finished as a concept album before the book was constructed. The songs tell the story in themselves, and the book fills in the details. Its solution is to have the ghosts do almost all of the singing, as if they are caught in a limbo they entered when their ship sank. Mr. Poe and Ms. Brook are appealing singers

who blend well together, but Mr. Poe's diction is far clearer (and understanding the lyrics is crucial). The book also could have filled in the details in a more consistent and revealing manner. For example, despite the characters addressing many racist remarks to Mr. Yasuhiro, they react impassively when they learn that he has fallen in love with a white woman.

Peter Askin's production sets an appropriately ghostly tone, and he draws effective performances from his actors. Ms. Winningham, Mr. Acuña, and Mr. Koch do their best with what they have been given, though Mr. Hoffmann comes across as more shrill than is necessary. The other production elements, particularly Aaron Rhyne's other-worldly projection design, are supportive but not distinguished. I longed for the discipline that Michael Mayer provided in his direction for *Spring Awakening*, particularly in staging "Take a Bow," the curtain-call number that Mr. Sheik composed to wrap things up.

Despite these many reservations, I enjoyed the show. As I overheard more than one conversation in which an audience member was claiming to have seen it more than once in its ten days of performances, I suspect that it will develop its passionate devotees.

The Old Globe presents *Whisper House* through February 21, 2010 at the Old Globe Theatre, Donald and Darlene Shiley Stage. Tickets (\$36 - \$89) available by calling (619) 23-GLOBE or visiting [The Old Globe website](#).

Music and lyrics by Duncan Sheik, book and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow. Directed by Peter Askin with Jason Hart as musical director and Wesley Fata as dance directory. Scenic design by Michael Schweikardt, costume design by Jenny Mannis, lighting design by Matthew Richards, sound design by Dan Moses Schreier, and projection design by Aaron Rhyne.

With David Poe and Holly Brook (Ghosts), Mare Winningham (Lilly), Arthur Acuña (Yasuhiro), A. J. Foggiano (Christopher), Ted Kōch (Charles, the Sheriff), and Kevin Hoffmann (Lieutenant Rando).

Photo: Craig Schwartz

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- [Bill Eadie](#)

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REVIEWS

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Whisper House

Reviewed By: **Rob Stevens** · Jan 22, 2010 · San Diego

Tony Award-winning composer Duncan Sheik and librettist Kyle Jarrow's musical *Whisper House*, now premiering at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, is an intriguing character study, a coming-of-age tale, and a ghost story all rolled into one. While the work has some significant flaws, in both conception and execution, the tale's unlikely elements are well blended, and director Peter Askin's clear and precise vision helps keep the audience enthralled throughout the 90-minute show.

The action, which is set in a haunted lighthouse on the coast of Maine in early 1942, begins when self-professed local curmudgeon and lighthouse keeper Miss Lilly (a believable and ultimately touching Mare Winningham) greets her young nephew Christopher (A.J. Foggiano), who has come to stay with her against his will for at least a month. His Army pilot father was recently killed in action in the South Pacific and his mother is recovering from the resulting nervous breakdown. His inquisitiveness and her lack of maternal instincts give their relationship a cold and prickly edge.

Lilly's helper at the lighthouse, Mr. Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuna, delivering a thoughtful, layered character), is a Japanese man who has been in her employ for three years. Because of his father's death at the hands of the Japanese, Christopher takes an immediate dislike to Yasuhiro. The local sheriff (Ted Koch) and a Coast Guard lieutenant (Kevin Hoffmann, providing comic relief) also want Yasuhiro gone from the coastal lighthouse for security reasons.

Adding to Christopher's distrust and confusion are the two resident ghosts (David Poe and Holly Brook) whom only he can see -- although the others are often bothered by their poltergeist pranks. The ghosts are part of a yacht party that drowned off the coast because Lilly's drunken father forgot to light the beacon on a long ago Halloween night. The action comes to a thunderous conclusion when a German U-boat is sighted off the coast and the Navy arrives to bomb them. Christopher comes of age by banishing his fear of the ghosts and coming to recognize the budding relationship between Lilly and Yasuhiro.

The technical aspects of the production are top-drawer. Michael Schweikardt's multi-level lighthouse set creates a marvelous backdrop for the action, aided immensely by Aaron Rhyne's projection design. Matthew Richards has provided ghostly lighting filtered through plenty of fog. Dan Moses Schreier's sound design is most effective. Musical director Jason Hart and his six-piece on-stage band are evocatively dressed in tuxes, top hats, and ghostly white makeup.

Sheik's music is appropriately haunting and downright eerie at times, providing the proper atmosphere for the piece. The lyrics (by Sheik and Jarrow) could use some fine tuning. The best number in the show is "The Tale of Solomon Snell," which doesn't really advance the plot, but the ghostly bells do deliver the shivers. And the dialogue too often borders on sitcom chatter.

All of the songs are delivered by the two ghosts, who not only wear head mics but also sing into handheld mics (as in Sheik's *Spring Awakening*). Poe has a beguiling early Bob Dylanish quality to his voice and his vocals for the most part are pleasant. On the other hand, Brook plants her lips firmly on her handheld microphones, making the lyrics unintelligible -- a particularly big problem when her songs are providing exposition.

Still, there's enough promise in *Whisper House* that Sheik might have another hit musical on his hands.



Arthur Acuna and Mare Winningham
in *Whisper House*
(© Craig Schwartz)



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THEATER REVIEW

Globe's 'Whisper House' musical is haunting, different

BY PAM KRAGEN
pkragen@nctimes.com

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The melancholy, 90-minute ghost story has an economically written book and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow and a haunting, highly melodic score by Duncan Sheik (who won a Tony and Grammy for his "Spring Awakening" musical score). Set in a Maine lighthouse during World War II, it's the story of an 11-year-old boy who's

haunted by loneliness, fear and the mischievous spirits of two ghosts who sing their way through Sheik's engaging, 10-song score.

While the book could still use some fleshing out, the score is strong and the production is excellent, particularly Peter Askin's imaginative and playful direction, and Michael Schweikardt's atmospheric lighthouse set. A note, though, to Sheik fans expecting something like the edgy, electric "Spring Awakening": "Whisper House" is an entirely different animal — restrained, moody and pared to the essentials.

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"Whisper House"

WHEN 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; through Feb. 21

WHERE Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

TICKETS \$36-\$89

INFO 619-234-5623
www.theoldglobe.org

Chicago boy who's sent to stay with his gruff, spinster Aunt Lily at her family's lighthouse after the death of his army pilot father and his mother's subsequent mental breakdown. He quickly grows suspicious of Yasuhiro, the

Japanese immigrant who works for Lily, and he's regularly visited by the spirits of two singing ghosts, a man and woman.

As legend has it (as told by town sheriff, Charles), the boat on which the two were performing on Halloween night 1912 sank when it crashed on rocks (Lily's alcoholic father hadn't lit the lighthouse lamp that night), drowning all on board. Since then, their spirits have roamed the coast, hoping to claim a life in revenge for their own deaths.

Leading the cast as Lily is Mare Winningham, who perfectly embodies the aloof, tight-lipped fortitude of her character. Arthur Acuna is noble and quiet as the misunderstood Yasuhiro, Ted Koch is likable as the sheriff Charles and Kevin Hoffman is especially good as the vain and overeager Lt. Rando. Understudy A.J. Foggiano took over the role of Christopher during rehearsals and on opening night, he was still exploring the character and putting little intonation into his lines.

Only the two ghosts — dynamically played by indie-rockers David Poe and Holly Brook — sing in "Whisper House," so it's more a play with music than a musical. Sheik's songs comment on the action more than advance the plot, and the ghosts function

See 'Whisper,' 22

'Whisper'

Continued from Page 20

more as figments of Christopher's imagination than as malevolent forces. Under Askin's direction, Poe is a playful poltergeist who manipulates people for fun, and Brook is the vaporous and seemingly gentle beauty. Standout numbers are "The Tale of Solomon Snell," "Play Your Part," "How It Feels" and "I Don't Believe in You."

Jarrow's minimalist book leaves you wanting more. It gives few details of Christopher and Lily's past and offers no internal monologues. Even in the touching finale, the last confession is delivered in an inaudible whisper. The songs serve as the emotional counterpoint, but it's sometimes hard to tell from whose perspective each song is being told. And some plot threads near the end — including a reference to a washed-up body — are left untied. More dialogue would help this show. Giving Christopher more personality and emotions might help the audience better connect to this

somber, prejudiced boy.

The action plays out on an elaborate set — a weathered, curling three-story skeletal lighthouse backed by a floating scrim that rises now and then to let the ghosts slip in and out of the ethereal world. The scrim also shields the onstage band and serves as a backdrop for Aaron Rhyne's evocative projections of the sea and walking spirits. (Sound designer Dan Moses Schreier adds to the effect with recordings of seagulls and crashing waves.)

Music director John Hart leads a nine-piece onstage band from the keyboard. At times, the music overpowered the singers, but he brings a real concert feel to the show. Jenny Mannis' period specific costumes are good, though it's never clear why the female ghost keeps stripping down to her bustier, hose and garters.

Because of its dark themes, grown-up songs and lack of exposition make "Whisper House" most suitable for teens and up. While it's not the barn-burning rock opera of Sheik's "Spring Awakening," "Whisper House" is a moving, bittersweet ghost story that's invitingly different.

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THEATER REVIEW: 'Whisper House' is spooky, different

- Story
- Discussion

By PAM KRAGEN - pkragen@nctimes.com | Posted: January 27, 2010 11:45 am | No Comments Posted | Print

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Craig Schwartz Ted Koch, Kevin Hoffmann, David Poe and Arthur Acuna in the world premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House" at the Old Globe through Feb. 21. Photo courtesy of Craig Schwartz.

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"Whisper House"

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Death Over Life

By Jeff Smith | Published Wednesday, Jan. 27, 2010

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The idea behind Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's new musical has potential: What if only certain characters sing? And what if they're ghosts haunting a lighthouse during World War II? The people in the "real world" live heightened lives (German U-Boats spotted off the Maine coast), while the ghosts' songs lace the proceedings with a spectral veneer.

But the only haunting aspect of *The Whisper House* is why the Old Globe produced it. The answer: Duncan Sheik wrote the angry, fearless songs for *Spring Awakening*. His ten numbers for *House* sound pretty much the same — a mix of U2 and Mark Knopfler doing salty dog shanties — and the lyrics (by Sheik and Kyle Jarrow) cram in every cliché about death but without menace. "It's good to be a ghost," one sings, "but even better to be dead." What could be a Goth musical ends up a dismal hybrid with each side tripping over the other's toes.

For *Spring Awakening*, Sheik had Franz Wedekind's remarkable story about repressed youth to work with. The book for *House* wouldn't pass Playwriting 1A. Young Christopher's father was shot down in air combat. His mother went mad. So the boy goes to live with his Aunt Lilly. In the show's only nuance (if you don't count that she salts her oatmeal), Lilly has no use for children. She runs a lighthouse near where a yacht sank in 1912. Two lovers and a seven-piece band drowned. The lovers need to kill someone so they can be released, or something like that; the fuzzy miking system obscures their mandate.

Young boy, ghosts, lighthouse — guess where the climactic scene takes place (the only missing element: strobed lightning). Can life reaffirm triumph over death? Jarrow peoples a stock situation with stock characters. The only unpredictable moment (thanks to smartly underplayed performances by Mare Winningham and Arthur Acuña): when Yasuhiro, who works for Lilly, declares his true intentions.

And the ghosts? They aren't tormented at all. They're rock stars. David Poe and Holly Brook have strong voices. But when they sing, a concert breaks out. Poe tilts toward a floor mike — à la Bono — and croons to the audience, with Brook accompanying. The songs fracture the fourth wall, and the singers drop character. Instead of menacing spirits desperate to escape their fate, they're cool dudes, so above it all you wonder why they haven't figured a way out already.

The singers, director, and authors should spend a sundown at the Whaley House or the northeasternmost room at the Casa de Estudillo in Old Town. They may not see actual ghosts, but as the sun creeps down the walls, they'll get a better visual sense of their subject from two alleged habitats.

In musicals, songs not only express inner feelings and develop the narrative but also reveal backstory. *House's* don't. As a result, the nonsinging characters have no depth, and the spoken scenes fall flat with exposition. People sit around the kitchen table and recall the past. Whatever energy the songs generate evaporates during these explanation-fests.

Except for the band that drowned — seven musicians behind a scrim in top hats with black circles around their eyes — the production values don't help. Director Peter Askin provides few mystical touches, and the set, an iron staircase spiraling up to an oval lamp, requires too much excessive movement from locale to locale to be useful.

The San Diego Theatre Critics Circle held its annual awards ceremony last Monday. Craig Noel Award winners for 2009:

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Death Over Life

Published Jan. 27, 2010

The idea behind Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's new musical has potential: What if only certain characters sing? And what if they're ghosts haunting a lighthouse during World War II? The people in the "real world" ...

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Published Jan. 20, 2010

David Rabe set Hurlyburly, a three-hour emotional maelstrom, in the Hollywood Hills, early '80s. As I watched Ion Theatre's snappy, polished, visceral production, I had a nagging sense of déjà vu. Then it dawned: I went ...

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Link and younger brother Booth have virtuoso hands. To hear him tell it, Link was "the Stink," the "be all end all," best three-card monte ...

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Tuning out

Old Globe's *Whisper House*: It takes a lot more than music to drive a musical

By [Martin Jones Westlin](#)



He's in no position to throw his arms around her, but Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuna) declares his love for Lilly (Mare Winningham) in spite of it all.

I've had the CD from The Old Globe Theatre's *Whisper House* for a little more than a year. Obviously, I've been listening to the tunes out of context, as the show had its world premiere at The Globe just last Thursday, Jan. 21. I have to say the dirge-like melodies have grown on me during that time, and I looked forward last weekend to putting a face with the name, hoping the story would turn out to be more than a bridge to the songs.

In one respect, it did. Playwright Kyle Jarrow is a musician's author; he knows when to illustrate his words with music, and he defers to the songs exactly on cue. Composer Duncan Sheik, who wrote the tunes for the spectacular *Spring Awakening* (he won one of the show's eight Tonys for

2007), somehow finds lushness in these spooky numbers, sung by two ghosts to a hapless boy at a remote New England lighthouse.

The problem—and it's huge—lies in the show's overall sense of itself. In trying to give his words a life separate from the music, Jarrow has dumbed down his script to an almost preschool level, and Michael Schweikardt's murky set is wholly underused while Sheik's work commands the lion's share of the attention. As an event, *Whisper House* makes a very good concert. As a play, it's as elusive as the ghosts themselves.

Eleven-year-old Christopher (A.J. Foggiano), fresh off his airman father's death and his mom's emotional collapse during World War II, has been shipped from Chicago to the Maine coast, where his Aunt Lilly (Mare Winningham) will take over his care. Lilly works out of her home—she tends the lighthouse that trips Chris' fears. Creepy music leaks through Chris' bedroom walls and gives way to the apparitions (David Poe and Holly Brook), drowned on their honeymoon cruise 30 years earlier. They've come to warn the boy of the dangers that lie ahead; Lilly's surly right-hand man Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuna) is already suspect amid his Japanese heritage, and those German U-boats off the coast look mighty hungry.

It all comes out in the wash, with Christopher learning valuable lessons about facing the unknown (“*Here are your lines,*” the ghosts sing in “Play Your Part,” “*now stick to the page / Like the wise man said, ‘All the world’s a stage’*”). Speeches driven by explanations of the set (“The stairs are old; they creak”) and tired platitudes (“I’m not going to leave you, Christopher... I promise”) just don’t measure up to such lyrics. Neither do director Peter Askin’s stage pictures. Schweikardt’s terrific scenery sits virtually unoccupied as often as not, precisely when some decent choreography would enliven the tunes.

I loved Winningham’s performance as Lilly—she doesn’t miss a nuance of the character’s button-down nature. And I really, really, *really* like the music, at once full-throated and subdued. If you care to join me in my revelry, then by all means, see *Whisper House*. If, on the other hand, you’re looking for a good time, Ion Theatre’s *Hurlyburly* is still on at Diversionary.

This review is based on the matinée performance of Jan. 23. Whisper House runs through Feb. 21 at The Old Globe Theatre mainstage, 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. \$45-\$79. www.oldglobe.org. Write to marty@sdcitybeat.com and editor@sdcitybeat.com.

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‘Whisper House’ plus more theater reviews, news

Local news includes "Ugly Betty" and "Romeo and Juliet"

By [Pat Launer](#), [SDNN](#)

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

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Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House" at The Old Globe. (Photo by Craig Schwartz)

A Haunting

THE SHOW: “Whisper House,” a world premiere ghost story with music, at The Old Globe



The scene is set by thrumming engine sounds and the squawk of seagulls. A dimly lit spiral staircase winds up three levels to a beacon up above. Beyond the skeletal structure is blackness. This is our spooky introduction to the bleakly ethereal, death-obsessed new play-with-music at the Old Globe.

“Whisper House” is a ghost story, set in the midst of World War II. It’s all about fear and paranoia, uncertainty about the future and apprehension about the unknown. Feelings we can all relate to in our modern world. It’s a time, after all, “when all the world’s at war.”

The themes play out in the mind and story of young Christopher, an 11-year-old whose pilot father was recently shot down by the Japanese. The news sent his mother into a tailspin. She’s not expected to recover from her nervous collapse. So, Christopher is sent to live with his closest relative, his father’s estranged sister, Lilly, who manages the isolated

New England lighthouse that's been in the family for three generations. She has no experience with, or use for, children. She has no idea how to talk to or comfort a boy who's on the threshold of adolescence and whose life is spinning out of control.

The loneliness and shadowy gloom of the lighthouse call forth the ghosts that have been hanging around for 30 years, since their party-boat went down - singers, orchestra and all - on Halloween night in 1912. They've found an ideal "subject" in Christopher ("boys are easily led"), and they fill his head with wild stories of dread (ominous warnings like "Better to Be Dead" and the whimsically dark "Tale of Solomon Snell").

Christopher is equally unnerved by the Japanese handyman (Arthur Acuña, quietly credible) who works for his taciturn aunt. After all, he's Japanese, and maybe (thanks to the suggestions of the ghosts) he's a spy. The child identifies more with the caricature of a Coast Guard lieutenant (Kevin Hoffman, made to look silly) who inflames Christopher's patriotism. There's also a local sheriff (Ted Kōch, solid) who, like the helper Yasuhiro, seems to be attracted to Lilly, and is torn in his loyalties. Each character is afraid of the real danger outside, and also fearful of taking a step outside a personal, emotional comfort zone. Given all the sorrow and despair that pervades the proceedings, the play ends, surprisingly, on a sweet note of hope.

This is the first theatrical effort, several years in the making, from the wunderkind who gave us "Spring Awakening," Tony and Grammy winner Duncan Sheik. That wildly imaginative, groundbreaking show (the "Hair" and "Rent" of its generation) won eight Tony Awards in 2007, including Best Musical. This is a smaller, darker, less ambitious piece, with book and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow. For the prior project, Sheik's more poetic librettist was Steven Sater; they won Tonys for Best Book and Best Score. There are no rockin' upbeat anthems in this production. The music is consistently dark and minor key, excellently played by a 7-member band (with musical direction by keyboardist Jason Hart). The mournful sounds are underscored by unique instruments for a small ensemble: a French horn, piccolo trumpet and bass clarinet.



Pat Launer

All the singing is by the two ghosts, still dressed in evening clothes (the man in top hat; the woman in diaphanous white, though she spends a good deal of time in her period undergarments). Holly Brook and David Poe are long-time collaborators with Sheik. In his recent one-night concert at the Globe, which was decidedly dark in tone (with *no* songs from "Spring Awakening" at all - a major disappointment), their voices melded perfectly. Here, too, without Sheik's vocal contributions, they sing well, both separately and together. Poe has a wide-ranging voice, and he carries the musical burden, insinuating himself into Christopher's sub-conscious. Brook has breathy, wraithlike tones that seem just right for an otherworldly specter.

Stage and screen actor Mare Winningham has put in some serious time in San Diego lately: in the Playhouse's world premiere of "Bonnie and Clyde" last year, and in "The Glass Menagerie" at the Globe in 2008. She has just the right aloof distance for the non-communicative aunt. And as her endlessly inquisitive nephew, 15-year-old A.J. Foggiano, who was brought into the production a scant five days before opening, is quite impressive.



The production is striking, with its evocative and provocative set (Michael Schweikardt) enhanced by scene-setting sound (Dan Moses Schreier), beautifully moody lighting (Matthew Richards) and fantastic projections (Aaron Rhyne) that give us a blustery, churning sea and floating gossamer phantoms. The costumes (Jenny Mannis) are either sensible or other-worldly, as the character demands.

This isn't likely to be a blockbuster. The tone is too deadly, and the book needs tightening and focus. But it's a small, quiet and engaging piece of theater, quirky and unpredictable, intriguing in its own unassuming way.

THE LOCATION: The Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park. (619) 234-5623; www.theoldglobe.org

THE DETAILS: Tickets: \$36-\$89. Tuesday-Wednesday 1t 7 p.m., Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m., Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m., Sunday at 7 p.m., through February 21.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Best Bet

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"Whisper House" At The Old Globe Theatre

*Ghosts never materialize***By Welton Jones**

Posted on Fri, Jan 22nd, 2010

Last updated Fri, Jan 22nd, 2010

If atmosphere was all that a ghost story needed, the Old Globe Theatre might have in "Whisper House" a show of some prom

Alas, the pop cantata by Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow, choking on lugubrious balladry and vague tangles of implausible pl gradually tapers away and evaporates into a wan sentimentality.

The scene is a remote lighthouse on the New England coast, early in World War II when German U-boats lit up night skies w burning American merchant ships. Michael Schweikardt's stately set, a cutaway of the light tower complete with the giant Fresnel lens at the top, could hold an entire summer camp's worth of ghost stories. Jenny Mannis has made excellent costur choices (with one deplorable exception), and Matthew Richards keeps the lighting menace-dim, and Aaron Rhyne's towering, elongated silhouette projections suggest restless spirits eager to tell tales.

Instead, however, we get a couple of cabaret singers who seem to be offering a narration in the form of several songs that so alike, all equally incomprehensible due to bad singing choices and crudities of the sound system.

Without the clues presumably contained in these songs, the ghost part of the story never really happens. There's talk of a ya that sank on Halloween night in 1912 with all hands lost, including the two band singers who continue (some say) to haunt th scene, seeking a victim to die and release them.

And, sure enough, there are David Poe and Holly Brook, crooning away into hand mikes with strutting poses that suggest a tryout for the musical "Cabaret." They look vaguely 1912ish, too, though they reek less of horror than of irony.

Their main focus seems to be on a boy come to stay with the lighthouse keeper after his Army Air Force father is killed in the South Pacific and his mother collapses. This kid, played with admirable concentration by A. J. Foggiano, sees the singers wh others don't and interacts with them even, possibly, including something carnal with the female. Hard to tell.

With the supernatural element mushed into confusion, there remains only a banal anecdote at about the Hardy Boys Books level, cruelly marred by inconsistencies.

For example, Mare Winningham, by far the most successful character on view with her worn New England finish, is supposec run this lighthouse as her father did before her. The suggestion is that she owns it. In reality, the Lighthouse Service operate the major aids to navigation with civil servants until July 1, 1939, when they all were taken over by the Coast Guard. Few if ar women were ever in charge, and the keepers mostly charged in 1939 to regular Coast Guard ratings.

But it doesn't matter, I suppose, since, in this lighthouse, THE LIGHT NEVER REVOLVES!

The whole point of a lighthouse is to beam a signal that can be recognized, one that always blinks on and off in a predetermined fashion so mariners can know WHICH light they're seeing. This one just glows. And, though there's talk of bells and horns, none are ever heard.

I can sigh and shrug when Kevin Hoffmann shows up as a Coast Guard officer in a Navy uniform (though it wouldn't have been hard to get that right), but I can't sit still when the damned light doesn't flash properly. (Full disclosure: I spent 24 years in the Coast Guard Reserve, including some time around lighthouses.)

Anyway, there's a sinister Japanese skulking about (Arthur Acuna, achieving considerable dignity in a cardboard part) and a genial but vaguely ineffective sheriff (Ted Koch, ineffective and vague) plus Hoffmann, who plays that young Coast Guard officer like a brainwashed fool.

OK, OK, I already went there. But then, when the air strike about to bomb the U-boat zooms overhead with all the powerful menace of a lawnmower engine, I pretty much gave up.

These are the kinds of distraction that loom especially large when nothing else is working. Director Peter Askin is no help, picking at details of schtick and neglecting the entire ghost thing. There's a "dance director" credited, Wesley Fata, but there's no dancing except for a grotesque jig by the young Coast Guard officer. This suggests some truly basic tectonic shifts in the show's birthing.

Nobody is credited with the musical arrangements for the seven-member band, including three horns, and I found them brassy and evocative under Jason Hart's leadership. Probably more than the score deserves.

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Venue	Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego



Welton Jones

About the author: [Welton Jones \(mailto:welton@sandiego.com\)](mailto:welton@sandiego.com) has been reviewing shows for more than 50 years, of those years at the San Diego Union-Tribune and, now, nearly 10 for SanDiego.com, where he wrote the first reviews to appear on the site.

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'Whisper House' lacks intensity, connection



Drama Desk

By Jenna Long

"I think the best thing is to talk to each other as little as possible."

Lilly awkwardly welcomes her nephew Christopher into her home when he is suddenly left parentless, setting up the story of a 1942 New England lighthouse filled with three uninspiring characters and two ominous singing ghosts.

The Old Globe's new production of "Whisper House" is a world-premiere Duncan Sheik musical, with book and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow, and Sheik's follow-up to the multiple award-winning Broadway sensation, "Spring Awakening."

While his new work showcases an ample variety of rock-infused alternative songs performed by the two talented spirits that loom over the lighthouse and in Christopher's nightmares, there's no comparison to the unbridled energy and passion that made "Spring Awakening" the widespread phenomenon it quickly became.

And, while the music is well done and a pleasant contrast to the sound expected from conventional productions, the melodies begin to blur together; there's certainly no gets-in-your-head, gotta-hear-it-again anthem like "The Bitch of Living," which aided Sheik's successful Broadway debut in 2006.

The elaborate set by Michael Schweikardt provides a fitting coastal location for the story, which takes place in Lilly's three-story rustic lighthouse complete with a long, winding staircase leading up to the light itself — which, given its major plot significance, should be more discernible than what appears to be an oversized bicycle reflector. Director Peter Askin's choice of keeping the orchestra onstage, dressed to fit in with the outcast spirits, fills the space well.

One major distinction Askin makes that doesn't quite work is the separation between singer and performer, in having the two ghosts — David Poe and Holly Brook — essentially

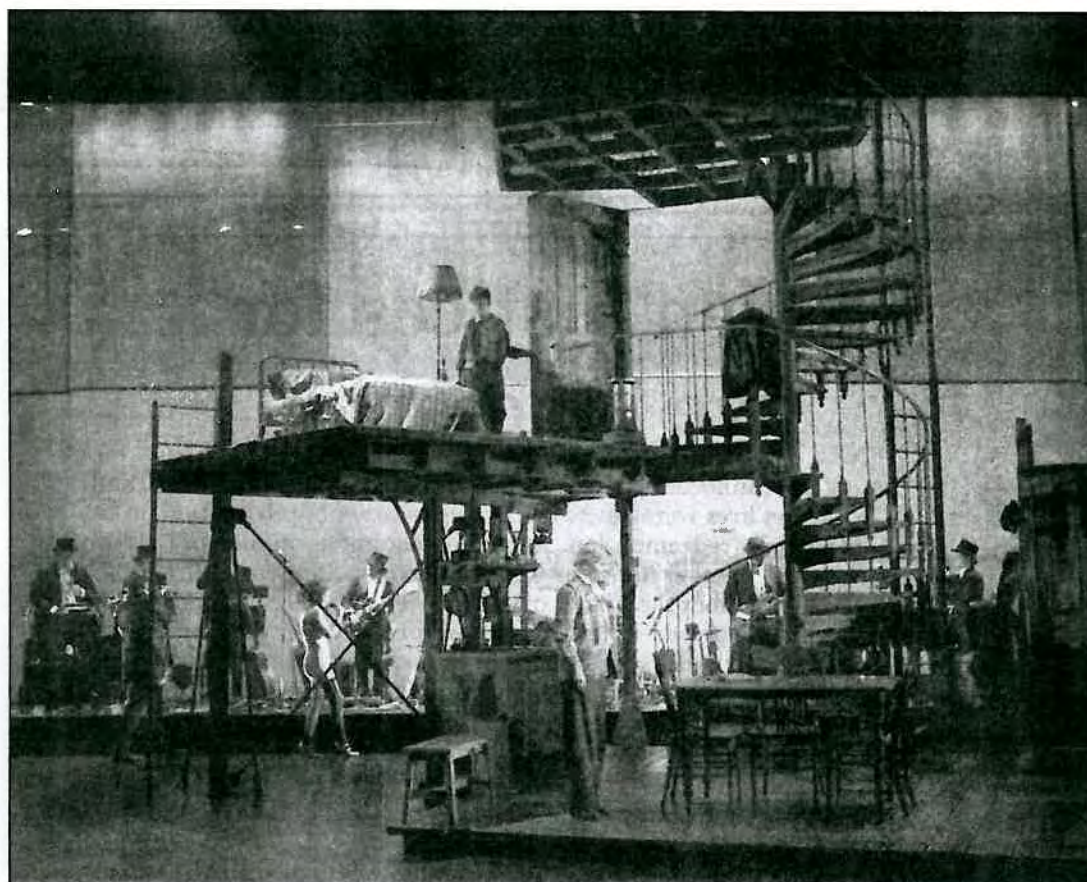


Photo: Craig Schwartz

The cast of the world premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House" at the Old Globe Theatre, playing through Feb. 21.

perform the entirety of the score while invading young Christopher's space in his new haunted house. The attempt is continually made to connect the music with the story by way of character-driven lyrics, background shadows and physical interaction between the ghosts and the boy (A.J. Foggiano), but there's still a palpable separation that affects the audience's investment in the story.

For one thing, the ghosts aren't scary; in fact, often their movements around the house are more comical or even seductive (thanks to lingerie-like costuming), rather than sinister. Also, perhaps because the three main characters — Christopher, Lilly (Mare Winningham) and Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuna) — are sung about rather than singing themselves, it's more natural to feel a connection to the ghosts than to the others. The three leads come across as rather stiff and two-dimensional, and it doesn't help that the plot has no real surprising twists to expose.

In casting updates, the *Los Angeles Times* reported Wednesday that actor Eric Brent Zutty, who was cast in the lead role of Christopher, was replaced by understudy Foggiano during previews for artistic reasons. It's diffi-

cult to assess whether the actor or the script is at fault, or perhaps both, but the adolescent role is more whiny and unlikable than sympathetic or moving.

Also Wednesday, the *Times* reported that Winningham will leave "Whisper House" early due to scheduling reasons, making her last performance as aunt Lilly Feb. 7. The Emmy winner, though well respected in the theater industry and recently praised for her maternal portrayal in La

Jolla Playhouse's "Bonnie and Clyde," does not hold interest in a leading role; for instance, the deep-seated romance between Lilly and Acuna's Yasuhiro culminates in her whispering in his ear. Not exactly the excitement of a gun-toting, bank-robber romance, but at least there are quirky ghosts to sing the curtain call.

"Whisper House" plays at the Old Globe Theatre through Feb. 21.

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'Whisper House' lacks intensity, connection

By Jenna Long, The Daily Transcript

Thursday, January 28, 2010

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Week ending January 28, 2010

By Charlene Baldrige

THE WEEK

Captivating *Whisper House* premieres at Old Globe

THE SHOW: The world premiere of *Whisper House*, with music and lyrics by Duncan Sheik and book and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow, directed by Peter Askin at the Old Globe through February 21

THE STORY: The Japanese shot down Christopher's father during World War II, and his mother, who suffered a nervous breakdown, is in an institution. He is sent to live with his late father's sister, Lilly, a feisty spinster who operates the New England lighthouse in which she and Christopher's father were raised. As her helper, Lilly employs Yasuhiro. A longtime U.S. resident, Yasuhiro secretly loves Lilly. Other living characters are the town Sheriff and Lieutenant Rando of the U.S. Navy.



Caption: Photo by Craig Schwartz

The lighthouse is also inhabited by ghosts, the spirits of those who did not survive a 1912 shipwreck. The tragedy was caused by the failure of the drunken lighthouse keeper (Lilly's father) to light the beacon. Bent on revenge, two ghosts who were in love reveal themselves to Christopher, troubling his already unstable psyche. Thus, the lonely, frightened boy is caught between the living and the dead. To add to Christopher's fears, German U Boats ply nearby waters, and he is certain that Yasuhiro is a spy.



Caption: **Arthur Acuña** as Yasuhiro and Mare Winningham as Lilly. Photo: Craig Schwartz

THE PERFORMERS: Surely this casting is perfection. The handsomely attired pair of ghosts (real rock performers **David Poe** and **Holly Brook**) sings Sheik's haunting score. Both are graceful, convincing and heart-wrenching (dance director is **Wesley Fata**). In his top hat and tux, with a fetching, twisted white scarf, the bearded Poe is a mesmerizing performer and a longtime Sheik collaborator. Brook is quite lovely in her period gown (costumes by **Jenny Mannis** are good all around), though not as much at ease on stage as Poe. Upstage right, sometimes silhouetted, music director **Jason Hart** (keyboard and conductor) and band members **Andy Stack**, **George Farmer**, **Kevin Garcia**, **Mark Margolies**, **Jane Swerneman**, and **Andrew Elstob** are also ghosts, gamely changing makeup and hats and playing a variety of instruments including bass clarinet (Margolies) and piccolo trumpet (Elstob) in perfect fulfillment of Sheik's fabulously orchestrated score, available for more than a year on CD.

With an edgy low-pitched voice, **Mare Winningham** is splendid as the icy, unsentimental Lilly, who is unused to children, especially inquisitive children like Christopher. When he persistently seeks to thaw her, she tells him he asks too many questions, commenting, "I have a reputation as a curmudgeon to maintain." Over the course of the play we are shown, not told, that Lilly's brusque exterior masks a wounded heart and soul.

Christopher not only sees dead people, he spies on the living with prompting from the ghosts, who sometimes seem loving and benign and sometimes not. Prepubescent San Diego area actor **A.J. Foggiano**, who is a four-time veteran of the Globe's *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, capably shows Christopher's vulnerability, gullibility, loneliness and courage as he tries to find himself in the world of adults and ghosts. As Yasuhiro, the buff **Arthur Acuña** conveys the man's deeply loving nature. Even when he is rebuffed and outcast, Yasuhiro is an extraordinary human being.

The glory of Jarrow's book is its unhurried nature, which allows the subtleties of the story, the music, the richness of the characters, and the droll lyrics to seep into one's consciousness. The unfolding of poignant story, underscored with light rock, is ever captivating. The concept is extraordinarily courageous and adds up to a unique musical. Thank god no one persuaded them to fill in the blanks.

Both Sheik and Jarrow have ventured into theater before, but not together. The Grammy and Tony Award-winning Sheik co-wrote the super Broadway hit, *Spring Awakening*. Jarrow plays in the rock bands Super Mirage and The Fabulous Entourage. He received an Obie Award at 24 for his play *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*.



David Poe and Holly Brook as the Ghosts. Photo: Craig Schwartz

As for *Whisper House*, it can be perfectly described as a theatrical tone poem. The operative word is *poem*.

THE PRODUCTION: **Michael Schweikardt's** set for *Whisper House* is every bit a visual wonder, with a spiral staircase to Christopher's room and, beyond, to the light. Thanks to **Matthew Richards'** lighting and **Dan Moses Schreier's** sound, the world is complete, day and night, in peace and war. It is eerie as appropriate with **Aaron Rhyne's** projection design and **Matt Kent's** shadow imagery suggesting the original art created by **Klaus Lyngel** for the "water-damaged" storybook that accompanies the ten-song CD. This is just another wondrous bit of subtle detail that makes up the subtly splendid whole.

THE LOCATION: 7 pm Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 8 pm Thursdays-Saturdays, 2 pm Saturdays-Sundays and 7 pm Sundays, the Old Globe Theatre, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park, San Diego, \$39-\$89, www.theoldglobe.org or (619) 23-GLOBE.

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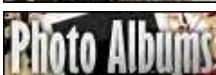
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Entertainment :: Theatre

Whisper House

by Steve Heyl
EDGE Contributor
Sunday Jan 24, 2010



Arthur Acuña as Yasuhiro and Mare Winningham as Lilly in Whisper House (Source:The Old Globe)

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brings are just as relevant in today's world. There are some minor pacing problems about halfway through but otherwise the show is snappy through its intermissionless 90 minute length.

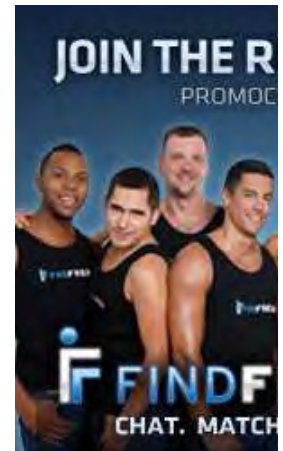
Even as the audience is arriving, the wizardry of the technical team is at work, slowly filling the theater with fog, sounds of the seashore, and the pulsating lamp at the top of scenic designer Michael Schweikardt's multi level lighthouse set. I have noted how effectively projection designer Aaron Rhyne's projections have enhanced other productions (e.g. Working and Bonnie and Clyde) and here he works his magic again, filling the space behind the lighthouse with seascapes, military planes, and especially, evanescent ghosts. Costume designer Jenny Mannis contrasts the early 20th century formalwear (including top hats) worn by those in the netherworld - the singing ghosts and their onstage musicians - with the plain 1940s styles worn by those living in a wartime economy that included widespread rationing.

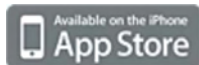
The ghosts, played engagingly by Holly Brook and David Poe move among the other actors, commenting on and affecting the action with their pranks, but never speaking. The ghosts were singers before their demise and communicate with Christopher through song. I found it distracting that they used handheld microphones, especially since not all of the mikes fit the period.

Do not come to this show expecting big traditional musical production numbers with chorus lines and elaborate hydraulics. The characters in the living world do not sing (with a minor exception), so all the songs are necessarily duets. The only dancing, although it is graceful and sophisticated, is done by the two ghosts. Duncan Sheik's (of 1996 single "Barely Breathing" and 2006 Tony winning Spring Awakening fame)

The Old Globe in San Diego has a reputation as a hotbed of new musical development and **Whisper House**, their third 'world premier' musical in seven months, shows why. The production shines as brightly as the namesake lighthouse in which it is set, although it is in many ways non-traditional. A ghost story musical? A musical with only two singers? A 1940s musical without any swing music? All unusual decisions, yet the pieces come together in rock solid fashion.

After his father is killed by a Japanese fighter in 1942, Christopher, a young boy, is sent to live with his aunt Lilly, who he has never met. Lilly is the keeper of a remote lighthouse in New England. Almost as soon as he arrives, Christopher begins to believe the lighthouse is haunted. He hears ghostly music that no one else hears and sees ghostly images that no one else sees. The ghosts tell him that Yasuhiro, a Japanese worker that Lilly hired three years earlier, is a spy. He must decide if the ghosts are real, and if they are real, whether they right about Yasuhiro. The setting is World War II but the fear and paranoia of 'the enemy' that war




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pop/rock score has many songs that could easily find their way on to the pop charts. Lyrically they range from slightly macabre ("It's true what we said / When the world's at war / It's better to be dead") to humorous ("The ghosts are here for good / if that doesn't scare you, it should") and tongue-in-cheek ("If we were dreams all along / who's been singing these ghostly songs?") Credit for lyrics is shared by Sheik and Kyle Jarrow.

Cast aside the traditional notion that musical require large casts. Not counting the onstage musicians, there are only seven actors. Ted Kõch and Kevin Hoffman play the local sheriff and a visiting lieutenant respectively. An insert in the program lists A.J. Foggiano a recent replacement in the role of Christopher, but his performance is as polished as the adult actors, infusing youthful innocence to lines like "I'm not being nosy, I'm inquisitive". Arthur Acuña brings a perfect ambiguity to Yasuhiro, keeping the audience guessing his motives right along with Christopher. And Mare Winningham's Lilly is spot on. Teeming with New England practicality, her brusque style (as she says "I have a curmudgeonly reputation to maintain") yields to more tender moments seamlessly. She is a major highlight of the show.

In a sea of revivals and musicals based on movies, Whisper House is beacon of originality.

Whisper House continues through February 21 at the Old Globe theater in San Diego. For more information visit the [Old Globe theater website](#)

A computer geek by day, one of Steve's evening loves is San Diego theater (the other is his husband of 20 years), which he enjoys sharing with others (theater, not the husband).

COMMENTS

"Whisper House"

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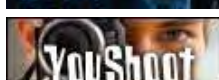
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TOP STORY



Whisper House

By Steve Heyl
It's 1942 - at the height of World War II - and Christopher, an imaginative young boy, is sent to live with an aunt he's never met: Lilly, a reclusive woman who serves as the keeper of a remote

lighthouse. Christopher begins to hear strange music no one else can hear seeping through the walls.

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Eddie Izzard :: Stripped, and on the move

By Jim Halterman
Eddie Izzard has become comedy's Marathon Man, literally. In addition to juggling movie roles and a tour of his latest stand-up show Stripped, Too that heads to South Africa when it completes its U.S. run next weekend, he's been running marathons -- 43 in 51 days. EDGE's Jim Halterman spoke to the tireless comedian as he prepared for his final dates on his tour to talk about the show, how he's gone from agnostic to atheist and why he's currently not wearing dresses too much onstage.



Kate Clinton :: "'Lesbian' is political enough"

By Joseph Erbenbraut
Comic veteran Kate Clinton has never been afraid of the "L" word, performing out and proud since the start of her stand-up career in 1981. Now, nearly three decades later, Clinton's brand of comedy remains relevant, topical and - most importantly - funny as she dissects the many issues currently facing our community and movement as she sets out on the Lady Haha tour. EDGE's Joe Erbenbraut spoke to the comedy legend about evangelicals, gay marriage, the conservative agenda and even Cirque du Soleil,



'Golden Gay' puts new spin on old obsession

By Scott Stiffler
Since they premiered in the 1980s, gay men have had a special relationship with the Golden Girls. In his new comedy, The Golden Gays, playwright John Patrick Trapper puts a new spin on an old obsession. EDGE's Scott Stiffler spoke with the playwright about his new comedy that offers a special kind of therapy for men obsessed with the classic sit-com.



Alison Arngrim, forever the



The Jamb

By Trevor Thomas
Though a flawed and often strange piece, The Jamb is a gay-themed play that is entertaining, thought provoking and absolutely worth seeing.



Shakespeare Unscripted

By Leon Acord
The Improv Theatre's successful string of stylized, unscripted performances at

Theatre Asylum ("Jane Austen Unscripted," "Tennessee Williams Unscripted," "Stephen Sondheim Unscripted") continues this month, with perhaps their most challenging production to date: "Shakespeare Unscripted."



Circus Welt

By Trevor Thomas
Nazis terrorize a circus filled with potential Dachau inmates in this adaptation of a 1914 Russian play. Despite a novel approach, there's

very little new here.

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REVIEW: Old Globe Theatre has world premiere of "Whisper House"

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By José A. López

January 27, 2010

"We are here to say, that all of this is real," sing the dapperly-dressed ghosts of "Whisper House," the highly anticipated musical that got its world premiere at the Old Globe Theatre last week.

The WWII-set play, running though Feb. 21, tells the story of an 11-year-old boy sent to live with his aunt in a New England lighthouse after his aviator father is killed in action by the Japanese and his mother suffers a nervous breakdown.

The play comes from rocker Duncan Sheik (co-written with Kyle Arrow), whose first journey into theater led to "Spring Awakening," the 2006 Tony-winning musical about teenage confusion that wowed critics and fans with its mash-up of 19th-century aesthetics and contemporary rock songs.

While that play exploded from the stage, with the large cast breaking into songs that would easily blend into the playlist of any alternative rock station, "Whisper House," seems to do the opposite, closing in on itself to create an air of mystery and paranoia and a sense of loss that permeates the piece.

As the boy, Christopher, longs for home, he clashes with his closely guarded aunt Lilly, winningly portrayed by Mare Winningham.

Because the lighthouse is a sensitive point of national security during the play's wartime era, she's told she has to dismiss her Japanese helper, Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña), who Christopher suspects — based on tips from the ghosts — may be a spy.



Mare Winningham as Lilly and Holly Brook as a ghost in Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House," which runs at the Old Globe Theatre through Feb. 21. *Photo Provided by Craig Schwartz*



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The singing in "Whisper House" is left up to two unnamed ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly

Brook, who wander through the lighthouse while the other characters go along their non-musical lives.

Only young Christopher (A.J. Foggiano) can hear their songs — they are accompanied by a full orchestra decked out as departed souls that play mostly behind a scrim — or see their actions, though what the ghosts can and can't physically do is not clearly defined.

Both Poe and Brook, professional recording artists, have strong and unique voices that well serve the songs, mostly atmospheric ballads that bear some of the trademarks of Sheik's pre-theater recordings.

"Whisper House," is a rewarding experience, a subtle mood piece filled with empty spaces that leaves it up to the viewers to fill in. It could, however, benefit from a few more variety in the songs to break up the piece ("The Tale of Solomon Snell" which details the fall of an overly cautious man accomplishes that).

"Whisper House" is directed by Peter Askin. Jason Hart is the musical director and Wesley Fata directs the dance.

Tickets are \$36-89. For more information, click [here](#).

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Old Globe Theatre World Premieres New Musical

Wednesday, January 21, 2010
Old Globe Theatre
San Diego, California

Review by Palm Springs Guides Theatre & Cinema Critic/Reviewer Jack Lyons
Photos by Craig Schwartz

When ghosts are listed as characters and have names in the “Bio” notes, one usually expects to see either a drama or a comedy. (Think “The Innocents” or “Blithe Spirit”.) However, in this production at San Diego’s venerable Old Globe Theatre, we’re dealing with a musical.



“Whisper House,” a new musical directed by Peter Askin, has two fathers, in a manner of speaking. The music and lyrics are by Duncan Sheik with the libretto and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow.

Jarrow and Sheik, coming off their Tony Award-winning blockbuster “Spring Awakening,” were

looking for a ghost-oriented project to write from the viewpoint of a young boy. Digging into their childhoods, they knew the power of the imagination. We can all remember the scary stories we heard as kids. They always seemed to take place in isolated locations, along with sounds that go bump-in-the-night, and we all know the effect such stories have on the young. So far, so good.

The story, set in wartime America of 1942, revolves around an isolated coastal Maine lighthouse, which, according to the local folk, claims that the ghosts of a passenger steamship that sank off shore in 1912 are still rummaging around the lighthouse and its grounds.



When an 11-year-old boy comes to live with his spinster, lighthouse keeper Aunt, a series of seemingly innocent acts by a Japanese handy-man-cum-assistant-lighthouse-keeper, set in motion a scenario of spies and sabotage in the boy's imagination. Add the constant drumbeat and mantra of wartime America where posters of "Loose Lips Sink Ships" abound and where the war news becomes the fuel that drives the newspapers, movies, and radio broadcasts of the day, it's easy to see why the young boy, whose father has just been killed by the Germans, becomes suspicious of those around him.



America is, after all, at war with Germany, Italy and the Japanese. The youngster sees himself as a patriot. (I couldn't help thinking back to the time of the odious Hitler Youth movement of the 1930s where it was one's duty to spy on everyone, with no exceptions, because you were doing your duty for *der vaterland*).

Metaphors and dichotomies abound in the story Jarrow and Sheik have created. The 1942 setting and its emotional arc, for example, make it easy to follow the contrails of that war, say to Iraq. Director Askin, however, keeps the focus on the core story, but gets to enjoy his flights of fancy and whimsy by having "the ghosts" sing all of the songs with an on-stage orchestra (behind a scrim) dressed in white tie and tails as ghostly reminders of the 1912 shipwreck.

None of the “live actors” sing a note in this production. None of the actors can see or hear any of the ghosts except one, 11-year-old Christopher (A.J. Foggiano), who turns in an astonishingly professional performance for one so young.

Mare Winningham takes the somewhat small, but pivotal role, of Aunt Lilly, and delivers a solid portrayal of a woman caught between many competing forces. (No, I don’t mean the ghosts.) Lilly’s no-nonsense approach to her nephew Christopher, as well as to the events of the day, are nicely realized in Winningham’s performance.



In short, the story is very spare of plot, and what plot there is, is not exactly clear or compelling. It’s a bit of a jumble. The “ghost singers” David Poe and Holly Brook grab the spotlight and focus when gliding across the stage, being careful not to touch the live actors, as they sing their songs. The songs’ lyrics are very dark, albeit, very meaningful. But because they come from the past of 1912, every time they appear, they retard the forward movement of the story. Also, I can’t recall or hum a single song from the score. That’s not a good sign for any musical that has commercial designs on record-albums, CD sales, and the like.

In the technical department, however, the Old Globe has few equals. The visually stunning lighthouse set and lighting, are appropriately murky and foreboding, while the sea sounds and projection special effects are very mood inducing.

“Whisper House” as written by Jarrow and Sheik, and visualized by Askin may be daring in concept, that is, presenting a musical in which the speaking cast sings nary a note could be labeled as not only bold, but risky as well. However, the success of this creative and different format remains to be seen.

The musical runs through Feb. 21.

Whisper House" at The Old Globe A Whisper Away From Potential

January 30, 1:24 PM - [San Diego Theater Examiner](#) - Carol Davis



Holly Brook and Davis Poe with Eric Brent Zutty in "Whisper House" at The Old Globe Theatre
Photo Craig Schwartz

By Carol Davis

San Diego, California-Welcome to the world premiere production of Duncan Sheik (music and lyrics) and Kyle Jarrow's (book and lyrics) "Whisper House", a brand new play with music now being presented on the Donald and Darlene Shiley stage of the Old Globe Theatre. Oh, and watch out for those ghosts because Whisper's spooky, hazy surroundings will lure you in and try to captivate, but lurking beneath the surface is more air than substance.

World premieres are tricky. They are chancy and they require a leap of faith for the producers. It's also important to know that after they have performed in front of that first audience some work may be needed, tweaked or parts eliminated altogether. What one may see on opening night might not look the same at the end of the run.

With all the hype and publicity surrounding Sheik's new work (he won a Grammy and two Tony's for his Broadway hit "Spring Awakening"?) "Whisper House" is somewhat of a mixed

bag. It's not a musical but a play with music and I liked the music, the band (even though they were ghostly looking) and the two main ghosts or performers, David Poe and Holly Brook. And as much as I did like the music, the sound system left much to be desired leaving everything sounding fuzzy and not allowing for the audience to understand much of the lyrics.

The story for what it's worth is scant leaving a viable cast with little to do and 'much ado about nothing' at evenings end. With all the buildup surrounding this opening I must admit it was disappointing on many fronts not the least of which is Jarrow's book that definitely needs the most work.

"Whisper House" takes place off the coast of Maine in a hunted lighthouse occupied by; call me Miss Lilly, (Mare Winningham) her faithful helper Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña) and a few ghosts. The time is 1942 and World War II is raging. German U Boats are rampant off the eastern seaboard 'disrupting the convoy of ships supplying Britain', Japan has already bombed Pearl Harbor, the U.S. is involved in the war on two fronts and President Roosevelt had issued a proclamation to authorize the FBI to detain aliens from the axis countries and move them inland. When Lieutenant Rando (Kevin Hoffman) comes to call with sheriff, Charles (Ted Koch) to install a radio that clues Lilly as to when to shut the lights down he asks, looking around, if she's the only one living in the lighthouse; ooops!

But there's more.

Into this mix, Lilly's nephew Christopher (A.J. Foggiano who replaced Eric Brent Zutty) is brought to the lighthouse to stay for an indefinite amount of time because after his father (Lilly's brother) was shot down by the Japanese and his mother, still in shock, couldn't take care of him, he was shipped off to his nearest living relative. Lilly doesn't particularly like kids and makes no bones about it and he would rather be anywhere other than with her. More on her later.

We recap:

Christopher hates the 'Japs' because they shot down his father's plane. He is also the only one of the mortals who hears and sees the ghosts who roam freely from room to room coaxing anyone who will listen to swap places with them. Personally, I would avoid that. Yasuhiro is up to something, but we don't know what that is until the very last minutes of the show. The Lt. casts a shadow over the innocence of those living in the lighthouse, bombs drop somewhere over the Atlantic and there are two ghosts luring the good folk of the lighthouse to switch places with them.

And, about that haunted lighthouse?

The story goes that in 1912 the two performers we see on stage (the ghosts) were performing on Halloween night of that year. The boat crashed up on the rocks around the lighthouse and sank drowning all on board. The legend (as told by the Sheriff) has it that Lilly's father, the late lighthouse keeper (the lighthouse has been in her family for years) who had been drinking, forgot to light the lamp on this particular night. The spirits have been circling the lighthouse ever since the crash, some even inhabiting it. Again as legend has it, if they can claim a life in revenge for

theirs they would be set free.

On the plus side, Mare Winningham does more with her Lilly character than is actually given her. Her stoic resolve, her New England breeding and tough shell is enough to scare away any adult let alone a frightened eleven-year boy in the throws of trauma. I know people like that just from my New England roots. Don't let her petite yet stern look deceive you. She's tough as nails; at least that's what she wants you to believe. That's the good news. On the other side of the coin, it would help to know more about her than the fact that the lighthouse has been in her family for generations and she hates kids. She is the most interesting of the group but comes across as a two dimensional character.

Arthur Acuña's Yasuhiro is convincing as Lilly's helper. He is the token scapegoat for a misguided political search and destroy mission but then he too is another under developed character. We watch him come and go, but again he is a man of very few words, some suspicious moves and lots of nothing in between. Ted Koch's Sheriff is the 'I just need to be here because of this Lt. guy'. For the most part he just gets in the way after telling the story of the Halloween crash. Kevin Hoffmann is a bit much as he tries to be a serious contender for the taking no prisoners part of this story. It's almost comical watching his antics.

A.J. Foggiano makes a great effort as Christopher the outsider who sees more, trusts less and is willing to put his honor and convictions on the line rather than stifle them as do the adults he is forced to live with. That he is the only one who sees the ghosts is a nice addition to an unfortunately unfinished and loose ends story.

Visually, Michael Schweikardt's towering three story lighthouse interior is breath catching and nicely detailed with scrims in the background showing ghosts floating about (Aaron Rhyme) with splashing waves and seagulls hawking in the distance (Dan Moses Schreier) that lend a taste of authenticity. Would that the lighthouse could talk, a better tale might have been woven.

Both Holly Brook and David Poe do their best covering the stage concert style giving Sheik's haunting music an even footed outing. Unfortunately the songs don't lend any insight to either the story or the characters. The two narrate the story with their singing. Director Peter Askin gives the two more latitude and less restraint than the living characters adding more color and excitement than anything going on in the real lighthouse world. Noteworthy tunes include: "We're Here To Tell You" (Parts I and 2), "The Tale Of The Solomon Snell", "Play Your Part", "How It Feels" and the clever "Take A Bow" at the very end.

Musical Director/Keyboards Jason Hart directs the nine-piece ghost band/orchestra; Jenny Mannis designed the period costumes and Matthew Richards lighting keeps mostly everyone in shadows with the exception of Yasuhiro especially when he is in his quarters. Even in the full light we never really know what he is up to until the very end and even that feels contrived.

The future of "Whisper House" may be a few notes or more exposition alas a whisper or two away from reaching its potential. In the meantime, you might want to catch it before it leaves San Diego.

See you at the theatre.

Dates: January 13th –February 21st

Organization: Old Globe Theatre

Phone: (619) 234-5623

Production Type: Musical Play.

Where: Old Globe Theatre, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park

Ticket Prices: \$36-\$89.00

Performance Times: Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m., Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m., and Sunday evenings at 7:00 p.m.

Web: TheOldGlobe.org

CultureVulture.net

Whisper House

World Premiere

Music and Lyrics by Duncan Sheik

Book and Lyrics by Kyle Jarrow

The Old Globe

San Diego

January 13-February 21, 2010

www.TheOldGlobe.org



David Poe and Holly Brook as Ghosts. Photo by Craig Schwartz

Whisper House is the astounding new musical by Duncan Sheik (*Spring Awakening*) and Kyle Jarrow, in which two ghosts guide us through a mystery-filled and magical journey. The story, set in 1942, is that of a Chicago boy, Christopher, who loses his father to war and sees himself forced to move to a haunted New England lighthouse, where his aunt Lilly will attempt to care for him. There, the dangers of World War II inspire present fears and let past deceptions manipulate residents and visitors alike.

David Poe and Holly Brook helm the cast as the two charismatic and whimsical singing ghosts. Through the amazing songs of Duncan Sheik, they push and pull characters through the story, influencing and judging their actions. Only Christopher can see them and for this very reason, the boy is the primary recipient of their attention. But neither he, nor the other individuals on

stage, will break into songs during the course of this unique musical (directed by Peter Askin). The ghosts own that privilege. As a result they provide the play with a one-of-a kind, powerful soundtrack, that not only enhances emotional moments, but also reveals to the audience crucial parts of the story.

Mare Winningham is the lonely aunt Lilly. The Emmy Award-winning actress very successfully brings forth the peculiarities of the lighthouse keeper and, thanks to the excellent book written by Kyle Jarrow, is able to take full advantage of the humor-filled dialogue. The young A.J. Foggiano holds his own in the role of Christopher and Arthur Acuña plays the part of Yasuhiro, a Japanese immigrant who works for Lilly. Ted Kōch is Charles, the local sheriff and Kevin Hoffmann completes this exceedingly talented cast as Lieutenant Rando.

The set designed by Michael Schweikardt cleverly exposes the inside of the lighthouse with living quarters at the bottom, the boy's bedroom in the middle and the lantern room at the top. The spine of this wall-less structure is the dramatic spiral staircase. Upstage hangs a screen behind which we can see the band and where sometimes silhouettes are projected (projection design by Aaron Rhyne). Sound design is by Dan Moses Schreier, lights by Matt Richards and costumes by Jenny Mannis.

In addition to being highly entertaining and emotionally filled, *Whisper House* is a breath of fresh air in the musical scene. It is innovative in its concept, creative in its production and inspiring in its theme. The topic of fears running our lives rings very true today in our climate of economic challenges and international conflicts. *Whisper House* teaches us a valuable lesson and reminds us all to embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

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Published: Feb. 1, 2010

Updated: 1:08 p.m.

New Duncan Sheik musical is moody but thin

By PAUL HODGINS
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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With "Spring Awakening," singer-songwriter [Duncan Sheik](#) proved that his distinctive sound could be adapted for musical theater in ways that were intriguing and fresh.

"Whisper House," Sheik's haunting and moody new musical making its world premiere at the Old Globe Theatre, shares many of the same strengths and weaknesses as "Spring Awakening."



David Poe and Holly Brook as Ghosts in the World Premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House" at The Old Globe, Jan. 13 - Feb. 21, 2010.

CRAIG SCHWARTZ,
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Like that Tony-winning hit, "Whisper House's" strong suit is the grim poetry it weaves out of loneliness and longing. But it suffers from a slow-moving and ill-conceived story, sketchy characters, and a general feeling of art-house pompousness that undermine its important message about the way fear and ignorance can corrode our humanity. It ends, literally, with a whisper – too quietly and without resolving anything.

And there's a more than occasional sense that the performers, under the direction of Peter Askin, aren't always sure what their characters are up to.

[Mare Winningham](#) plays Lilly, the crusty proprietress of a lighthouse somewhere along the New England coast. The place has been operated by her family for generations. It's 1942, and the locals are ultra-vigilant – Nazi U-boats are in the area, and Allied ships have been sunk.

Lilly, who is single and as ruggedly self-reliant as New Englanders can be, has been given a responsibility that she doesn't relish. Her 11-year-old nephew, Christopher (A.J. Foggiano), has been sent to live with her temporarily. Christopher's mother has suffered a breakdown, evidently caused by the death of his father, a fighter pilot, in the Pacific; he was shot down by the Japanese.

Christopher doesn't like his aunt or her barren surroundings. What really frosts him, though is the presence of Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña), a Japanese man who helps husbandless Lily with her many chores. Understandably, Christopher is suspicious of all things Japanese.

So are local officials. Charles, the Sheriff (Ted Kõch), takes a shine to the boy and clearly harbors a neighborly concern for Lilly, but he's not so sure about Yasuhiro, who doesn't help his own case by being quiet and mysterious.

The tension is ratcheted up exponentially when an officious young naval officer, Lieutenant Rando (Kevin Hoffman), appears with a special radio transmitter and news that Lilly and her lighthouse are now an important part of the war effort. She must turn off its light at a moment's notice so that German subs can't target the silhouettes of Allied ships.

Story Highlights

'Whisper House' at the Old Globe needs better story, richer characters



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Christopher has been spying on Yasuhiro, and he's convinced that the man's new camera and a torn-up note spell evil espionage. He tells Rando about Yasuhiro, and the naval officer's over-reaction sets the story's culminating crisis in motion.

Overseeing everything and providing commentary in song are two ghosts (David Poe and Holly Brook), victims of a shipwreck on [Halloween 1912](#) that was caused by the negligence of Lily's drunken father, who forgot to turn on the lighthouse's beacon that night. They're bent on revenge of any sort, even if it means hurting blameless little Christopher – an unfortunate motivation that makes the singing spirits intensely dislikable.

The best elements of this production are the music and the ghostly atmospherics.

Sheik's songs, as usual, are cunningly crafted, pliant, and deeply emotional. "The Tale of Solomon Snell" could be the soundtrack for a new, tastefully spooky ride at [Disneyland](#). Backed by a seven-piece band that provides unorthodox and colorful sounds, Poe and Brook deliver Sheik's music with an ethereal longing that suits their characters, two lovers who drowned before their desire could be consummated.

Michael Schweikhardt's set is an expressionistic wonder: the lighthouse tower stripped of its walls, topped by a huge light and anchored by a large spiral staircase. Aaron Rhyne's projections add richly to the overall effect.

The performances leave something to be desired – a reflection, I think, of new-play-itis and Askin's inability to establish a unifying tone. They're one-dimensional: Lily is as stoic as a totem pole, Christopher is pathologically inquisitive, and Yasuhiro is that Central Casting cliché, the inscrutable Asian. They need to be explored more deeply by the writers.

Winningham, usually a convincing stage performer, looks uncomfortable in her role (she's bowing out of the production Feb. 7 because of a scheduling conflict, according to the Old Globe, and will be replaced by Celeste Ciulla). Foggiano is still struggling with the finer points of his portrayal. Acuña's is the most successful of the major performances, mainly because Yasuhiro is given more baggage and a bigger arc than the other characters.

Many Old Globe world premieres find a future life on Broadway. It's hard to imagine "Whisper House" enjoying the same fate unless Sheik and his co-writer [Kyle Jarrow](#) roll up their sleeves and turn a sketchy series of ideas into a full-blown book musical.

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Should the Ducks have traded goalie Jean-Sebastien Giguere?

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☐ No, he's the face of the team

☐ Not sure

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Lost In Yonkers

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Back when Neil Simon started writing plays like *Come Blow Your Horn* and *Barefoot In The Park* for the Broadway stage, few could have imagined that the author of such lightweight fare would go on to one day be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Then came *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and the rest of the "Eugene Trilogy" and critics were forced to admit that Simon was a playwright of unique, remarkable gifts. His 1991 masterwork *Lost In Yonkers* impressed audiences and reviewers alike and from that play forward Simon would forever be referred to as Pulitzer Prize Winner Neil Simon.

Lost In Yonkers has gone on to become a regional and community theater favorite. I've seen it on the big proscenium stage, in 99-seat venues, and now, with The Old Globe's superb, almost-twentieth anniversary revival, in the round. I've seen it performed by unknowns. I've seen it performed by veteran actors. The Old Globe production has allowed me to experience the Simon magic as interpreted by Tony Award Winner Judy Kaye in the role of Grandma Kurnitz, and the result is the very best *Lost In Yonkers* I've had the pleasure to see.

Most StageSceneLA readers are doubtless aware of *Lost In Yonkers'* plot, which recounts the ten eventful months young Jay and Artie spend with ditzy Aunt Bella and their German-Jewish "grandmother from hell." The year is 1942, the world is at war, and the brothers have recently suffered the loss of their mother to cancer, an illness which has left their dad, Eddie, severely in debt to a rapacious loan shark. Dad's solution (to head south and earn enough money to pay off his debts) means leaving his two teens behind with Grandma The Hun.

Grandma Kurnitz suffered a foot injury as a child and since then has walked with a multi-purpose cane, just right for administering punishment to a disobedient child. Reveals Jay, "Pop said she could swing her cane so fast, she could have been one of the greatest golfers in the world." Oldest son Louie works as "some big mobster's henchman," which Artie at first confuses with "hunchback" until Jay corrects him. Daughter Gert has a unique speech defect; she says the first half of every sentence breathing out and the second half sucking the air back in. ("I once saw her try to blow out a candle," says Jay. "Halfway there she sucked it back on.") Finally, there's Bella, whom Jay describes as "a little closed for repairs." When Artie wonders about Aunt Bella's education level, Jay informs him that she did go to high school ... a little, but "she missed the first year because she couldn't find it."

Lost In Yonkers adroitly balances a trio of plots—Jay and Artie's attempt to survive a year with "Frankenstein's Grandma," Bella's wish to marry a movie usher named Johnny (contingent on getting her mother to give her \$5000 so that Johnny can open a restaurant), and the surprise visit of Uncle Louie on the lam from the mob.

For those expecting Simon's trademark one-liners, there are many of those. When Arty asks Bella what movie she's just seen, she replies, "I don't know. I couldn't find the theater I was looking for, so I went to the one I found." Later, the preteen asks his aunt if it's true that

Grandma is partly deaf. Bella's response? "Oh sure. But the other part hears perfectly."

What sets *Lost In Yonkers* apart from the rest of the Neil Simon oeuvre is its cast of characters, including arguably the two most complex and multilayered women the master playwright has ever created: Grandma Kurnitz and Bella. Add to that a pair of very real adolescents, a father who would sacrifice pretty much everything for his family, a low-level gangster uncle, and an aunt with a speech impediment slash emotional scar and you've got seven of the best Simon characters you'll likely ever see on stage at once.

Both Bella and Grandma are tough nuts for an actor to crack. The danger is to make Bella too "comedy dumb" and Grandma too "one note." Jennifer Regan and Broadway star Kaye not only avoid these pitfalls. They give the two finest performances I've yet seen in these challenging roles.



Regan's Bella is so bubbling with childlike enthusiasm and energy that she virtually bounces and jumps around the stage. She may be one taco short of a combination plate (or maybe even two), but she's no dummy where human relationships are concerned, and much of the joy of Regan's performance is seeing those sparks of intelligence and wisdom shine through. In Regan's gifted hands, Bella's joys are a joy to behold and her disappointments heartbreaking. When Bella finally stands up to her terror of a mother, you believe it because Regan has already given you glimpses of her inner moxie, and the actress's performance is reason enough to catch this production.

But there's more, in the person of the magnificent Miss Kaye. Abandoning all vanity as she disappears into Grandma's barbed-wire gray-haired frumpiness, Kaye gives the most three dimensional performance I've yet seen in the role. She's scary as all get-out at first sight, or rather at first sound, since the thump thump thump of her cane precedes her wherever she goes. No matter how cold and unfeeling Grandma may appear to be, Kaye's eyes speak volumes of long-buried pain, and as cruel as she may seem, Kaye makes us understand that Grandma truly believes that what she does is for the good of her family. Two pivotal moments late in Act Two have never been as powerful as they are in Kaye's extraordinary performance.

Steven Kaplan is simply marvelous as older brother Jay, and Austyn Myers (repeating the role he played in *La Mirada* last year) milks every great Arty moment like the young pro he is. Jeffrey M. Bender, who played to perfection a woman *and* a hunchback in *The Old Globe's The Mystery Of Irma Vep* last year, here gets to add another great characterization to his repertoire as mob henchman Uncle Louie. Amanda Naughton gets many laughs as sweet Aunt Gert, and Spencer Rowe is paternal love personified as the boys' father Eddie. (Lucky Lowe gets much more stage time than usual, too. Read on to find out why.)

Director Scott Schwartz understands these people well, and working with his masterful team of performers, gets overall the most believable performances I've yet seen in the play.

The in-the-round staging is a bit of a mixed bag.. On the plus side, it makes seeing this *Lost In Yonkers* a much more "up close and personal" experience than it would be in a proscenium theater with the same number of seats. Schwartz moves the actors around the stage unobtrusively, yet in a way that mostly insures that no audience member is shortchanged. But there are scenes where this proves impossible and the production suffers a bit for it. I was seated behind the sofa, thereby missing the facial reactions of anyone seated there, particularly noticeable in an early scene where all I could see was the back of Bella's head. A dramatic confrontation between Bella and Grandma in Act Two had both Regan and Kaye facing me, thereby denying almost half the audience the full effect of the scene. The fault is not Schwartz's but the in-the-round setup. On the other hand, we now get to see rather than just hear Eddie as he reads the letters he has written to his boys from the four corners of the U.S. (and, standing in the aisles, from the four corners of the Sheryl and Harvey White Theatre).

Ralph Funicello's set design features just the furniture one would expect to find in a 1940s Yonkers apartment, and a nice window effect visible before each act begins. Alejo Vietti's costumes are precisely what each character would wear, circa 1942. Kudos too to Matthew McCarthy's lighting and Paul Peterson's sound design. (I loved the dramatic opening music and radio war reports.)

My guest on Sunday was discovering *Lost In Yonkers* for the first time and fell in love with the production (and Simon's play) from the get-go. I felt exactly the same as a seasoned *Lost In Yonkers* devotee. A word of warning to any future productions of *Lost In Yonkers*. You've got a tough act to follow.

The Old Globe Sheryl and Harvey White Theatre, Balboa Park, 1363 Old Globe Way, San Diego. Through February 28. Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 7:00. Thursdays and Fridays at 8:00. Saturdays at 2:00 and 8:00. Sundays at 2:00 and 7:00. Reservations: 619 234-5623 www.theoldglobe.org

--Steven Stanley
January 31, 2010

Photos: Craig Schwartz

Whisper House

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"I present to you a story set upon a Northern shore. Denizens of lighthouse during times of war. The foolish things they did. The foolish things they said. I'm sure you would agree they would be better off dead."

Singing these lyrics are a 1910s-garbed 2010-alternative-rock-performing pair of ghosts haunting a 1941 Maine lighthouse. The spectral vocalists, one male, one female, and their equally deceased backup band are the victims of a 1912 Halloween night shipwreck, unable even 29 years later to depart from the lighthouse whose keeper brought about their deaths through negligence. If only he had remembered to turn on the light that fateful night.

Welcome to the world of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's mesmerizing new musical drama *Whisper House*, now getting its World Premiere production at San Diego's Old Globe Theater.

The alt-rock ghosts (David Poe and Holly Brook) continue their exposition in song:

"Lilly keeps the lighthouse. She's afraid of the unknown. She's no ray of sunshine, so mostly she's alone. No one cares about her longing or the dreams on which she's fed." And...

"Witness Yasuhiro. He hails from old Japan. He searches for redemption in this strange and foreign land. And now he works for Lilly to earn his daily bread. And..."

"Please welcome young Christopher. He's come here on a train. His father flew to heaven in a fiery aeroplane. He's come to live with Lilly. He's got visions in his head."

Lilly (Mare Winningham), Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña), Christopher (A.J. Foggiano), and Charles, the Sheriff (Ted Kõch), would all, we are told by the ghosts, be "better off dead," that is if the two spirits haunting Lilly's lighthouse can have their way. To paraphrase the old adage, "Death loves company."

Lilly, a self-described curmudgeon, is scarcely the mothering type as preteen Christopher soon discovers. Her chilly presence combined with the loss of a mother (still reeling from her fighter pilot husband's death) and the possibly dangerous presence of Lilly's "Jap" lighthouse worker begin to make Christopher long for oblivion, the kind promised by ghosts that only he can see. Sheriff Charles, too, considers Yasuhiro a threat, particularly now that German U-boats are out there somewhere along the Maine coast quite possibly ready to strike. Add to this lonely quartet young Navy Lieutenant Rando (Kevin Hoffman) come to arrest Yasuhiro and cart him off to an internment camp, and there you have pretty much the characters and plot of *Whisper House*, minus its touching, tear-jerking denouement.

If the above synopsis seems hardly the stuff of a musical, fear not, for it can only hint at the magical spell woven by *Whisper House*. Fans of Sheik's score for the Broadway hit *Spring Awakening* will have some idea of the minor-keyed songs he has composed for this newest endeavor, melodies eminently deserving the term haunting. Until the play's final moments, none of

the characters sing a note, making Whisper House an amalgam of alt-rock concert and straight play. I've never seen anything like it before, and I loved every minute.

As frightening as the ghosts are to Christopher, they are not above a bit of mischief-making, pulling the sheets off the boy's bed, blowing out candles, and making the obnoxious young lieutenant dance a jaunty jig. Mostly for us, though, they are there to sing, both to and about the characters on stage, and in one particularly spooky number, about an unfortunate man named Solomon Snell.



Meanwhile, Winningham, Lilly, Acuña, Foggiano, Kōch, and Hoffman bring Lilly, Yasuhiro, Christopher, Charles, and the lieutenant to vivid life under the exquisite direction of Peter Askin. Winningham, one of the St. Elmo's Fire "brat pack," has graduated to the middle-aged roles she seemed born to play even back then. Her Lilly is so brittle from the chill in her heart that it seems at times that she could break from it, making her gradual warming to Christopher all the more powerful. Filipino-American Acuña is absolutely convincing as Japanese Yasuhiro, and if Lilly's temperature is rising, it's at least in part due to the sparks he's igniting by his mere presence in a room. Foggiano is a heartbreaking mixture of longing, loneliness, and juvenile bravado, and he's got as great a face as you're ever likely to see in a child actor. Kōch does richly three-dimensional work as a man whose own sense of right and wrong may be at odds with what's required of him in time of war. Hoffmann makes the most of his brief role as an oddly endearing loose cannon of an Navy officer.

Still, it is the performances of Poe and Brook that make Whisper House so out of the ordinary, he with his rockstar voice mixing gravel and silk, she with her ethereal pipes and otherworldly presence. Together, they have an electricity that's not quite there on Sheik and Brook's concept CD, but which comes alive when backed by music director Jason Hart on keyboard and the rest of the live upstage band. On CD, most of the songs give little clue to the onstage action. On stage, they accentuate and enhance the drama that unfolds.

There is no real choreography per se, but Dance Director Wesley Fata has designed graceful, evocative movement for the cast, particularly for the ghostly pair.

Michael Schweikardt's three-story set manages to suggest a lighthouse atop a seacoast home without extraneous detail. Aaron Rhyne's superb projections show us the pounding surf below, silhouettes of the ghosts as Christopher likely sees them, and armies of GI's marching off to war. Matthew Richards' delicate lighting design adds to the air of mystery. Jenny Mannis's excellent costumes run the gamut from early-20th Century evening wear to Lilly's drab housedresses. Dan Moses Schreier's sound design has rock concert volume and clarity without drowning out the voices on stage.

A review can only begin to suggest the eerie enchantment of Whisper House. If those vocalizing ghosts play their cards right, this show could easily go on to become a cult classic. Clearly, Spring Awakening was only the beginning of singer-songwriter Sheik's theatrical magic.

Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego. Through February 21. Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 7:00, Thursdays and Fridays at 8:00, Saturdays at 2:00 and 8:00, Sundays at 2:00 and 7:00. Reservations: 619 234-5623 www.oldglobe.org

--Steven Stanley
January 31, 2010

Photos: Craig Schwartz

[Show REVIEW Commentary \(As seen in Previews 1/13/10\)](#)

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A Play With Music

" Whisper House "

A 'dark horse' candidate for future success, the SD Old Globe Theatre, under the direction of *Peter Askin*, has delivered a book by *Kyle Jarrow*, that is only *mildly curious* on some 1942 (off the coast of New England) WW II history level! On a *rumble-scale* of 1-to-10 ... **WHISPER HOUSE** (to this viewer) hovers somewhere at a '5' ... midway to popular audience opinion. Despite

the Old Globe's top quality production values, and talents of *Michael Schwerkardt's* Scenic Design, *Matthew Richards* Lighting, and *Aaron Rhyme's* unique Projection designs, it was a challenge to get emotionally involved...with a spinster light-house operator, with her Japanese laborer, and her temporarily inheritance of a young lad ... in the midst of German U-Boats tooling-about the West Coast.



Holly Brook – "Ghost Singer" Composer Duncan Sheik



David Poe – "Ghost singer"

This play with music, comes with a 'ghostly' score by *Duncan Sheik*, who is a Grammy and Tony Award-winning singer-songwriter-composer, and has won a Tony Award, for the Broadway production of "*Spring Awakening*"...and his songs here are eerily performed by 'Ghosts' *David Poe* and *Holly Brook*. *Poe* is known for his two commissioned works for dance.... "*The Copier*" for the Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet (coming soon on 4/24, to San Diego), and "*Shadowland: Music for Pilobolus*". With the support of a 7-piece upstage show combo (who appeared to be dressed in top hats / tuxedos), under the direction of keyboardist *Jason Hart*. At the preview performance, there were some *sound-balance issues*, preventing hearing clearly the lyrics being sung, however I would imagine will be corrected by the opening night. The *Duncan Sheik* songs (though not identified in the program) included (*I believe*) titles: IT'S BETTER TO BE DEAD, WE'RE HERE TO TELL YOU, RING THE BELL, THE REPEATS, PLAY YOUR PART and THE WORLD HAS ENDED.



Mare Winningham



Eric Zutty

Director **Peter Askin** has cast excellent Equity actors in **Mare Winningham**, as the Lighthouse caretaker LILLY (*Winningham remembered for her recent La Jolla Playhouse appearance in "Bonnie & Clyde"*), **Arthur Acuna**, as her Japanese laborer – smitten with LILLY, and later shipped-off to a Japanese Internment Camp, and **Tech Koch**, as the gregarious, but likeable CHARLES, The Sheriff...all were well-cast, and believable in their portrayals. The one disappointment came with the 14-year old **Eric Zutty**, as the youngster CHRISTOPHER, a potentially engaging role, however, played here all on one-level...*no expression, no dimension...not even a 'smile' on his face in the final bows!* The non-Equity role fell to **Kevin Hoffmann**, as the US Government's Lt. RANDO, who breaks-up the little lighthouse family – with the military concerns for security!



Old Globe where you find the ...
"Whisper House"

Frankly, I see the **WHISPER HOUSE** having perhaps some 'legs' for an Off-Broadway small theatre run....for a very select audience. Overheard from a patron exiting the Old Globe this night.... "Why was this d... show written?"...

Coming up very soon, will be Neil Simon's **LOST IN YONKERS**

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Whisper House

By January Riddle



Poe, Brook
Photo by Craig Schwartz

There is music and there are songs, but this is not a musical. There are ghosts, but this is not a ghost fable. There is a plot, but this is not the point.

It is much easier to say what *Whisper House* is not than to decipher what it is. The rambling world premiere production on San Diego's Old Globe Theatre stage features an Emmy Award-winning actor (Mare Winningham), a Tony Award-winning

composer (Duncan Sheik) and an experienced director (Jason Hart). Michael Schweikardt's scenic design is brilliant, with scrims and foggy shadows that define the mood around the huge spiral staircase.

It would seem that this play-about-something-that-could-be-illogical-fears had a lot going for it. But, as any chef knows, a collection of ingredients does not, in itself, make an inspiring dish. In this case, plopping all the best into a pot and stirring it occasionally has created a less than flavorful stew. Kyle Jarrow's book and lyrics need serious adjustments.

Take the songs. The 8-member orchestra conducted by Jason Hart produces sounds that are somewhat haunting, in a rock 'n' roll kind of way, rather fun, and innovative. The words, delivered by the two ghosts (a daring Holly Brook and an energetic David Poe), serve to tell tales of ghastly episodes and to warn the audience of mayhem to come. In that latter vein, they resemble the admonitions and announcements of the Greek chorus, moving the play along and offering some audio variety. On opening night, the sounds were more banshee than spectral, however, as the mikes produced screeching that threatened to do severe eardrum damage. Corrections later in the evening made the sounds more bearable. Yet, there are problems with the story-telling purpose. "The Tale of Solomon Snell," a long, windy number about a man buried alive, is one example. It makes no sense to those who do not know the reasons behind the Victorian penchant for coffins with bells attached.

The bells are a contrivance throughout the play. Because the context for their peals, dings, and clangs is lacking in the script, they become noises without nuance.

The storyline is simple enough. Set in WWII New England, the play focuses on Lilly (Mare Winningham), a lighthouse keeper, and her adolescent nephew Christopher (a wooden, but promising - he works so hard that he will surely grow into the role - A.J. Foggiano), who has come to live with her after the death of his aviator father and the mental breakdown of his mother. Lilly has no experience with children, so their initial meeting and adjusting brings some welcome and delightful humor to the plot. As the plot thickens, Lilly shows that taking in is not the same thing as taking care. Changing and adapting is not something that she is wont to do, so poor Christopher is left to his own fears and devices.

Lilly's philosophy about fear is that it should never prevent one from achieving, yet it becomes clear that she would rather talk the talk than walk

beyond her own mental and physical self-imposed confinement. The play's primary theme is fear. The ghosts that haunt each of the characters are reminders of what is lost by fearing to embrace the life-altering powers of change and chance.

Christopher's fears are justified and obvious. Who wouldn't be scared of the dark and the deep, given his recent history? And his newfound benefactor does nothing to help allay them.

Lilly has taken over and run a lighthouse for many years, so we can assume that she is not a stupid or incompetent woman, but her character as written is densely imperceptive. Ok, so she has never been around children. But come on, it doesn't take a child psychologist to understand that this kid has had some serious trauma, including his current residential upheaval, and deserves communication and attention beyond "You ask too many questions" and bowls of sugarless oatmeal. An accomplished actor who can wring tears from a dry Kleenex when she has a decent part, Winningham makes the best of this unlikeable character, and her New England accent seems to fall easily off her tongue. But she has been given too little to do and not much to accomplish in Lilly's stoic pessimism. Until the final scenes, this agoraphobic and self-centered woman presents as patently unlikeable, except to the sheriff who hates her coffee but may be keen on her.

That her boarder and hired hand Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuna) falls in love with her is one of the play's unintentional mysteries. An immigrant from Japan, Yasuhiro has a story that could provide a much-needed depth to the play. But his motivations are only touched upon, and his character, while touchingly wrought by Acuna, becomes just a symbol of American guilt and prejudice. Lilly realizes, much too late, that she has missed the transformative power of love.

Her fears have held her captive in her own little tower. In the long aftermath of 9-11 and its sequels of terrors and TSAs, we can relate. As each of the characters discovers, Franklin D. Roosevelt was right. Fear of fear is frightful.

But so is this play's hasty and trite resolution. The last scene shows a penitent, rather pitiful Lilly, who has missed the chance to love and to save others and herself. In the end, we see that Charles, the Sheriff, (a stoic Ted Koch) has missed the chance to become more than a friend to Lilly. Lieutenant Rando (a stilted Kevin Hoffmann) has missed the point of anything at all. And Christopher has learned, much too late, to make his apologies meaningful, that things are not always what they seem.

Despite the dreariness of San Diego's recently stormy weather, this play's serving of theatrical stew is not comfort food.

"Whisper House" plays on The Old Globe stage in San Diego's Balboa Park through Feb. 21. Performances: Tues-Weds at 7pm; Thurs-Sat at 8pm; Sun at 7pm. Matinees on Sat & Sun at 2 pm. Tickets are \$36-89. Discounts for students, youth, seniors and groups. Reservations: at www.TheOldGlobe.org or 619-23-GLOBE.

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WHISPER HOUSE: MURMURS OF SOMETHING GREAT

By C. Davis Remignanti

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, 5 FEBRUARY 2010 — It should work. It almost does. But *Whisper House*, which is in its world premiere run at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, is in need of significant tinkering.

On paper, at least, *Whisper House*, the new musical collaboration from Duncan Sheik (*Spring Awakening*) and Kyle Jarrow (*A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*), has all the ingredients for a fascinating and fulfilling evening of theater.

Three storm-tossed individuals — a man, a woman and a child — are thrown together by happenstance, setting up a nice piece of dramaturgical tension over whether the unlikely trio can form a family unit, finding solace and fulfillment in each others' company. Place them in an eerily gothic setting, then toss in the presence of a couple of grudge-holding ghosts, intent on spoiling everyone's chances for happiness. Finally, wrap the entire story in an unusual theatrical form — one where the mortals do all the talking and the ghosts do all the singing.



Michael Schweikardt's set for *Whisper House*
Photo courtesy of The Old Globe Theatre

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The problem is that the two threads — dramatic and musical — are not intertwining gracefully. Everything about the evening's presentation is period (early in World War II) except the music which, even though lovely, is decidedly contemporary. The effect is rather like flipping channels between two television programs — spending a few minutes watching a classic film on AMC, then dashing over to MTV for some music, then back to the movie, etc... What is perhaps the evening's most ear-worm-worthy tune ("The Tale of Solomon Snell") is awkwardly shoe-horned into the proceedings and, while a fun diversion, serves mostly to grind the story to a four-minute halt.

The stylistic time-shifting is a worthy conceit, one that served Mr. Sheik well in his fantastically popular *Spring Awakening*. But here it's not fully cooked, and *Whisper House* needs the hand of a brave and ruthless master chef who can make the possibly-painful decisions required to allow the disparate flavors to blend into a savory whole.

Emmy Award winner Mare Winningham is pitch- and picture-perfect as Miss Lilly, but she deserves the opportunity to show the cracks in her character's curmudgeonly veneer, a chance not afforded her with the current script and direction. (Unfortunate news: Ms. Winningham is leaving the production two weeks into its run, citing "scheduling conflicts." Hmmm.) Arthur Acuña gives a fine performance as Yasuhiro, but he seems miscast physically — distractingly youthful and, frankly, buff — which serves to strain even a willing suspension of disbelief when it comes to the tender feelings that sprout between his character and Lilly. (Clever costuming would go a long way toward correcting that oversight.) The pivotal role of young Christopher will always be a challenge to cast, as the script, the story, indeed the entire evening hinges on a child actor with dramatic skills far in advance of his years.



Arthur Acuña and Mare Winningham in *Whisper House*
Photo courtesy of The Old Globe Theatre

The two un-named ghosts, as currently presented, are meant to be menacing (they sing: "We're here to tell you / Ghosts are here for good / If this doesn't terrify you / It should. It should.") but, in fact, they are creepy only in the way Michael Keaton's *Beetlejuice* was — odd, yes, but all-in-all, kind of entertaining and fun to have around. Certainly not the kind of

ghosts that could plausibly encourage a little boy to consider killing himself. In the fuzzily-conceived roles, David Poe and Holly Brook show they've got the musical chops, but in the end, the ghosts are just too darn likeable.

Michael Schweikardt's beautiful and evocative set is under-served by Matthew Richard's lighting — just because the dramatic mood is dark doesn't mean essential pieces of stage business should take place in near-total darkness.

Finally, the evening seems a bit brief — the intermission-less performance clocks in at just over 90 minutes — and, if the exasperated sighs of the audience members around me are any indication, the end is abrupt and unsatisfying. The proceedings could easily sustain an additional 20 - 25 minutes, precious opportunity to let the characters and story develop a more fully realized depth of flavor.

Whisper House is a worthy evening out, but for the wrong reasons: either because it affords the audience member a chance to see what could become the next great thing in an early and un-refined state, or because it might be your only opportunity to witness what may prove to be nothing more than an asterisk in the history of musical theater.

Whisper House

Through 21 February 2010

The Old Globe Theatre

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San Diego, CA 92101-1696

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C. Davis Remignanti writes on design and the visual and decorative arts for Culturekiosque.com. He last wrote on **The Johnny Mercer Centenary**.

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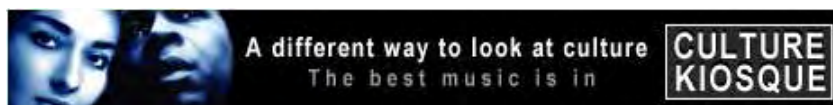
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theater

Grandma and ghosts

BY JEAN LOWERISON

Published Thursday, 04-Feb-2010 in [issue 1154](#)

'Lost in Yonkers'

Most kids like to visit Grandma. But 15-year-old Jay (Steven Kaplan) and 13-year-old Arty (Austyn Myers) are reminded why they don't when dad Eddie (Spencer Rowe) makes them sit in starched and sweaty discomfort in the sweltering living room, waiting for the old dragon to emerge from the bedroom.

Grandma Kurnitz (Judy Kaye) is a Holocaust escapee with a thick German accent and cane who raised her kids with sharp words and harsh punishment in order to teach them that "you don't survive in this world without being like steel." She doesn't like noise, disorder or, apparently, children. She ruled the family by intimidation and still terrorizes at-home, mildly retarded but sunny 35-year-old daughter Bella (Jennifer Regan) – and anyone else within earshot.

The script indicates that Bella was born with scarlet fever which could have affected her brain; sister Gert (Amanda Naughton) gasps for breath when visiting her mother (but only then). The fourth sib is smalltime gangster Louie (Jeffrey M. Bender). Though Grandma regards Eddie as weak (he cries), he is the most normal of the quartet.

It's 1942, and Jay and Arty have recently lost their mother to a long bout with cancer. Dad, deep in hock to a loan shark for her care, intends to leave the kids with Grandma while he moves South to sell scrap metal for the war industry – a trade he thinks will raise the money relatively quickly. Can the boys survive life with Grandma?

Neil Simon's family dramedy *Lost in Yonkers* plays through Sunday, Feb. 28, at the Old Globe's new Sheryl & Harvey White Theatre, wonderfully directed by Scott Schwartz.

A far cry from the usual Simon collection of one-liners, *Lost in Yonkers* may well be his best play. Winner of both Tony and Pulitzer prizes for best play in 1991, it offers fully realized characters and an engaging narrative arc. The Globe has added a sterling cast, fine direction, an appropriate set and costumes; the result is a superb production.

Kaplan and local favorite Myers are stage naturals and terrific as the boys, saying as much with expressions and movements as with words.

Regan is heartbreaking as Bella, the girl-woman so desperate for love that she wants to take up with an inappropriate man.

Rowe is heart-tugging as Eddie, who only wants the best for his boys but knows what they're in for at Grandma's.

Bender is convincing as Louie and Naughton does well in a small but difficult role.

But this show belongs to Kaye's Grandma, the dragon with the cane, who reportedly "could swing the cane so fast, she could have been one of the greatest golfers in the world," and thanks to great makeup and acting is a frightening presence indeed.

Lost in Yonkers is set during the war, but this is a family saga, not a war story.

Tolstoy said that happy families are alike but unhappy families are unhappy in their own way. This family is certainly distinctive, this production riveting.

Lost in Yonkers plays through Sunday, Feb. 28, at the Old Globe's Sheryl & Harvey White Theatre. Shows Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets, call 619-23-GLOBE or visit www.theoldglobe.org.

'Whisper House'



'Lost in Yonkers': (l. to r.) Jennifer Regan as Bella and Judy Kaye as Grandma Kurnitz in Neil Simon's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Lost in Yonkers*, at The Old Globe, through Feb. 28. CREDIT: PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ



'Whisper House': (bottom) Holly Brook as a Ghost, (top) Eric Brent Zutty as Christopher and David Poe as a Ghost, in the World Premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House* at The Old Globe, through Feb. 28.

CREDIT: PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.

Ghost stories may be a lot of things – murky, misty, foggy, maybe even a little out of focus. But most of all, they are supposed to be scary.

Whisper House is murky, all right, getting lost in its tripartite plot strands encompassing ghost story, coming-of-age saga and political morality tale. This new musical by Tony-winning songwriter Duncan Sheik and book writer and co-lyricist Kyle Jarrow plays through Sunday, Feb. 21, at the Old Globe Theatre, with Peter Askin directing.

Eleven-year-old Christopher (A.J. Foggiano) sees dead people cavorting around the old Maine lighthouse where he's been sent to stay with his taciturn Aunt Lilly (Mare Winningham), keeper of the lighthouse since her father's death.

Lilly demands to be called "Miss Lilly," acknowledges that she doesn't dig kids and opines that "I think the best thing is to speak to each other as little as possible," which doesn't exactly make Christopher feel welcome.

But it's 1942, Christopher's dad has been killed in action in the South Pacific and his mom's hospitalized with a breakdown. And now he's stuck in this drafty old lighthouse with his weird aunt and her Japanese handyman Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña), whom Chris regards as the enemy because of his nationality.

So for company he's left with two spiffily-clad ghosts (David Poe and Holly Brook), the sources of the titular whispers. They serve as narrators, Greek chorus and soundtrack, as this overmiked duo sings all the songs – in cabaret style, with frequently mushy diction.

They also have designs on the kid. Seems in 1912 they died at a fancy Halloween yacht party on a night when Lilly's father got drunk and forgot to turn the light on; the boat ran aground

and sank. They need to take a life in order to be released.

Or something. The problem is, there's nothing particularly ghostly (and certainly nothing scary) about them, other than the fact that only Christopher sees them. These two sound like club singers, look like they stepped out of "Topper" and seem downright sensual.

The World War II plot strand reports the (real) danger of German U-boats patrolling U.S. coastlines and burning American merchant ships, and also notes the U.S. government decree that no resident of German, Italian or Japanese ancestry can live near a "sensitive location." This underdeveloped part of the plot offers two underwritten characters. Coast Guard Lt. Rando (Kevin Hoffmann) arrives to install a radio so Lilly can be signaled when to turn off the lights. And genial Sheriff Charles (Ted Kych) comes to tell Lilly that Yasuhiro must leave. Both characters are too sketchy to be more than mere plot devices.

Foggiano is effective as Christopher, though he seems more puzzled than scared by the spectral spirits, and perhaps even attracted to the female ghost. But will he grow up and realize who his real friends are? His story needs to be more sharply written.

Winningham is reliably terrific as the tight-lipped spinster lighthouse keeper, a model of New England self-sufficiency who, as far as we can tell, neither wants nor needs human connection.

Acuña is to be congratulated for managing to create a layered character from the script's stereotype of the Japanese immigrant.

The show's technical aspects are generally first-rate, starting with Michael Schweikardt's set: the interior of the lighthouse, with winding staircase, a small room on the second level and a big (but, oddly, not revolving) light at the top, enclosed by a railing and a narrow widow's walk. Matthew Richards' lighting design, eerie sound effects by Don Moses Schreier and Aaron Rhyne's back projections are equally effective. And Jason Hart's fine seven-piece band, arrayed in a ghostly, top hat-clad line to the rear, add to the otherworldly look.

But the show itself needs work, beginning with the banal sitcom-level script. If this is a ghost story, scare me a little. If it's about war, give me an explosion that shakes the rafters. If it's about scared people learning to connect, show me a connection.

"If you're terrified, that's how you're supposed to be," the ghosts sing.

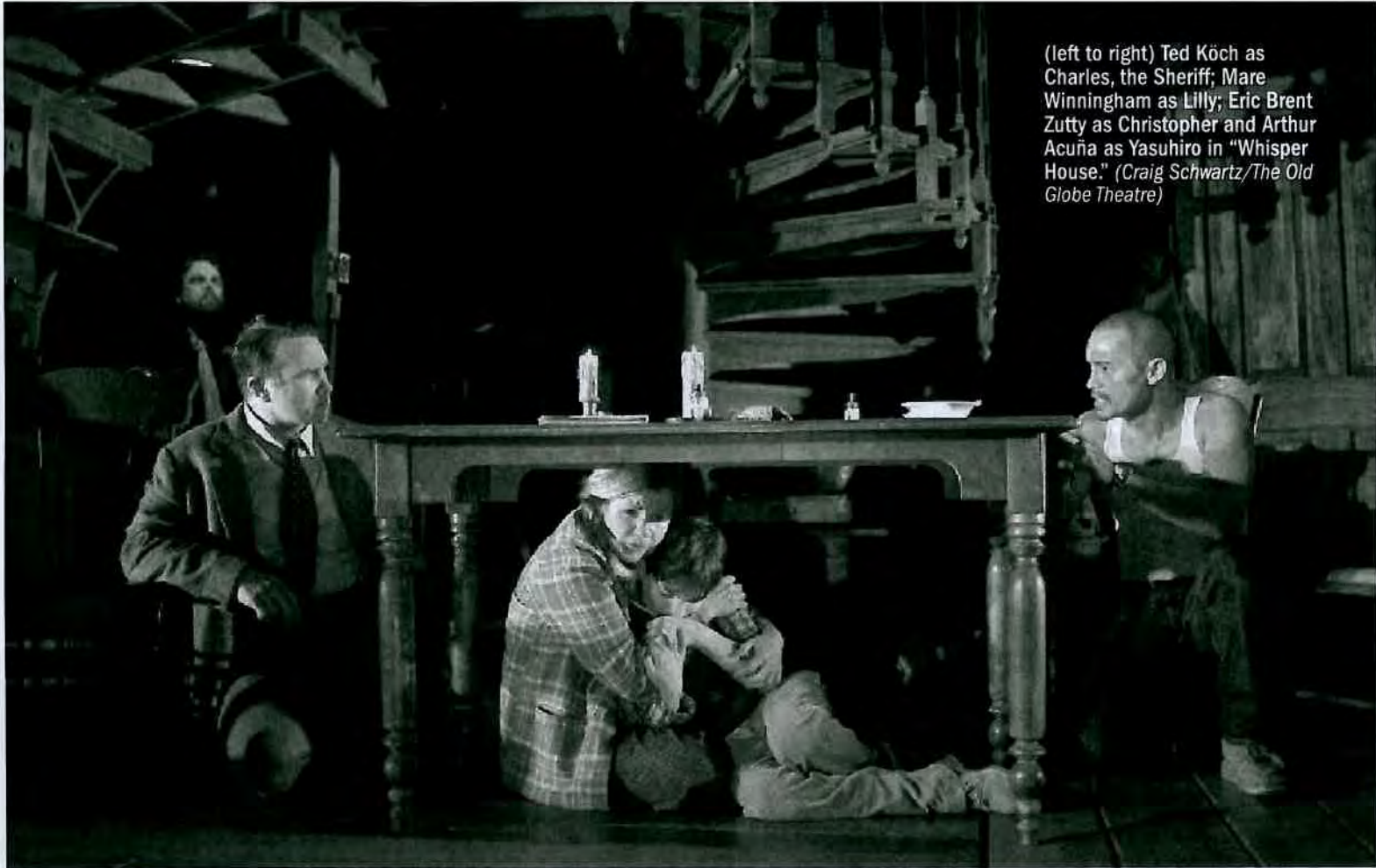
Alas, I wasn't terrified. I was looking at my watch.

Whisper House plays through Sunday, Feb. 21, at the Old Globe Theatre. Shows Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 7 p.m.; matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets, call 619-23-GLOBE or visit www.theoldglobe.org.

No comments yet

SAN DIEGO UPTOWN NEWS

February 5, 2010



(left to right) Ted Köch as Charles, the Sheriff; Mare Winningham as Lilly; Eric Brent Zutty as Christopher and Arthur Acuña as Yasuhiro in "Whisper House." (Craig Schwartz/The Old Globe Theatre)

‘Whisper House’ shouts out for more story, fewer songs

By Patricia Morris Buckley
SDUN Theatre Critic

A good ghost story sends a tingle down the spine, gives listeners a sleepless night and makes for a memorable evening's entertainment. At least that's the idea behind "Whisper House," a new musical from Duncan Sheik, who is best known for his score for the Tony Award-winning, groundbreaking musical "Spring Awakening."

And there just might be a great spooky experience in this show, but it needs to honed more. A lot more. As the Old Globe has the honor of premiering the show, chances are it will get a lot of polishing before going to New York.

"Whisper House" is set in 1942 at the height of WWII. Eleven-year-old Christopher is sent to live with his old maid aunt after his father is killed in the war and his mother has a nervous breakdown. His Aunt Lilly, who runs a lighthouse on the New England

coast, is cold and distant to her nephew, yet friendly with her Japanese handyman, Yasuhiro. Like many kids during WWII, Christopher has been taught to hate "the Japs" and is convinced that Yasuhiro is a spy.

He's not the only one to be suspicious of Yasuhiro. When the lighthouse is fitted with a radio to report the sighting of any German subs, the government demands that Yasuhiro leave. It's then that Christopher learns to respect the man and not judge him based on

color or nationality.

"Whisper House" is about refusing to let fear run your life. The time period of WWII, when fear and prejudice permeated the culture, mixed in with a ghost story is a perfect vehicle for demonstrating this theme. There are two ghosts who haunt the lighthouse and interact with Christopher, the only one who can see them. They are, presumably, the ghosts of a boat that ran into the shore many decades ago, the only time his grandfather forgot to light the lighthouse beacon.

These two ghosts never talk to Christopher – they sing to him, often telling him what to do. Sheik's music is fittingly haunting and has the feel of another time.

see *Whisper*, page 25

FROM PAGE 22

WHISPER

But there's just too much of it. The opening number, "Better to Be Dead," is a rousing start to the show. It also sets up the story and the tension perfectly. Some songs move the action forward, but just as many do not, such as "Earthbound Starlight," which adds nothing except stalling the action. There are 12 songs in the show, sung beautifully by David Poe and Holly Brook, but the production would be better off with half that amount.

The problem with cutting any songs is that the show is a mere 90 minutes long with no intermission. With less music, it would only be 60 to 70 minutes in length, sort of a glorified one-act. So the story would need to be beefed up, but there are enough interesting elements in it that this easily could be done.

The production gets much of its weight from the subtle and natural acting of Mare Winningham as Aunt Lilly. Last seen in San Diego in the La Jolla Playhouse's "Bonnie & Clyde," Winningham plays the role as stoic and unbending, a woman scarred by her past so badly that she can't open up to anyone. Aunt Lilly also lets fear run her life and Winningham never tries to sugarcoat the character to win the audience's favor, but in the end the character does just that.

As Yashiro, Arthur Acuna is also distanced from the audience and plays the role as a cold fish. These characters are as frosty as the chilling wind that whips around the lighthouse. Christopher is not yet as boxed off as the adults are (perhaps why he alone can see the shots?) and A.J. Foggiano brings a nice energy to the role, although it would be helpful to see why the ghosts affect his character so much.

Peter Askin's excellent direction is finely tuned and exact. The show's production elements are really outstanding. Michael Schweikardt's set of a staircase winding up toward the

"WHISPER HOUSE"

WHEN: Through Feb. 21

WHERE: Old Globe Theatre

TICKETS: \$36-\$89

INFO: (619) 234-5623

WEB: www.TheOldGlobe.org

lighthouse beacon is beautifully stripped down and evocative. Projections on the back walls provide glimpses of the water and pure-white ghostlike creatures (the band is also on stage, dressed as ghosts). Matthew Richards' lights help us make the many transitions from reality to fantasy and back again. The costumes by Jenny Mannis look like the real clothes these characters would wear and the ghost outfits have a sense of otherworldliness (although I'm not sure why the female ghost strips down to her underwear).

There's a lot in "Whisper House" that is memorable and captivating. However, it's still like a block of stone waiting to be made into a sculpture. Once the excesses are chipped away, it should be more than just a good ghost story – it has the potential to be great theater. ♦

Whisper Roles



ERIC BRENT ZUTTY
Christopher



DAVID POE
Ghost



ARTHUR ACUNA
Yashiro



MARE WINNINGHAM
Lilly



HOLLY BROOK
Ghost

Theater Review: **Whisper House**

Fewer songs, more story would make ‘Whisper House’ holler

By Patricia Morris Buckley

SDUN Theatre Critic



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These two ghosts never talk to Christopher – they sing to him, often telling him what to do. Sheik’s music is fittingly haunting and has the feel of another time. But there’s just too much of it. The opening number, “Better to Be Dead,” is a rousing start to the show. It also sets up the story and the tension perfectly. Some songs move the action forward, but just as many do not, such as “Earthbound Starlight,” which adds nothing except stalling the action. There are 12 songs in the show, sung beautifully by David Poe and Holly Brook, but the production would be better off with half that amount.

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"Whisper House"

When: Through Feb. 21

Where: Old Globe Theatre

Tickets: \$36-\$89

Info: (619) 234-5623

Web: www.TheOldGlobe.org

Rob Stevens' Entertainment Blog

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[Stephen Sondheim's SWEENEY TODD is Bloody Good](#)

February 7, 2010

It has been over 30 years since SWEENEY TODD first swung his razor high to the music and lyrics of Stephen Sondheim. The original Broadway production won a bunch of Tony and other awards and the show is considered a masterpiece by the composer of other acknowledged stellar creations such as COMPANY, FOLLIES, A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC, PACIFIC OVERTURES, PASSION etc. This writer saw the original Broadway production with Len Cariou, Angela Lansbury and Victor Garber and countless productions in the three decades since then everywhere from a tent on the lawn of a mansion in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to outdoor theaters in Solvang and Vista, California. Long Beach's Musical Theatre West is the latest to revive this modern opera and it just may be the finest production in the group's 57 year history.


Not a wrong note is sounded under the taut, immaculate and tension-filled direction of Calvin Remsberg. The 22-piece orchestra under the direction of John Glaudini and the large chorus of angelic voices make the music soar and induce goosebumps before Sweeney makes his first terrifying slice. Julie Ferrin's exemplary Sound Design is a key ingredient in making sure every nuance of lyric is clearly heard. Jean Yves-Tessier's lighting is bloody good work also.

Norman Large towers over the stage as the brooding, vengeful, blood-thirsty barber done wrong. He is never not frightening, but there is still some small piece of humanity beating away in his black heart. But Large leavens the darkness with a bit of sly, dry humor. The real revelation of this production is the multi-layered performance of Debbie Prutsman as his henchwoman Mrs. Lovett. Prutsman has always been a mistress of comic timing, eliciting laughs where no one got them before. But here her Nellie plumbs the depths of richness in this character. She's a mooning love-struck girl hopelessly in love with Todd, eager for any crumb of his attention. She's an intrepid entrepreneur, quick with an idea of how to economically dispose of the bodies Sweeney's razor has sliced through as well as make a tidy profit. And her heartbreak is palpable when she realizes she must have her adopted son killed because he has discovered the awful secret she's been hiding. Brava Diva!

When you add in the superb supporting cast featuring Dan Callaway and Sarah Bermudez as the star-crossed young lovers, Jim Holdridge as the slow but not dumb Toby, Michelle Duffy as the tragic Beggar Woman, as well as Richard Gould, Roland Rusinek and Alan M-L Wager as the real villains of the melodrama, you have a SWEENEY TODD for the ages.

(Carpenter Performing Arts Center, campus of California State University in Long Beach. \$30-80. www.musical.org. Ends Feb 14)

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 Posted by robstevensentertainment

[Neil Simon's LOST IN YONKERS](#)

February 7, 2010

Neil Simon is undoubtedly the most successful playwright in the history of the American theater. He has had over 30 plays or musicals produced on Broadway since his first COME BLOW YOUR HORN in 1961. Many of them were later turned into hit movies with Simon writing the screenplay. LOST IN YONKERS, currently at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, was written in 1991 and earned Simon his third Tony Award and his first Pulitzer Prize. Unlike his semi-autobiographical trilogy (BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS, BILOXI BLUES, BROADWAY BOUND), Simon made up the characters in YONKERS. Yet he is quoted as saying "It is probably the most honest play I've ever written." That honesty shines clearly in this revival due to Scott Schwartz's no frills but steadfast direction and a top notch cast.

The action is set above a sweet shop where a tyrannical German-Jewish matriarch terrorizes children and grandchildren alike. Teenage grandsons Jay (Steven Kaplan) and Arty (Austyn Myers) set the stage with horrific descriptions of Grandma Kurnitz's past deeds they either witnessed or were told about. The audience expects an ogre, or at least the Frankenstein Monster to make its appearance. But

it's just a steely old woman with a limp, a cane and barbed wire braids. Judy Kaye's iron-willed Grandma doesn't tolerate levity or laziness, crying or weakness. Her performance rightly dominates the proceedings, even though she is off stage more than on.

The time is 1942 and Jay and Arty recently lost their mother to a long and expensive illness. Their father Eddie (Spencer Rowe) is in debt to the mob for \$9,000 he borrowed to ease his wife's suffering. Thanks to America's entry into World War II, Eddie has found a money-making job, but it takes him on the road. He pleads with his mother to take in his grandchildren for a while, but she steadfastly refuses to be bothered. But Eddie's unmarried sister Bella, who lives with her grandmother, makes it a done deal. Bella, at 35, is still childlike due to Scarlet Fever as a child. As played by Jennifer Regan, she is the heart and soul of this production as well as providing a cornucopia of laughs. Amanda Naughton as older sister Gert, who escaped her mother only to retain a breathing/speech impediment that provides much laughter in her one scene. Jeffrey M. Bender as Louie, the black sheep of the family with his criminal activities, adds a touch of seriousness as well as some laughs.

Simon has created a play with a seriously dysfunctional family as its focal point, set against the background of the Depression and war, but he didn't economize on the laughs. But for the most part, here they aren't just one-liners. Although still uproariously funny, they are more character driven and therefore feel more real. Ralph Funicello's scenic design, Alejo Vietti's costumes and Matthew McCarthy's lighting design are all first rate.

(Sheryl and Harvey White Theatre at the Old Globe Theatre in Balboa Park, San Diego. Ends Feb 28. \$29-62. www.theoldglobe.org)

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[Posted by robstevensentertainment](#)

[Ghosts sing but do they thrill in WHISPER HOUSE](#)

February 7, 2010

Tony Award-winning composer Duncan Sheik's eagerly anticipated follow-up to SPRING AWAKENING is being given its World Premiere at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre through February 21. Set in a haunted lighthouse on the coast of Maine in early 1942, Kyle Jarrow's book is an intriguing character study as well as a coming of age tale and a ghost story. The unlikely elements are well blended and a top-notch cast and director Peter Askin's clear and precise vision keep the audience enthralled for the 90-minute intermission-less show.

The action begins when self-professed local curmudgeon and lighthouse keeper Miss Lilly (a solid, believable and ultimately touching performance by Mare Winningham) greets her young nephew Christopher (A.J. Foggiano) who has come to stay with her against his will for at least a month. His Army pilot father was recently killed in action in the South Pacific and his mother is recovering from the resulting nervous breakdown. His inquisitiveness and her lack of maternal instincts give their relationship a cold and prickly edge. Lilly's helper at the lighthouse, Mr. Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuna, delivering a thoughtful, layered character), is a Japanese man who has been in her employ for three years. Because of his father's death at the hands of the Japanese, Christopher takes an immediate dislike to Yasuhiro. The local sheriff (Ted Koch) and a Coast Guard Lieutenant (Kevin Hoffmann providing comic relief) also want Yasuhiro gone from the now security risk area of the coastal lighthouse.

Adding to Christopher's distrust and confusion are the two resident ghosts (David Poe and Holly Brook) who only he can see although the others are often bothered by their poltergeist pranks. The ghosts are part of a yacht party that drowned off the coast because Lilly's drunken father forgot to light the beacon on a long ago Halloween night. The action comes to a thunderous conclusion when a German U-boat is sighted off the coast and the Navy arrives to bomb them. Christopher comes of age by banishing his fear of the ghosts and coming to recognize the budding relationship between Lilly and Yasuhiro.

The technical aspects of the production are top drawer. Michael Schweikardt's multi-level lighthouse set creates a marvelous backdrop for the action, aided immensely by Aaron Rhyne's projection design. Matthew Richards has provided ghostly lighting filtered through plenty of fog. Dan Moses Schreier's sound design is most effective. Musical director and keyboard player Jason Hart and his six-piece on-stage band are dressed in tuxes, top hats and wearing ghost white makeup to emulate the look of lead singer Poe. Sheik's music is appropriately haunting and downright eerie at times, providing the proper atmosphere for the piece. The lyrics by Sheik and Jarrow could use some fine tuning. The best number in the show is "The Tale of Solomon Snell" which doesn't really advance the plot and seems more Edgar Allan Poe or Edward Gorey, but the ghostly bells do deliver the shivers. Jarrow's book at times strains credulity—it's a given ghosts can walk through walls but can they also transport solid objects through those walls? And the dialogue between Lilly and Christopher as well as Lilly and the Sheriff borders on sitcom chatter. And why is the female ghost in and out of her dress so often? Is she trying to seduce the young Christopher as well as scare him.

But the show's main problem is that all the songs are sung by the two ghosts, who not only wear head mics but also sing into handheld mics. Poe has a beguiling early Bob Dylan quality to his voice and his vocals for the most part are pleasant. Brook on the other hand plants her lips firmly on her handheld mic, making the lyrics unintelligible. That's an even bigger problem when her songs are providing exposition. This production of WHISPER HOUSE is a good start and with some adjustments here and there, Sheik might have another winner on his hands.

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Theatre Review: "Whisper House" @ The Old Globe, 02/06/10

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"I present to you a story/set upon a northern shore/the denizens of lighthouse/during times of war" the male ghost sings as he presents the audience with the story of *Whisper House*. He introduces the characters to us: Lilly (keeps the lighthouse/she's afraid of the unknown/she's no ray of sunshine/so mostly she's alone) the sheriff, Charles (will he stand for justice/or something else instead), Yasuhiro (he hails from old Japan/he searches for redemption/in this strange and foreign land), and young Christopher (he's come to live with Lilly/and he's got visions in his head/he may be our main attraction). He questions all of them: are you "better off dead"?

Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's new musical, [*Whisper House*](#), carefully crafts a new style of story-telling that is powerful, unique and riveting.

I honestly didn't think that Sheik would be able to pull off, yet again, another juxtaposition of worlds. The [first was in *Spring Awakening*](#) when he juxtaposed the story set in the 1890's with modern rock music. It was brilliantly done and well executed. This time, it's the ghosts that are singing his contemporary pop/folk/rock score while the story is set in February, 1942. The minute the two ghosts – David Poe and Holly Brook – walk on stage in their ghostly apparel, you realize that you are witnessing something special.

Whisper House almost feels like a "play with music", as none of the main characters in the story (besides the ghost) actually sing. With none of the actors singing, the story is grounded in harsh reality. It is set in a Maine lighthouse during World War II at the time when German U-boats were sighted on the Atlantic coast. The FBI was arresting thousands of suspected enemy aliens, mostly of German, Italian and Japanese descent. Now the story wouldn't have been as powerful without the music and yet the music doesn't tell the full story. They need each other to exist, but only in the way that is uniquely presented. The interplay between the two is phenomenal and that's why I think *Whisper House* is borderline genius.

I went into this production knowing the score very well. I had been listening to the *Whisper House* CD released by Duncan Sheik for almost a year as it had quickly become one of my favorite records. (Holly Brook, the female ghost, also

sings on this CD.) Though I was familiar with the score, I didn't actually understand the story so as it unfolded in front of me, I was on the edge of my seat. The best part was that it almost felt like I saw two different shows simultaneously - the play and then a concert version of *Whisper House*.

The music was played in a way that felt concert-like and yet still very dramatic. Both Poe and Brook had earpieces (something you rarely see in a musical) and were in perfect sync with the incredible seven-piece band. The beautiful arrangements of Sheik's songs featured a fantastic woodwind/horn section – clarinet, bass clarinet, french horn, trumpet and piccolo trumpet. These arrangements were some of the best moments in the music. The duo's vocal harmonies throughout all 12 songs were spot-on and perfectly in tune.

The band became a subtle part of the story as they dawned different masquerades throughout the show. First as the ghosts of a hired band for a steamship that had sunk off the Atlantic in the early 1900's, followed by top hat illusionists, Japanese geishas, masked Venetian carnival revelers and Hessian soldiers. All of this just added to the overall effect of the show.

Sheik has created a whole new musical vernacular for musicals. It's current and up-to-date while still never losing his story-telling abilities. He's bridging the gap between the two worlds and doing it very well. Because his perspective is so current, when *Whisper House* gets to Broadway (because I know it will), it will not feel out-dated or be coined as a "bad rock musical" as several of other "pop/rock" musicals have.

The music wasn't the only fantastic part of this production. Mare Winningham's portrayal of Lilly is Tony-worthy; every nuance was perfectly meticulous. The interplay between Lilly and her servant, Yosuhiko (Arthur Acuna), was completely understated – just like it should have been. You knew that each other cared and relied on the other, but neither one of them could outwardly show it. Every character had an enormous backstory that the audience members weren't privy too, yet we all understood each of the characters.

The beautiful set designed by Michael Schweikardt and incredible lighting design by Matthew Richards only added to the already Broadway-worthy production. The sound design by Dan Moses Schreier (as noted above) is some of the best I've heard in the theatre and the projections they used (during most of the songs) just added another dimension to the production.

"If you have a bell let it ring/While you live you should sing/But the show's over for now/Take a bow" the male ghost sings as the show ends. This production ends February 21st at The Old Globe, but I have a feeling it's far from playing it's last song. If the producers are smart, they'll find a small Broadway house, like the John Golden Theatre, to let *Whisper House* sing into next year's Tony Awards.

[Whisper House](#) at The Old Globe

January 13th – February 21, 2010

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A NOTE FROM DALE



Rob, Hitch, Charlene & Jenni have all posted new columns as of Feb 11th.

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THE WHISPER HOUSE - READ KRISTIN'S NEWS

TEEN THEATRE PERSPECTIVE by Kristin Perkins

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In fact all the technical aspects of the show were superb. Lighting designer Mathew Richards created a definite mood and specific time of day as well as handling the light of the light house. Besides the basic lighting there was also Aaron Rhyne in charge of projection design, whether it was clips of war, the ocean, or ghostly humanoid shapes floating on stage the effect was stunning. The sound, designed by Dan Moses Schreier, was always realistic from seagull calls and crashing waves to dropping bombs.

The actors were all very good especially Mare Winningham as a gruff but ultimately endearing Aunt Lucy; pulls off the sarcasm and bite but makes you love her nevertheless. Christopher, the displaced young boy who is forced into his Aunt Lily's care, is played by A.J. Foggiano, who for a young actor is talented and fairly convincing. Arthur Acuña plays Yasuhiro the worker who deals with the pressure of being Japanese during WWII with a grace only to be matched by the actors own sincerity.

The Whisper House is not a "regular musical", you would do better to think of it as a play with multiple musical interludes. The songs are all sung by the unnamed Ghosts, playing them are David Poe and Holly Brook, both talented singers and are together a formidable duet. The music composed by Tony award winner Duncan Sheik (Spring Awakening), is an original and entertaining mix of Folk, Modern and elements of rock. The voices tended to be husky, the music held a strong beat, the overall effect was haunting.

The Whisper House is thoroughly enjoyable, technically stunning, with great acting and music, the overall directing, by Peter Askin, was well done. The one hamper to an otherwise great show was the script itself. Written by Kyle Jarrow the script of the Whisper House seems full of potential but in its current state doesn't know what it wants to be. It's a ghost story, but its also an unexpected comedy, a coming of age tale, a romance, a historical social commentary, it tries to be all of these things but elements tend to collide and mitigate each other. Each individual piece is never played to the full extent or properly explained in all aspects and the overall whole feels weak. The story is a good one, the music is enjoyable nevertheless one leaves ultimately unsatisfied.

The Whisper House is playing until February 21, for more information go to www.theoldglobe.org.

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Playhouse

Whisper House Old Globe Kristin Perkins

The first thing you notice upon walking in to the Old Globe Theater to see Whisper House is the set. Although this may usually hold true for any production that does not use an opening curtain I would like to emphasis this point; you notice the set before you notice the people, the seats, and the sound, it grabs your attention and like any exceptional piece of art holds it there. The set, designed by Michael Schweikardt, is a glorious, emotional expression of what the Whisper House should have been. More literally it was a lighthouse stripped of its walls but for a door, built to fill the height of the stage with three levels; bottom kitchen, upstairs bedroom, and the light itself with tightly curled stair in-between. The design was both realistically detailed and fantastically built.



The Secret Garden - Patio Playhouse



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POWAY NEWS CHIEFTAIN

January 28, 2010

Old Globe premieres 'Whisper House'

BY JOSÉ A. LÓPEZ

"We are here to say, that all of this is real," sing the dapperly-dressed ghosts of "Whisper House," the highly anticipated musical that got its world premiere at the Old Globe Theatre last week.

The WWII-set play, running through Feb. 21, tells the story of an 11-year-old boy sent to live with his aunt in a New England lighthouse after his aviator father is killed in action by the Japanese and his mother suffers a nervous breakdown.

The play comes from rocker Duncan Sheik (co-written with Kyle Arrow), whose first journey into theater led to "Spring Awakening," the 2006 Tony-winning musical about teenage confusion that wowed critics and fans with its mash-up of 19th-century aesthetics and contemporary rock songs.

While that play exploded from the stage, with the large cast breaking into songs that would easily blend into the playlist of any alternative rock station, "Whisper House," seems to do the opposite, closing in on itself to create an air of mystery and paranoia and a sense of loss that permeates the piece.

As the boy, Christopher, longs for home, he clashes with his closely guarded aunt Lilly, winningly portrayed by Mare Winningham.

Because the lighthouse is a sensitive point of national security during the play's wartime era, she's told she has to dismiss her Japanese helper, Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña), who Christopher suspects — based on tips from the ghosts — may be a spy.

The singing in "Whisper House" is left up to two unnamed ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, who wander through the lighthouse while the other characters go along their non-musical lives.

Only young Christopher (A.J. Foggiano) can hear their songs — they are accompanied by a full orchestra decked out as departed souls that play mostly behind a scrim — or see their actions, though what the ghosts can and can't physically do is not clearly defined.



Mare Winningham as Lilly and Holly Brook as a ghost in Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House," which runs at the Old Globe Theatre through Feb. 21. Photo Provided by Craig Schwartz

Both Poe and Brook, professional recording artists, have strong and unique voices that well serve the songs, mostly atmospheric ballads that bear some of the trademarks of Sheik's pre-theater recordings.

"Whisper House," is a rewarding experience, a subtle mood piece filled with empty spaces that leaves it up to the viewers to fill in. It could, however, benefit from a few more variety in the songs to break up the piece ("The Tale of Solomon Snell" which details the fall of an overly cautious man accomplishes that).

"Whisper House" is directed by Peter Askin. Jason Hart is the musical director and Wesley Fata directs the dance.

Tickets are \$36-89. For more information, go to www.TheOldGlobe.org.

[RETURN to HOME PAGE >>](#)

LOST IN YONKERS



The Old Globe Theater, now through February 28

Contact 619-23-GLOBE or www.TheOldGlobe.org

Review by Peggy Lips-Kaz

Hold on to your seats and break out your wallet. This is THE show to see. As you know, I really love live theater, especially when it is as perfect as is this production.

Yes, we start with a Pulitzer prize winning play by Neil Simon. That is an A+.

Now the complimentary component...a superb cast !!! You have been transported to Yonkers, NY for the evening. Just listen to the actors, then you'll know, for sure, where you are. Their expressions are such a part of their complete characterizations.

Tony Award winning Judy Kaye is spectacular as Grandma Kurnitz. This is not a typical role for her to play. As a talented singer, her roles normally include singing, but not this one. She is the matriarch of the family and a survivor of Germany during the 1930's. Her children hate her, but she was doing the best for her children, the only way that she knew how. She wanted to teach them that the world is tough, and you have to be tough to survive. These lessons came with a huge cost for her children. She is a magnificent "Grandma Diva".

The youngest of the cast, Austen Myers and Steven Kaplan, portraying Jay and Arty (grandsons) have extensive acting credits and they were great. It is encouraging to see really good young talents to carry on this great profession of acting.

Grandma's surviving children were played by Spencer Rowe, Jeffrey Bender and Amanda Naughton. Their sibling interplay was fabulous ! The last and certainly not least was Jennifer Regan as Bella, the fourth child. Hers was probably the most demanding role of the show. She portrayed the mentally disabled daughter. You never forgot who she was. From the silly, loud woman-child to the sad withdrawn, insecure girl, she drew in the audience to her plight.

The audience experienced all the human emotions associated with humor, fear, sadness, pain, memories, lessons, lost opportunities and choices. In this theater, you can see all the audience experiencing the show.

"The cherry on top of the ice cream soda" is the wonderful new 250-seat arena-style Sheryl and Harvey White Theater in the Conrad Presby Center at the Old Globe complex. This means it is a theater in the "round", but it is actually square. The audience is on all sides of the stage. Every member of the audience has a perfect eye-level view of the actors on stage. This has state-of-the-art-acoustics,

two-stage level entrances, plush seating and complete access for patrons with disabilities. Every aisle was used by the performers to give the sense of physical involvement with the show.

In the program are two wonderful stories about Neil Simon. One reason his stories are so realistic according to Simon, "I tried to capture the characters as I do in my semi-autobiographical plays. I spared nobody in that play"(Lost in Yonkers). The chemistry shown between the two brothers was similar to the relationship Neil had with his own brother, Danny. The timing of teasing, cons and sibling bantering are familiar to many of us.

Of course the talent behind the scenes shows itself in the flawless production. Scott Schwartz is the Director. Kudos to all the crew who kept the timing, cues, lighting, sound and staging all in tune !

This is a play that will evoke self-reflection, gratitude, memories and best of all, Love.

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San Diego beyond the surface

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Posted by: **cantmisssd** | February 16, 2010

Whisper House

Seeking out historical parallels for modern fears is natural and probably healthy. There's a decided comfort to knowing- or at least believing- that other people have faced these same challenges and the world is still here. In the Old Globe's current production of *Whisper House*, the string of human experience connecting us all to the ghosts of the past is explored both literally and figuratively, as ghosts of a decades old shipwreck haunt the isolation, fear and mistrust of the caretakers of a lighthouse against the backdrop of more ambiguous uncertainties of World War Two.

The story opens as Christopher arrives at the lighthouse where his aunt is the caretaker. His father has been shot down in the South Pacific, and he's thrust indefinitely into the care of his estranged and emotionally closed-off aunt Lilly and forced to wrestle with his grief when he meets the Japanese assistant caretaker at the lighthouse, 'Mr.' Yasuhiro. Yasuhiro's hidden agenda is exposed as new military regulations demand the relocation of all Japanese from at-risk areas.

Providing musical narration and indulgent support for the boy's assumptions are the ghosts of a lovelorn couple who drowned 20 years earlier because the lighthouse lamp was out. As ghosts tend to be in such stories, they're mischevious and malicious as they lead Christopher down a path to undermine others' chance for love.

Music and lyrics by Duncan Sheik is apparently one of the primary draws, but I've always been indifferent to his work, so I went in with no particular excitement or expectation. While the music occasionally lapsed lyrically into painful literalism, it functioned well and carried the narrative. Leaving the theatre, there didn't seem to be the buzz that the final curtain usually brings, perhaps because the structure doesn't lend itself to developing an emotional connection to the story or characters. The songs take up a major portion of the 90 minute runtime, but aren't an active part of the plot. The songs narrate what's happening, but those things don't *actually* happen. So often, the actual action of *Whisper House* feels disjointed vignettes chosen at random to break up the minstrel chronicle of events.

Ultimately though, I was impressed by how well the production juggled eternal themes of insecurity, heartbreak and isolation while connecting the racial fears of the wartime 40s with post-9/11, vaguely-racial paranoia. Race- and visual cues in general- provide a clumsy brush for judgment. But in times when that which threatens us seems immeasurably beyond our control, the most accessible outlet for our fears is often the most attractive. And while we may not always have a poorly defined, difficult to combat foreign enemy, the fundamental fears and insecurities of opening up emotionally is universal and eternal. Multiple generations of love lost make sure we remember that it's simply part of being alive.

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MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2010

Whisper House at The Old Globe



David Poe and Holly Brook in the World Premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House* at The Old Globe, Jan. 13 - Feb. 21, 2010. Photo by Craig Schwartz.

Tony and Grammy Award-winning songwriter Duncan Sheik follows up his Broadway sensation, *Spring Awakening*, with this haunting new musical. It's 1942 - at the height of World War II - and Christopher, an imaginative young boy, is sent to live with an aunt he's never met: Lilly, a reclusive woman who serves as the keeper of a remote lighthouse. Not yet comfortable in his surroundings, Christopher begins to hear strange music no one else can hear seeping through the walls. It doesn't take long for him to suspect the lighthouse may be haunted, and these ghosts tell him that Yasujiro, a Japanese worker that Lilly has employed, should not be trusted. Is Christopher's imagination getting the best of him? Or are these ghosts warning Christopher about the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

I mentioned last week that I went to see Duncan Sheik perform a concert at The Old Globe and was in complete awe of the show. A few days later I followed up by seeing the production of *Whisper House* and I cannot stress enough that everyone should go see this show. I don't really consider myself much of a theatre person mostly because, let's face it, it's not the cheapest form of entertainment. I tend to be skeptical when the word "musical" is attached, and even more so when child actors are involved. I know that is really weird, but the former makes me think of grating repetitive songs like "Oklahoma!" and the latter because they can be kind of annoying if their cuteness overpowers their stage skills. That said, this show is fantastic, and Eric Zutty, who plays Christopher, plays off his aunt Lilly's character perfectly (played by Mare Winningham who is a recognizable tv, film, and theatre actress). Since I don't want to be one of those people that tells you the ending, I really won't go more into the story than is described above, but truly, the ghosts and the songs they sing are the stars of this show. I felt the show presented a WWII story I hadn't



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heard before, but was also really relatable to the wars we are in today and how our leaders and lawmakers create a culture of fear. Additionally, though I saw the show four nights ago, the songs are still in my head...in this case a good thing... and they work in the story or as stand alone pieces of music. The simple set, the full band, the outstanding casting, and the beautiful soundtrack make for a perfect show that I would definitely see again.

For info on tickets, [click here](#).

MUSICAL NUMBERS

"Better to Be Dead"

"We're Here to Tell You (Part 1)"

"We're Here to Tell You (Part 2)"

"And Now We Sing"

"The Tale of Solomon Snell"

"Earthbound Starlight"

"Play Your Part"

"You've Really Gone and Done It Now"

"How It Feels"

"I Don't Believe in You"

"Better to Be Dead"

"Take a Bow"

[Listen to Whisper House](#)

Labels: [duncan sheik](#), [the old globe](#)

POSTED BY **ROSEMARY** ON MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2010



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Tuesday, Jan 19, 2010

Theater Review: Duncan Sheik's 'Whisper House'

January 18, 2010 by [Lance Carter](#)

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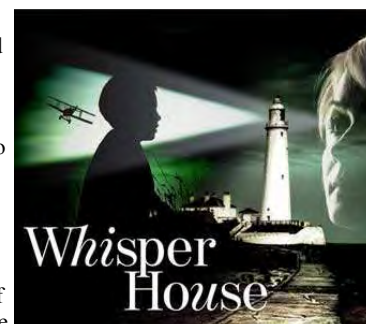
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This past weekend I saw **Duncan Sheik**'s new musical, *Whisper House* at **The Old Globe Theater** in **San Diego**. I say musical, but it's not really a musical in conventional terms. The cast don't burst out in song and dance across the stage. No, they leave the singing to the Ghosts.

Set in **World War Two** (1942), Christopher (**Eric Brent Zutty**) is sent to live with his aunt Lilly (**Mare Winningham**) in a remote lighthouse. Christopher soon begins to hear music that no one else can hear and to top it off, he begins to suspect his aunts Japanese worker, Yasuhiro (**Arthur Acuna**), of being a spy.

And that's all I'm giving away.

The Ghosts played by indie rockers, **Holly Brook** and **David Poe**, come and go in the scenes, singing and pretty much doing whatever they want. They take off lampshades and turn the stand into make-shift microphones, fling off Christopher's covers when he's trying to sleep and make general mischief for the cast. They act as... narrators of the show? I'm hesitant to say narrators because at some points they deliberately sing their songs to screw things up. And that's what makes this show so great. The Ghosts are having a fantastic time messing with everyone. And usually to a bad outcome.





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The set is fantastic, the songs are great (I'm still singing *The Tale of Solomon Snell*, *We're here to tell you* and *Take a Bow* to myself) and the cast is perfect – particularly Winningham (she reminded me of my aunt) where she has this detached love for Christopher. You know she cares for him but can't bring herself to show him any sort of emotion.

If you liked (or loved, like me) Sheik's *Spring Awakening*, you'll love this show.

[Click here to listen to the music.](#)

Music & Lyrics by **Duncan Sheik**

Book & Lyrics by **Kyle Jarrow**

Directed by **Peter Askin**

Now playing at **The Old Globe** through February 21

Tickets: \$55-\$105

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La Bohème

San Diego Opera brings Puccini to the Civic Center

Amy Fleming

The Opera. The image this brings to mind isn't exactly hip or happening. In fact, it's more likely to involve lots of old people, songs sung in languages incomprehensible to even their native speakers, and large women in Viking helmets.

After attending our very own San Diego Opera production of Puccini's *La Bohème*, about a poor writer in turn-of-the-century Paris who falls in love with his sickly, but beautiful, neighbor, I can say two of those three images are accurate.



The Power of Emotion

Cory Weaver/sdopera.com

While there were no particularly Rubenesque Viking women to be found on stage, I did find myself a part of a small minority of audience members under the age of 50. This, however, didn't make the production any less enjoyable. When you go to a show, your neighbor shouldn't be the focus of your attention anyways, assuming the production was worth what you paid for your tickets.

This version of Puccini's *La Bohème* was more than successful at diverting my attention away from my geriatric fellow audience members. Whether or not I could understand what was being said, or rather, sung, the force of the emotion behind it was so apparent, I couldn't help but be moved.

Piotr Beczala, playing the role of Rodolfo, was particularly adept at conveying the feelings of his character to an audience that understand absolutely nothing of what was being sung, linguistically speaking (unless you fixated on the supertitles, which acted as nothing but a distraction from the real drama of the music). But because of the force of his tenor voice, you feel Rodolfo's pain as he clings to his dying love, Mimi.

The other noteworthy performance within the production was that of Priti Gandhi playing Musetta. She acted as the comic center of the opera, playing the diva with verve. During her solo *Quando me n'vò* (Musetta's Waltz), Gandhi had me bent over, practically in tears of mirth as she hoists up her skirts, desperate for the attention of her former lover.

The opera isn't for everyone. Most teenagers would certainly not be able to sit through a three-hour musical production in a foreign language. But before you write off the opera as strictly for old people and those who speak Italian, keep in mind that emotion is a universal language.

It's Better to Be Dead?

Duncan Sheik's eerie new play *Whisper House* debuts at the Old Globe

Taryn Finete-O'Connor

It's four in the morning and you're at an after-hours piano bar on the top level of a cruise ship that's headed for shore. The headliners are the too cool lovers who wore Converse to your high school prom, and never really gave a damn about what you thought, as long as they were together. Then the lighthouse fails, and the ship goes down, but their spirits never drown. They haunt the lighthouse that failed them, and seek revenge, all during the vulnerable age of WWII. Welcome to Duncan Sheik's *Whisper House*.

The Old Globe Theater's world premier of the musical embodies the fascination of a haunted funhouse twisted with the hardships a family faces when they realize that all's fair in love and war. Aunt Lilly runs a lighthouse during WWII, but with the threats of U-Boats and mutinous Japanese, as well as a little boy who wants to be anything but helpful, it's hard to keep everything sailing smoothly.

Luckily, we have our piano bar duet, played by the eerie Holly Brook and David Poe, there to sing us through the story. And when they disappear, you feel yourself sinking too, into your seat, while the plot slows down. The two ghosts are a breath of fresh air, with hauntingly enchanting voices, and their story is the one you're left dying to watch onstage, not left to the imagination, especially seeing that they have the talent to play it better than one probably could ever imagine.

Not that Lilly and her ever complicated relationships with her nephew and only companion, Mr. Hatsuhero, aren't riveting, but they lack the curiosity, and the magic that the two ghosts bring to the stage. It may not be an instant success like Sheik's last piece, *Spring Awakening*, but with some thoughtful attention to plot, this show could be Broadway bound.



Holly Brook and David Poe sing a ghostly song.

theoldglobe.org

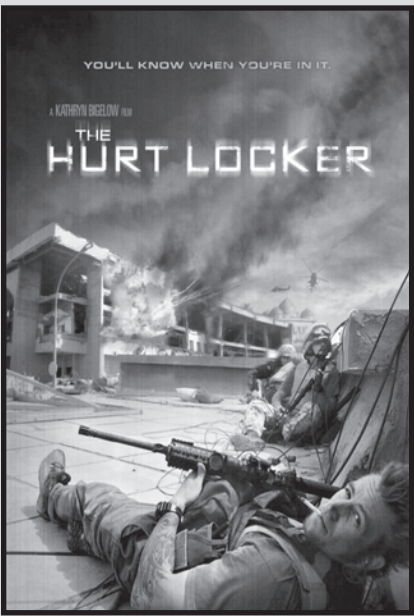
The Tower's Oscar Favorites

Disclaimer: Written before the ceremony

Best Picture

Adam: *A Single Man*. As much as this may be considered cheating, I don't really care. This movie was not nominated, yet it was the best movie of the year. With a stellar screenplay, flawless art direction and cinematography, a beautiful soundtrack and phenomenal acting, it is my clear winner despite the fact that it was snubbed (for *The Blind Side*??). As for my realistic choice, I would have to go with *Inglourious Basterds*. This is Tarantino's strongest all-around film since *Pulp Fiction* and deserves to win the award that *Pulp* missed out on.

Jake: *The Hurt Locker*. Easily the most intense movie I saw this year, *The Hurt Locker* combines spot-on portrayals of soldiers, gripping depictions of bomb defusion, and beautiful cinematography and editing. Director Kathryn Bigalow captures suspenseful shots of the actors in their quest to survive a seemingly endless war. The movie does not shove its political message down the throats of viewers as some movies this year did, but rather provides an unbiased look at the daily lives of a company of soldiers in Iraq. Scene after scene, the movie presents tense situations on the desolate Iraqi battlefields. From the dead silence of a sniper battle to the terrifying shouts of a car bomb scene, Bigalow continually finds ways to take hold of the audience and not let go.



iconocritic.com

Best Actor

Adam: Colin Firth, *A Single Man*. Firth's portrayal of a homosexual professor who has to deal with the loss of his partner is unparalleled. It's a day in the life of a suicidal intellectual who is just trying to understand the world around him. And the most amazing of Firth's feats is his ability to follow the vision of debut-director Tom Ford and end up with such a beautiful product.



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Jake: Colin Firth, *A Single Man*. While Jeff Bridges probably deserves and will win this award, I did not see *Crazy Heart*, so I can't comment on his performance. However, the emotional spectacle of Firth's portrayal of a gay man who has lost his partner is spectacular. His performance is, at its most basic, extremely likable, yet subtle. He finds ways in his interactions with other characters to create a fleshed-out persona for a lightly-written part. In the role, Firth mastered an understated portrayal of grief at the loss of a loved one.

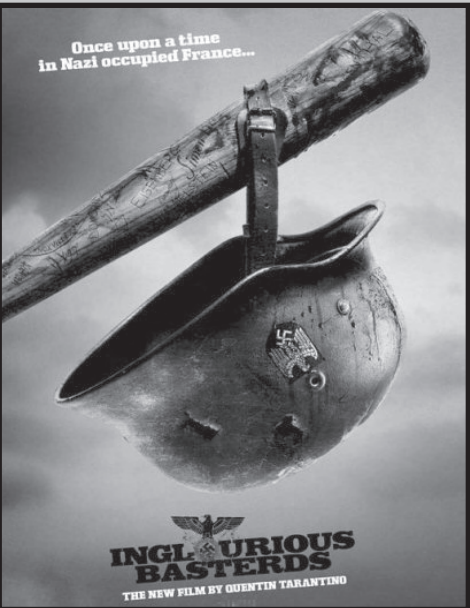
Best Actress

Adam: Carey Mulligan, *An Education*. Mulligan, age 24, plays a 16 years old British schoolgirl who falls in love with a man about twice her age and has to cope with the reality of living a life too old for her. As an actress, Mulligan had to forget her real age, become a convincing teenager and then pretend to be older, but she was actually just pretending to be her own age. Sounds complicated? I'm sure it was for her as well.

Jake: Carey Mulligan, *An Education*. With, unfortunately, little chance of winning, Mulligan stands out in a category of uninteresting performances this year. Helen Mirren is getting old and has won before, Gabourey Sidibe was powerful, but painful to watch, Sandra Bullock was painful to watch, and Meryl Streep has won many times before. Mulligan portrays a young British girl smitten with an older man. Her performance is realistic and enjoyable to watch develop. While Bullock will probably win this award for her bland work as a Southern mother in the feel-good *Blind Side*, Mulligan's performance deserves it.

Best Director

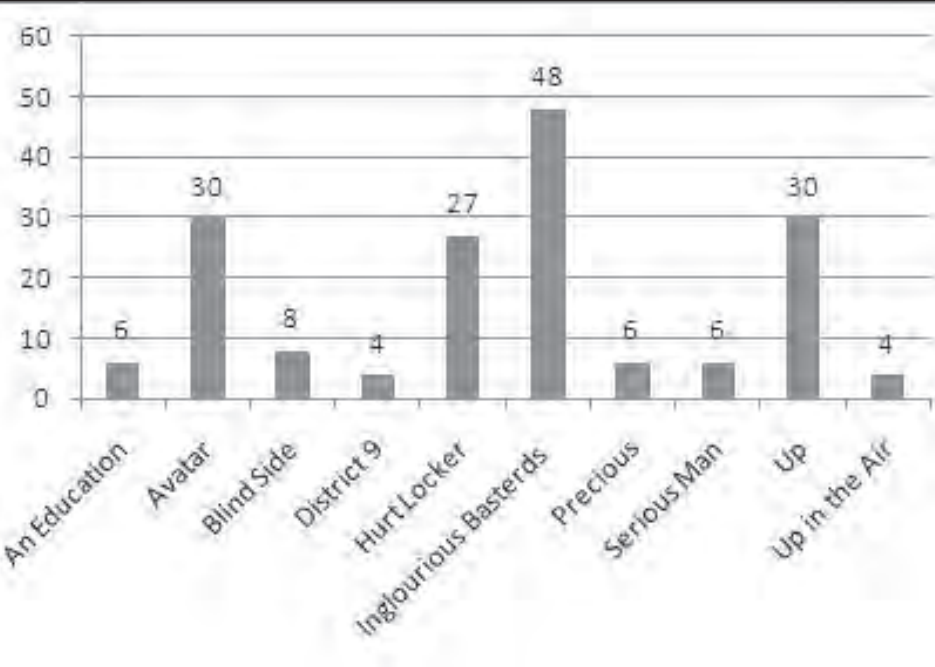
Adam: Quentin Tarantino, *Inglourious Basterds*. It's Tarantino's turn. Just like it was Scorsese's turn four years ago and the Coen brothers' turn last year, this year Tarantino



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deserves it. He's created enough brilliantly written, acted and shot films that his victory is long overdue. Having been robbed in the past due to his direct and quite gruesome style, this year's *Inglourious* has been well enough received that the critics could and should cast him their votes.

Jake: Kathryn Bigalow, *The Hurt Locker*. Film directors have many responsibilities, as they must turn the screenplay into a visual product. Some of their duties entail deciding how each shot of the film looks, where the camera should be set up, the lighting, set design, actor's movements and line deliveries, and in most cases, helping to edit the final product. With *The Hurt Locker*, Bigalow succeeds in bringing out the strongest performances from her actors, picking the most intriguing camera angles (with shots from a robot's perspective, camera in the dirt perspective, and from inside of a suicide bomber's eyes), and editing the product together to be tight and striking, to create a masterfully directed movie.



Student poll for Best Picture

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Whisper House

January 16, 12:20 AM San Diego Theater Examiner Erin Reiter



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David Poe, Eric Brent Zutty, Arthur Acuña, Holly Brook and Mare Winningham in *Whisper House*
Photo by Craig Schwartz.

Whisper House at the Old Globe Theater brings you coming of age story set in a lighthouse that just may be haunted. It is in the middle of World war Two and a young boy named Christopher is sent to live with his aunt, a remote and self sufficient woman who has little experience with children. Christopher wants to go back to his mother who has suffered a mental collapse due to the untimely death of his father, a pilot who was shot down. His aunt runs the lighthouse she inherited from her father and runs it out of duty and her own lack of bravery to explore the world. She has a dedicated helper in a Japanese gentleman who Christopher immediately greets with suspicion and mistrust. The main narrators and strongest voices in the story belong to the mischievous ghosts who Christopher can see and hear. They use this power to alternately scare, comfort and cajole Christopher into

action, whether it is for the best or not.

The performers in this cast are all excellent, and helped make the characters more than the caricatures that they could have become. Mr.Yasuhiro is played with all the quiet dignity and pride that an honorable gentleman would have in his situation. Played by Arthur Acuna, Yasuhiro is a character that strikes a chord with those watching and makes you wonder what happens to the character after the curtain falls. Lily is played with a quiet humor by Mare Winningham who was last seen in the world premier musical *Bonnie and Clyde* at the La Jolla Playhouse. Lily is a pragmatist and someone who does her duty, whether she wants to or not. She and Christopher circle each other with a wariness that stems from both the situation and the fact that they are strangers to each other. The ghosts performed by David Poe and Holly Brook bring a macabre joy to the havoc they wreck and David Poe especially makes being a ghost look like a lot of fun.

Whisper House is not a clear cut musical in the traditional way; it is more a play with music as the main mode of communicating. The ghosts are your narrators and use the songs to not only describe what is going on but also to help set the mood for the scenes between songs. While this play is set during World War Two the music is contemporary and has a definite rock vibe. It is a modern anachronistic touch that helps lend to the idea that the ghosts may be observing and interacting with the people in 1942 but that they have the ability to outlast any sense of linear time. The songs are clever, but you must listen very closely because there is a lot of information contained within them and if you miss it you may be a few steps behind. If you are a fan of Duncan Sheiks' *Spring Awakening* you will like the music in *Whisper House*.

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Heitman & Heitman

Tim and Paula Rant, Wax, and Rhapsodize

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2010



The Whisper House -- At the Old Globe in San Diego

It's a Duncan Sheik show, so you gotta compare it to Spring Awakening right? This one was even more of a play with music than Spring was. The show is 90 minutes with no intermission but there was only about 20 minutes of stage worthy material there. With Spring you had the raw energy of the kids sexuality all over the stage to carry through the 'with music' part and to make you forget the anachronistic nature of the modern music against the period piece. We don't have that teen angst in Whisper so the anachronisms are like cymbal crashes at a cello concert. The handheld mics, micstands, and modern day musical styles and lyrics are jarring.

The vocalists were highly stylized with thin and shallow voices amplified to match the volume of the band. They were very good singers for the style of music they were working with but I have to say that when the kid sang his 2 or 3 bars at the end of the show, I wanted to hear much more of THAT voice. It sounded stronger than the two ghosts put together. We had the same quality of lyrics in this show (rhyming 'Boston' with 'caution') that we had in Spring (where we rhymed 'jump' with 'come') but again we were able to look past that while experiencing Spring; we just figured we weren't watching a William Finn show and got over it – cuz there was so much there on stage to keep you there. Whisper however seems like it's attempting to be real theatre, therefore it can't lean on the audiences willingness to forgive the raw untrained quality of the piece that was given for Spring.

You have to earn every moment of stage time. That's true for the actor as

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well as the director and the writer. If you are going to repeat lyrics you need a good reason for it. In Pop music it just the style, but the stage requires the performance to engage the audience with each moment, each silence, each note and each lyric. Pop repetitions in the tunes were just repetitious. The songs were good for what they were. They'd likely be very nice in a concert setting or on a recording, they just didn't do anything to move the story along.

The exposition led us to believe that we were going to learn a lot about these ghosts in the lighthouse. It was a disappointment to find that the exposition of the ghost story was simply there to justify their presence in the play. Their plight and haunting were barely reference in the body of the play.

It wasn't a BAD night of theatre, but it certainly wasn't engaging either. I'm glad I went. I like to see lots of different kind of stuff and anything with music is truly my cup of tea. I would recommend it if you don't have to pay full price.

posted by Tim Heitman @ [5:24 PM](#) [2 comments](#) [links to this post](#)



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2009

What Do You See!!

The gripping tensile strength of art lies in its complete subjectivity. Take Andy Warhol's can of tomato soup. Whaddaysee? Take a second and think about it, what DO you see??



Uwannaknow what I see? A ticketing system. A metaphor of the business that I'm in. You go to the store you grab the soup you go to the register you pay your 2 bucks for the soup. BUT there's more than soup in that purchase. You don't think of it right at first but you just paid a Canning Fee, a Labeling Fee, a Packaging and Transportation Fee, a Retail Markup Fee – you can probably think up a few more can't you?

Every company that participated in getting that can of soup into your hands got a piece of your 2 bucks. If your receipt had that all broken out into its

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Monday, February 08, 2010

Whisper House Revisited

On Wednesday night, I was out at Bar Pink catching Joe Jack Talcum of the Dead Milkmen, and I bumped into some friends who had gone to see *Whisper House* based on [the review I wrote about the show](#). This pleased me to no end, because it's nice to know people actually read and take to heart some of my suggestions, but even more than that, they loved the show as much as I did. I had already made plans to see the show again the next night, but based on their thoughts, I was excited to see how the show had changed from when I saw it. I knew there were some re-writes and changes in the story, and that the original Christopher was no longer in the show, so I was interested to see if it would hold up.

I don't really ever read *The Reader* outside of *Blurt*, but while flipping through, I read their scathing review of the show and I questioned my own opinion, as if maybe I'm just not theatre-savvy enough to be appropriately critical. After seeing the show a second time, call me easy, but I loved the show even more, and frankly will just continue to ignore *The Reader's* reviews on just about everything, because how they see the world is clearly different than the way I see it.

This time around I took my mom. She's the kind of person who loves specific shows...*Hair*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and we even dropped \$95 a ticket to see Sebastian Bach as the lead in *Jesus Christ Superstar* a few years back. As a kid she used to take us to pretty much anything [Bill Virchis](#) was involved with around San Diego and sometimes to local high school productions, too, but bigger shows were out of our budget. I'll also say about my mom that after I kept programming it into their car stereo, KPRi is her favorite radio station, though she still has no idea who Duncan Sheik is, but she's pretty open minded when it comes to music.

I didn't want to influence my mom with the show, so I didn't tell her anything about it except that I saw the show and thought she'd like it. And she did. She loved it, actually. She thought the music was great, the story fit. She read the program before the show and she really connected the parallels with wartime fear-mongering done during WWII and the U.S. response post-9/11.

It isn't a complicated story, and any holes that might've existed have been filled. I suspect that if you're a right-wing conservative, you'll have a visceral reaction to this show and it's probably not for you. Ditto if you're not into contemporary rock music. I consider the music quite mellow, but at times the seniors around me looked like they were watching Black Sabbath or something. After the show, an elderly woman turned to her husband and said, "You couldn't pay me enough money in the world to see this play again." And that's fine. I can see how this show wasn't for her. On the other hand, as my 59 year old mom said, "sometimes old farts just can't be pleased." As I said last time, if you're looking for a traditional musical, this is not it. I've heard that one of the biggest complaints is that there's no dancing and that the actors don't sing. For that I am grateful. I prefer the singing be left to the ghosts.

The show has two more weeks before it ends on February 21 and I would encourage you to check it out. I know it's not cheap, but there are several outlets for discounted tickets that you can try: [20under30](#): The Old Globe has a program for people under 30 to buy tickets for \$20. Only the purchaser has to be under 30, and your ID will be checked at the show, but this is a bargain worth investigating.

Win Here: Since you've read this far, I have TWO pairs of tickets to give away for the show. You can see any performance (subject to availability). Send your name and phone number in an email with subject *Whisper House* to sddialedin AT gmail. I will pick one winner on Wednesday and one more on Friday.

Sarah Taylor Ellis

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Whisper House: Old Globe, 1/29/10

2 02 2010

“I’ll record in my diary that, theatrically speaking, 2010 started in San Diego with this occult charmer.” -Charles McNulty, [LA Times review](#)

This is quite a bold statement from McNulty, but *Whisper House* – while still needing a bit of development – certainly makes a dynamic impression. Following the success of *Spring Awakening*, Duncan Sheik’s latest theatrical venture at the Old Globe – along with librettist Kyle Jarrow – is something strikingly new on stage, yet strangely familiar from a different form of media.

In the midst of WWII, 11-year-old Christopher loses his father, a soldier whose fighter plane is shot down over the Pacific. When this tragedy debilitates his mother, the inquisitive boy is shipped off to his emotionally-distant Aunt Lilly, who runs a lighthouse on the New England shore with the help of a Japanese immigrant named Yasuhiro. Set afloat in this strange new world, Christopher begins to hear enchanting music: ghost musicians of a steamship that sank on Halloween night in 1912. These ghosts give Christopher the attention that his aunt denies – and slowly draw the boy to clues that Yasuhiro may be an enemy spy.

I am always intrigued by the form of musicals, and the interrelationship of book and numbers in this piece is remarkably innovative for stage. With a few exceptions, *Whisper House* effectively plays like a film with a pop music soundtrack.

The lead ghosts, the exceptional David Poe and Holly Brook, toy with Christopher’s emotions through a haunting score that loosely and poetically comments on the dramatic situation, much as a film heightens an emotional moment by amping up the background music. Because the characters in the “real life” drama of *Whisper House* only sing in diegetic moments, the ghosts’ music is spectral just as a film’s soundtrack is spectral: simultaneously there and yet not there. (This also explains why – after the opening number – the audience neglected to applaud between pieces. The production numbers rise to the forefront and fade out into underscoring, much as a film score.) Director Peter Askin stages the show accordingly: the spotlight creates an obvious montage effect in some musical numbers, panning from character to character as they silently reflect on a dramatic moment. I turned to my roommate laughing as we reached the final number “Take a Bow,” which confirmed my filmic observations: the song lyrically brings out the characters one-by-one for a bow, much as a filmic rolling of the credits. I have never seen such an interrelationship of music and book onstage before, which places *Whisper House* as an exciting theatrical innovation.

A.J. Foggiano’s Christopher was – I’m sorry to say – disappointing. The entire musical centers around the boy’s perception of the world, yet Faggiano could not command the stage accordingly. Mare Winningham (as Lilly) and Arthur Acuna (Yasuhiro) deliver much more galvanizing and emotionally-nuanced performances, although certain elements of their relationship should be foregrounded earlier in the narrative. Admittedly, it took me some time to delve into the plot, which lacks fluidity in the beginning; some storyline shifts are a little jarring and unconvincing. Creating this believability from the outset is essential because *Whisper House* is largely a realist drama/film, with accompanying spectral song.

Nonetheless, Jarrow hooked me about 10 or 15 minutes in. Now for what most excites me about *Whisper House*, besides the formal innovations. If anyone knows how to contact Kyle Jarrow, Duncan Sheik, or anyone on the creative team directly, please let me know. I think I know how to develop *Whisper House* into a powerful political commentary


with even stronger contemporary relevance. All the pieces are in place: the ghosts already straddle 1912 and modern-day America in costume, gesture, and musical style. Yet the ghosts' motivation for revenge right now is simply a thwarted romance: the male lead singer never had the chance to propose to his beloved female lead before their steamship sank that fated Halloween night.

In addition to this personal motive, why not give the ghosts a historically-rooted desire for the repetition of violence? Push the steamship's sinking forward a few years to 1914-1917, and *Whisper House* could tie the event to WWI. The unfinished links of WWI could then further motivate the ghosts' desire for revenge in WWII – and, by poetic extension, comment on the ongoing repetition of violence in current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

When *Whisper House*'s narrative turned to the historical implications of WWII, I was captivated. Because Lilly runs a lighthouse, the government calls on her to turn off the light and endanger approaching enemy U-boats; as Lieutenant Rando proudly explains, war makes us cogs in this “great” American machine. But as Lilly and her nephew learn, this duty to our country often comes to the detriment of personal relationships and humanity itself. This theme, which already has clear contemporary relevance, could be made all the more powerful by linking the ghosts to a historical strand, rather than simply a thwarted personal romance on a superstitious Halloween night. *Whisper House* has all the necessary ingredients to provoke thought about how the violent spectres of the past continue to haunt us today. With a bit of further development, Kyle Jarrow and Duncan Sheik will have achieved a truly remarkable new piece of musical theater.

« [“Living in a Daydream,” Act III Cabaret “Living in a Daydream” Video](#) »

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Musicals in LA

The Old Globe's Whisper House



Part musical theatre, part indie rock concert, **Duncan Sheik** and **Keith Jarrow's** world premiere musical *Whisper House* is not the kind of traditional show that can be put into a box, neatly wrapped up and dismissed as just another new musical. Ethereal, timeless, and timely, it creates an artistic presence that lives in the gap between worlds, much like the ghosts (and the humans) that inhabit the lighthouse in the story.

It is 1942 during the height of World War II when suspicion and fear became powerful weapons between men. The singing ghosts (an outstanding **David Poe** and **Holly Brook**) begin the show by introducing us to the unusual cast of misfit characters, all of whom are also somehow caught between worlds.

There is 11-year old Christopher (**A. J. Foggiano**) who comes to the lighthouse after his fighter pilot father has been shot down by the enemy and his mother has had a nervous breakdown. He is to live with his Aunt Lily (**Mare Winningham**), an isolated, fearful woman whose life has all but passed her by. Lily's Japanese hired hand Yasuhiro (**Arthur Acuna**) is a loner, haunted by the unnamed ghosts of his past and even Sheriff Charles (**Ted Koch**) and Lieutenant Rando (**Kevin Hoffmann**) are caught between the prejudice and fear of the time, attempting to do the right thing, based on their own limited understanding of the world. And do not forget the ghosts - tragically tied to Lily's lighthouse and a world left behind too soon.

As the story unravels, we see how fear affects the decisions people make and what happens when we forget to consider the consequences of our actions. It is ultimately a lesson in not letting fear run our lives, and also about the relationships we create that hold our lives together.

Director **Peter Askin**, musical director **Jason Hart** and the stellar cast have succeeded in exposing the delicate balance between our ideals and our reality, making *Whisper House* an intriguing exploration of human behavior. Long after I left the theatre I continued to think about what I had seen and how relevant its message is in today's world.



Michael Schweikardt's multi-level futuristic lighthouse design beautifully connects the past, present and future, linking the characters together in their separate worlds, as well as creating space to look between the lines of what they say into the imaginings of their minds.

Add to that the additional production elements of lighting (**Matthew Richards**), sound (**Dan Moses Schreier**) and costumes (**Jenny Mannis**) and the haunting melancholy onstage is complete.

Currently running through February 21 at **The Old Globe** in San Diego, this is a musical not to be missed. www.theoldglobe.org/.

Photos by **Craig Schwartz**



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Where Music Still Matters

Ghostly doings in the “Whisper House”

by David Coddon on January 22, 2010



(clockwise from left) David Poe, Eric Brent Zutty, Arthur Acuña, Holly Brook and Mare Winningham in the World Premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow’s *Whisper House* at The Old Globe, Jan. 13 – Feb. 21, 2010. Photo by Craig Schwartz.

Duncan Sheik’s melodies of passion come couched in fear

The whispers heard in “**Whisper House**,” **Duncan Sheik** and **Kyle Jarrow**’s new musical which opened Thursday night at the **Old Globe**, are not so much hushed voices as are they melodies of passion, longing and the kind of unfulfilled dreams that are couched in fear. The story of “*Whisper House*” is, literally, a haunting one, with 10 tunes composed by Sheik (“**Spring Awakening**”) and sung with Broadway-ready flamboyance by two ghosts (**David Poe**, **Holly Brook**). The musicians on stage (behind a scrim and dressed as if for a masquerade ball) are their equally unearthly compatriots in (mostly) playful manipulation.

The mortals in their sphere are Lilly (the dependable **Mare Winningham**), the self-proclaimed curmudgeon who operates a lighthouse on the coast of New England in 1942, with the specters of WWII looming dangerously close to shore. In her charge is 11-year-old Christopher (portrayed on Thursday by **A.J. Foggiano**), her nephew, whose soldier-father was killed fighting in the Pacific. The third, inscrutable human on the premises is Lilly’s hired helper, the Japanese Mr. Yasuhiro (**Arthur Acuna**). No sooner does young Christopher come to live with his aunt than does he begin to see and hear ghosts that no one else can. They are, he discovers, the victims of a Halloween Night yacht singing off the coast, an accident that resulted from Christopher’s grandfather’s failing to turn on the guiding lighthouse beacon. The “inquisitive” Christopher — it’s a description he uses himself on several occasions to justify his precocious curiosity — finds himself immersed in the mysteries of the lighthouse, of his aunt and of Mr. Yasuhiro, while the two singing ghosts propel him toward difficult truths.



Singer/songwriter
Duncan Sheik

The one-act “Whisper House,” which is making its world premiere at the Globe, is a play with songs rather than a musical in the purest sense. None of the mortal cast members ever breaks into song, and the ghostly renderings of Poe and Brook constitute a play within a play. It’s not all as organic as it could be, but under the direction of **Peter Askin**, the musical interludes never feel contrived or out of place. As for Sheik’s songs, the romantic “Earthbound Starlight” and the subsequent “Play Your Part” resonate most, with the theatrical and even a little silly “The Tale of Solomon Snell” the most fun for the audience. The band, under the direction of **Jason Hart**, is solid, and the Globe’s acoustics cooperate nicely.

The lighthouse set, dark and atmospheric and complete with rolling fog, is made-to-order for an old-fashioned ghost story. But the contemporary minded “Whisper House” (its WWII vigilance-paranoia is compatible with post-9/11 sensibilities) turns out to be more complex than that. Its lingering lessons — about conquering fear and accepting love — are inherently human lessons. They are essential lessons, too, learned not in whispers but in the life that unfolds around us.

Tagged as: ["Whisper House"](#), [Duncan Sheik](#), [Old Globe Theatre](#)

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A Life in the Day

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT BOOKS, MOVIES, MUSIC AND GAY LIFE IN THE LBC

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2010

Whispering in San Diego, Pt. 2

We headed back to the Inn to rest and maybe munch a few appetizers before the walk back to the theater. Tanya motioned us to the sitting room where a couple sat on one sofa tapping away at a laptop as they enjoyed the sliced meats and cheeses. And we just started talking, trading descriptions of our rooms, sharing our reasons for staying at the Inn. Soon two more couples joined us, and we all enjoyed spending the next hour or so getting to know one another. Nancy and Carol owned the canine cryogenic lab; Barry's girlfriend Nicole was starting her own business, *Puppy Air Care*, which helps breeders transports puppies on planes sitting with people rather than in the cargo hold; Lucy and her husband were visiting to see the show (like us) and were then heading back to the LA area on Sunday. Something about sitting in that cozy room, with a fireplace warming the air, seemed so comfortable that no one minded simply sitting and talking to strangers about politics, theater, dog sperm, or what have you.

A little after 7pm, we reluctantly excused ourselves to get ready for the theater.

The Old Globe was located to the right and somewhat behind the Museum of Man in Balboa Park. We followed quite a few other walkers along the Cabrillo Bridge and up the steps to the theater grounds which resemble the actual Old Globe from Shakespeare's time. At least, I think they do. No matter, it was a wonderful building on the outside, and a very intimate theater on the inside mimicking the original theater. The stage itself was uncurtained, allowing us to examine the singular set piece: a large metal spiral staircase beginning from a make shift kitchen, leading up to a bedroom off to the left side and continuing up to a large light. A quite nice deconstruction of a lighthouse from set designer Michael Schweikardt. A faint sound of waves played over the loudspeakers guiding us to our seats in the orchestra section not too far from the stage.

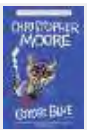


The lights dimmed, and two ghosts appeared on the stage, rocking almost

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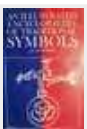
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immediately into the opening song to introduce the story and the characters. *Whisper House* takes place at a lighthouse in 1942 New England. Christopher's father was killed during the war by a Japanese plane, causing his mother to have a nervous breakdown. He arrives at the lighthouse run by his Aunt Lily with the help of her Japanese handyman Mr. Yasuhiro and refuses to settle into his temporary new life. On his first night in his new bedroom, he hears strange music and asks his Aunt about it. She tells him about a yacht in the midst of a costume ball that crashed off the rocks because the lighthouse wasn't lit one night and how the ghosts of the two singers are rumored to haunt the lighthouse. Throughout the show, the Ghosts appear to the boy, showing him that Mr. Yasuhiro might be up to something and in a time of war against the Japanese, that augment's Christopher's resentment for the handyman.

I enjoyed the story and felt the acting to be top-notch, especially by Mare Winningham as Lily and David Poe as one of the ghosts. Duncan Sheik's new music was also terrific, with clever lyrics and storytelling and very much in his style. Somehow though, I didn't feel that they connected to one another. The ghosts did all the singing throughout the entire show so we'd see the main actors performed a bit then remained onstage with the light dimmed while the ghosts came out and sang their songs. They held to the fringes of the set, away from the main actors, though the lights would focus on them. The actors sometimes continued with smaller actions, such as walking up the stairs or opening a package, but as an audience member, my eyes were drawn to the light and to the singing so I almost missed a few important parts of the story. As a whole, it seemed a bit disjointed, very stop and start, stop and start. And at times, the band seemed to overpower the singers, drowning out the female singer. I feel the show has quite a bit of potential with great songs and a great story, but the two need to be combined better. Perhaps having the ghosts interact with the actors would have helped me to enjoy the show more than I did.

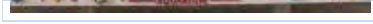
But we did walk up to Duncan Sheik afterward, said hello and now have an autographed program.

The next morning, we packed up the car and then wandered to the dining room to enjoy our complimentary breakfast: a pecan and raisin muffin with fresh squeeze orange juice followed with whole wheat buttermilk french toast for me and scrambled eggs with garlic sausage and potatoes for Caesar. We hiked back to the park to work off some of the delicious food, then hightailed it out of town before both the Charger's game and the impending rain started.



We did, however, make one final stop before heading back home: the [Sea Life Aquarium](#) in Carlsbad. The aquarium was closed that last time we visit Legoland so we thought it might

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be fun to see the sea. It turned out to be a fun and slightly disorienting experience. Fun because Lego scenes were hidden everywhere including inside some of the tanks, and disorienting because of both the concavity and convexity of some of the glass. We tested the glass first with an outstretched hand to keep from bumping our heads. Sea Life displayed some neat specimens from three types of sea horses to sharks to jellyfish and rays. A few rooms contained touch pools with a guide explaining the different creatures and how to gently touch them without scaring them (some of the few times children weren't running around, screaming at the top of their lungs). Sadly, the visit ended after an hour and a half: we'd seen everything. So we walked back to the car and drove North.

Labels: [the sea](#), [theater](#), [travel](#)

POSTED BY GREG AT 8:39 PM | 1 WORDS OF WISDOM

MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2010

Whispering in San Diego, Pt. 1

Saturday morning, Caesar called Enterprise to pick us up in the car he rented for our quick trip to San Diego. We both stood outside, waiting for the compact to arrive like we'd seen in all those TV commercials. After about 20 minutes, a semi-beat up white van parked across the street, and the driver called over to us asking if we were the ones waiting for Enterprise. We gathered our bags and headed across the street. As we approached, the driver said he only had room for one passenger in the van. Caesar and I looked at each other, and I waved him into the van. The rental was in his name, anyway. I could wait until he drove all the way back to pick me up.

30 minutes later, and with ugly thoughts about Enterprise ruining the start of our road trip weekend, Caesar slowed to a stop in front of the apartment -- not in the compact he requested, but a boxy "upgrade" called a Dodge Avenger. I threw my stuff in the trunk, climbed into the passenger seat, whacking my knees against the all-encompassing dashboard, and we made a break for the southbound freeway.

For some reason, the Traffic Gods were on our side, allowing us to reach San Diego in about an hour and thirty minutes. And we were afraid we wouldn't make it until well after 3 PM! Caesar guided the car along Sixth St. while I scanned the street signs for Maple, and soon enough we parked in front of a beautiful Victorian house about three blocks from the entrance to Balboa Park. *The Britt Scripps Inn* took my breath away



as we got out of the car. Three stories tall with walls painted in rusts and yellows and greens. The west-facing wall displayed a gorgeous series of stained glass windows from floor to ceiling, set perfectly to capture the sunlight. A large camphor tree, the oldest planted in the U.S., grew in what was once the backyard and now shadowed the Inn's Carriage House. We slowly climbed the steps, taking everything in, and buzzed for the innkeeper. Tanya showed us into the main hallway, making us feel at home immediately and treating us as if we were the owners returning home from a short trip. She also explained a little about the house stating that it offered 9 rooms -- 8 in

Current Reading

Catalyst: A Tale of the Barque Cats
Anne McCaffrey/Elizabeth Ann
Scarborough

The Seance
John Harwood

Openly Bob
Bob Smith

Such Times
Christopher Coe

Current Music

A Low High
All India Radio

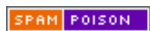
Wide Open Spaces
Dixie Chicks

In a Moment's Time
7and5

Kaleidoscope World
Swing Out Sister

Volta
Björk

Badges and Buttons



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the house itself and one in the Carriage House. Each room had its own theme, ranging from Gothic to Aesthetic to Renaissance to a Library. When booking our room, we asked for one with a Queen bed, not selecting a specific room, so we were pleasantly surprised when Tanya smiled and said we had the Carriage House. She guided us through the house, past the delicious aroma of fresh-baked cookies from the kitchen, and out the back.

She showed us the small herb garden and the small pomegranate bush, around the camphor tree to the small green and yellow Carriage House. She moved a small hanging plate and inserted the key to open the door, and I think we were both in awe of how cozy the room seemed. A nice big sleigh bed guarded at the back by two hand carved nightstands topped with Tiffany lamps. A red and white patchwork quilt covering the feather mattress. A long oil painting of a quaint farm with an 1800s look settled on the wall. A smaller hand carved dresser near the closet. A flat screen TV with a DVD player (conveniently hidden in the closet because of the lack of space by the TV itself). The new bathroom contained not only a towel warmer (!!!) but a jacuzzi tub with a raining showerhead. Tanya pointed out a few things, like the phones and the robes and the thermostat, then mentioned she would be serving appetizers between 5 and 7. She hoped we enjoyed our stay and left us to unpack.

We gathered our bags from the car, and while I unpacked, Caesar moved the car into the driveway next to the Carriage House, parking behind a truck with schools of what appeared to be sperm rounding the sides and onto the hood. The lettering advertised *cryogenic services for canines*, and we learned later that the couple who operated the service were also staying as guests in the Inn. We unpacked, and since the whole reason for our visit -- Duncan Sheik's new musical *Whisper House* -- wasn't until 8 that evening, we took a walk to *Balboa Park*.



Three blocks from the Inn, we followed El Prado past the spacious dog park (with dozens of very well-behaved dogs) and crossed the Cabrillo Bridge to wander around the museums and shops. Most of the buildings were erected in 1914-1915 for the Panama-California Exposition and now house such places as the Museum of Man, the San Diego Art Museum and the Spreckles Organ Pavillion. We wandered through

the mummies and the retablos in the Museum of Man, then managed to make it inside the botanical gardens for 10 minutes before they closed. (It's amazing how many orchid pictures I can take when in a hurry, such as the one to the left.) Afterwards, we took a half-priced look around the Natural History Museum looking the extensive fossil collection as well as some amazing black and white aerial photography of places such as the Grand Canyon from the 1950s.

By then, the Sun started to disappear so we headed back to the Inn.

Labels: [museums](#), [theater](#), [travel](#)

POSTED BY GREG AT 9:20 PM | 1 WORDS OF WISDOM

THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2010

So. Cal.

theater in southern california and beyond

Monday, January 25, 2010

Whisper House



In all fairness, it must be said that I came into this show unable to stop myself from comparing it to Duncan Sheik's Tony Award-winning smash, *Spring Awakening*. The die-hard fans of that show may be up in arms against me, but I think that the Old Globe's premier of Sheik's *Whisper House* was a remarkably better play.

Granted, the two could not be more different (although apparently microphones are a requirement). *Spring Awakening* was astounding for its power ensemble vocals and visuals. *Whisper House* is not a musical in that sense; it is more of a play that is interrupted and narrated by two singing ghosts (the only two characters that sing through the entire show) that are haunting a young boy forced to live with his spinster Aunt Lilly in the family lighthouse after his father is killed in World War II.

My biggest disappointment in *Spring Awakening* was that the beautiful music had no story to accomplish or was lyrically completely irrelevant to the plot. *Whisper House* has a very tangible story as Aunt Lilly, played brilliantly by Mare Winningham (who was also wonderful in the La Jolla Playhouse's *Bonnie and Clyde* earlier this year- my apologies for missing the post) must deal with a bratty young nephew as well as the racial tension of WWII against her Japanese worker and love interest.

The ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, carried off Duncan's pop style flawlessly while clearly enjoying their fiendish antics on stage wandering through the play's action. Their chemistry and harmonies reminded me of the Irish duo *The Swell Season*. The costumes and set added wonderfully to the eeriness of the piece, although the projections seemed, at times, a bit unnecessary. Visually and vocally, this show is easily the best thing I have seen at the Globe. And you know how I feel about *The Grinch*...

xxjeannexx

RSS

WED JAN 20TH

"Whisper House" at the Old Globe[mattinreallife:](#)

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I'm a huge fan of live theater, and I try to get out and see plays whenever I can. The Old Globe Theater in San Diego makes this really easy for me with their "20 Under 30" mailing list. They shoot me out emails all the time inviting me to shows for \$20.

*I got one a couple weeks ago inviting me to see **"Whisper House,"** a new musical done by Duncan Shiek (yeah, the "Barely Breathing" guy) for half price, only \$10 each. I like Duncan's music and Jeanne and Jon's friend Holly was in it so I figured I would go check it out.*

I took my mom and my brother last Tuesday and we all loved the show. The story was good, the music was great, and the actors were right on. Holly looked and sounded great. David Poe, who had a song on "The OC" that I dug, was good too. I think the show, with a few minor tweaks, could easily make it to Broadway.

Definitely check it out if you get the chance. If you're under 30, sign up for the "20 under 30" club and get emails about cheap shows: <http://www.theoldglobe.org/20under30/>

And check out some stills from the play here:

http://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Photo_Flash_The_Old_Globe_Presents_WHISPER_HOUSE_20100115

@WhisperHouse @HollyBrook :)

Monday, January 25, 2010

Theatre review: *Whisper House*, or, A Critic Goes Bicoastal

Almost five months ago, I moved myself from New York to San Diego. During my decade in New York, I saw (and reviewed) thousands of plays. In my heyday I was reviewing three or four plays a week, and that's not counting the ones I saw that I wasn't reviewing. Since moving to San Diego, I've seen one--Noah Haidle's *Saturn Returns* at South Coast Rep in Costa Mesa.

Last night I went to my first play in San Diego; Duncan Sheik's *Whisper House* at the Old Globe. Yes, that Duncan Sheik, of *Spring Awakening* fame. It was disconcerting to say the least, watching off-Broadway theatre so far off-Broadway.

In New York, I saw all manner of plays and playhouses. I saw shows on Broadway and at BAM, packed to the gills; I sat in leaky basements in the East Village where I was one of three audience members. I've seen plays in cars (yes, *in* cars), in churches, in the subway, in apartments, in parks, in the street, and in innumerable basements. More often than not, I was watching theatre in a repurposed space--I saw plays in an actual theatre maybe 35% of the time. I've sat on folding chairs, backless benches, church pews, boxes, floor mats, and the grass. Comfortable seating was a luxury, as was a coat check. Occasionally there was a folding table set up where I could purchase \$6 beer or box wine.

Now, I didn't always live in New York. I've seen plenty of community and regional theatre, so it's not like the concept of free parking at the theatre is completely unheard-of. But it is very unfamiliar. The Old Globe has free parking. Lots of it. And a valet. More importantly, I drove to the theatre; no subway required. (I've missed plays because of subway delays and snafus. No worrying about that here!) The Old Globe also has a year-round outdoor pub. Let me just restate that--year-round. *Outdoors*. Their theatres have cushy seats, and wide aisles. My knees didn't automatically hit the back of the seat in front of me for the first time in--well, nearly a decade. Best of all, I didn't have to swing back out into the aisle and perform a couple of advanced yoga moves in order to cross my legs.

The last play I saw in New York was *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, at the Public, an incredibly subversive and hilarious musical. The theatre (the Public's black box space) was about the size of three corner offices. Not one audience member was over 40, and there couldn't have been seating for more than 50 people, tops. The play started at 10 PM. I sat in a folding chair, with my coat on my lap. I took the subway there, and back again to Brooklyn. If I remember correctly, it was about 45 degrees outside.

Fast forward several months to San Diego. *Whisper House* is also a subversive musical, by a guy who made his name in New York. The Old Globe was enormous, and beautiful, and seated 600. I drove there, and parked for free. It was 70 degrees outside; despite that, there was a coat check. My seat had a cushion, and ample leg room. Granted, when I saw *Spring Awakening* on Broadway, the weather was lovely and I had a coat check and a cushy seat then, too. Duncan Sheik plays well on both coasts, it seems. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

It helped that I was viewing a familiar name; musicals have never been my forte, but *Spring Awakening* is one of the few that I actually like. Duncan Sheik is becoming a force to be reckoned with, I think; while this show is stylistically very different from *Spring Awakening*, Sheik still shows his characteristic musical insouciance.

While fellow reviewer Evan Henerson wasn't thrilled with *Whisper House*, (see his review [here](#)) I thought it was perfect for my own personal reentry into the theatre world. I agree with much of his review--the book was pretty thin--but atmospherically, I felt the evening was exceptional. The play's soundtrack was very nearly a cross between The Killers and a moody James Bond theme song; the lighting and fog usage were eerie and mournful without being overwrought; the acting was excellent; the set was architecturally interesting; and the audience was happily mixed, both old and young alike. And the piece was, for good or ill, recognizably Duncan Sheik.



FEATURES

Concert precedes multifaceted artist's premiere of the musical 'Whisper House' at the Old Globe

By James Hebert
THEATER CRITIC

You size up the life and times of Duncan Sheik, and it's hard not to think: "Quite a ride."

The pop artist's ascendance from backup player to singing-songwriting star to unlikely musical-theater maverick? Well, that.

But there's also Sheik's literal ride: A bicycle with a shiny purple chain guard, pink-walled tires and matching neon hand grips.

Since arriving in San Diego last month to open his world-premiere musical "Whisper House," Sheik has been pedaling this bling-y thing between his lodgings and the Old Globe Theatre — a Buddhist on two hot wheels.

He might prefer locomotion by snowboard — before coming here, Sheik had spent the holidays on the slopes of Switzerland with his French girlfriend. But on this brisk yet bright late-December day, as Sheik shepherds the bike through the park's tourist crowds toward the Globe, there's scant chance of a sudden freeze.

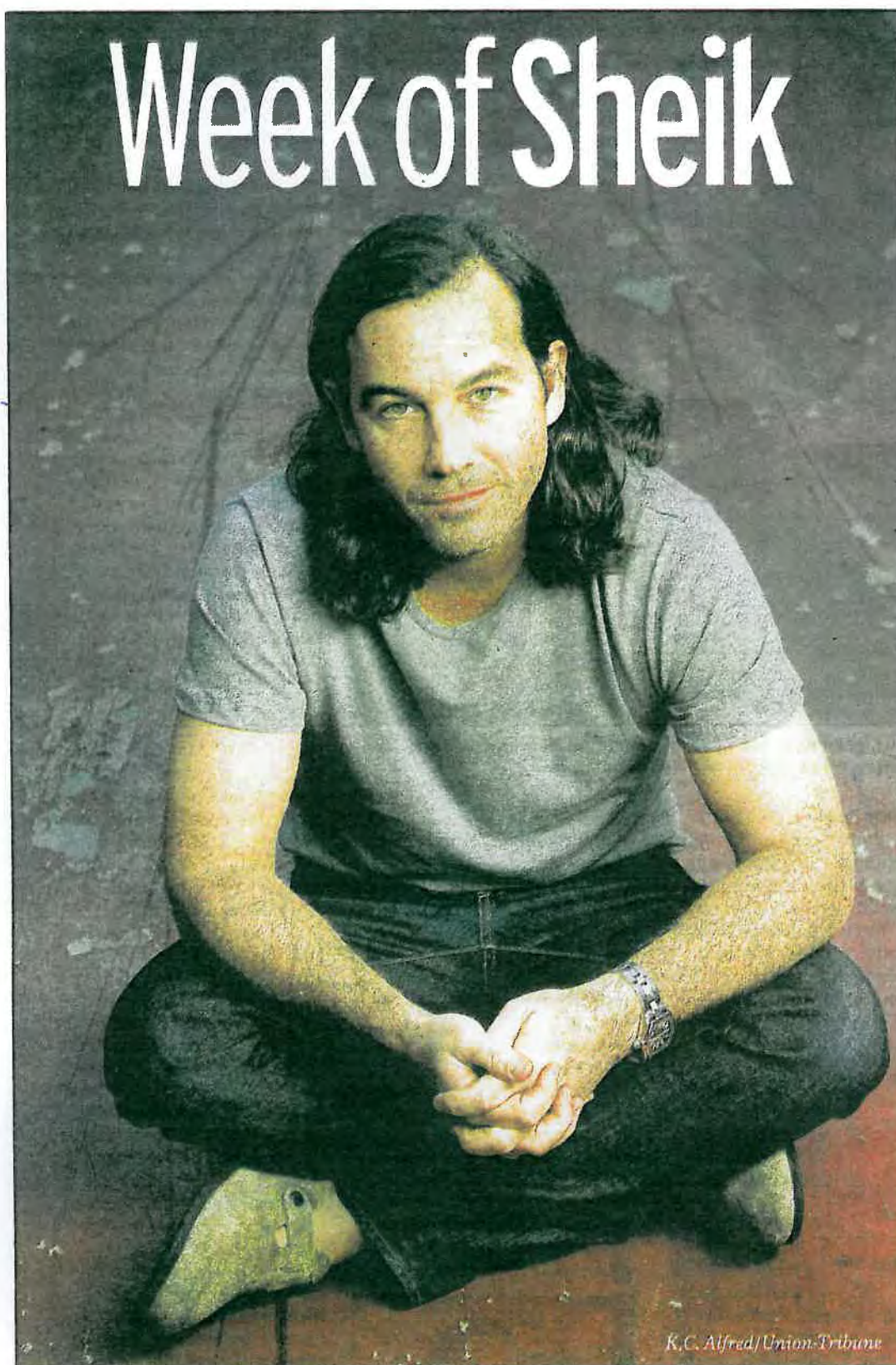
The big chill is reserved for "Whisper House," the "whimsically malevolent" ghost story Sheik has created with writer-lyricist Kyle Jarrow. The play's run begins Wednesday, but before that, Sheik performs a concert Monday at the Globe that will draw not just from the new show's score but from a range of his career material.

"I'll certainly do a couple of things (from 'Whisper House'), just kind of stripped-down," Sheik says, chatting over a pre-rehearsal lunch. "I think it would be odd not to. At the same time, I don't want to do a bunch of stuff from 'Whisper House,' because I want people to come see the show.

"There'll be a combination of some very very new, unreleased material, some stuff from (my) catalog, some theater.

And, just maybe, material from Sheik's long-awaited album of '80s cover songs? (That collection still has no release date, although Sheik put his version of the Psychedelic Furs' 1984 single "The Ghost in You" on the digital release of the "Whisper House" album.)

"There might be one or two things (from that)," Sheik



Week of Sheik

SHEIK SPEAKS

Artist: Duncan Sheik (born in 1969 in Montclair, N.J.)

Best known for: Songs "Barely Breathing" and "Half-Life," musical "Spring Awakening."

Up next: "Whisper House" (with Kyle Jarrow), Old Globe Theatre

Pet project: Building a recording studio in upstate New York to develop musical scores.

On his ever-evolving pop career: "I'm actually at the point where this whole idea of making an album is going out the window. I have lots of ideas for collections of music that maybe you serialize in some way, release them one by one. And then maybe after that, they come out as an album."

DETAILS

Duncan Sheik in concert
The Old Globe Theatre

When: Monday, 8 p.m.

Where: The Old Globe Theatre, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park

Tickets: \$25-\$75

Phone: (619) 234-5623

Online: theoldglobe.org

says, still adjusting to the rush of activity as rehearsals begin in earnest. "Thank you for reminding me, because I should get a couple of them ready for the concert."

Sheik's laid-back demeanor and easy humor can mask the fact he's had a very busy decade and a half or so of creating diverse, often intense work that has put him in both the pop and Broadway spotlights.

Three years after Sheik, now 40, broke big with the gently propulsive 1996 chart hit "Barely Breathing," he and Steven Sater, a writer and lyricist whom the composer met in Buddhist circles, workshopped a little-noticed musical at La Jolla Playhouse called "Spring Awakening."

In 2006, that long-shelved project — based on Frank Wedekind's unflinching 1891 play about German teens' sexual awakening — hit Broadway and quickly became a Tony-winning smash.

The idea of being a musical-theater darling still feels a little awkward to Sheik, who has continued to tour and release recordings (most recently the "Whisper House" album, out for a full year now) as well as work on "The Nightingale" and "Nero (Another Golden Rome)," two long-gestating stage projects with Sater.

"There's always been this somewhat tortured love-hate relationship with musical theater in general," Sheik says. "With 'Spring Awakening,' Steven Sater and I would always refer to it as an anti-musical. And we got told by our producers and everybody that we weren't allowed to call it that anymore, because it's really insulting

to the rest of the theater community.

"We were like, 'OK ... are we really that sensitive about it?'"

One reason he's pleased about "Whisper House" is that the new work — more a play with music than a true musical — neatly bridges his pop and stage careers; two of its key performers, Holly Brook and David Poe, are also his longtime musical partners.

Those two will perform with Sheik in Monday's concert, which benefits the Globe's education programs.

"I'm thrilled because I love the way they sing," Sheik says of their roles in the stage show. "Frankly, a lot of the difficulty of the two worlds of musical theater versus pop music just kind of goes away."

And there's a lot to be said for a smooth ride.

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



Week of shiek: [Duncan Sheik](#)

Concert precedes multifaceted artist's premiere of the musical 'Whisper House' at the Old Globe

By [James Hebert](#), UNION-TRIBUNE THEATER CRITIC

Thursday, January 7, 2010 at midnight



K.C. Alfred / Union-Tribune

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Los Angeles Times

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BACKSTAGE

Duncan Sheik enters the 'Whisper House'

The new musical from the 'Spring Awakening' composer is a ghostly affair. It opens Tuesday at the Old Globe in San Diego.




Lt. Rando (Kevin Hoffman) breaks into dance. (Don Bartletti / Los Angeles Times)

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'Whisper House'

By John Horn
January 17, 2010

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January 17, 2010



DON BARTLETT/ Los Angeles Times

SINGING GHOST: David Poe rehearses "Whisper House" at San Diego's Old Globe.

BACKSTAGE

FEAR, WAR AND ROCK

DUNCAN SHEIK SPRINGS BACK WITH A GHOSTLY SEMI-MUSICAL.

JOHN HORN
REPORTING FROM SAN DIEGO

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[See 'Whisper,' Page E8]

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Photographs by DON BARTLETT Los Angeles Times

ON THE COAST: The living and dead mix in a lighthouse during World War II in "Whisper House," from "Spring Awakening's" Duncan Sheik. For more photos, go to latimes.com/arts



THE CAST: Eric Brent Zutty, clockwise from top, David Poe, Ted Koch and Mare Winningham rehearse.



CREATORS: Book writer and lyricist Kyle Jarrow, left, and composer and lyricist Duncan Sheik observe a rehearsal of their new musical.

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Los Angeles Times

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BACKSTAGE

Duncan Sheik enters the 'Whisper House'

The new musical from the 'Spring Awakening' composer is a ghostly affair. It opens Tuesday at the Old Globe in San Diego.



Lt. Rando (Kevin Hoffman) breaks into dance. (Don Bartlett / Los Angeles Times)

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An early album release served another purpose. Sheik and Jarrow believed that introducing the music before the show's premiere would familiarize some of the audience -- even if only a small fraction -- with "Whisper House's" musical and dramatic lexis. "I think it's really great when you know the music, to some extent, when you see a show," Sheik says. It's a formula that worked well with the Who's "Tommy" and Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Jesus Christ Superstar," both of which were first known as albums before they were seen as staged musicals.

If the music captures the imagination of people who don't normally go to the theater (meaning anyone born after 1970), all the better. "To me, the tough thing about theater is: How do you get young kids to see it?" Jarrow says. "A lot of younger people will buy a concert ticket before they buy a theater ticket. And that's a pity. I think the more 'Whisper House' sounds like a rock concert, the better."

It's the same kind of thinking that is guiding "[American Idiot](#)," a new musical based on the songs of punk rockers Green Day that premiered last fall (under the direction of "Spring Awakening's" Michael Mayer) at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre and will [open on Broadway](#) on April 20.

The Old Globe, which had been talking to Jarrow about another production, became the home for "Whisper House" after the Connecticut venue fell through. "We just think it's different and special and fragile and unique," Louis Spisto, the theater's chief executive officer and executive producer, told the cast and crew at the musical's first read-through. If the show succeeds in San Diego, a move to Broadway could be likely. "There are definitely parties interested in this," Spisto said.

But before there's any further talk of New York, Sheik, Jarrow, Askin and the show's cast and creative team worked to make sure "Whisper House" feels like a cohesive whole, not so many competing parts.



Tour Canada's Hôtel de Glace, a 36-room lodging made entirely of snow and ice.

"That's what Duncan and I were most worried about," Jarrow says. "We didn't want it to be a play that pauses, and then there's a rock concert."

john.horn@latimes.com

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January 17, 2010

Kyle Jarrow (left) and Duncan Sheik are collaborators on "Whisper House." K.C. Alfred / Union-Tribune

SCARING UP A FEW

GHOSTS



David Poe, one of the singing ghosts, with Eric Zutty in "Whisper House," a play not so much about specters as it is about rising above life's fears. Sean M. Haffey / Union-Tribune

Collaborators explore what apparitions will take shape in translating 'Whisper House' to the stage

By James Hebert
THEATER CRITIC

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SEE **Sheik, E6**

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SHEIK

CONTINUED FROM E1

'Awakening' put him on hot list of musical theater

when it hit Broadway in 2006.

The success of "Spring Awakening," adapted from the German playwright Frank Wedekind's long-banned 1891 story of teenage sexual dramas and traumas, made Sheik an unlikely musical-theater hero and a newly hot property. But if the veteran pop singer-songwriter fears any sky-high expectations (Ghosts of Tonys Past?) concerning his return, he's definitely not letting on.

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"Bonnie & Clyde" as well as the Globe's memorable 2008 revival of "The Glass Menagerie."

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"And yet they're handicapped, too, because they no longer have their human selves. So there's this weird mixture of their sardonic attitude, and then a kind of sadness and pathos of no longer being alive, no longer being able to experience those emotions."

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James Hebert: (619) 293-2040; jim.hebert@uniontrib.com; blog, housesets.uniontrib.com; Twitter, jimhebert

Scaring up a few ghosts in ‘Whisper House’

Collaborators explore what apparitions will take shape in translating work to the stage

By [James Hebert](#), UNION-TRIBUNE THEATER CRITIC

Sunday, January 17, 2010 at 12:01 a.m.



K.C. Alfred / Union-Tribune

[Kyle Jarow](#) (left) and [Duncan Sheik](#) are collaborators on “Whisper House.”



Photo by Sean M. Haffey - Union-Tribune

[David Poe](#), one of the singing ghosts, with Eric Zutty in “Whisper House,” a play not so much about specters as it is about rising above life’s fears.



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GETTING INTO THE SPIRIT

If there’s an unearthly quality to some songs on “Whisper House” – the Duncan Sheik album whose music is woven through the Old Globe’s new stage production – it might be that ghosts looked over his shoulder as he wrote.

Sheik composed many of the songs while he and writer-lyricist Kyle Jarrow were on a little field trip to the haunted corners of Charleston, S.C. The mordantly funny track “The Tale of Solomon Snell,” about a man inadvertently buried alive, comes straight from a story they heard (during a graveyard tour) about hysteria during a long-ago outbreak of yellow fever.

Jarrow explains that a wealthy victim sometimes would arrange in advance to have a string tied to his or her finger before burial. “The string went to a bell, and you’d pay some guy to wait so that if you woke up (from a deathlike coma), you’d ring the bell and they’d dig you out.” (Snell’s would-be savior gets drunk and misses the bell.)

In a strange way, the album served as a bell-ringer all its own. It came out a full year ago, after a production of the stage version at a theater in [Delaware](#) fell through. The Globe heard the album and Sheik’s pitch, and pulled the show from purgatory.

Sheik says that while it’s unusual for the score of a theater piece to be completed so far ahead of the actual show, it helped him get across the concept to Globe CEO/executive producer Louis G. Spisto and others at the theater.

He adds that it’s a technique once used frequently by [Andrew Lloyd Webber](#), the composer behind “Cats” and numerous other shlockbusters.

“Not that I remotely feel I’m following in the footsteps of Andrew Lloyd Webber,” Sheik is quick to add.

Now, that would be chilling.

— JAMES HEBERT

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Sheik helms Globe's 'Whisper House'

BY PAM KRAGEN
pkragen@nctimes.com

It's not unusual that the Old Globe, home to the long-running "Grinch" musical, is producing a new musical for family audiences this month. But it's a downright surprise that "Whisper House" springs from the imagination of two of the edgiest voices in American musical theater.

The score for the 90-minute musical (actually, more a play with music) was composed by Tony-winner Duncan Sheik, whose smash rock musical "Spring Awakening" featured strong language and simulated sex.

And the book was written by Kyle Jarrow, 30, a Brooklyn-based writer/composer whose past projects were about serial killers, Scientology, war, politics and amputation. But, as Jarrow explains, both of them were once preteen boys, so they can relate to the central character in "Whisper House," which opens tonight in its world premiere.

Set in 1942, "Whisper House" is the story of Christopher, an 11-year-old boy whose fighter pilot father died in World War II and whose mother had a nervous breakdown as a result. Christopher is sent to live at a haunted New England lighthouse with his crusty Aunt Lilly (played by Emmy winner Mare Winningham) and her Japanese-American maintenance man, Yasuhiro. There, Christopher encounters the spirits of several people who died in the waters around the lighthouse. He discovers secrets from his family's past, and he uncovers what he believes to be a secret spy plot. The musical was designed to appeal to audiences ages 10 and up.

"My fear is that people will see Duncan's name and think it's edgy, adult material, but that couldn't be further from the truth," Jarrow said. "It's a ghost story and there are



The cast rehearses for the Old Globe's "Whisper House." Photo courtesy of Craig Schwartz

themes of death, war and racism in the show, but they're dealt with in a way that's appropriate for families."

Sheik said he's excited to tell a story for young audiences because he's loved musical theater ever since he was 12, when he played the Artful Dodger in a youth production of "Oliver" in Hilton Head, S.C. "There's a part of me that is very excited to know that somewhere down the road, kids in elementary school will be doing their own productions of 'Whisper House.'"

"Whisper House" was conceived in 2007 when the directors of a theater company in Stamford, Conn., asked Sheik and Jarrow to write a musical set in a New England lighthouse. The two New Yorkers had never met, but they had something in common — successful careers both as musical theater composers and musicians (particularly Sheik, whose 1997 pop hit "Barely Breathing" spent 55 weeks on the Billboard Hot



Duncan Sheik

Kyle Jarrow

100 chart).

"Musical theater is a contentious subject in the normal music business," Sheik said. "For some, it's a guilty pleasure, for others, they can't stand it. My mission has been to try and do work where musical theater can be embraced by the music world and be seen as something that's totally cool in the culture."

During a 10-day writing retreat in Charleston, S.C., in early 2008, Sheik, Jarrow and then-director Keith Powell created the music and the story of Christopher, Aunt Lilly and the ghosts. Financial problems forced the Stamford theater to cancel the produc-

tion and Powell moved on to other projects. But Sheik's record label released the "Whisper House" concept album as a CD, and after a trio of workshops, the project ultimately made its way to the Old Globe.

Although Sheik, 40, described the early run-throughs last week as "shambolic," he's excited to finally get "Whisper House" in front of the public.

"When it is all 100 percent together, I think it will be really cool," he said. "I think the audiences are going to eat it up."

Like Sheik's "Spring Awakening" and all of Jarrow's musicals (including "Hostage Song" and "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant"), "Whisper House" will have singers performing onstage with mike stands and visible microphones. The actors in the musical don't sing, but the ghosts — the spirits of a band killed when the yacht on which they were performing

"Whisper House"

WHEN Opens Thursday and runs through Feb. 21; showtimes, 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays

WHERE Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

TICKETS \$36-\$89

INFO 619-234-5623
www.theoldglobe.org

went down at sea on Halloween night, 1912 — perform with mikes and instruments as a sort of Greek chorus, commenting on the action. (Sheik's longtime musical collaborators, Holly Brooks and David Poe, lead the band.)

"Duncan and I are both from the music world and we thought that the audience already knows it's not real," Jarrow said. "People don't break into song in real life, so let's explore the artifice."

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'Whisper'

Continued from Page 13

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"I love working with Duncan. We're both musicians, so we speak the same language, and he doesn't get married to ideas, so he's always open to trying new stuff. Also, he's still new to theater, so he's not jaded. He still has a real enthusiasm for the art form."

Sheik agrees about his enthusiasm.

Musical theater rejuvenated both his career and his sense of self-worth. After the success of "Barely Breathing," Sheik had a long, dry spell that made him question his talents. It wasn't until 2006's "Spring Awakening" (which earned him a Tony and a Grammy and has been produced in 18 cities worldwide) that he felt revived.

"It gave me back some of the confidence I had lost over the previous 10 years," he said. "After I had a big hit, I was still putting out music, but it wasn't as commercially successful, and I started thinking that maybe the things I'm doing are only meant for a small audience. 'Spring Awakening' proved that wasn't the case, and it was a great boost of confidence."

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'Spring Awakening' composer Sheik helms Globe's family musical 'Whisper House'

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By PAM KRAGEN - pkragen@nctimes.com | Posted: Wednesday, January 20, 2010 10:30 am | No Comments Posted

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Craig Schwartz The cast of the world premiere production of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House" at The Old Globe, Jan. 13-Feb. 21, 2010. Photo courtesy of Craig Schwartz



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It's not unusual that the Old Globe, home to the long-running "Grinch" musical, is producing a new musical for family audiences this month. But it's a downright surprise that "Whisper House" springs from the imagination of two of the edgiest voices in American musical theater.

The 90-minute musical's score was composed by Tony-winner Duncan Sheik, whose smash rock musical "Spring Awakening" featured strong language and simulated sex. And the book was written by Kyle Jarrow, 30, a Brooklyn-based writer/composer whose past projects were about serial killers, Scientology, war, politics and amputation. But, as Jarrow explains, both of them were once preteen boys, so they can relate to the central character in "Whisper House," which opens tonight in its world premiere.

Set in 1942, "Whisper House" is the story of Christopher, an 11-year-old boy whose fighter pilot father died in World War II and whose mother had a nervous breakdown as a result. Christopher is sent to live at a haunted New England lighthouse with his crusty Aunt Lilly (played by Emmy winner Mare Winningham) and her Japanese-American maintenance man, Yasuhiro. There, Christopher encounters the spirits of several people who died in the waters around the lighthouse. He discovers secrets from his

family's past, and he uncovers what he believes to be a secret spy plot. The musical was designed to appeal to audiences ages 10 and up.

"My fear is that people will see Duncan's name and think it's edgy, adult material, but that couldn't be further from the truth," Jarrow said. "It's a ghost story and there are themes of death, war and racism in the show, but they're dealt with in a way that's appropriate for families."

Sheik said he's excited to tell a story for young audiences because he's loved musical theater ever since he was 12, when he played the Artful Dodger in a youth production of "Oliver" in Hilton Head, S.C. "There's a part of me that is very excited to know that somewhere down the road, kids in elementary school will be doing their own productions of 'Whisper House.'"

"Whisper House" was conceived in 2007 when the directors of a theater company in Stamford, Conn., asked Sheik and Jarrow to write a musical set in a New England lighthouse. The two New Yorkers had never met, but they had something in common ---- successful careers both as musical theater composers and musicians (particularly Sheik, whose 1997 pop hit "Barely Breathing" spent 55 weeks on the Billboard Hot 100 chart).

"Musical theater is a contentious subject in the normal music business," Sheik said. "For some, it's a guilty pleasure, for others, they can't stand it. My mission has been to try and do work where musical theater can be embraced by the music world and be seen as something that's totally cool in the culture."

During a 10-day writing retreat in Charleston, S.C., in early 2008, Sheik, Jarrow and then-director Keith Powell created the music and the story of Christopher, Aunt Lilly and the ghosts. Financial problems forced the Stamford theater to cancel the production and Powell moved on to other projects. But Sheik's record label released the "Whisper House" concept album as a CD, and after a trio of workshops, the project ultimately made its way to the Old Globe.

Although Sheik, 40, described the early run-throughs last week as "shambolic," he's excited to finally get "Whisper House" in front of the public.

"When it is all 100 percent together, I think it will be really cool," he said. "I think the audiences are going to eat it up."

Like Sheik's "Spring Awakening" and all of Jarrow's musicals (including "Hostage Song" and "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant"), "Whisper House" will have singers performing onstage with mike stands and visible microphones. The actors in the musical don't sing, but the ghosts ---- the spirits of a band killed when the yacht on which they were performing went down at sea on Halloween night, 1912 ---- perform with mikes and instruments as a sort of Greek chorus, commenting on the action. (Sheik's longtime musical collaborators Holly Brooks and David Poe lead the band.)

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"Whisper House"

When: Opens Thursday and runs through Feb. 21; showtimes, 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays

Where: Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

Tickets: \$36-\$89

Info: 619-234-5623

Web: www.theoldglobe.org

Posted in Theatre on *Wednesday, January 20, 2010 10:30 am* | Tags: Entertainment Preview, Nct, Theater

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Theatre



'Spring Awakening' composer Sheik helms Globe's family musical 'Whisper House'

By: By PAM KRAGEN - pkragen@nctimes.com

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'Whose Line' vets bring live improv to town

By: By JIM TRAGESER - jtrageser@nctimes.com

When told that a Google search brought up dozens, maybe hundreds, of sites about him or his touring "The Colin and Brad Show," veteran TV comic Brad Sherwood took it in stride.

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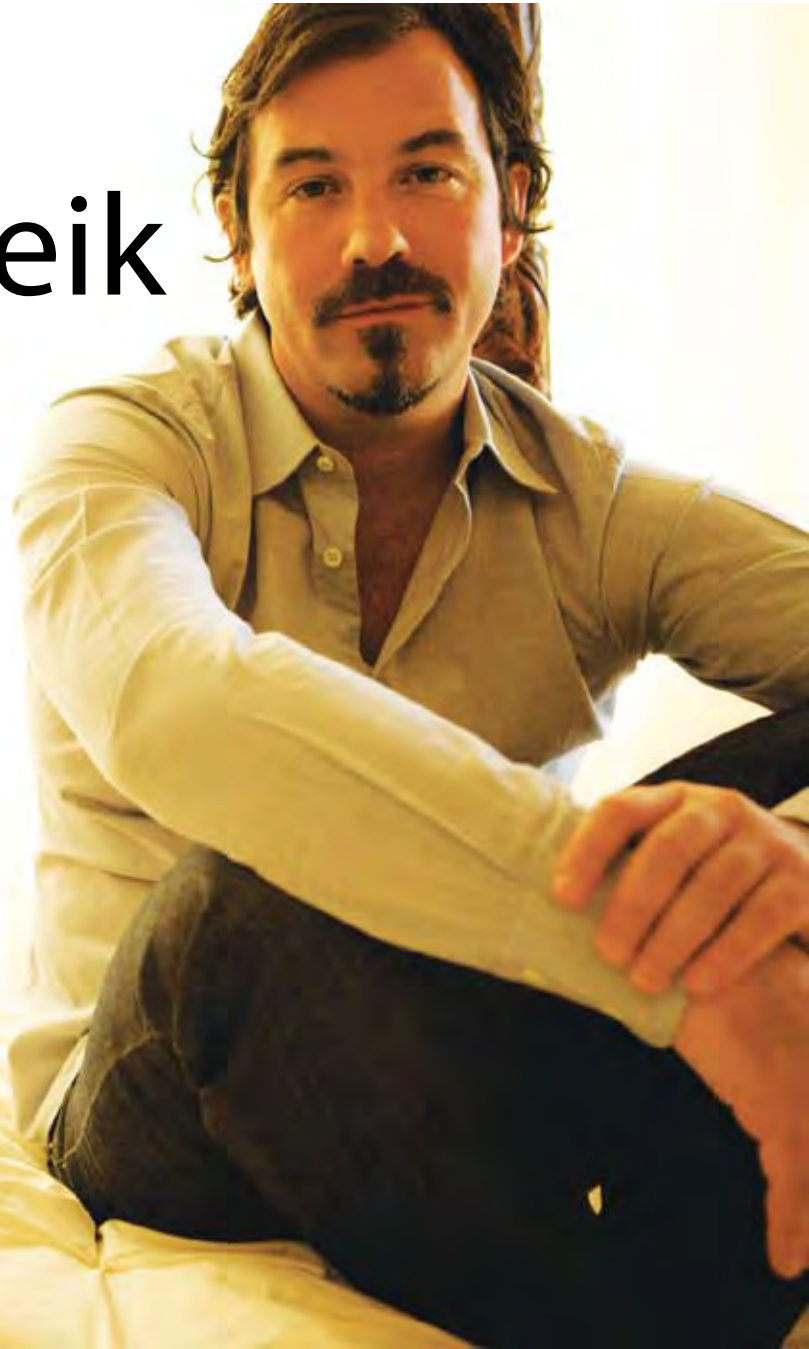


Duncan Sheik

A SPIRITED DISCOURSE ON *WHISPER HOUSE*

by bill biss

After a very successful turn on Broadway creating the music for a frustrated and anguished environment in *Spring Awakening*, Duncan Sheik now casts his musical spell on the spirit world with his new musical called *Whisper House*. The book for the musical was written by Kyle Jarrow and tells the story of a young boy, Christopher who has lost his father in WWII. His mother is too mentally unstable to care for him; hence he is sent to live with a distant aunt who he has never met. His aunt, Lilly, is a lighthouse keeper and lives with a worker she has employed to help her named Yasujiro. As Christopher explores this new world, he finds himself visited by four ghosts. Is this a child's wild imagination or are these ghosts simply warning him of dangers that lie ahead. Duncan Sheik is extremely thrilled about this new production heading to The Old Globe Theatre on January 13 through February 21. Don't be too frightened though. Read on.



The Rage Monthly: You are using your album *Whisper House* as a sounding board for this stage production. Did you go into the songwriting process thinking this will not only be an album but will be adapted to the stage from the very beginning?

Duncan Sheik: Yeah. In fact, what happened was it was initially conceived only as a stage musical. I finished writing the songs...most of them, by February of 2008. So, I started recording them as demos, fancy demos. Then some people at Sony heard those recordings. They got very excited about it and they were like maybe this is the next Duncan Sheik album. The way that the album came out as a proper release was a little bit of a happy accident.

Rage: Oh good. It's almost like you're letting the cat out of the bag before the stage musi-

cal even happens, as it's the same music on the album and in the play.

DS: Yes. There were a couple things going on. One of the big issues was actually the fact that we'd been commissioned by a theatre in Connecticut that kind of went out of business. So, we needed to attract attention from some other regional theatres to get the show produced. The record actually became a really great way of cementing people's excitement about the piece.

Rage: One of the songs is called "Better To Be Dead." Will you tell me about the songwriting process and research for these songs?

DS: Sure. The idea of working on a piece that dealt with ghosts and a ghost story in a lighthouse kind of appealed to me because I grew up in Hilton Head, South

Carolina. Telling ghost stories and ghost lore was a big part of growing up in South Carolina. Being there kind of triggered a pre-adolescent, spooky style of being that I used to experience as a kid. So, right away there was an internal connection to the setting and the mood of the piece. Actually, Kyle, Keith Powell and I went down to Charleston in January of 2008 to do a writing retreat. While we were there we went on one of those...it's kind of cheesy but they do a ghost tour of Charleston and tell all these ghost stories. We immersed ourselves in that kind of narrative style. That really informed the tone of the songs.

The funny thing about ghost stories is that they're meant to be scary but there's also an aspect of them that is kind of whimsical. They almost have a sense of humor. I tried to really play that up in the song lyrics. When the ghosts are singing, "It's better to be dead," it's their sardonic way of looking down at the pathos of these sad human beings who are living their kind of pathetic little lives. The ghosts have kind of been there and done that and quote, unquote, risen above it all. At least, that's what they tell themselves.

Rage: Your last collaboration on *Spring Awakening* working with Steven Sater was so successful. How does this collaboration feel for you working with Kyle Jarrow?

DS: Kyle is a very different kind of writer than Steven, which is fine. Steven is very immersed in poetry and the Greek classics, somewhat more obscure kinds of things that are important pieces of literature but a bit on the fringe. Whereas Kyle is a little bit more populist in a certain way, in terms of his writing style. The big difference in this collaboration is really that I wrote the lyrics, and then Kyle and I made some adjustments here and there. The story is really Kyle's and the songs are mainly mine. What was so fun about that, for me, is obviously I had written lyrics for my own records in the past, but I had spent the past three or four years mainly working on theatre stuff with Steven. So, I hadn't really written any lyrics at all. It was so great. I had three years of pent-up subconscious material that was waiting to come out. I won't say it was easy to write these songs but they just came very naturally and that was a lot of fun.

Rage: Please tell me about the cast of *Whisper House*.

DS: The great actress, Mare Winningham is playing Lilly. We're really excited to have her on board. A young boy named Eric Brent Zutty plays Christopher. The director and Kyle auditioned him and they are "over the moon" about him. I haven't met him yet but I trust their judgment in these matters. Then, we have a great Filipino actor, Arthur Acuna, who is playing Yasuhiro who's the Japanese fellow who works at the lighthouse. Most importantly, for me, we have Holly Brook playing a female ghost. I'm very thrilled about that. I'm also thrilled that my good friend, David Poe is

singing the male lead ghost who I sing on the record. We've been working together for ten years. He really understands my sensibility. He's a great singer. He's just kind of a raffish character. I'm really excited to get him on stage and see what he does.

Rage: Now, it's just the ghosts who sing all the songs?

DS: Yes. There are songs that happen in between the scenes. Our challenge from the very beginning was how do you integrate the actors into the songs in some way? And how do you integrate the ghosts into the scenes in some way to make this whole thing work? It's a little bit of a very different conceit for a piece of musical theatre. I think we've had some really good solutions to that issue. This is the first time that we are properly staging the piece.

Rage: It sounds very avant-garde to me.

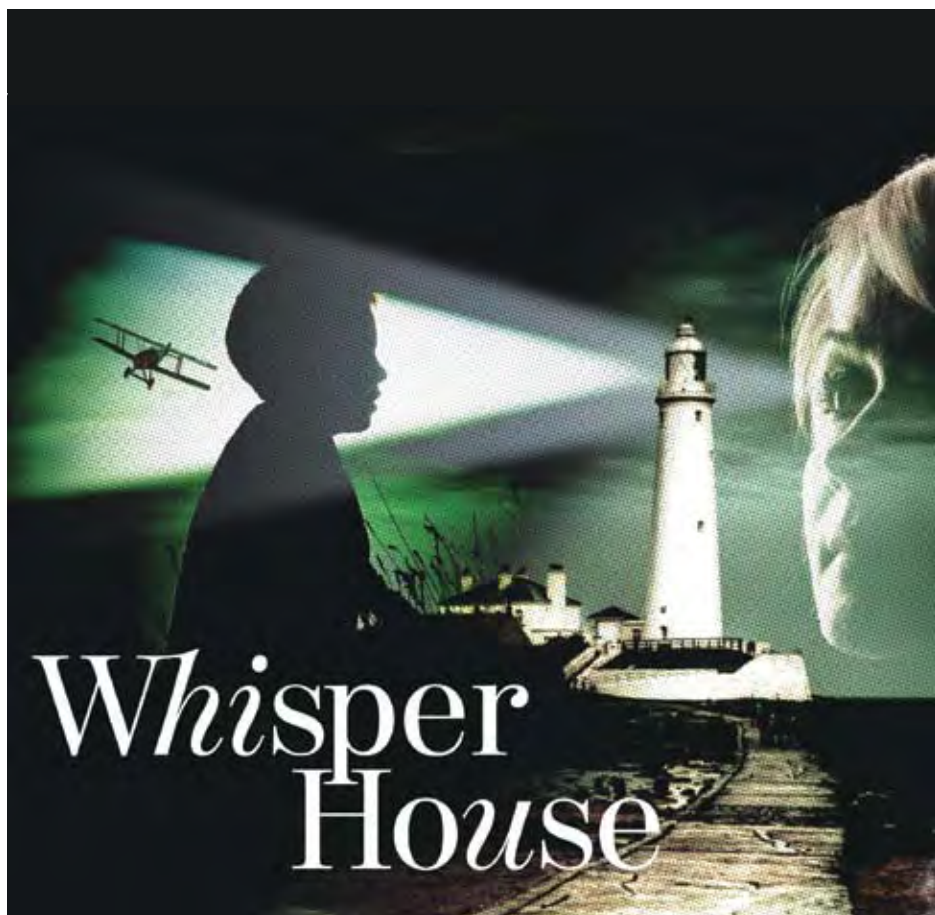
DS: (laughter) There's an aspect of it that is avant-garde in terms of the structure and the set-up but in fact, the music and the story itself are not avant-garde at all. I think the story is engaging and quite moving and also, quite funny.

Rage: Thank you. I'm looking forward to seeing the show.

DS: Great, great. I can't wait.



Mare Winningham will portray "Lilly" in *Whisper House*.



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Shhh! Duncan Sheik 'Whisper House' Concert

Posted by [Jonathan Young](#) on Sunday, January 10, 2010 · [Leave a Comment](#)



Tony and Grammy Award winner [Duncan Sheik](#) performs in concert with members of his touring band and special guest David Poe at The [Old Globe](#) on Jan. 11 at 8 p.m., prior to the world premiere of his new musical, *Whisper House*. Sheik has toured extensively this year and will perform songs from *Whisper House* and his other acclaimed albums.

Sheik initially found success as a singer, most notably for his 1996 debut single, "[Barely Breathing](#)," which spent 55 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100. He has since expanded his work to include compositions for motion pictures and the Broadway stage. Sheik won two Tony Awards, as composer and arranger, for the Broadway production of [Spring Awakening](#). Written with lyricist Steven Sater, *Spring Awakening* also received the Tony Award for Best Musical.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, *Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. Previews for *Whisper House* open Jan. 13, with opening night Jan. 21.

Sheik is currently developing two additional musical theater projects. *Nero (Another Golden Rome)* had a workshop production this summer at Vassar College, featuring *Wicked* star Idina Menzel and *Spring Awakening* ingénue Lea Michelle. *The Nightingale* is slated for a 2010 opening at San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater.

For tickets to the concert, call the Old Globe Box office at (619) 23-GLOBE (234-5623) or log on to www.oldglobe.org. Proceeds from the Jan. 11 concert benefit the Globe's education activities.

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SEARCH

Duncan Sheik takes 'Whisper House' on the road

Published January 5, 2010 06:01 AM [Comments and 0 Reactions](#)

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By [Tara Hall](#) / LiveDaily Contributor

Singer/songwriter [Duncan Sheik](#) [[tickets](#)] will take on a round of early spring dates behind "Whisper House," his first studio set since composing the Tony Award-winning musical "Spring Awakening."

Sheik will begin the roadwork with a March 18 performance in South Orange, NJ, followed by five more East Coast shows through that month's end. The seven-city outing will conclude with a four-night run

slated for April 7-10 in San Francisco. Details are below.

"Whisper House," which surfaced last January, doubles as the soundtrack to the musical of the same name, which debuted last month in San Diego. For the latest release, the musician collaborated with writer Kyle Jarrow, who wrote the story about an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who is sent to live with his grandmother in a haunted lighthouse after his father gets shot down over the Pacific Ocean during World War II. Sheik penned the music and lyrics for the show.

"I guess in the afterglow of the success of 'Spring Awakening,' I had this sense of confidence that maybe something that I'm writing could actually make it," Sheik explained in an [interview](#) with LiveDaily last spring.

Sheik, who rose to fame with the 1996 hit single, "Barely Breathing," wrote the music for the 2006 Broadway smash, "Spring Awakening," which won a Grammy for Best Musical Show Album in 2008 and Tony Awards for Best Original Score, Best Musical and Best Book.

According to a note posted at his [website](#), Sheik is currently working on new material for a forthcoming record, though no further details have yet been given.

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RANCHO BERNARDO NEWS JOURNAL

January 28, 2010

Old Globe premieres 'Whisper House'

BY JOSÉ A. LÓPEZ

"We are here to say, that all of this is real," sing the dapperly-dressed ghosts of "Whisper House," the highly anticipated musical that got its world premiere at the Old Globe Theatre last week.

The WWII-set play, running through Feb. 21, tells the story of an 11-year-old boy sent to live with his aunt in a New England lighthouse after his aviator father is killed in action by the Japanese and his mother suffers a nervous breakdown.

The play comes from rocker Duncan Sheik (co-written with Kyle Arrow), whose first journey into theater led to "Spring Awakening," the 2006 Tony-winning musical about teenage confusion that wowed critics and fans with its mash-up of 19th-century aesthetics and contemporary rock songs.

While that play exploded from the stage, with the large cast breaking into songs that would easily blend into the playlist of any alternative rock station, "Whisper House," seems to do the opposite, closing in on itself to create an air of mystery and paranoia and a sense of loss that permeates the piece.

As the boy, Christopher, longs for home, he clashes with his closely guarded aunt Lilly, winningly portrayed by Mare Winningham.

Because the lighthouse is a sensitive point of national security during the play's wartime era, she's told she has to dismiss her Japanese helper, Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuña), who Christopher suspects — based on tips from the ghosts — may be a spy.

The singing in "Whisper House" is left up to two unnamed ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, who wander through the lighthouse while the other characters go along their non-musical lives.

Only young Christopher (A.J. Foggiano) can hear their songs — they are accompanied by a full orchestra decked out as departed souls that play mostly behind a scrim — or see their actions, though what the ghosts can and can't physically do is not clearly defined.



Mare Winningham as Lilly and Holly Brook as a ghost in Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House," which runs at the Old Globe Theatre through Feb. 21. Photo Provided by Craig Schwartz

Both Poe and Brook, professional recording artists, have strong and unique voices that well serve the songs, mostly atmospheric ballads that bear some of the trademarks of Sheik's pre-theater recordings.

"Whisper House," is a rewarding experience, a subtle mood piece filled with empty spaces that leaves it up to the viewers to fill in. It could, however, benefit from a few more variety in the songs to break up the piece ("The Tale of Solomon Snell" which details the fall of an overly cautious man accomplishes that).

"Whisper House" is directed by Peter Askin. Jason Hart is the musical director and Wesley Fata directs the dance.

Tickets are \$36-89. For more information, go to www.TheOldGlobe.org.

Trés Sheik!

A cult rocker kicks off a new era at The Old Globe with the world premiere of *Whisper House*

| By AnnaMaria Stephens |

Watch out, Tommy. Move ovah, Joizy Boys. The latest rock opera hits the stage this month, christening—and haunting—the Old Globe’s new \$22 million Conrad Prebys Theater Center.

A trio of Grammy and Tony Award winners conjured up *Whisper House*, a rock musical about a boy living in a lighthouse full of ghosts. It make sense that *30 Rock* regular and director Keith Powell tapped Duncan Sheik, who’s somewhat of a ghost himself. The musician vanished for a decade after his huge hit single, “Barely Breathing.” But he made a remarkable comeback in 2006 with his racy score for Broadway’s *Spring Awakening*, which netted eight Tonys. *Whisper House* is his hotly tipped follow-up, and the pairing with Powell and playwright Kyle Jarrow—an Obie winner famous for a one-act sendup of Scientology—represents a formidable amount of dramatic *je ne sais quoi*.

Set in WWII, *Whisper House* follows Christopher, a pitiful little thing whose mother loses it after his father’s plane is shot down over the Pacific. The boy is sent to his Aunt Lily, a spinster living in a lighthouse on a bleak New England spit. There’s plenty of melancholy and melodrama, all observed by a rock-band ensemble of singing specters.

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Sheik’s indie-folk song cycle, already released as an album, belongs solely to the phantom band. They serve as a Greek chorus, taunting Christopher with an old-time ditty that summarily says: You’re never safe, no matter what you do. “It’s a great thing to express to an 11-year-old boy,” laughs Sheik. “But when people feel terrified of bad things happening at any moment, it’s really easy to control them. It’s very insidious.”



KEEPING SCORE Duncan Sheik looks to repeat his Tony-winning success at The Old Globe.

The ghosts may mock the humans they haunt, but in doing so belie what they sorely miss—“being able to express emotions, even sadness,” muses Sheik. “There’s joy and love and the physicality of being alive.”

Visually, *Whisper House* pays homage to the charmingly macabre illustrator Edward Gorey—both Sheik and Jarrow acknowledge his influence. Sheik describes the set’s centerpiece as a skeletal lighthouse with shadowy projections.

The production is one of the first to be staged at Conrad Prebys, which merges the flagship Old Globe theatre with a new, state-of-the-art, multilevel facility. “The Globe is a good thing for us,” says Sheik. “There aren’t many regional theaters that can do production at that level of quality.”

Through Feb. 21 at The Old Globe Theater, Balboa Park. 619.234.5623. theoldglobe.com.

Trés Sheik!

A cult rocker kicks off a new era at The Old Globe with the world premiere of *Whisper House*

| By AnnaMaria Stephens |

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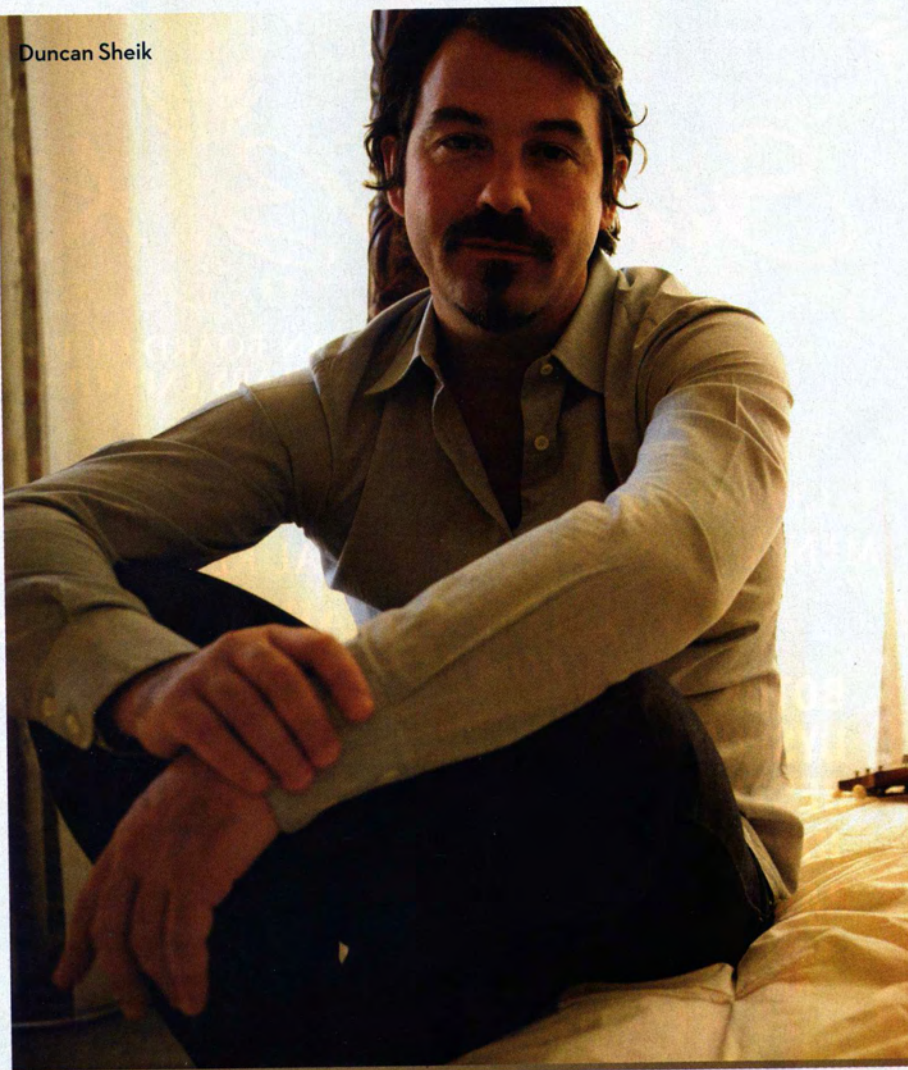
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Duncan Sheik



Spring Awakening composer Duncan Sheik
premieres *Whisper House* at the Old Globe.

By Charlene Baldridge

Keith Powell, an actor on the television series *30 Rock* invited the brightest and best—Duncan Sheik, composer of the Tony Award-winning *Spring Awakening*, and Kyle Jarrow, creator of the Obie Award-winning musical *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*—to write a musical for him to direct. The result is *Whisper House*, which opens January 13 in previews for its world premiere engagement at the Old Globe. As it happened, Powell's *30 Rock* schedule proved intractable, though he is still involved as a producer. Obie Award-winning director Peter Askin will stage *Whisper House*.

This extraordinary new musical was conceived during a creative retreat at a seashore replete with an old lighthouse. A new American fable, Sheik (music and lyrics) and Jarrow's (book and lyrics) collaboration concerns 11-year-old Christopher, whose father is shot down in the Pacific during

Men Who Stare At Ghosts



World War II. When Christopher's mother falls apart emotionally he is sent to live with his Aunt Lilly, who keeps a lighthouse on the East Coast, where everyone is on the lookout for U-Boats and aliens. Christopher immediately senses that the lighthouse is haunted, and indeed there are ghosts that only he hears and sees. They comment sardonically on the odd behavior of lighthouse regulars, among them Yasujiro, who helps Lilly keep the lighthouse and who loves her unrequitedly.

Released on CD in January 2009, the *Whisper House* concept album demonstrates that the



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music is appealing, extremely listenable pop/rock that is adroitly orchestrated, especially for winds and brass. The lyrics are exceptionally droll.

There's also a practical mystery involved. Along with the download is a booklet (Jarrow wrote the text) with an appealing little boy depicted (block-print illustrations by Swedish artist Klaus Lynged). It contains more prints, each representing a song title. There are missing pages. Inside, the incomplete narrative grows more and more blurry, and by the final page is completely illegible.

Thinking there must be something wrong with her printer or the download, the frustrated purchaser asks Sheik about the problem. At first there is silence. Then he says, "Hmm," and further, "it's that way on purpose. Listen to the music as you would to any record album. The text is meant to be a teaser. It's just the broad strokes of the narrative."

Jarrow expands. "Duncan and I had this crazy idea that it would be fun if the booklet gave you a little peek into the story that ends with a big question mark, so we created this book with a lot of water damage because it takes place in a lighthouse. To be honest, a lot of people have been confused. Maybe it was too high-concept."

These two young men—Jarrow, who got his Obie at 23, just turned 30, and Sheik, whose maelstrom of creative success began at 27

with his incredible 1996 hit single, "Barely Breathing"—are the epitome of high concept creator/performers who specialize in communicating in new ways.

Jarrow is keyboardist with a glam rock band called The Fabulous Entourage and also with his new band, Super Mirage. Gleefully, he points out their names just happen to rhyme. He's been writing plays ever since his acting career dried up at the awkward age of 13. Author of nine plays/musicals, he also writes for television and film, an occupation he admits he's more than a little in love with.

"I love rock music," Jarrow says. "I love theater. What I like to see and what I like to make are shows that work for music but also work as plays, where there's consistent dramaturgy between the book scenes and the songs, where the characters sing with the same voice in which they speak. As soon as you break into song you're just not in a realistic mode anymore.

"In *Whisper House* the only people who sing are the ghosts. The music represents a fantasy world and that helps justify the songs. We explore the idea of a kid who's dealing with a parent's death through a theatrical mode and working with the way he sees ghosts, who help him through his mourning."

Jarrow, whose other shows are definitely not family fare, says there is nothing scary or inappropriate about *Whisper House*, which employs five >CONTINUED ON PAGE 54

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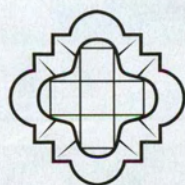
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>GHOSTS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45



Artist Klaus Lyngelied illustrated the booklet that accompanies Sheik's *Whisper House* CD, released last year

actors, two singers, and a band whose sound he calls "lush."

Sheik grew up in Hilton Head, S.C., where the iconography includes a big red-and-white lighthouse. "In South Carolina," he says, "there's a lot of ghost lore. My friends' parents told us ghost stories on camping trips, so the *Whisper House* thematic material is near and dear."

His Scottish grandmother, a pianist and artist, influenced Sheik. "She just sat down and played Rachmaninoff, and she had a lot of spirit that rubbed off on me." His grandparents gave him his first guitar for Christmas and encouraged the musical pursuits that changed what he calls "my little hobby" into an extraordinary musical career.

Both Sheik and his *Spring Awakening* collaborator Steven Slater are practicing Buddhists, something Sheik says affects every aspect of his life. "We were told countless times by countless theaters and producers that the idea of doing *Spring Awakening* as a modern musical was never going to get off the ground. They said it wasn't commercial enough and we had made it even more confusing."

The 2006 musical that would never fly, based on Frank Wedekind's 1891 play, ran for three years on Broadway and received eight Tony Awards. The cast album received a 2008 Grammy Award. In addition to a national tour that passed through San Diego in 2008, the musical has been produced in major cities worldwide.

Sheik continues, "Buddhist practice really gives you the courage of your own convictions, a kind of internal faith and perhaps a creative wisdom, for lack of a better word. Buddhism talks about the human condition in very realistic terms. We go through different states in life: peril, anger, hunger, animality, tranquility, rapture, learning, realization, compassion

and enlightenment. Great pieces of theater, novels and music express all these aspects, and that's what we try to do."

Spring Awakening had an eight-year development period, which included a Sundance workshop in 2000. *Whisper House* was workshopped only last summer at Vassar College and New York Stage and Film. The Old Globe's Lou Spisto read the work about 18 months ago and considered it for last season, but that wasn't possible because the piece was being considered by a Connecticut theater that had been involved from the beginning. More recently, Spisto was in conversation with Jarrow about other matters, when Jarrow mentioned the Connecticut production was off. Spisto decided to schedule the world premiere at the Globe.

"Whether it is a commercial or Broadway show is yet to be established," Spisto says. "We're doing the piece because we love the piece. The music is gorgeous. The play is very spare. It will play to our subscriber audience as well as to a new audience familiar with Duncan Sheik. It can reach all ages, young people, people who remember the war. It's about patriotism, racism and mostly about family."

And ghosts. Don't forget the ghosts.

Whisper House runs Jan. 13-Feb. 21 at the Old Globe Theatre, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park, 619.234.5623, theoldglobe.com.



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A Ghostly Awakening: Duncan Sheik's 'Whisper House'

PLAYBILL

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Mervyn Rothstein, Playbill.com – Wed Jan 20, 6:13 pm ET

A new ghost-story musical by Kyle Jarrow and *Spring Awakening*'s Duncan Sheik materializes at The Old Globe.

"It's set in and around an isolated lighthouse in Maine during World War II," Duncan Sheik says. "There's a young boy named Christopher whose father was shot down over the Pacific by the Japanese. His distraught mother has been taken to a sanitarium, and he has been sent to live with his Aunt Lily, who is not so great with children, to use a bit of [an] understatement."

Also at the lighthouse is a Japanese servant named Yasujiro. "Christopher," Sheik says, "is incredibly mistrustful of Yasujiro because his father was killed by the Japanese, and he begins to suspect that the servant may be a spy. In the middle of it all, it appears that the lighthouse may be haunted by ghosts - all of whom were members of a band playing on a ship that went down in 1912."

Sheik, the Tony- and Grammy Award-winning composer of *Spring Awakening*, is talking about his new musical, *Whisper House*, premiering this month at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego. Sheik has written both music and lyrics; book and lyrics are by Kyle Jarrow, an Obie winner Off-Broadway for *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*. The director is Peter Askin, whose credits include *Trumbo* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.

It all started, Sheik says, when a friend, the actor Keith Powell (Twofer on "30 Rock") got him and Jarrow together with the idea of creating a theatre work that would involve ghosts and lighthouses. Jarrow wrote a draft, and there was a workshop with no music.

Six months later, in early 2008, "Keith, Kyle and I went down to South Carolina," says Sheik, "and basically came up with a draft of a complete show, with a set of songs." Sheik recorded the songs, which became his new album, marking his return to writing both music and lyrics after several years of working with Steven Sater, the lyricist and librettist of *Spring Awakening*.

"It was a lot of fun to become a lyricist again," Sheik says. "What was also fun was that it's the ghosts that sing, so I was writing not as Duncan Sheik but from the perspective of these ghosts, who are whimsily malevolent characters."

The ghosts "operate in some ways as Christopher's inner thoughts and fears," he says. They are dressed in costume from the turn of the 19th century, as an illusionist in a top hat, a Hessian soldier, a reveler at a Venetian carnival and a geisha. "They are in part a Greek chorus commenting on the pathos of these human beings in the lighthouse, and they speak the characters' unspoken fears and heartaches."

The actors playing the humans "never sing. They speak the text. The ghosts sing and never really speak. In a way the show is really a play, with the songs integrated into the piece. There are two alternate realities that co-exist."

Sheik is trying, he says, "to be progressive in terms of musical theatre. I've been seeing a lot of musicals and learning and understanding more and more about the form than I knew when I was writing *Spring Awakening*. I feel I have a much better sense of how to do this; I have a confidence about it. I'm taking the traditional rules of the form and trying to bend them a little to make them more my voice."

Because the ghosts' ship sank in 1912, the Titanic comes to mind. Is there a connection?

"Not really," Sheik says, and laughs. "I guarantee that Celine Dion will not be singing this material."

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Music, ghostly happenings steer 'Whisper House'

BY DIANA SAENGER
Contributor

What happens when an orphaned boy is forced to live with his crotchety aunt in a presumably haunted New England lighthouse is the theme of "Whisper House," a world premiere musical by songwriter Duncan Sheik and writer/musician Kyle Jarrow.

"Whisper House," directed by Peter Askin, runs through Feb. 21 in The Old Globe Theater.

Set in 1942, "Whisper House" has World War II in full swing. Eleven-year-old Christopher (Eric Brent Zutty), who has suffered losing

'Whisper House'
■ **When:** Through Feb. 21
■ **Where:** The Old Globe Theater, Balboa Park
■ **Tickets:** \$55-\$105
■ **Contact:** (619) 23-GLOBE, www.TheOldGlobe.org

his father to the war and his distraught mother to an institution, must now live with his Aunt Lilly (Mare Win-

ningham), a lighthouse keeper.

Music, performed by ghosts (David Poe and Holly Brook), is filtered throughout the heart-warming story as Christopher imagines he's hearing strange noises in the lighthouse. It's when Christopher begins to hear the strange music that his fears intensify.

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Jan 13, 2010

By Diana Saenger

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Photo: courtesy of The Old Globe

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'Whisper House'

- When: Through Feb. 21
- Where: The Old Globe Theater, Balboa Park
- Tickets: \$55-\$105
- Contact: (619) 23-GLOBE, www.TheOldGlobe.org

Diana Saenger

Diana Saenger is a freelance writer for the La Jolla Light. To make comments about articles, contact talkback@lajollalight.com.

Beautiful music and ghostly happenings steer 'Whisper House'

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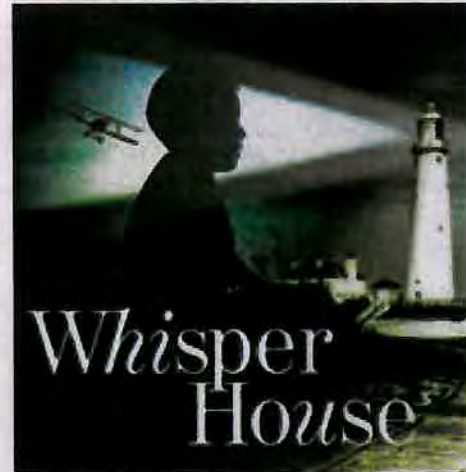
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RANCHO SANTA FE REVIEW

January 14, 2010

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By *Diana Saenger*
Contributor

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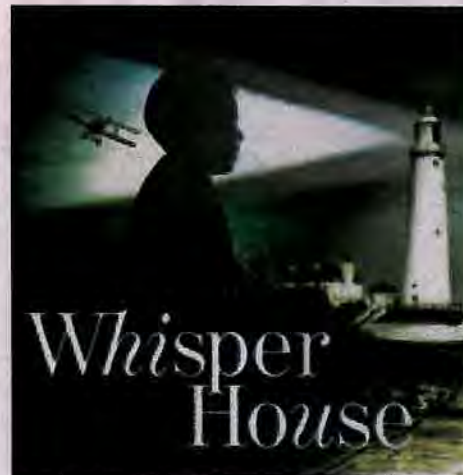
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[Duncan Sheik's New Musical 'Whisper House' Opening in San Diego](#)

- Posted on Jan 13th 2010 6:10PM by [Michael D. Ayers](#)
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San Diego take note: following his smash Broadway hit 'Spring Awakening,' [Duncan Sheik](#)'s new musical theater venture, 'Whisper House,' is opening Wednesday night at the Old Globe Theatre. The play is the result of three-plus years of writing by Sheik and playwright Kyle Jarrow. The tale centers on an 11-year-old boy who's sent to live with his aunt in a lighthouse where a literal band of ghosts end up doing what they do best: haunt.

"There were all these really funny conversations we had in the development, like 'are ghosts real?'" Sheik tells Spinner. "[They were] very ontological conversations. What does it mean for a ghost to be real? Those are questions that I think the audience should be asking. We don't answer those questions and I hope it comes across as enigmatic."

Fans have been able to hear the music that Sheik composed for 'Whisper House' -- the album was released nearly a year ago -- and the singer-songwriter says that above everything, it was nice to get back to writing lyrics. "It had been three-plus years since I'd written any lyrics at all," he reveals. "My last record that I'd written was in 2005, so when I jumped into writing the lyrics for the show, I thought I'd never done this before: written lyrics from the perspective of another character other than myself."

"When I really got into it, I got in a zone," he adds. "The ghosts kind of have an attitude about them, a cynical, sardonic sense of humor. It was great to write from that perspective"

Only time will tell if 'Whisper House' has the same success that followed 'Spring Awakening.' Sheik is being cautiously optimistic about taking it elsewhere. "Hopefully -- fingers crossed -- I'll be like 'we should definitely bring it to New York.' But I'm not an expert at what it takes to produce commercial theater. I just got really lucky on my first show out of the box. It's possible that 'Whisper House' has a different life. It may be suited for a different environment."

'Whisper House' is scheduled to run through Feb. 21.

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New England Lighthouses

History, News, Photography, and Commentary

Thursday, January 21, 2010

Whisper House, a Haunted Musical

Strange as it may sound, a new musical play that just opened takes place at a haunted Maine lighthouse during World War II. The musical, "Whisper House," by Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow, is at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, California. It stars Mare Winningham, who's well known for many appearance in movies and TV.

Here's a description of the play from the Old Globe Theatre:

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, *Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

Sounds pretty intriguing to me. Check out this video for more info on the music:

Posted by Lighthouseer at [8:13 AM](#)



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Though his name will be familiar to Playbill readers everywhere, Duncan Sheik's powerhouse vocals might not be for pop alternative acts who stopped following his every move since the one-hit wonder of the '90s, "Barely Breathing." Yet the composer for the Tony Award-winning [musical](#) Spring Awakening is anything but new to the business, and now that he's heading out for a spring trek through the States with his new set Whisper House, decade-long fans are sure to gear up as Duncan Sheik tickets become available again online.

On top of promoting the new album, Sheik's new play of the same name is currently premiering at San Diego's [Old Globe Theater](#) starring Emmy Award winner Mare Winningham. The follow-up to his Grammy Award-winning musical, Sheik

worked with Kyle Jarrow for the executively produced Lou Spisto show that runs through Feb. 21. In preparation of his new play, Sheik will perform the Whisper House hits in front of audiences at the Old Globe Theater, benefitting the Globe's education activities.

Before long he'll be hitting the road in support of the Whisper House hits like "We're Here to Tell You" and "It's Better to be Dead" with a jaunt through several cities in March. "There's kind of some spooky [elements](#) to [the album], but it's meant to be a little bit of fun," Sheik says to LiveDaily. "It was actually a lot of fun writing it. I got to write from the perspective of the persona of the ghost, as opposed to Duncan Sheik."

Whisper House is equally the soundtrack to the new musical, which is set during World War II and follows 11-year-old Christopher, who lives in a haunted New England lighthouse with his Aunt Lilly. The tunes are performed by ghosts and delve into the boys' fears. Sheik said to LiveDaily, "I guess in the afterglow of the success of Spring Awakening, I had this sense of confidence that maybe something that I'm writing could actually make it."

The musical isn't a first-time collaboration between Duncan Sheik and lyricist Steven Sater, as the two musical masterminds also teamed up during the [musician's](#) 2000 Nonesuch album Phantom Moon. Their time together won't end following the production of Whisper House, either, as they move on to the next musical theater production of Nero (Another Golden Rome). The next musical feature under Sheik's helm underwent a workshop this summer at Vassar College with Idina Menzel and Spring Awakening's Lea Michele.

At 39 years of age, Duncan Sheik doesn't mind the stereotypes that his 1996 debut hit "Barely Breathing" was a [one hit wonder](#). He has since redeemed himself with a plethora of awards and an expanded repertoire that includes compositions for film and Broadway. Along with his Tony Awards for the wildly popular Spring Awakening, Sheik has created six albums since his synonymous debut in 1996, including 1998's Humming, 2001's Phantom Moon, 2002's Daylight, 2006's White Limousine and Brighter/ Later: A Duncan Sheik Anthology and 2007's Greatest Hits: A Duncan Sheik Collection.



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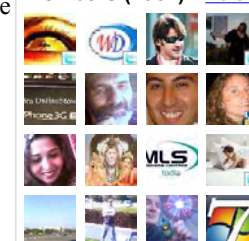
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DUNCAN SHEIK



Singer David Poe rehearses "Whisper House" at San Diego, California's Old Globe Theater, January 10, 2010. (Don Bartelt/Los Angeles Times/MCT) Duncan Sheik springs back with ghostly semi-musical 'Whisper House'

Duncan Sheik springs back with ghostly semi-musical 'Whisper House'

[21 January 2010]

By John Horn
 Los Angeles Times (MCT)

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SAN DIEGO — Duncan Sheik is a skeptic of the supernatural — "I completely don't believe in ghosts," the singer-songwriter says. Yet if his new musical "Whisper House" is to succeed in its world premiere Thursday at the Old Globe Theatre, audiences — not to mention some of the musical's characters — will need to have faith in things that go bump in the night.

The musical unfolds in distinct but concurrent realms: the living (five inhabitants of a coastal Maine town) and the dead (two singing ghosts, and their seven-piece backup band). And there are three separate "Whisper House" time periods: The ghosts last drew breath in the early 20th century, the people in Maine are living in the 1940s, and the musicians could have been playing a gig last night at a club. If the show comes together, none of that should matter.

Recent history stands to benefit "Whisper House." "Spring Awakening," the 2006 theatrical love child of Frank Wedekind's late 19th-century coming-of-age play and Sheik's modern ballads, not only swept the Tonys (eight wins, including best musical) but also proved that the sum of a classic text and contemporary melodies can actually be much greater than its outwardly dissonant parts.

"Whisper House" loosely follows that mash-up model, yet with a novel twist: The five "Whisper House" protagonists don't break into song. Instead, the new musical's choral complement is delivered by rock-and-rolling ghosts, who wander in and out of the action like ethereal intruders.

"The question now is how is this going to read?" Sheik says between rehearsals in San Diego. "How funny is or isn't it going to be? That's a total mystery to me. I just hope it's going to work."

The new production, with music and lyrics by Sheik and a book and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow, may unfold during World War II but owes its thematic inspiration to modern conflict and the paranoia it can incite. When the creative team assembled for the show's first read-through in



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mid-December, Jarrow stood before the cast and crew to say he saw "Whisper House" as being as much about orange threat-level alerts as anything else.

"I first started writing this in the heat of the Iraq war — that fear is something that guides a lot of life, that there is all this stuff telling us to be afraid," said Jarrow, whose playwriting credits include "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant" and "Armless." "How do you process fear and not let it control your life? That's one of the biggest questions of modern living."

Modern living isn't intrinsic to "Whisper House," as the story unfolds in early 1942. Christopher (Eric Brent Zutty) is an 11-year-old boy whose pilot father was killed by the Japanese; his mother, devastated by grief, suffers a nervous breakdown. Christopher is accordingly dispatched to a Maine lighthouse run by his spinster aunt, Lilly (Mare Winningham).

Lilly is assisted in her coastal endeavors by Yasuhiro (Arthur Acuna), a Japanese American of whom Christopher immediately becomes suspicious. Christopher's anxiety grows stronger as the show progresses, and he sees signs of treachery in what might be benign acts.

At the same time, Lilly reconsiders where her personal loyalties lie: to her cosseted, emotionally protected life or to those people around her who need (like a lighthouse, put another way) a beacon of guidance and protection.

As the threat of U-boat attacks intrudes on the ordinary isolation of the "Whisper House" lighthouse, so, too, do the show's ghosts. The shadowy musicians — the wraithlike remains of a band whose steamer was dashed on nearby rocks in 1912 — are led by two vocalists (David Poe and Holly Brook) who not only offer commentary on the on-stage action but also, like contemporary sirens belting out pop songs, try to lure the lighthouse's inhabitants to their own personal shipwrecks — even suicide.

As the musical's opening song, the moody ballad "Better off Dead," has it:

Release your heavy heart

Rest your weary head

When all the world's at war

It's better to be dead

"Whisper House" presents unconventional staging on a number of levels. In "Spring Awakening," the songs by Sheik and Steven Sater served a different narrative purpose (articulating the characters' inner lives) and were performed by the principal cast; as with most musicals, the songs gave way to dialogue (and vice versa) about every five minutes.

In "Whisper House," the show unfolds like a traditional play for longer stretches — the musical numbers are fewer (11 total, compared to "Spring Awakening's" 20 tunes) and further between, with some dialogue scenes lasting more than 10 minutes. "In normal musical theater, that would be anathema," Sheik says. "I was initially a little bit concerned about that. And the music is from a totally different reality from what's happening on stage."

At the same time, some of the "Whisper House" songs are performed as shadow plays in pantomimes projected on a translucent upstage screen, choreographed by Pilobolus Dance Theatre's Matt Kent, who collaborated with Poe on the dance troupe's recent "Shadowland" show.

What's more, the rules for the interaction between the dead and the living aren't always clear. Christopher can hear the ghosts' music, but even though Poe's crooning apparition blows out Yasuhiro's Zippo while he's trying to light a cigarette, it's ambiguous who can (and can't) discern the ghosts' physical presence. What's less vague is their role as they wander about the stage: They're gumming up the works, stoking paranoia.

"No matter what you do," the ghosts sing in the parable song "The Tale of Solomon Snell," "you'll never be safe." Or, in what Sheik and Jarrow say



is a parroting of statements from the George W. Bush administration in the song "We're Here to Tell You":

We're here to tell you

That all of this is real

And if you're terrified today

That's how you're supposed to feel (for real)

"The ghosts are meant to muck up the lives of the living characters" says the musical's director, Peter Askin ("Sexaholix," "Hedwig and the Angry Inch"). Adds Jarrow: "The more they can make the living people's lives awful, the more their song 'Better off Dead' makes sense."

The musical was originally commissioned by Connecticut's Stamford Center for the Arts in 2007 with actor Keith Powell ("30 Rock") set to direct, just as "Spring Awakening" was becoming a Broadway sensation. Sheik and Jarrow went off to write, knowing the songs would have to carry a narrative burden that the "Whisper House" book couldn't shoulder on its own.

"These are characters who don't talk about their feelings a lot," Jarrow says. "But you need back story. You need exposition. And you don't want to put that in the mouths of characters who wouldn't say it." But by the time the music and book were fleshed out, Stamford was on the ropes, eventually filing for bankruptcy.

Sheik, whose greatest pop hit was 1996's "Barely Breathing," already had recorded demo versions of the show's songs, and Sony Music Entertainment decided to release the record as a concept album a year before the musical's opening. "We didn't know where the show would go up, but we knew it would go up somewhere," Sheik says.

The album's liner notes only hinted at what the underlying musical was really about. What's more, the compositions and arrangements (a little guitar, some light percussion and a few horns) didn't sound like Stephen Sondheim or Rodgers & Hammerstein. "It's meant to be music you could hear in your car and you wouldn't instantly know it's musical theater," Sheik says.

An early album release served another purpose. Sheik and Jarrow believed that introducing the music before the show's premiere would familiarize some of the audience — even if only a small fraction — with "Whisper House's" musical and dramatic lexis.

"I think it's really great when you know the music, to some extent, when you see a show," Sheik says. It's a formula that worked well with the Who's "Tommy" and Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Jesus Christ Superstar," both of which were first known as albums before they were seen as staged musicals.

If the music captures the imagination of people who don't normally go to the theater — meaning anyone born after 1970 — all the better. "To me, the tough thing about theater is: How do you get young kids to see it?" Jarrow says. "A lot of younger people will buy a concert ticket before they buy a theater ticket. And that's a pity. I think the more 'Whisper House' sounds like a rock concert, the better."

It's the same kind of thinking that is guiding "American Idiot," a new musical based on the songs of punk rockers Green Day that premiered last fall (under the direction of "Spring Awakening's" Michael Mayer) at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre and will open on Broadway on April 20.

The Old Globe, which had been talking to Jarrow about another production, became the home for "Whisper House" after the Connecticut venue fell through. "We just think it's different and special and fragile and unique," Louis Spisto, the theater's chief executive officer and executive producer, told the cast and crew at the musical's first read-through. If the show succeeds in San Diego, a move to Broadway could be likely. "There are definitely parties interested in this," Spisto said.

MUSICALS IN LA

Wednesday, December 9, 2009

Whisper House Cast & Creative Team Announced at The Old Globe



Old Globe executive producer Lou Spisto today announced the complete cast and creative team for the world premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's new musical, *Whisper House*. Peter Askin helms the show, musical director is Jason Hart and the dance director is Wesley Fata.

Emmy Award winner Mare Winningham will headline the show playing Lilly. She last appeared at The Old Globe as Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* and is currently appearing in the world premiere of the Frank Wildhorn musical, *Bonnie and Clyde*, at La Jolla Playhouse

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, *Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher (Eric Brent Zutty), who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

The talented cast also features Arthur Acuña as Yasuhiro, Kevin Hoffman as Lieutenant Rando and Ted Koch as Charles. The creative team for *Whisper House* includes Michael Schweikardt (Scenic Design), Jenny Mannis (Costume Design), Matt Richards (Lighting Design), Dan Moses Schreier (Sound Design) and Richard Costabile (Stage Manager).

Whisper House will run January 13 – February 21, with opening night scheduled for January 21 at 8:00 pm. Tickets are currently available by subscription only. Single tickets will go on sale on December 13 at noon and can be purchased online at www.theoldglobe.org/, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

Duncan Sheik will also perform in concert at the Globe prior to the run of *Whisper House* with special guest, David Poe. Sheik has toured extensively this year and will perform songs from *Whisper House* and his other acclaimed albums. Tickets are currently available to subscribers and single tickets will go on sale Friday, December 11 at noon.

<http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2008/11/duncan-sheik-talks-whisper-house-nightingale-cover.html>

By Henry Freedland

Duncan Sheik talks *Whisper House*, covers album, more



Only two years after including "I Don't Believe in Ghosts" on the remix-friendly *White Limousine*, Grammy-nominated songwriter Duncan Sheik is already singing a different tune about spirits. His stage follow-up to [Tony-adored](#) rock musical *Spring Awakening* tells the story of a boy who's surrounded by them.

"There's a young boy named Christopher," Sheik explained shortly after [his performance](#) in the *Paste* office last week. "It's WWII and his father is shot down over the Pacific and his mom is sent to a sanitarium. And so he is sent to live with his aunt Lily in a lighthouse in Maine. The lighthouse seems very spooky, and there are many ships that have crashed off the shore, and the names of the people who died in the vicinity of the lighthouse are on these plaques in the lighthouse. So the boy comes to believe the lighthouse is haunted when he hears ghostly music. And he believes that the lighthouse is haunted by these musician-ghosts who sing all the songs to him."

The play, *Whisper House*, is the brainchild of director [Keith Powell](#), best known for his role as *TGS* staff writer Toofer on NBC's *30 Rock*. As Sheik told it, "the whole thing was Keith's idea. He said, 'I want to do a play that involves ghosts and lighthouses, and I want you to write the music for it.'" Soon librettist Kyle Jarrow was brought on board and the three went down to Charleston in January to write the bulk of the songs. One of them, "Earthbound Starlight," serves as a prologue, and Sheik speculated that an animation of the song narrating the show's developing premise might start off the action when *Whisper House* hits the stage. "Multimedia," mused Sheik, "it's always good, I guess."

But fans won't have to wait for the April opening to hear all the tunes. After the 10-day Charleston retreat, Sheik recorded the songs. To his surprise, Sony and Victor Records showed interested in releasing them. "I actually didn't mean for this to be the next Duncan Sheik record," said the songwriter. "It's just, I made the demos, and then everyone said, 'Oh, this is your next record, so now we're putting it out as the next record.' And that's just what happened." *Whisper House* is set for a January 2009 release.

On his current tour, Sheik carries with him female vocalist [Holly Brook](#), who will likely become a *Whisper House* cast member alongside Sheik-collaborator [David Poe](#) on the male part. But even as the show reaches fruition, Sheik's other projects continue to see the light of day. The tour EP includes a rendition of the Psychedelic Furs' [oft-covered](#) "The Ghost In You," a hint of Sheik's upcoming covers album, which will also include music by Depeche Mode, Tears for Fears, The Smiths, New Order and the Thompson Twins. "It's all music from the '80s that was nominally kind of synth-pop, but it's recorded in these very, very kind of even more miserable, sad acoustic versions," Sheik said. (So perhaps he hasn't changed *completely* from 1996's pop smash ["Barely Breathing"](#) after all.)

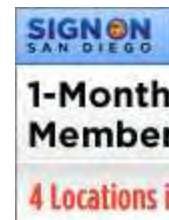
For *Spring Awakening* fans, Sheik spilled some details about his new collaboration with project partner Stephen Sater, *The Nightingale*, based on a Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale. Even though he admits that it's more chamber piece than rock musical, he assured devotees it wasn't such a radical shift as all that. "It won't be surprising for anybody who's heard *Spring Awakening* in terms of the music," Sheik said. *Nightingale* is scheduled to open in September 2009 at San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater.

So why all the play-action for the songwriter? "The truth is, I really like narrative," he said, "and I like the relationship of music to narrative. Whether it's in a theatrical context, or a filmic context. It could be a CD with a book for all I care. It's just I like the idea of songs helping to tell a story, and having the story really helping the songs to become more emotionally resonant. I realize that's one of the things I'm passionate about, that I enjoy."

And while he thinks the future likely holds "a record that's just a collection of songs," Sheik's happy with his current world of work. "For the time being," he said, "I'm really enjoying the process of working with story and seeing how that can broaden the palate of what songs might be."



NIGHT AND DAY



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The haunted and the vaunted

A look back at the year in theater

BY JAMES HEBERT

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2010 AT 4:35 P.M.

For [theater](#) in San Diego, 2010 began with a whisper. It ended with something more akin to a shiver.

Duncan Sheik's spare, lyrical ghost story "Whisper House," a world-premiere work (and Sheik's first stage piece since the huge Broadway success of "Spring Awakening"), proved to be a beacon of haunting things to come when it hit the Old Globe Theatre last January.

Cygnnet Theatre followed with a ravishingly nasty revival of [Stephen Sondheim](#)'s blood-soaked "Sweeney Todd." Ion Theatre, freshly settled



SEAN M. HAFHEY

into its revamped Hillcrest digs, rolled out Jeffrey Hatcher's inventive adaptation of the chiller "[Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde](#)." (Clearly, based on these two shows, Victorian London was not a place to go sticking your neck out.)

David Poe and Holly Brook played singing ghosts in the Old Globe's world-premiere production of Duncan Sheik's "Whisper House."

Moxie Theatre pulled off the myth-based afterlife meditation "Eurydice" with an affecting minimalism, and then (in partnership with Intrepid Shakespeare Co.) staged the witch-centric classic "The Crucible" with a maximum sense of relevance.

And North Coast Repertory Theatre joined the supernatural scrum (in name, anyway) with a devastating take on "Ghosts," Henrik Ibsen's story of family breakdown.

Toward year's end, La Jolla Playhouse played for keeps with two shows steeped in their own particular kinds of horror: Director Robert Woodruff's adaptation of the Dostoevsky tale of alienation "Notes From Underground"; and an unforgettable production of Lynn Nottage's "Ruined," the 2009 Pulitzer Prize-winner about tragedy and redemption in war-torn Central Africa.

Looking back, it's easy to think of 2010 as a theater year that reveled in the unsettling and the upsetting. But as always, there was light, too, whether it came via the bright satirical blasts of Diversionary Theatre's "[title of show]" or the more muted radiance of Moonlight Stage Co.'s elegant "Ring Round the Moon."

Given those contrasts and the massive variety of theater that happens regularly on local stages, picking 10 top plays out of the 100-plus I saw this year feels harshly arbitrary, like comparing apples with oranges and then matching those both against figs. Or aardvarks.

And yet I've managed to come up with a list that is so unimpeachable it is guaranteed to stand the test of time. That time being approximately 37 minutes, when doubt and regret and second-guessing will begin to set in.

So -- and please, stop me before I dither again! -- on to the list. But first, the disclaimers and honorable mentions:

I missed Ion's "Hurlyburly," which many of my critic colleagues raved about; as well as "Notes From Underground" (reviewed by freelance writer Jennifer Chung Klam while I was out of town), a show that seemed to divide audiences (and critics) like few others.

Besides shows mentioned earlier, I also admired Intrepid's "King John," North Coast Rep's "[25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee](#)" (a plum of a local premiere), Cygnet's hugely ambitious "The Norman Conquests" as well its "Private Lives," the Playhouse's sumptuous "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and the Globe's bracing take on Neil Simon's "Lost in Yonkers" (along with the theater's very strong Shakespeare Festival).

And one out-of-town pick: The band [Green Day](#)'s Broadway opus "American Idiot," a gritty tone poem scribbled in power chords and raw poignancy. Now there's a show that took 2010 from a whisper to a scream.

1. **"Ruined," La Jolla Playhouse:** I thought I was prepared for the blistering impact of Nottage's play, having seen the 2009 off-Broadway staging (and having read the script while serving as a Pulitzer juror). Yet Liesl Tommy's direction drew fresh sparks from the friction of hope and despair in Nottage's story of women who've found dubious refuge from war in a makeshift bar and brothel.
2. **"Sweeney Todd," Cygnet Theatre:** Deborah Gilmour Smyth, a performer of amazing range, helped make this show as the gleefully savage Mrs. Lovett, but she had plenty of help from fellow cast members and Cygnet's chill-filled staging.
3. **"Whisper House," Old Globe:** Duncan Sheik's atmospheric score, by turns playful and disquieting, carried this simply scripted musical about a young boy struggling to vanquish ghosts (real or imagined) while holed up in a remote Maine lighthouse.
4. **"Yellow Face," Mo'olelo Performing Arts Co.:** Seema Sueko's company, known more for its commitment to social causes than to comedy, stretched beautifully with David Henry Hwang's smart, coyly self-referential satire.
5. **"boom," San Diego Repertory Theatre:** Peter Sinn Nachtrieb's deceptively silly play wound up on the Pulitzer shortlist in 2009 for its utterly original take on such big topics as evolution, creation myths and global apocalypse. (Not to mention Craigslist dating.) Rep artistic chief Sam Woodhouse's ear seemed perfectly tuned to the play's very weird wavelength. (What's the frequency, Peter?)
6. **"[title of show]," Diversionary Theatre:** Speaking of creation myths: Tracking the evolution of "[title of show]" could give anyone headaches. It's a musical about the birth of a musical: Itself. Somehow, director James Vasquez and his cast figured it out exquisitely.
7. **"The Taming of the Shrew," Old Globe:** Director Ron Daniels brought all kinds of fun to Shakespeare's story of a reluctant bride and her too-eager suitor, with an especially sharp eye for the plights of secondary characters.
8. **"Ghosts," North Coast Rep:** It was amazing to come to a performance of this notoriously difficult Ibsen work late in the run, and find the Solana Beach theater packing every last seat in the house. A testament to artistic chief David Ellenstein's directorial mastery of the story's tensions and textures.
9. **"Hairspray," San Diego Rep:** Woodhouse and Co. teamed with student actors and musicians from the San Diego School of Creative and Performing Arts to stage the hit musical's local premiere with eye-catching pizzazz.
10. **"miXtape," Lamb's Players Theatre:** Yes, it's a musical revue, and yes, it pays homage to some of the dippiest pop-culture moments in history. Somehow, though, creators Colleen Kollar Smith and Jon Lorenz make this '80s tribute something more than just a guilty pleasure. I'll say it again (even if it wasn't very funny the first time): They whip it good.

Local arts scene drew national acclaim

BY PAM KRAGEN
pkragen@nctimes.com

With the exception of its art galleries, San Diego County's arts scene was in a growth mode in 2010, with a number of homegrown artists from the fields of art, dance, fashion and literature making their mark on a national level with awards and television appearances. Here's a month-by-month roundup:

January

● Lux Art Institute in Encinitas expanded its artist-in-residency program to include Kids-in-Residence, an in-depth, after-school arts program for local children ages 8 to 12. The multiweek programs allow the grade-schoolers to work with the institute's visiting artists, who live on-site and create site-specific work during month-long residencies throughout the year.

● Solana Beach's Ordovery Gallery, which in the past exhibited only fine art photography by founder Abe Ordovery and others, held its first-ever all-painting exhibit in January. The gallery also sells monoprints, glass art, ceramics and art jewelry.

February

● San Diego native Justin Halpern completes work on his book "S--- My Dad Says," based on his Twitter.com account that logs the amusing, expletive-filled comments made by his 75-year-old father, retired UCSD Medical Center radiologist Dr. Samuel Halpern.

Launched in August of last year, Halpern's Twitter account now has 1.9 million followers and has spawned a Warner Bros. television series starring William Shatner that premiered in September. Halpern's book topped the New York Times nonfiction best-sellers list in June.



Justin Halpern



Citing low ticket sales and donations, the Mingei International Museum closed its 7-year-old downtown Escondido satellite museum in June. NCT file photo

March

● When the National Endowment for the Arts was handing out federal arts grants in 2009, San Diego ranked at the bottom among California cities, earning just two NEA grants (for a total of \$75,000, given to the Old Globe Theatre and the inner-city photography program Aja Project) compared with state leader San Francisco (which got 37 grants totaling \$1.4 million) and No. 2 finisher L.A., with 15 grants totaling just over \$1 million.

In a move that may (or may not) have been related to harsh criticism from local arts groups and agencies about the small number of local grants, new NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman kicked off his national "Art Works" tour in March with visits to Balboa Park, the NTC Promenade, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and La Jolla Playhouse, and in May he returned to Balboa Park to launch the Blue Star Museums initiative (where 13 local museums offered free summer admission to military families).

Subsequently, NEA grants to San Diego County arts organizations in 2010 more than quadrupled to \$360,000. This year's grantees: \$90,000

for an addition to UC San Diego's Stuart Collection of site-specific sculpture by artist Do-Ho Suh; \$30,000 for the Museum of Photographic Arts' online exhibition series; \$20,000 for the San Diego Historical Society's African-American art collection; \$75,000 for the San Diego Museum of Art's documentation program; \$45,000 for the San Diego Museum of Man's American Indian collection; \$10,000 for Orchestra Nova's webcast programming; \$15,000 for Mo'olelo Performing Arts' production of the play "Yellow Face"; \$55,000 for the Old Globe's student youth education program and its production of the musical "Whisper House"; \$10,000 for the UC Regents' Theatre Journal in La Jolla; \$15,000 each for the San Diego Latino Film Festival and San Diego Asian Film Foundation; \$40,000 for San Diego Opera's "Nabucco" production; \$20,000 for San Diego Repertory Theatre's Latino theater production by Culture Clash; and \$25,000 to La Jolla Playhouse for a war-themed play by Naomi Iizuka.

● San Diego Zoo reopened its Polar Bear Plunge exhibit

after a \$1 million expansion. The renovated exhibit (home to the park's three bears, Chino, Tatqiq and Kalluk) includes more window areas where visitors can see the bears up close, as well as a number of interactive exhibits that teach visitors about how climate change (the melting polar ice cap) is threatening the future of polar bears and other Arctic wildlife.

April

● Ed Fosmire, the former director of development for Cal State Long Beach, took over as executive director for the Oceanside Museum of Art. Fosmire replaced Skip Pahl, who retired after 12 years at the museum.



Ed Fosmire

Fosmire said his initial goal is to expand the community's awareness of the Oceanside museum and its collections.

Before becoming director of development at the university, Fosmire was director of development and marketing at Long Beach Museum of Art.

● Longtime UC San Diego writing professor Rae Armantrout was honored with the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and the 2009 award from the National Book Critics Circle for her 10th collection of poems, "Versed." The book was also a finalist for the Circle's National Book Award. Armantrout, a 2008 Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry who has taught poetry and poetics for 20 years at UCSD, heads the university's department of literature writing section. Her book "Versed" is a double collection. The first half of the book plays with the notion of



Rae Armantrout

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vice versa, and the second half is about her experience fighting cancer.

● Seth Lerer, a literature professor at UC San Diego, won the 2010 Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism, for his book "Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter." Lerer's book also won the 2009 National Book Critics Circle Award. Written both for academics and the general

public, Lerer said his book was inspired by his own love for children's novels as a boy and the books that his son is reading now. The \$30,000 prize, the largest cash prize in English-language literary criticism, is administered for the Capote estate by the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop. Lerer is dean of the Arts and Humanities department at UCSD.

● UltraStar Cinemas became the first movie theater chain in San Diego County to install high-tech D-Box seats in some of its auditoriums. The motion-simulator seats carry an \$8 premium,

but UltraStar has had few problems filling the rocking-and-rolling chairs for screenings of thrillers and action films.

● San Dieguito Art Guild relocated its Offtrack Gallery to the Encinitas' Lumberyard Shopping Center. The gallery was forced to move when its old location at Second and D streets was sold.

May

● One of San Diego's longest-serving television news anchors, NBC 7/39's Marty Levin, retired after more than 30 years on the

air. Levin worked at three different San Diego networks, as well as stations around the country (including an NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C.). He has co-anchored the NBC 7/39 news for the past 14 years with Susan Taylor, who said of Levin in a statement: "He's smart and insightful. He's always known what's important and how to get to the heart of the story. It's never been about him. It's always been about the news product."

● SeaWorld San Diego debuted Blue Horizons, a dolphin, whale, bird and

aerialist show in the renovated Dolphin Stadium. The show, about a young girl who imagines a fantastical world in the air and sea, features bottlenose dolphins, short-finned pilot whales and a variety of exotic birds (including East African crowned cranes, Australian coral-billed parrots, black vultures and more) performing in the water and in the air, along with a cast of human performers who will dive from platforms, plunge from bungees and swing on "clouds." Dolphin Stadium was retrofitted with 700 more seats and new sets,

swings, diving boards and sound system for the show, which replaced "Dolphin Discovery," a nature-themed dolphin show that ran from 1996 to 2009.

June

● Mingei International Museum closed the doors June 26 on its 7-year-old satellite museum in downtown Escondido.

The closing of the 23,000-square-foot building on Grand Avenue was attributed by officials to low attendance and a lack of do-

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nations. The Balboa Park-based textiles museum paid \$5.25 million for the former J.C. Penney department store building in 2001, and spent another \$2 million remodeling the space, staffing the museum and filling it with exhibits over the years. Mingei officials said they plan to use the building for storage and won't rule out the possibility of some day reopening the museum.

● Scripps radiologists and the San Diego Museum of Man embarked on a project to solve some 550-year-old riddles involving four **Peruvian mummies**.

The bodies of four naturally mummified children from Peru were carefully removed from the museum's collection and transported

to Scripps Memorial Hospital Imaging Pavilion in La Jolla, where they were CAT-scanned to determine their ages, causes of death and any other mysteries that may exist under the tight cotton cloths that bound their bodies for half a millennium. Research on the results is now under way.

● Members of the California Ballet company mourned the death of **Paul T. Koverman**, a longtime company member and instructor who passed away May 6 in Dayton, Ohio. He was 56.

Koverman was a company principal dancer from 1978 to 1984, when he left to run a ballet school in Phoenix. He later rejoined California Ballet in 1991 as resident choreographer, instructor and ballet master, a position he held until 2004. During those years, he was also an instructor at San Diego State University.

Among the dozen works in his local repertoire are 1998's "Elegy," and 2001's "Breathless" and "Symphonic Dances" and "In Memory Of ... United We Stand." Koverman passed away after a short illness in Dayton, where he'd been living for the past two years. He was raised in Dayton but spent most of his dance career in California and Arizona.

● **Kathryn Kanjo** was hired as the chief curator, and head of the curatorial department, of the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego.

Kanjo previously served as director of the university art museum at UC Santa Barbara since 2006. She started her curatorial career at MOCA San Diego, when she served as an assistant curator from 1992-1994. After that, she worked as a contemporary art curator for the Portland Art Museum

from 1996-1999 and served as executive director of Artpace San Antonio in San Antonio, Texas, from 2000-2006. She joined the MOCA San Diego staff on July 20.

July

● Escondido jewelry designer **Kimberly Allison** won first place in the eighth annual International 2010 Ugly Necklace Contest. The secret to her success? Tampons.

Allison unwrapped cotton tampons and hand-dyed them in purple and magenta ink, then tied them together with strings, chains, a plastic cockroach, a Pond's facial towelette, a plastic razor, rubber duck, JC Penney employee ID card, candy bar wrapper and Mardi Gras beads to create a necklace she calls "Go With the Flow."

As hideous as it sounds, Allison had plenty of rivals for the top prize. Other entries include "The Super Duper Purple Pooper Scooper," "The Purple Eyesore of Texas" and "The Drinking Girls Necklace: The Grapes of Wrath." To see Allison's winning necklace, visit landofodds.com/ugly8contest.htm.

● Local artists **Aaron Chang** and **Wade Konikowsky** teamed up to open the Aaron Chang Ocean Art Gallery, a gallery in the Cedros Design District of Solana Beach.

Chang is an award-winning commercial photographer who has worked in more than 40 countries and whose work has been featured on the covers of more than 100 magazines. Konikowsky is a Carlsbad-based oil painter who focuses on ocean-inspired themes. His work is displayed internationally in 17 galleries.

● San Diego native **Micah Parzen** was appointed executive director of the San Diego Museum of Man.

Parzen, who holds a Ph.D. in anthropology, is a partner in the San Diego law

firm of Luce, Forward, Hamilton & Scripps, where he is the firm's pro bono program coordinator. The Point Loma resident career has been in law, but his heart has been in anthropology. He has conducted extensive fieldwork with the Navajo Nation and is an active human rights advocate.

● Encinitas native **Christopher Collins** was one of 16 contestants chosen for Lifetime Television's eighth season of the "Project Runway" fashion challenge series. In a biography provided by the network, the 30-year-old Collins says his mother taught him to sew, but he developed his fashion skills while a freshman at San Francisco State. The La Costa Canyon High School grad runs his own contemporary couture line in San Francisco. The soft-spoken Collins was eliminated in the season's 11th round where he made an ill-conceived activewear outfit for client (and show judge/producer) Heidi Klum.

● The Port of San Diego selected a panel of artists led by England's Peter Fink to **artistically light the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge**. The \$4 million project will string a constantly changing pattern of LED lights along the 2.1-mile span of the bridge to create an iconic nighttime art installation.

August

● Poway sculptor **Richard Becker** was elected to membership in the National Sculpture Society, an honor that he believes makes him the first San Diegan to join the prestigious organization since its founding in 1893.

Becker, an engineer by day, said one of his sculptures, "Head," a bust fragment from the Miramar National Cemetery POW Monument, was selected for exhibition through October at the Brookgreen Gardens in Myrtle Beach, S.C. The bust was created as a test piece for a much larger bronze commissioned for

the Miramar cemetery by the San Diego chapter of the American Ex-Prisoners of War. The bust fragment was juried into the National Sculpture Society's 77th annual Awards Exhibition at Brookgreen Gardens. The primary model for Becker's piece was Tommy Crosby of Chula Vista, the grandson of former WWII POW Tom Crosby.

● **The San Marcos Historical Society** held a dedication for its new museum — a 1940s-era schoolhouse — in Walnut Grove Park's Heritage Park row on Sycamore Drive. The museum temporarily closed in mid-2009 to make way for a new school at its old location on San Marcos Boulevard. The society's goal now is to raise enough money to bring home the schoolhouse's original bell; a former San Marcos newspaper publisher in Northern California has offered to restore and donate the bell if the society can pay for its transportation.

● The California Center for the Arts, Escondido Museum hosted an unusual exhibit that allowed visitors to add their own work to the show with **"Leveled: An Interactive Experiment in Art."** Four artists created installations that museumgoers were strongly encouraged to touch, enter, climb aboard, alter and paint.

September

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See **Arts, 15**

Arts

Continued from Page 14

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YEAR IN REVIEW: San Diego arts scene expanded, drew national attention

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By PAM KRAGEN - pkragen@nctimes.com North County Times - The Californian | Posted: Wednesday, December 29, 2010 8:03 am | No Comments Posted | Print

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[Buy this photo](#) Escondido residents Kai Messick and Caston Turner check out the window display at the Mingei Museum during their walk along Grand Avenue in downtown Escondido in March. Museum officials closed the museum on June 26 due to a bad economy and struggling patronage.

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With the exception of its art galleries, San Diego County's arts scene was in a growth mode in 2010, with a number of homegrown artists making their mark on a national level with awards and television appearances. Here's a month-by-month roundup:

January:

-- Lux Art Institute in Encinitas expanded its artist-in-residency program to include Kids-in-Residence, an in-depth, after-school arts program for local children ages 8 to 12. The multiweek programs allow the grade-schoolers to work with the institute's visiting artists, who live on-site and create site-specific work during monthlong residencies throughout the year.

-- Solana Beach's Ordovery Gallery, which in the past exhibited mostly fine art photography by founder Abe Ordovery and others, held its first-ever all-painting exhibit in January. The gallery also carries paintings, monoprints, glass art, ceramics and art jewelry.

February:

-- San Diego native Justin Halpern completes work on his book "**Sh*t My Dad Says**," based on his Twitter.com account that logs the amusing, expletive-filled comments made by his 75-year-old father, retired UCSD Medical Center radiologist Dr. Samuel Halpern. Started in August of last year, Halpern's Twitter account now has 1.9 million followers and has spawned a Warner Bros. television series starring William Shatner that premiered in September. Halpern's book topped the New York Times nonfiction bestsellers list in June.

March:

-- When the **National Endowment for the Arts** was handing out federal arts grants in 2009, San Diego ranked at the bottom among California cities, earning just two NEA grants (for a total of \$75,000, given to the Old Globe Theatre and the inner-city photography program Aja Project) compared with state leader San Francisco (which got 37 grants totaling \$1.4 million) and No. 2 finisher L.A., with 15 grants totaling just over \$1 million.

In a move that may (or may not) have been related to harsh criticism from local arts groups and agencies about the small number of local grants, new NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman kicked off his national "Art Works" tour in March with visits to Balboa Park, the NTC Promenade, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and La Jolla Playhouse, and in May he returned to Balboa Park to launch the Blue Star Museums initiative (where 13 local museums offered free summer admission to military families).

Subsequently, NEA grants to San Diego County arts organizations in 2010 more than quadrupled to \$360,000. This year's grantees: \$90,000 for an addition to UC San Diego's Stuart Collection of site-specific sculpture by artist Do-Ho Suh; \$30,000 for the Museum of Photographic Arts' online exhibition series; \$20,000 for the San Diego Historical Society's African-American art collection; \$75,000 for the San Diego Museum of Art's documentation program; \$45,000 for the San Diego Museum of Man's American Indian collection; \$10,000 for Orchestra Nova's webcast programming; \$15,000 for Mo'olelo Performing Arts' production of the play "Yellow Face"; \$55,000 for the Old Globe's student youth education program and its production of the musical "Whisper House"; \$10,000 for the UC Regents' Theatre Journal in La Jolla; \$15,000 each for the San Diego Latino Film Festival and San Diego Asian Film Foundation; \$40,000 for San Diego Opera's "Nabucco" production; \$20,000 for San Diego Repertory Theatre's Latino theater production by Culture Clash; and \$25,000 to La Jolla Playhouse for a war-themed play by Naomi Iizuka.

-- **San Diego Zoo** reopened its Polar Bear Plunge exhibit after a \$1 million expansion. The renovated exhibit (home to the park's three bears, Chinook, Tatqiq and Kalluk) includes more window areas where visitors can see the bears up close, as well as a number of interactive exhibits that teach visitors about how climate change (the melting polar ice cap) is threatening the future of polar bears and other Arctic wildlife.

April:

-- **Ed Fosmire**, the former director of development for Cal State Long Beach, took over as executive director for the Oceanside Museum of Art. Fosmire replaced Skip Pahl, who retired after 12 years at the museum. Fosmire said his initial goal is to expand the community's awareness of the Oceanside museum and its collections.

Before becoming director of development at the university, Fosmire was director of development and marketing at Long Beach Museum of Art. He holds a masters and bachelor's degree in art history from Cal State Long Beach and specializes in Asian art with a particular interest in the arts of India, Tibet and Japan.

-- Longtime UC San Diego writing professor **Rae Armantrout** was honored with the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and the 2009 award from the National Book Critics Circle for her 10th collection of poems, "Versed." The book was also a finalist for the Circle's National Book Award. Armantrout, a 2008 Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry who has taught poetry and poetics for 20 years at UCSD, heads the university's department of literature writing section. Her book "Versed" is a double collection. The first half of the book plays with the notion of vice versa, and the second half is about her experience fighting cancer.

-- **Seth Lerer**, a literature professor at UC San Diego, won the 2010 Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism, for his book

"Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter." Lerer's book also won the 2009 National Book Critics Circle Award. Written both for academics and the general public, Lerer said his book was inspired by his own love for children's novels as a boy and the books that his son is reading now. The \$30,000 prize, the largest cash prize in English-language literary criticism, is administered for the Capote estate by the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop. Lerer is dean of the Arts and Humanities department at UCSD.

-- **UltraStar Cinemas** became the first movie theater chain in San Diego County to install high-tech D-Box seats in some of its auditoriums. The motion-simulator seats carry an \$8 premium, but UltraStar has had few problems filling the rocking-and-rolling chairs for screenings of thrillers and action films.

-- San Dieguito Art Guild relocated its Offtrack Gallery to the Encinitas' Lumberyard Shopping Center. The gallery was forced to move when its old location at Second and D streets was sold.

May:

-- One of San Diego's longest-serving television news anchors, NBC 7/39's **Marty Levin**, retired after more than 30 years on the air.

Levin worked at three different San Diego networks, as well as stations around the country (including an NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C.). He has co-anchored the NBC 7/39 news for the past 14 years with Susan Taylor, who said of Levin in a statement: "He's smart and insightful. He's always known what's important and how to get to the heart of the story. It's never been about him. It's always been about the news product."

-- **SeaWorld San Diego** debuted Blue Horizons, a dolphin, whale, bird and aerialist show in the renovated Dolphin Stadium. The show, about a young girl who imagines a fantastical world in the air and sea, features bottlenose dolphins, short-finned pilot whales and a variety of exotic birds (including East African crowned cranes, Australian coral-billed parrots, black vultures and more) performing in the water and in the air, along with a cast of human performers who will dive from platforms, plunge from bungees and swing on "clouds." Dolphin Stadium was retrofitted with 700 more seats and new sets, swings, diving boards and sound system for the show, which replaced "Dolphin Discovery," a nature-themed dolphin show that ran from 1996 to 2009.

June:

-- **Mingei International Museum** closed the doors June 26 on its 7-year-old satellite museum in downtown Escondido.

The closing of the 23,000-square-foot building on Grand Avenue was attributed by officials to low attendance and a lack of donations. The Balboa Park-based textiles museum paid \$5.25 million for the former J.C. Penney department store building in 2001, and spent another \$2 million remodeling the space, staffing the museum and filling it with exhibits over the years. Mingei officials said they plan to use the building for storage and won't rule out the possibility of some day reopening the museum.

-- Scripps radiologists and the San Diego Museum of Man embarked on a project to solve some 550-year-old riddles involving four **Peruvian mummies**.

The bodies of four naturally mummified children from Peru were carefully removed from the museum's collection and transported to Scripps Memorial Hospital Imaging Pavilion in La Jolla, where they were CAT-scanned to determine their ages, causes of death and any other mysteries that may exist under the tight cotton cloths that bound their bodies for half a millennium. Research on the results is now under way.

-- Members of the California Ballet company mourned the death of **Paul T. Koverman**, a longtime company member and instructor who passed away May 6 in Dayton, Ohio. He was 56.

Koverman was a company principal dancer from 1978 to 1984, when he left to run a ballet school in Phoenix. He later rejoined California Ballet in 1991 as resident choreographer, instructor and ballet master, a position he held until 2004. During those years, he was also an instructor at San Diego State University. Among the dozen works in his local repertoire are 1998's "Elegy," and 2001's "Breathless" and "Symphonic Dances" and "In Memory Of ... United We Stand." Koverman passed away after a short illness in Dayton, where he'd been living for the past two years. He was raised in Dayton but spent most of his dance career in California and Arizona.

-- **Kathryn Kanjo** was hired as the chief curator, and head of the curatorial department, of the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego.

Kanjo previously served as director of the university art museum at UC Santa Barbara since 2006. She started her curatorial career at MOCA San Diego, when she served as an assistant curator from 1992-1994. After that, she worked as a contemporary art curator for the Portland Art Museum from 1996-1999 and served as executive director of Artpace San Antonio in San Antonio, Texas, from 2000-2006. She joined the MOCA San Diego staff on July 20.

July:

-- Escondido jewelry designer **Kimberly Allison** won first place in the eighth annual International 2010 Ugly Necklace Contest. The secret to her success? Tampons.

Allison unwrapped cotton tampons and hand-dyed them in purple and magenta ink, then tied them together with strings, chains, a plastic cockroach, a Pond's facial towelette, a plastic razor, rubber duck, JC Penney employee ID card, candy bar wrapper and Mardi Gras beads to create a necklace she calls "Go With the Flow."

As hideous as it sounds, Allison had plenty of rivals for the top prize. Other entries include "The Super Duper Purple Pooper Scooper," "The Purple Eyesore of Texas" and "The Drinking Girls Necklace: The Grapes of Wrath." To see Allison's winning necklace, visit landofodds.com/ugly8contest.htm.

-- Local artists **Aaron Chang and Wade Koniakowsky** teamed up to open the Aaron Chang Ocean Art Gallery, a gallery in the Cedros Design District of Solana Beach.

Chang is an award-winning commercial photographer who has worked in more than 40 countries and whose work has been featured on the covers of more than 100 magazines. Koniakowsky is a Carlsbad-based oil painter who focuses on ocean-inspired themes. His work is displayed internationally in 17 galleries.

-- San Diego native **Micah Parzen** was appointed executive director of the San Diego Museum of Man.

Parzen, who holds a Ph.D. in anthropology, is a partner in the San Diego law firm of Luce, Forward, Hamilton & Scripps, where he is the firm's pro bono program coordinator. The Point Loma resident career has been in law, but his heart has been in anthropology. He has conducted extensive fieldwork with the Navajo Nation and is an active human rights advocate.

-- Encinitas native **Christopher Collins** was one of 16 contestants chosen for Lifetime Television's eighth season of the "Project Runway" fashion challenge series. In a biography provided by the network, the 30-year-old Collins says his mother taught him to sew, but he developed his fashion skills while a freshman at San Francisco State. He runs his own contemporary couture line in San Francisco. The soft-spoken Collins was eliminated in the season's 11th round where he made an ill-conceived activewear outfit for client (and show judge/producer) Heidi Klum.

-- The Port of San Diego selected a panel of artists led by England's Peter Fink to **artistically light the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge**. The \$4 million project will string a constantly changing pattern of LED lights along the 2.1-mile span of the bridge to create an iconic nighttime art installation.

August:

-- Poway sculptor **Richard Becker** was elected to membership in the National Sculpture Society, an honor that he believes makes him the first San Diegan to join the prestigious organization since its founding in 1893.

Becker, an engineer by day, said one of his sculptures, "Head," a bust fragment from the Miramar National Cemetery POW Monument, was selected for exhibition through October at the Brookgreen Gardens in Myrtle Beach, S.C. The bust was created as a test piece for a much larger bronze commissioned for the Miramar cemetery by the San Diego chapter of the American Ex-Prisoners of War. The bust fragment was juried into the National Sculpture Society's 77th annual Awards Exhibition at Brookgreen Gardens. The primary model for Becker's piece was Tommy Crosby of Chula Vista, the grandson of former WWII POW Tom Crosby.

-- **The San Marcos Historical Society** held a dedication for its new museum ---- a 1940s-era schoolhouse ---- in Walnut Grove

Park's Heritage Park row on Sycamore Drive. The museum temporarily closed in mid-2009 to make way for a new school at its old location on San Marcos Boulevard. The society's goal now is to raise enough money to bring home the schoolhouse's original bell; a former San Marcos newspaper publisher in Northern California has offered to restore and donate the bell if the society can pay for its transportation.

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Where Words Fail

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The result in theaters: artistic timidity. Stage the familiar, the nonthreatening, the audience-stroking; show steaming pizzas, not famished faces.

In recent years, the line between entertainment and art has blurred. What emerges from a look back at 2010 are attempts to take audiences beyond safe themes and stock responses to the place where words fail and emotions brim — the attempts, in other words, at art.

Ion Theatre deserves an award for courage. They took over the old Sixth at Penn stage, converted it into a handsome, intimate space, and never once gave in to the Don’t Worry, Be Happy syndrome.

They opened 2010 at *Diversions* with *Hurlyburly*. The word on David Rabe’s vortex of narcissistic males: if you stage it, they won’t come. Those who did saw one of the year’s finest

French Riviera exterior, which looked permanent, then followed it with a posh Parisian flat filled with, what, 20 pillows, 50?

One of my favorite scenes last year happened during the scene change for *Private Lives*. When first performed back in the ’30s, the transition took place behind a curtain. Cygnet did it before our eyes: a cavalcade of pillows, tossed here and there, bouncing into place, piling higher and higher. In the age of minimalism — economic and artistic — it was a kick to watch old-time, scenic opulence accumulate, amazingly, in about ten minutes.

My love of musicals has been lifelong, but my respect for well-made ones grows every year: so many elements to integrate, so many people wearing hats you wonder which works better, collaborators (Rodgers and Hammerstein) or control freaks (Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse)?

The musicals of 2010 provided no answer. They had appealing ideas: a haunted lighthouse (*Whisper House*, Old Globe), New Orleans’

red-light district and the birth of jazz (*Storyville*, San Diego Rep), a life of Charlie Chaplin (*Limelight*, La Jolla Playhouse). But none had a halfway decent book. The stories were just transitions to the next song. And in some cases, you’d swear the score and the book met for the first time on opening night. Some needed more central control, others had too much, but they made one thing clear: in musicals, the story’s still the spine.

There were two local answers for musical success: have James Vasquez direct (he codirected *Sweeney* and helmed *Title of Show*, the four-handed charmer at *Diversions*); the other, cast Steve Gunderson. He excelled — if I can remember them all — in *Hairspray*, *Into the Woods*, *The Grinch*, *Sweeney Todd*. To top it off, Starlight did a lively version of *Suds*, which Gunderson cowrote.

For its summer festival, the Old Globe hired a director at once in control and democratic. Adrian Noble, artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1991 to 2002, staged two of the year’s most impressive productions: *King Lear* and *The Madness of George III*. In both, speech and action were one. There was never a sense, as so often in Shakespeare and “classic” theater, of spaces between the two: strange pseudo-pauses or false emphases. The cast for *Lear* performed as if every moment was brand new. Best overall staging I’ve seen of that great play.

The critics only award acting that originates in San Diego. Might have to make 2010 an exception. Tovah Feldshuh’s one-person show, *Golda’s Balcony* — about Golda Meir, fourth prime minister of Israel — practically hypnotized Old Globe



Bill Camp in *Notes from the Underground*: “I am a sick man. I am a wicked man.”

productions. Francis Gercke played Eddie, an Omega male so self-absorbed he might implode. For almost three hours, Gercke sustained a manic

intensity. As part of an outstanding ensemble cast, Karson St. John did an unforgettable monologue as Bonnie, a stripper who uses a balloon.

audiences. Whether gray-haired and chain-smoking in a beat-up blue bathrobe or shedding decades in seconds, Feldshuh was masterful — not only as Meir but also in cameos (including a hilarious Henry Kissinger).

It will be equally impossible to forget another “touring” performance: Bill Camp as The Man in *Notes from Underground* at La Jolla Playhouse (based on the Dostoevsky novel and originally staged at Yale Rep). Barefoot on a snow-covered floor, wearing a headset mike, his face often projected across the rear wall, Camp began with the book’s first words: “I am a sick man. I am a wicked man. I am an unattractive man,” and then backed them up. He played all four seasons often, it seemed, at once: funny, confused, passive, angry, the later percolating into a massive eruption. In the end The Man took on the full hatred of the audience. He just stared back, as if he didn’t care, so long as your reaction was violent.

I’m always curious about what makes a great performance tick. As I watched Feldshuh and Camp (and Rob McLure playing Charles Chaplin in *Limelight*), I applied the Technique Test: pull back and check out the craft, find the hooks and stays in their strings of moments. See the actor. Impossible. They were so focused you couldn’t break yours.

Ditto *Ruined* at La Jolla

Playhouse. I had read Lynn Nottage’s play before (it won the Pulitzer Prize in drama for 2009) but had no idea it could sting — or sooth — so deeply.

Civil war storms around Mama Nadi’s demilitarized bar/brothel in the Ituri rain forest. Somehow, with gunfire not far away, she accommodates miners, rebels, and soldiers of the Democratic Republic of Congo and provides relative safety for her girls. Then forces close in.

And somehow the play (and the excellent Liesl Tommy-directed production) managed to find positives amid convincing chaos. The ensemble cast was amazing, and the sound/score so integral it became clear only afterward that *Ruined* is also a musical with choreography, songs, and an ongoing, pulslike beat.

When you reach that place where words fail and emotions brim, sometimes it’s tempting to corral — and distance — your response with metaphor. So *Ruined* is about “survival” or “exploitation” or what the author calls the “war on women.” And it’s all these in triplicate, but so much more, and far more immediate. As with the Technique Test, it wouldn’t let you pull away. As the song goes, the play and production were far better than a metaphor can ever, ever be. ■

STORIES THEATER REVIEWS

Where Words Fail

By Jeff Smith | Published Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2010

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A current TV commercial says one in six Americans is "going hungry" — one in six. But instead of showing them, you see images of smiling faces and great heaps of food — puffy pizzas sliding off of a tray — and joy abounding, thanks to the Bank of America. There's a disjoint between what you see and hear. TV wouldn't dare show the homeless man I saw on Rosecrans, holding a cardboard sign that read, "If this recession hasn't bit you yet, you're an a-hole!"

The result in theaters: artistic timidity. Stage the familiar, the nonthreatening, the audience-stroking; show steaming pizzas, not famished faces.

In recent years, the line between entertainment and art has blurred. What emerges from a look back at 2010 are attempts to take audiences beyond safe themes and stock responses to the place where words fail and emotions brim — the attempts, in other words, at art.

Ion Theatre deserves an award for courage. They took over the old Sixth at Penn stage, converted it into a handsome, intimate space, and never once gave in to the Don't Worry, Be Happy syndrome.

They opened 2010 at Diversionary with *Hurlyburly*. The word on David Rabe's vortex of narcissistic males: if you stage it, they won't come. Those who did saw one of the year's finest productions. Francis Gercke played Eddie, an Omega male so self-absorbed he might implode. For almost three hours, Gercke sustained a manic intensity. As part of an outstanding ensemble cast, Karson St. John did an unforgettable monologue as Bonnie, a stripper who uses a balloon. She sums up the 20th Century with "Who does anybody know who is doing okay?" Even so, she adds, people shouldn't be "pushing others out of cars."

In its own space, among other impressive projects, Ion staged *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, with Deanna Driscoll and Jeffrey Jones. Like Rosina Reynolds and Richard Baird, who clicked on every imaginable cylinder in North Coast Rep's *Ghosts*, Driscoll and Jones did remarkable tandem work (allegedly a box-office no-no, *Ghosts* was one of North Coast Rep's best-sellers).

Cygnnet Theatre once again demonstrated its versatility. They followed a rip-roaring version of Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* (said to be audience-unfriendly, it

played to sold-out houses — we seeing a pattern here?), with its exact opposite: Noel Coward's elegant farce *Private Lives*. Like the contrasting styles, the sets couldn't have been further apart: Sean Fanning caked *Sweeney*'s brick walls with London soot; Andrew Hull opened *Lives* with a windswept French Riviera exterior, which looked permanent, then followed it with a posh Parisian flat filled with, what, 20 pillows, 50?

One of my favorite scenes last year happened during the scene change for *Private Lives*. When first performed back in the '30s, the transition took place behind a curtain. Cygnet did it before our eyes: a cavalcade of pillows, tossed here and there, bouncing into place, piling higher and higher. In the age of minimalism — economic and artistic — it was a kick to watch old-time, scenic opulence accumulate, amazingly, in about ten minutes.

My love of musicals has been lifelong, but my respect for well-made ones grows every year: so many elements to integrate, so many people wearing hats you wonder which works better, collaborators (Rodgers and Hammerstein) or control freaks (Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse)?

The musicals of 2010 provided no answer. They had appealing ideas: a haunted lighthouse (*Whisper House*, Old Globe), New Orleans' red-light district and the birth of jazz (*Storyville*, San Diego Rep), a life of Charlie Chaplin (*Limelight*, La Jolla Playhouse). But none had a halfway decent book. The stories were just transitions to the next song. And in some cases, you'd swear the score and the book met for the first time on opening night. Some needed more central control, others had too much, but they made one thing clear: in musicals, the story's still the spine.

There were two local answers for musical success: have James Vasquez direct (he codirected *Sweeney* and helmed *Title of Show*, the four-handed charmer at Diversionary); the other, cast Steve Gunderson. He excelled — if I can remember them all — in *Hairspray*, *Into the Woods*, *The Grinch*, *Sweeney Todd*. To top it off, Starlight did a lively version of *Suds*, which Gunderson cowrote.

For its summer festival, the Old Globe hired a director at once in control and democratic. Adrian Noble, artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1991 to 2002, staged two of the year's most impressive productions: *King Lear* and *The Madness of George III*. In both, speech and action were one. There was never a sense, as so often in Shakespeare and "classic" theater, of spaces between the two: strange pseudo-pauses or false emphases. The cast for *Lear* performed as if every moment was brand new. Best overall staging I've seen of that great play.

The critics only award acting that originates in San Diego. Might have to make 2010 an exception. Tovah Feldshuh's one-person show, *Golda's Balcony* — about Golda Meir, fourth prime minister of Israel — practically hypnotized Old Globe audiences. Whether gray-haired and chain-smoking in a beat-up blue bathrobe or shedding decades in seconds, Feldshuh was masterful — not only as Meir but also in cameos (including a hilarious Henry Kissinger).

It will be equally impossible to forget another "touring" performance: Bill Camp as The Man in *Notes from Underground* at La Jolla Playhouse (based on the Dostoevsky novel and originally staged at Yale Rep). Barefoot on a snow-covered floor, wearing a headset mike, his face often projected across the rear wall, Camp began with the book's first words: "I am a sick man. I am a wicked man. I am an unattractive man," and then backed them up. He played all four

seasons often, it seemed, at once: funny, confused, passive, angry, the later percolating into a massive eruption. In the end The Man took on the full hatred of the audience. He just stared back, as if he didn't care, so long as your reaction was violent.

I'm always curious about what makes a great performance tick. As I watched Feldshuh and Camp (and Rob McLure playing Charles Chaplin in *Limelight*), I applied the Technique Test: pull back and check out the craft, find the hooks and stays in their strings of moments. See the actor. Impossible. They were so focused you couldn't break yours.

Ditto *Ruined* at La Jolla Playhouse. I had read Lynn Nottage's play before (it won the Pulitzer Prize in drama for 2009) but had no idea it could sting — or sooth — so deeply.

Civil war storms around Mama Nadi's demilitarized bar/brothel in the Ituri rain forest. Somehow, with gunfire not far away, she accommodates miners, rebels, and soldiers of the Democratic Republic of Congo and provides relative safety for her girls. Then forces close in.

And somehow the play (and the excellent Liesl Tommy-directed production) managed to find positives amid convincing chaos. The ensemble cast was amazing, and the sound/score so integral it became clear only afterward that *Ruined* is also a musical with choreography, songs, and an ongoing, pulseline beat.

When you reach that place where words fail and emotions brim, sometimes it's tempting to corral — and distance — your response with metaphor. So *Ruined* is about "survival" or "exploitation" or what the author calls the "war on women." And it's all these in triplicate, but so much more, and far more immediate. As with the Technique Test, it wouldn't let you pull away. As the song goes, the play and production were far better than a metaphor can ever, ever be.

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Curtain Calls

Week Ending December 25, 2010

By Charlene Baldrige and Brenda

The team of Brenda and Charlene, representing the intuitive and the critical, attended in the neighborhood of 218 events this year: 120 plays and musicals for review; 39 student productions or play readings; 9 dance concerts; and 50 musical events, including chamber music, symphony and opera. These dates do not include face-to-face interviews, editorial meetings or Critics' Circle meetings. When one considers reading, copy-editing for hire, listening to recordings, and the actual writing, there is little time for the poetry that pursues me, insists I write it down, and tend to its burgeoning cottage industry.

Though we loudly express ourselves when voting on awards, and though we are allowed passion votes, much work that Brenda and I consider astonishing is seen by few or not admired by the majority. Therefore we reserve the right to make our own list of the laudable, which more than likely will not appear on others' lists or award ceremonies.

Commendations off the beaten path:

Bonnie Wright for the amazing Fresh Sound series she curates at Sushi Visual and Performance Gallery

John Stubbs for the Luscious Noise series he curates and conducts at Anthology

Kate Hatmaker and **Demarre McGill** for Art of Elan, the sellout, eclectic classical music series they conceived and present in the Hibben Gallery at San Diego Museum of Art

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To the young actors and singers of San Diego whose talent, purpose and singular dedication have so inspired us this year

To the indefatigable UCSD professor/La Jolla Symphony & Chorus artistic director **Stephen Schick**, whose love of music, people and artists so enriches our lives

To **Kyle Donnelly**, who auditions upwards of 600 UCSD MFA candidates each year, selecting young actors for the program, which consistently knocks our socks off, most recently with a production of [JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE](#) that equals any seen anywhere

To all the teachers, who pass on love and respect for the art form in their dealings with youth: These would include **Ed Hollingsworth**, **DeAnna Driscoll**, **Linda Libby**, **Leigh Scarritt**, **Kim Strassburger**, **Jim Winker**, and **Ruff Yeager**, and these are just a few of legions. See my interview with Hollingsworth, an enormously big-hearted outtake from numerous interviews Charlene conducted for her December article in PERFORMANCES MAGAZINE.

[Most Memorable of 2010](#)

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Absent from the above selections--made by a committee comprising Brenda and Charlene alone--are most the obvious award-winners that are bound to appear on anyone's year's best lists. These would include RUINED, CHAPLIN and NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND at the Playhouse.

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Iconic and dearly beloved theatre leader/director Craig Noel, former artistic director of the Old Globe Theatre

Esteemed actor Robert Ellenstein, father of David Ellenstein

Photographer Randy Rovang (left)



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Mare Winningham, David Poe, Holly Brook, et al. Set for Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House* at Old Globe

By: **Andy Propst** · Dec 10, 2009 · San Diego

Emmy Award winner Mare Winningham will star in Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House*, to run January 13 - February 21 at **The Old Globe Theatre**. Peter Askin will direct the production, which will feature musical direction by Jason Hart.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, *Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook. The company will also feature Arthur Acuña (Yasuhiro), Kevin Hoffman (Lieutenant Rando), Ted Koch (Charles), and Eric Brent Zutty (Christopher).

The creative team will include Michael Schweikardt (scenic design), Jenny Mannis (costume design), Matt Richards (lighting design), and Dan Moses Schreier (sound design).

For further information, visit www.theoldglobe.org.



Mare Winningham
(© Cliff Lipson)



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Sheik & Jarrow's Haunted *Whisper House* Musical Will Star Mare Winningham at Old Globe

By *Kenneth Jones*
10 Dec 2009



Mare Winningham
photo by Cliff Lipson

Emmy Award winner Mare Winningham, who is also known as a singer, was acclaimed for her soulful, folky Off-Broadway performance in *10 Million Miles*.

Mare Winningham will be among cast members of the Old Globe Theatre's world-premiere production of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House*, a ghost-story musical, to bow in San Diego in January.

Peter Askin will direct the original show, which has music and lyrics by Sheik (who shared a Best Score Tony Award for *Spring Awakening*) and book and lyrics by Jarrow. The musical director is Jason Hart and the dance director is Wesley Fata.

Whisper House will run in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 13-Feb. 21, 2010. Opening night is Jan. 21.

For tickets and information, visit www.TheOldGlobe.org or call (619) 23-GLOBE. Single tickets go on sale Dec. 13.

"Set in 1942 at the height of World War II," according to Old Globe, "*Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown."

Academy Award nominee Winningham ("Georgia," "St. Elmo's Fire") is currently appearing in the world premiere of the Frank Wildhorn musical, *Bonnie and Clyde*, at La Jolla Playhouse. She last appeared at The Old Globe as Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass*



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Menagerie. She'll play Aunt Lilly in *Whisper House*.

For her work in the musical *10 Million Miles*, Winningham received the Lucille Lortel Award and a Drama Desk Award nomination in 2008.

In addition to Brook, Poe and Winningham, the cast includes Arthur Acuña (Yasuhiro), Kevin Hoffman (Lieutenant Rando), Ted Koch (Charles) and Eric Brent Zutty (Christopher).

The *Whisper House* creative team includes Michael Schweikardt (scenic design), Jenny Mannis (costume design), Matt Richards (lighting design), Dan Moses Schreier (sound design) and Richard Costabile (stage manager).

Sheik is an alt pop singer-songwriter who was first widely known for his 1996 debut single, "Barely Breathing," which spent 55 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100. He has since expanded his work to include compositions for motion pictures and the Broadway stage. Sheik won two Tony Awards, as composer and arranger, for the Broadway production of *Spring Awakening*, written with lyricist Steven Sater. It won the Tony for Best Musical.

Sheik and Sater are currently developing two new musical theatre projects: *Nero* (*Another Golden Rome*) and *The Nightingale*.

Jarrow is a writer and musician based in New York City. He writes for the stage as well as film and television, and he plays in the bands The Fabulous Entourage and Super Mirage. He won the OBIE Award at age 24 for his Off-Broadway hit *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*, which has subsequently been produced all over the country. His play, *Armless*, won the Overall Excellence Award at the New York International Fringe Festival. Other plays include *Love Kills*, *Trigger*, *President Harding is a Rock Star*, *Rip Me Open* (co-writer), *Hostage Song* (music & lyrics), *Gorilla Man* (script available from Samuel French), and the upcoming *Big Money* (with Nathan Leigh).

Director Askin's New York City stage credits include John Leguizamo's *Sexaholix*, *Spic-O-Rama* (Drama Desk Award) and *Mambo Mouth* (Obie, Outer Critics' awards); plus Paul Weitz's *Show People* and *Privilege*, among others.

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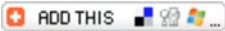


Winningham to Star in Sheik & Jarrow's WHISPER HOUSE; Runs at OLD GLOBE Jan. 13 - Feb. 21

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Wednesday, December 9, 2009; Posted: 09:12 PM - by [BWW News Desk](#)



Old Globe Executive Producer [Lou Spisto](#) today announced the complete cast and creative team for the World Premiere of [Duncan Sheik](#) and [Kyle Jarrow's](#) *Whisper House*. Emmy Award winner [Mare Winningham](#) headlines the new musical, Sheik's follow-up to his Tony and Grammy Award-winning Broadway sensation, *Spring Awakening*. [Peter Askin](#) helms the show, with music and lyrics by Sheik and book and lyrics by Jarrow. The musical director is [Jason Hart](#) and the dance director is [Wesley Fata](#). *Whisper House* will run in the [Old Globe Theatre](#) Jan. 13 - Feb. 21. Previews run Jan. 13 - Jan. 20. Opening night is Jan. 21 at 8:00 p.m. Tickets to *Whisper House* are currently available by subscription only. Single tickets will go on sale on Dec. 13 at noon and can be purchased online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](#), by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

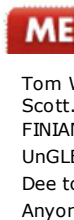
Sheik will also perform in concert at the Globe prior to the run of *Whisper House* with special guest, David Poe.

Sheik has toured extensively this year and will perform songs from *Whisper House* and his other acclaimed albums. His concept album for *Whisper House* was released earlier this year on RCA Victor. Proceeds from the concert will benefit the Globe's education activities. Tickets to [Duncan Sheik](#) in Concert are currently on sale to subscribers only. Single tickets will go on sale Friday, Dec. 11 at noon.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, *Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

[Mare Winningham](#) is currently appearing in the world premiere of the [Frank Wildhorn](#) musical, *Bonnie and Clyde*, at [La Jolla Playhouse](#). She last appeared at [The Old Globe](#) as Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* and will play Lilly in *Whisper House*. Winningham has appeared on stage, screen, and in over 60 movies for television. Her work has earned an Academy Award nomination (Georgia) and two Emmy Awards (Wallace, *Amber Waves*), among others. For her New York stage debut in Atlantic Theater's musical *10 Million Miles*, Winningham received the [Lucille Lortel](#) Award and a Drama Desk Award nomination in 2008. As a singer/songwriter, Winningham most recently released an album of original Jewish Country/Folk songs, "Refuge Rock Sublime."

In addition to Brook, Poe and Winningham, the cast includes Arthur Acuña (Yasuhiro),



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Kevin Hoffman (Lieutenant Rando), [Ted Koch](#) (Charles) and Eric Brent Zutty (Christopher).

The Whisper House creative team includes [Michael Schweikardt](#) (Scenic Design), [Jenny Mannis](#) (Costume Design), Matt Richards (Lighting Design), [Dan Moses Schreier](#) (Sound Design) and [Richard Costabile](#) (Stage Manager).

[Duncan Sheik](#) initially found success as a singer, most notably for his 1996 debut single, "Barely Breathing," which spent 55 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100. He has since expanded his work to include compositions for motion pictures and the Broadway stage. Sheik won two Tony Awards, as composer and arranger, for the Broadway production of Spring Awakening. Written with lyricist [Steven Sater](#), Spring Awakening also received the Tony Award for Best Musical. Sheik and Sater's creative partnership began with the album, Phantom Moon, released on Nonesuch in 2000. They are currently developing two new musical theater projects. Nero (Another Golden Rome) had a workshop production this summer at [Vassar College](#), featuring Wicked star [Idina Menzel](#) and Spring Awakening ingénue [Lea Michele](#). Their other project, The Nightingale, is slated for a 2010 opening at San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater. His albums include "[Duncan Sheik](#)" (1996), "Humming" (1998), "Phantom Moon" (2001), "Daylight" (2002), "White Limousine" (2006), "Brighter/Later: A [Duncan Sheik](#) Anthology" (2006) and "Greatest Hits: A [Duncan Sheik](#) Collection" (2007).

[Kyle Jarrow](#) is a writer and musician based in New York City. He writes for the stage as well as film and television, and he plays in the bands The Fabulous Entourage and Super Mirage. He won the prestigious OBIE Award at age 24 for his Off-Broadway hit A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant, which has subsequently been produced all over the country. Jarrow's play Armless won the Overall Excellence Award at the New York International Fringe Festival. Other plays include Love Kills, Trigger, President Harding is a Rock Star, Rip Me Open (co-writer), Hostage Song (music & lyrics), Gorilla Man (script available from Samuel French), and the upcoming Big Money (with Nathan Leigh). Jarrow's playwriting work encompasses both musical theater and straight plays, and has been presented at New York Theatre Workshop, Performance Space 122, The [John Houseman](#) Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, [Williamstown Theatre](#) Festival, Abron Arts Center, [HERE Arts Center](#), Boston Theatre Works, [New Dramatists](#), The Flea, The Hangar Theatre and Dad's Garage in Atlanta, among others. He's particularly well-known for incorporating rock and pop music into the theater, a topic that he's written and spoken about widely. Jarrow was a 2005-2006 [Dramatists Guild](#) Fellow. He was nominated for a 2004 Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle Award and a 2004 [BackStage West](#) Garland Award, and was runner-up for the 2002 Princess Grace Playwriting Award. He was winner of the 2001 [John Golden](#) Prize. He's a co-founder of the indie publishing company Awkward Press. Jarrow has guest-lectured at Juilliard, Pratt, and [The Actors Studio](#). Jarrow has developed film and TV projects for ABC, Paramount, Touchstone, Fox TV, and Deline Pictures among others, and his debut indie film Armless (directed by Habib Azar) is a selection of the 2010 Sundance Film Festival. His band The Fabulous Entourage appeared as part of the 2006 Whitney Biennial, on the Knitting Factory Mainstage, at Joe's Pub, Viper Room, Bowery Ballroom, and with bands such as Hot Chip and We Are Scientists, and put out an album called Play Nice Now. Jarrow can also be heard on the "This Drama" EP from Super Mirage and the album "There Will Come Soft Rains" from his synth pop side project Krakow! Jarrow also produced the cast album of A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant. He is a graduate of Yale University, where he majored in religious studies.

[Peter Askin](#)'s NY stage credits include [John Leguizamo](#)'s Sexaholix, Spic-O-Rama (Drama Desk Award) and Mambo Mouth (Obie, Outer Critics' awards); Paul Weitz's Show People and Privilege; Pulitzer Prize finalist [Dael Orlandersmith](#)'s Monster and Beauty's Daughter (Obie Award), as well as her play The Gimmick (conceived and directed). Other credits include Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Trumbo and [Eve Ensler](#)'s The Good Body. Askin's upcoming projects include [Stephen King](#) and [John Mellencamp](#)'s The Ghost Brothers of Darkland County. He has directed regionally at Goodman Theater, American Conservatory Theater, [Seattle Repertory Theatre](#), McCarter Theatre Center, [Ahmanson Theatre](#), Westport Country Playhouse and Dorset Theatre Festival. His film and television credits include Smithereens (co-writer), Company Man (co-writer, director) and Trumbo (director) and HBO's "Spic-O-Rama."

[Jason Hart](#) has toured internationally with [Rufus Wainwright](#) and was a core member of Mercury-Prize winners Antony and [The Johnsons](#). His other performing and/or recording credits include [Gavin DeGraw](#), [Elton John](#), [Lou Reed](#), Keren Ann, [Kris Kristofferson](#), the B52's and others. His theater credits include Burleigh Grimes at New World Stages (keys, bass and guitar), Medea: In Concert at New York University (original music, musical direction) and The Shadow at the High School of the Performing Arts (original



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music, musical direction). Hart is also a songwriter and recording artist whose debut CD is entitled "If I Were You".

[Wesley Fata](#) has choreographed several productions at [The Old Globe](#) including the 2008 Shakespeare Festival and [Stephen Sondheim's](#) *Marry Me a Little*. His Broadway credits include *Master Harold...and the Boys* (dir. [Athol Fugard](#)); [David Merrick's](#) *I Won't Dance* (dir. [Tom O'Horgan](#)); *The News*, *Senator Joe* (dir. [Tom O'Horgan](#)); and *Hair* (assistant director/choreographer, original production). Fata's regional credits include [James Lapine's](#) *12 Dreams*, Public Theatre; [Gertrude Stein](#) (dir. [James Lapine](#)), New York Theatre of the Eye; *Lost in the Stars* (dir. [Arvin Brown](#)); *Camille* with [Kathleen Turner](#), [Long Wharf Theatre](#); *Travels With My Aunt* (with [Jim Dale](#)), Minetta Lane Theater; and *Capitol Cakewalk*, Vineyard Theater. He has also choreographed numerous operas including *Les Troyens*, Vienna State Opera; *A Soldiers Tale* (cond. Gerald Schwartz), [Carnegie Hall](#); [Leonard Bernstein's](#) *Mass*, Kennedy Center (10th anniversary production); and *Daphne and News of the Day*, Santa Fe Opera. His film credits include *The Coen Brothers' The Hudsucker Proxy* and *The Good Shepherd* (co-choreographed with [Julie Arenal](#); dir. [Robert De Niro](#)). Fata has taught at the Yale School of Drama for 32 years and has choreographed as many plays there.

TICKETS to [Whisper House](#) are currently available by subscription only. Single tickets go on sale at noon on Dec. 13 and can be purchased online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](#), by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. Performances begin on Jan. 13 and continue through Feb. 21. Ticket prices range from \$36 to \$89. Performance times: *Previews*: Wednesday, Jan. 13 at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 14 at 8:00 p.m., Friday, Jan. 15, at 8:00 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 16 at 8:00 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 17 at 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 19 at 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 20 at 7:00 p.m. *Regular Performances*: Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m., Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m., and Sunday evenings at 7:00 p.m. Discounts are available for full-time students, patrons 29 years of age and under, seniors and groups of 10 or more.

TICKETS to [Duncan Sheik](#) in Concert are currently available by subscription only. Single tickets go on sale at noon on Dec. 11 and can be purchased online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](#), by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. Ticket prices for the Jan. 11 8:00 p.m. concert are \$25, \$45 and \$75. \$75 seats include a post-show meet and greet reception with [Duncan Sheik](#) in Hattox Hall. Concert and [Whisper House](#) packages are also available for \$55, \$75 and \$105. The \$105 package also includes the post-show meet and greet reception with [Duncan Sheik](#).

The Globe's year-long 75th Anniversary celebration will begin with the recently announced 2010 Summer Season. Acclaimed director [Adrian Noble](#) is the Artistic Director of the 2010 Shakespeare Festival and will direct Shakespeare's *King Lear* (June 12 - Sept. 23) and [Alan Bennett's](#) *The Madness of George III* (June 19 - Sept. 24). Presented in repertory, the Shakespeare Festival will also include *The Taming of the Shrew* (June 16 - Sept. 26). The season also features the World Premiere of the Broadway-bound musical, *Robin and the 7 Hoods* (July 14 - Aug. 22) directed by [Casey Nicholaw](#) with lyrics by [Sammy Cahn](#) and music by [Jimmy Van Heusen](#), and the West Coast Premiere of *The Last Romance* (July 30 - Sept. 5), a romantic comedy by [Joe DiPietro](#) starring television icon, [Marion Ross](#). Tickets to the Globe's 2010 Summer Season are currently available by subscription only.

SEASON SUBSCRIPTIONS offer substantial savings with special subscriber benefits. Subscriptions can be purchased online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](#), by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE [234-5623] or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. Subscriptions to the Globe's Summer Season range from \$75 to \$365. Five-play packages range from \$146 to \$365. Four-play packages (Festival plus musical) range from \$117 to \$309. Shakespeare Festival packages (3 plays) range from \$75 to \$225. Discounts are available for full-time students, patrons 29 years of age and younger, seniors and groups of 10 or more.

LOCATION: [The Old Globe](#) is located in San Diego's Balboa Park at 1363 Old Globe Way. There are several free parking lots available throughout the park. Valet parking is also available (\$10). For additional parking information visit [www.BalboaPark.org](#).

CALENDAR: [Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas](#) (11/21-12/27), *I Do! I Do!* (12/11-12/20), [Duncan Sheik](#) in Concert (1/11), *Whisper House* (1/13-2/21), *Lost in Yonkers* (1/23-2/28), *Street Lights* (2/20-2/28), *Boeing-Boeing* (3/13-4/18).

The Tony Award-winning Old Globe is one of the country's leading professional regional



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theaters and has stood as San Diego's flagship arts institution for 74 years. Under the direction of Executive Producer [Louis G. Spisto](#), [The Old Globe](#) produces a year-round season of 15 productions of classic, contemporary and new works on its three Balboa Park stages: the 600-seat [Old Globe Theatre](#), the 250-seat Sheryl and Harvey White Theatre and the 612-seat outdoor Lowell Davies [Festival Theatre](#), home of its internationally renowned Shakespeare Festival. More than 250,000 people attend Globe productions annually and participate in the theater's education and community programs. Numerous world premieres such as *The Full Monty*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *A Catered Affair*, and the annual holiday musical, *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*, have been developed at [The Old Globe](#) and have gone on to enjoy highly successful runs on Broadway and at regional theaters across the country.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

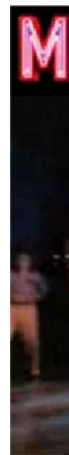
ARTHUR ACUÑA (Yasuhiro) just finished a competition short (Philippine entry) for the ASEAN-ROK Film Festival in Korea next year. He also appeared as Lihn at [Goodman Theatre](#)'s world premiere of *Ghostwritten*, after a workshop production in Sundance 2006. Some other recent credits include: *Two September* and *Most Wanted* at [La Jolla Playhouse](#), and received an Obie Award for *The Romance of Magno Rubio* in the role of Nick. His international credits include the lead in [David Henry Hwang's](#) *The Golden Child* in Manila, Philippines. He also played leads in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and *The Real Thing* with Repertory Philippines. Some of Acuña's film credits include: *To Maritina*, *Rigodon*, *Batang West Side* (as Bartolo) at the Manila International Film Festival (for which he received the Best Actor Award). Television roles include: "Law and Order", "Law and Order: Criminal Intent", "Third Watch", "As the World Turns", "Stella", "To Maritina" and "One Life to Live." Acuña will be playing the role of Macario Locsin in the next John Sayles film to be shot next year.

HOLLY BROOK (Female Ghost) is a Wisconsin native and lives on the southern coast of Oregon, deep in the woods, with her own little recording studio. After seven years of bouncing between LA, New York and tour, she left the over-stimulating, empty promise-lands to nurture her creative muses and refocus on what's really important. Brook had three independent albums under her belt by age fifteen, in mother-daughter duo, "Generations". At 19, she was recognized worldwide for her vocal contribution on a song called, "Where'd You Go," by Fort Minor, which was a Linkin Park side project. Soon after she released her debut solo record, "Like Blood Like Honey", on Machine Shop Records/Warner Bros., she teamed up with [Duncan Sheik](#). Together, they've worked on many projects and have toured the country numerous times. She is the featured female vocalist on the "Whisper House" album. Brook is currently awaiting the release of her new album, "O'Dark Thirty" for which Sheik has had a major hand in producing (date TBA). This is Brook's first step back into a theater production in 10 years, when she participated in a dozen or so community theater musicals.

KEVIN HOFFMAN (Lieutenant Rando) has appeared at [The Old Globe](#) in *Twelfth Night* (Sebastian), *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Musketeer), *Coriolanus* (Senator) and *Six Degrees of Separation* (Ben). He most recently played *Speed* in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* with [The Old Globe](#)/USD Professional Actor Training Program where he was also seen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Greeks: The Murders*. Regionally, Hoffman has performed in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Merry Wives of Windsor* at The Theater at Monmouth, as well as *Proof* at Barksdale Theatre. His TV credits include "As the World Turns" and "All My Children." His many commercials include Sony, Callaway Golf, and Fidelity Financial. Hoffman holds a BFA in Acting from Elon University.

[Ted Koch](#) (Charles) has appeared in several Broadway productions including: *The Pillowman*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. His Off Broadway credits include: *Meshugah*, [Naked Angels](#); *The Chaos Theories*, Shotgun Productions; *Topsy Turvy Mouse*, Cherry Lane Theater. His national tours include: *Frost/Nixon*, *Death of a Salesman*. Koch as also appeared in the following regional production: *The Front Page* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*, [Williamstown Theater Festival](#); *True West*, [Arena Stage](#) ([Helen Hayes](#) Nomination- Outstanding lead Actor); *Pig Farm* and *Sea of Tranquility*, [The Old Globe](#); *Ella*, Crossroads Theatre; Broadway, Pittsburgh Public; *A Streetcar Named Desire*, [Studio Arena Theatre](#); *The Fair Maid of the West* and *Orphans*, CT-20 Ensemble ([Joseph Jefferson](#) Award- Best Actor); *As You Like It*, the [Goodman Theatre](#); *Guys and Dolls*, [North Carolina Theatre](#); *Macbeth*, Burning Chrome and *All's Well That Ends Well*. TV and film credits include: "Gossip Girl", "Cashmere Mafia", "The Sopranos", "The West Wing", "Law & Order", "Law & Order: Criminal Intent", "Ed", "Third Watch", "Hack", "One Life to Live", "Guiding Light", "Chicago Hope", "Early Edition", "Cold Souls", *Collar*, *A Crime*, *Griffin and Phoenix*, *Hannibal*, *Autumn in New York*, *Dinner Rush*, *Stranger* and *Death of a Salesman* for Showtime.

DAVID POE (Lead Singer Ghost) is a songwriter, performing musician, producer and



composer for film and dance. Transplanted from the American Midwest to New York City, Poe served as the sound engineer at CBGB before being signed to Sony Music. He has released five critically-acclaimed studio albums and two live albums: his debut, "David Poe" (Sony/550 1997), produced by T-Bone Burnett, "The Late Album" (Sony/Epic 2002), "Love Is Red" (Universal/Fuel 2004), "David Poe Live & Solo" (The Artists Den 2005) a live performance DVD, "David Poe Onstage at World Café" (Universal/Decca 2006), and two commissioned works for dance: "The Copier: Music for Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet" (2008) and "Shadowland: Music for Pilobolus," (2009) the company's first-ever full-length shadow dance piece, currently on tour. Poe has produced recordings for Regina Spektor, [Joseph Arthur](#) and Kraig Jarret Johnson, collaborated with several other songwriters, including T-Bone Burnett, Grace Potter and Reni Lane and scored five films, including The Brooklyn Heist, Dare and the forthcoming Harvest, with longtime collaborator [Duncan Sheik](#). In 2009, [The Sundance Institute](#) named him a composer fellow for his film score work. His songs have taken him around the globe as support act for [Bob Dylan](#), Joan Baez and [Tori Amos](#) and have been featured in numerous film and television soundtracks: Transamerica, "The OC", "Dawson's Creek", Seibutsu: Still Life, Jesus Henry Christ and [Sam Shepard](#)'s play The Tooth of Crime (Second Dance). A new David Poe CD will be released this fall.

[Mare Winningham](#) (Lilly) is currently appearing in the world premiere of [Frank Wildhorn](#)'s musical, Bonnie and Clyde, at [La Jolla Playhouse](#). She has appeared on stage, screen, and in over 60 movies for television. Her work has earned an Academy Award nomination (Georgia) and two Emmy Awards (Wallace, Amber Waves), among others. For her New York stage debut in Atlantic Theater's musical 10 Million Miles, Winningham received the [Lucille Lortel](#) Award and a Drama Desk Award nomination in 2008. As a singer/songwriter, Winningham most recently released an album of original Jewish Country/Folk songs, "Refuge Rock Sublime."

ERIC BRENT ZUTTY (Christopher) is a 14-year-old student at Community Middle School from Princeton NJ and is thrilled to join the cast of Whisper House as Christopher at the [Old Globe Theatre](#). He has played the role of Aaron Carson in the New York City production of Trouble in Shameland, and has appeared in TV shows such as "Law and Order: SVU," "One Life to Live" and "Late Night with [Conan O'Brien](#)."

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Duncan Sheik

Sheik & Jarrow's Haunted *Whisper House* Musical Will Star Mare Winningham at Old Globe

Mare Winningham will be among cast members of the Old Globe Theatre's world-premiere production of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House*, a ghost-story musical, to bow in San Diego in January.

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Duncan Sheik to Tour in Concert of Songs from His New Musical *Whisper House*

NEWS By Broadway.com Staff

January 4, 2010 - 4:01PM



Duncan Sheik

Tony
Award-
winning

*Duncan Sheik will perform
songs from 'Whisper House'
in concert.*

singer/songwriter Duncan Sheik has scheduled concert dates in six cities to perform songs from his new musical , which is set to debut at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre beginning January 13. Sheik will also give a benefit performance of the score at the Old Globe on January 11, with proceeds going to the company's

educational activities.

As previously announced, Mare Winningham will lead the cast in Peter Askin's world premiere production of , featuring a book and additional lyrics by Kyle Jarrow. Opening night will be January 21. Sheik released a solo CD of the score last year.

The follow-up to Sheik's Tony and Grammy Award-winning Broadway hit , follows Christopher, an 11-year-old living with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse during World War II following the death of his father. The songs weave together to tell the story of a child's grief and spinster's longing as seen through the eyes of the ghosts that haunt the lighthouse.

Sheik wrote most of the music during a retreat on an island near Charleston, SC. "Charleston has this history of ghost stories, a southern tradition that I kind of grew up with," he said in a statement. "I reconnected with it in some way and used that to write the lyrics to these songs. Having this narrative was so much more rich and vital, and it was so much more fun to write from the persona of these ghosts, these dead people, and the whimsical malevolence I could articulate through their voices."

Thus far, Sheik has booked concert dates in South Orange, NJ (March 18), Arden, DE (March 19), Port Washington, NY (March 20), Orlando, FL (March 25), Tampa, FL (March 26) and Jupiter, FL (March 29).

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Winningham Inhabits *Whisper House*, the New Musical by Sheik and Jarrow, Jan. 13-Feb. 21

By [Kenneth Jones](#)
13 Jan 2010



Mare Winningham
photo by Cliff Lipson

Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House*, a ghost-story musical set in a haunted lighthouse, begins its world-premiere run Jan. 13 at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego.

Sheik, the alt-rock singer-songwriter who won a Tony Award for his score to the musical *Spring Awakening*, wrote the new show's music and lyrics, and Jarrow penned book and lyrics. Emmy Award winner Mare Winningham, who is also known as a singer, and was acclaimed for her soulful, folksy Off-Broadway performance in *10 Million Miles*, stars.

Peter Askin directs the original show. The musical director is Jason Hart. The dance director is Wesley Fata.

Whisper House will run in the Old Globe Theatre to Feb. 21. Opening night is Jan. 21.

"Set in 1942 at the height of World War II," according to Old Globe, "*Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown."

As previously reported, Keith Powell, an actor-director who founded Delaware's Contemporary Stage Company, brought the idea of the show to Sheik. The musical was inspired by a day trip Powell took in Maine a few years ago, when he was acting in New England. He toured some local lighthouses and heard ghost stories about the dwellings.

"I called Duncan Sheik and said, 'I don't know exactly what I want to do with you, but I know I want it to include ghosts and lighthouses,'" Powell told Playbill.com in 2008.

Academy Award nominee Winningham ("Georgia," "St. Elmo's Fire") recently appeared in the world premiere of the Frank Wildhorn musical, *Bonnie and Clyde*, at La Jolla Playhouse. She last appeared at The Old Globe as Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*. She plays Aunt Lilly in *Whisper House*. For her work in the musical *10 Million Miles*, Winningham received the Lucille Lortel Award and a Drama Desk Award nomination in 2008.

In addition to Brook, Poe and Winningham, the cast includes Arthur Acuña

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(Yasuhiro), Kevin Hoffman (Lieutenant Rando), Ted Koch (Charles) and Eric Brent Zutty (Christopher).

The *Whisper House* creative team includes Michael Schweikardt (scenic design), Jenny Mannis (costume design), Matt Richards (lighting design), Dan Moses Schreier (sound design) and Richard Costabile (stage manager).

*

Sheik was first widely known for his 1996 debut single, "Barely Breathing," which spent 55 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100. He has since expanded his work to include compositions for motion pictures and the Broadway stage. Sheik won two Tony Awards, as composer and arranger, for the Broadway production of *Spring Awakening*, written with lyricist Steven Sater. It won the Tony for Best Musical.

Sheik and Sater are currently developing two new musical theatre projects: *Nero* (*Another Golden Rome*) and *The Nightingale*.

Jarrow is a writer and musician based in New York City. He writes for the stage as well as film and television, and he plays in the bands The Fabulous Entourage and Super Mirage. He won the OBIE Award at age 24 for his Off-Broadway hit *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*, which has subsequently been produced all over the country. His play, *Armless*, won the Overall Excellence Award at the New York International Fringe Festival. Other plays include *Love Kills*, *Trigger*, *President Harding is a Rock Star*, *Rip Me Open* (co-writer), *Hostage Song* (music & lyrics), *Gorilla Man* (script available from Samuel French), and the upcoming *Big Money* (with Nathan Leigh).

Director Askin's New York City stage credits include John Leguizamo's *Sexaholix*, *Spic-O-Rama* (Drama Desk Award) and *Mambo Mouth* (Obie, Outer Critics' awards); plus Paul Weitz's *Show People* and *Privilege*, among others.

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We've got the first photos for the World Premiere of [Duncan Sheik](#) and [Kyle Jarrow](#)'s Whisper House. Emmy Award winner [Mare Winningham](#) headlines the new musical, Sheik's follow-up to his Tony and Grammy Award-winning Broadway sensation, Spring Awakening. [Peter Askin](#) helms the show, with music and lyrics by Sheik and book and lyrics by Jarrow. The musical director is [Jason Hart](#) and the dance director is [Wesley Fata](#). Whisper House will run in the [Old Globe Theatre](#) Jan. 13 - Feb. 21. Previews run Jan. 13 - Jan. 20. Opening night is Jan. 21 at 8:00 p.m. Tickets to Whisper House are currently available by subscription only. Single tickets will go on sale on Dec. 13 at noon and can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, Whisper House is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? Whisper House is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

TICKETS to Whisper House are currently available by subscription only. Single tickets go on sale at noon on Dec. 13 and can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. Performances begin on Jan. 13 and continue through Feb. 21. Ticket prices range from \$36 to \$89. Performance times: Previews: Wednesday, Jan. 13 at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 14 at 8:00 p.m., Friday, Jan. 15, at 8:00 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 16 at 8:00 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 17 at 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 19 at 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 20 at 7:00 p.m. Regular Performances: Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m., Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m., and Sunday evenings at 7:00 p.m. Discounts are available for full-time students, patrons 29 years of age and under, seniors and groups of 10 or more.

Photo credit: [Craig Schwartz](#)



[Mare Winningham](#) and Holly Brook

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The cast of the World Premiere of [Duncan Sheik](#) and [Kyle Jarrow's](#) *Whisper House*

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PHOTO CALL: Sheik and Jarrow's *Whisper House* Haunts the Old Globe

By [Matthew Blank](#)
15 Jan 2010

Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's new musical, *Whisper House*, plays its world premiere at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego.

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Sheik, the singer-songwriter who won a Tony Award for his score to the musical *Spring Awakening*, wrote the ghost-story's music and lyrics, and Jarrow penned book and lyrics.

"Set in 1942 at the height of World War II," according to Old Globe, "*Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead?"

The production stars Mare Winningham as Aunt Lilly. Also featured are Arthur Acuña as Yasuhiro, Kevin Hoffman as Lieutenant Rando, Ted Koch as Charles and Eric Brent Zutty as Christopher, with David Poe and Holly Brook as the ghosts who perform all of the show's songs.

Here is a first look at the musical:

View the Entire Photo Gallery



Holly Brook with (above:) Eric Zutty and David Poe
Photo by Craig Schwartz

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BROADWAY BUZZ

First Look at Duncan Sheik's Haunting New Musical *Whisper House*

PHOTOS By Broadway.com Staff

January 15, 2010 - 1:48PM



Duncan Sheik

*Tony winner Duncan Sheik
premieres his latest
creation.*

Those wondering what Duncan Sheik would do to follow-up his newfound Broadway career after the Tony-winning smash need to get to the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego! , the new musical he wrote with Kyle Jarrow, started

performances this week and runs through February 21 at the theater. In , a young boy goes to live with his reclusive aunt in a spooky lighthouse at the height of World War II, and winds up hearing strange music seeping through the walls. Check out these just-released photos from the haunting production, directed by Peter Askin! **Photos by Craig Schwartz**



Eric Zutty, Holly Brook and David Poe



Mare Winningham and Holly Brook



Ted Kõch, Mare Winningham, Eric Zutty and Arthur Acuña



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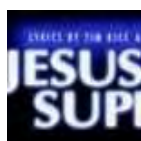
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Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow Discuss Fear, Expectations and 'Whisper House'
by BWW News Desk

(Jan. 17 3:34 PM) - Duncan Sheik is once again set to take the theatre world by storm with the upcoming musical 'Whisper House'; but he's not letting past successes weigh too heavily on his mind. 'Whisper House' marks Sheik's first stage production since his critically acclaimed coming-of-age sensation, 'Spring Awakening'. And while some may feel inclined to surpass the already-high expectations, the clout of Spring Awakening does not add added pressure, "I don't feel it personally at all," Sheik says in an interview with the San Diego Union Tribune, "Because the intentions of the two things are so different. With 'Whisper House,' frankly, the goals were more modest. Especially initially, it was this slightly small, tight little thing we were doing — hopefully this thing of beauty."

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR Closes At The San Diego Civic Theatre, 1/17
by BWW News Desk

(Jan. 17 12:30 AM) - Jesus Christ Superstar, the first masterpiece from the legendary writing team of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, exploded onto the scene in 1971 changing the world of musical theatre forever. With a score of amazing songs - ?I Don't Know How to Love Him?, ?Hosanna?, ?Everything's Alright?, ?What's the Buzz?, ?Superstar?, and



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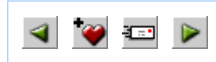
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Sheik attack

Duncan Sheik to Tour in Concert of Songs from His New Musical Whisper House



Tony Award-winning singer/songwriter Duncan Sheik has scheduled concert dates in six cities to perform songs from his new musical Whisper House, which is set to debut at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre beginning January 13. Sheik will also give a benefit performance of the score at the Old Globe on January 11, with proceeds going to the company's educational activities.

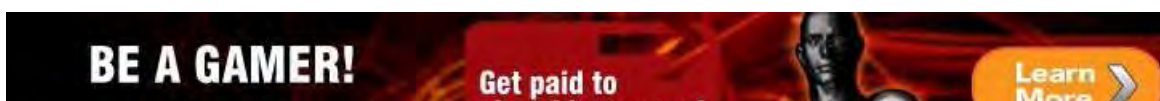
As previously announced, **Mare Winningham** will lead the cast in Peter Askin's world premiere production of Whisper House, featuring a book and additional lyrics by Kyle Jarrow. Opening night will be January 21. Sheik released a solo CD of the score last year.

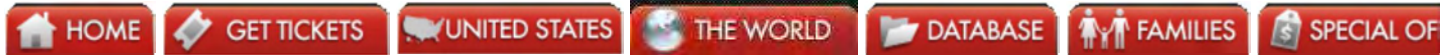
The follow-up to Sheik's Tony and Grammy Award-winning Broadway hit **Spring Awakening**, Whisper House follows Christopher, an 11-year-old living with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse during World War II following the death of his father. The songs weave together to tell the story of a child's grief and spinster's longing as seen through the eyes of the ghosts that haunt the lighthouse.

Sheik wrote most of the music during a retreat on an island near Charleston, SC. "Charleston has this history of ghost stories, a southern tradition that I kind of grew up with," he said in a statement. "I reconnected with it in some way and used that to write the lyrics to these songs. Having this narrative was so much more rich and vital, and it was so much more fun to write from the persona of these ghosts, these dead people, and the whimsical malevolence I could articulate through their voices."

Thus far, Sheik has booked concert dates in South Orange, NJ (March 18), Arden, DE (March 19), Port Washington, NY (March 20), Orlando, FL (March 25), Tampa, FL (March 26) and Jupiter, FL (March 29).

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[Duncan Sheik](#) is once again set to take the [Theatre World](#) by storm with the upcoming musical 'Whisper House'; but he's not letting past successes weigh too heavily on his mind. 'Whisper House' marks Sheik's first stage production since his critically acclaimed coming-of-age sensation, 'Spring Awakening'. And while some may feel inclined to surpass the already-high expectations, the clout of 'Spring Awakening' does not add added pressure, "I don't feel it personally at all," Sheik says in an [interview](#) with the San Diego Union Tribune, "Because the intentions of the two things are so different. With 'Whisper House,' frankly, the goals were more modest. Especially initially, it was this slightly small, tight little thing we were doing - hopefully this thing of beauty".

'Whisper House' is set in 1942, and tells the story of 11-year-old Christopher who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts. With an underlying message of embracing the unknown rather than fear it, co-creator [Kyle Jarrow](#) explains that the concept of fear, particularly the type of fear experienced in the modern era, is one he felt needed to be explored. In an [interview](#) with the Los Angeles Times, Jarrow revisits the origins of 'Whisper House', "I first started writing this in the heat of the Iraq war -- that fear is something that guides a lot of life, that there is all this stuff telling us to be afraid," said Jarrow, "How do you process fear and not let it control your life? That's one of the biggest questions of modern living."

'Whisper House' opens at the [Old Globe Theatre](#) on January 21 with a run scheduled until February 21. Tickets are available via [www.TheOldGlobe.org](#), by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

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A Ghostly Awakening: Duncan Sheik's *Whisper House*
 By [Mervyn Rothstein](#)
 20 Jan 2010

 Arthur Acuña and Mare Winningham
 photo by Craig Schwartz

A new ghost-story musical by Kyle Jarrow and *Spring Awakening*'s Duncan Sheik materializes at The Old Globe.

*

"It's set in and around an isolated lighthouse in Maine during World War II," Duncan Sheik says. "There's a young boy named Christopher whose father was shot down over the Pacific by the Japanese. His distraught mother has been taken to a sanitarium, and he has been sent to live with his Aunt Lily, who is not so great with children, to use a bit of [an] understatement."

Also at the lighthouse is a Japanese servant named Yasujiro. "Christopher," Sheik says, "is incredibly mistrustful of Yasujiro because his father was killed by the Japanese, and he begins to suspect that the servant may be a spy. In the middle of it all, it appears that the lighthouse may be haunted by ghosts — all of whom were members of a band playing on a ship that went down in 1912."

Sheik, the Tony- and Grammy Award-winning composer of *Spring Awakening*, is talking about his new musical, *Whisper House*, premiering this month at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego. Sheik has written both music and lyrics; book and lyrics are by Kyle Jarrow, an Obie winner Off-Broadway for *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*. The director is Peter Askin, whose credits include *Trumbo* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.

It all started, Sheik says, when a friend, the actor Keith Powell (Twofer on "30 Rock") got him and Jarrow together with the idea of creating a theatre work that would involve ghosts and lighthouses. Jarrow wrote a draft, and there was a workshop with no music.

Six months later, in early 2008, "Keith, Kyle and I went down to South Carolina," says Sheik, "and basically came up with a draft of a complete show, with a set of songs." Sheik recorded the songs, which became his new

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album, marking his return to writing both music and lyrics after several years of working with Steven Sater, the lyricist and librettist of *Spring Awakening*.

"It was a lot of fun to become a lyricist again," Sheik says. "What was also fun was that it's the ghosts that sing, so I was writing not as Duncan Sheik but from the perspective of these ghosts, who are whimsily malevolent characters."

The ghosts "operate in some ways as Christopher's inner thoughts and fears," he says. They are dressed in costume from the turn of the 19th century, as an illusionist in a top hat, a Hessian soldier, a reveler at a Venetian carnival and a geisha. "They are in part a Greek chorus commenting on the pathos of these human beings in the lighthouse, and they speak the characters' unspoken fears and heartaches."

The actors playing the humans "never sing. They speak the text. The ghosts sing and never really speak. In a way the show is really a play, with the songs integrated into the piece. There are two alternate realities that co-exist."

Sheik is trying, he says, "to be progressive in terms of musical theatre. I've been seeing a lot of musicals and learning and understanding more and more about the form than I knew when I was writing *Spring Awakening*. I feel I have a much better sense of how to do this; I have a confidence about it. I'm taking the traditional rules of the form and trying to bend them a little to make them more my voice."

Because the ghosts' ship sank in 1912, the Titanic comes to mind. Is there a connection?

"Not really," Sheik says, and laughs. "I guarantee that Celine Dion will not be singing this material."



Singers David Poe and Holly Brook
photo by Craig Schwartz

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Sheik and Jarrow's *Whisper House*, a Haunted Musical, Opens in California

By [Kenneth Jones](#)
21 Jan 2010



Whisper House stars Eric Brent Zutty and David Poe
photo by Craig Schwartz

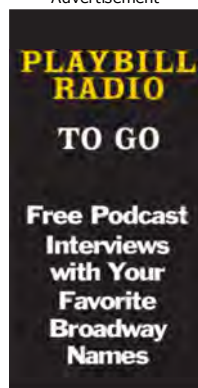
The world premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House*, a ghost-story musical set in a haunted lighthouse, opens Jan. 21 following previews from Jan. 13 at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego.

Emmy Award winner Mare Winningham, who is also known as a singer, and was acclaimed for her soulful, folky Off-Broadway performance in *10 Million Miles*, stars in the period musical, set in the 1940s.

Sheik, the alt-rock singer-songwriter who won a Tony Award for his score to the musical *Spring Awakening*, wrote the new show's music and lyrics, and Jarrow penned book and lyrics.

Peter Askin directs. The musical director is Jason Hart. The dance director is Wesley Fata.

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Whisper House will continue in the Old Globe Theatre to Feb. 21.

"Set in 1942 at the height of World War II," according to Old Globe, "*Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the

musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown."

As previously reported, Keith Powell, an actor-director who founded Delaware's Contemporary Stage Company, brought the idea of the show to Sheik. The musical was inspired by a day trip Powell took in Maine a few years ago, when he was acting in New England. He toured some local lighthouses and heard ghost stories about the dwellings.

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"I called Duncan Sheik and said, 'I don't know exactly what I want to do with you, but I know I want it to include ghosts and lighthouses,'" Powell told Playbill.com in 2008.

Read the Playbill magazine feature about *Whisper House* [here](#).

*

Academy Award nominee Winningham ("Georgia," "St. Elmo's Fire") recently appeared in the world premiere of the Frank Wildhorn musical, *Bonnie and Clyde*, at La Jolla Playhouse. She last appeared at The Old Globe as Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*. She plays Aunt Lilly in *Whisper House*. For her work in the musical *10 Million Miles*, Winningham received the Lucille Lortel Award and a Drama Desk Award nomination in 2008.

In addition to Brook, Poe and Winningham, the cast includes Arthur Acuña (Yasuhiro), Kevin Hoffman (Lieutenant Rando), Ted Koch (Charles) and Eric Brent Zutty (Christopher).

The *Whisper House* creative team includes Michael Schweikardt (scenic design), Jenny Mannis (costume design), Matt Richards (lighting design), Dan Moses Schreier (sound design) and Richard Costabile (stage manager).

*

Sheik was first widely known for his 1996 debut single, "Barely Breathing," which spent 55 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100. He has since expanded his work to include compositions for motion pictures and the Broadway stage. Sheik won two Tony Awards, as composer and arranger, for the Broadway production of *Spring Awakening*, written with lyricist Steven Sater. It won the Tony for Best Musical. In 2009, he released a "Whisper House" album, featuring songs from his developing project.

Sheik and Sater are currently developing two new musical theatre projects: *Nero* (*Another Golden Rome*) and *The Nightingale*.

Jarrow is a writer and musician based in New York City. He writes for the stage as well as film and television, and he plays in the bands The Fabulous Entourage and Super Mirage. He won the OBIE Award at age 24 for his Off-Broadway hit *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*, which has subsequently been produced all over the country. His play, *Armless*, won the Overall Excellence Award at the New York International Fringe Festival. Other plays include *Love Kills*, *Trigger*, *President Harding is a Rock Star*, *Rip Me Open* (co-writer), *Hostage Song* (music & lyrics), *Gorilla Man* (script available from Samuel French), and the upcoming *Big Money* (with Nathan Leigh).

Director Askin's New York City stage credits include John Leguizamo's *Sexaholix*, *Spic-O-Rama* (Drama Desk Award) and *Mambo Mouth* (Obie, Outer Critics' awards); plus Paul Weitz's *Show People* and *Privilege*, among others.

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The cast of *Whisper House*
photo by Craig Schwartz



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Ciulla Replacing Winningham in Old Globe's WHISPER HOUSE

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[Celeste Ciulla](#) will replace [Mare Winningham](#) in the role of 'Aunt Lily' at [The Old Globe](#)'s world premiere production of 'Whisper House' beginning February 8 citing "scheduling reasons" for the replacement. Ciulla last appeared on [The Old Globe](#) stage during its 2009 Shakespeare Festival in 2009, playing Volumnia in [Coriolanus](#).

The World Premiere of [Duncan Sheik](#) and [Kyle Jarrow](#)'s [Whisper House](#) was held January 21 at San Diego's [The Old Globe](#). This marks Sheik's follow-up to his Tony and Grammy Award-winning Broadway sensation, [Spring Awakening](#). [Peter Askin](#) helms the show, with music and lyrics by Sheik and book and lyrics by Jarrow.

The musical director is [Jason Hart](#) and the dance director is [Wesley Fata](#). [Whisper House](#) will run in the [Old Globe Theatre](#) until Feb. 21.

Tickets to [Whisper House](#) can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, [Whisper House](#) is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by [David Poe](#) and [Holly Brook](#), and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? [Whisper House](#) is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

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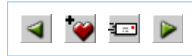
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Entry tags: [*whisper house](#), [casting news](#), [duncan sheik](#), [regional theatre](#), [west coast](#)

Sheik & Jarrow's Haunted Whisper House Musical Will Star Mare Winningham at Old Globe

Mare Winningham will be among cast members of the Old Globe Theatre's world-premiere production of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House*, a ghost-story musical, to bow in San Diego in January.

Peter Askin will direct the original show, which has music and lyrics by Sheik (who shared a Best Score Tony Award for *Spring Awakening*) and book and lyrics by Jarrow. The musical director is Jason Hart and the dance director is Wesley Fata.

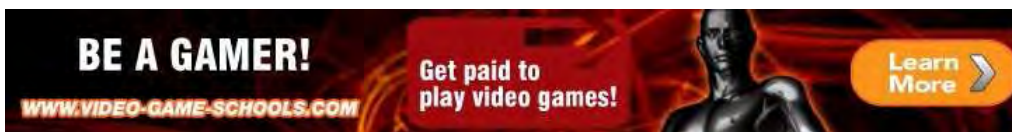
Whisper House will run in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 13-Feb. 21, 2010. Opening night is Jan. 21.

"Set in 1942 at the height of World War II," according to Old Globe, "*Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown."

In addition to Brook, Poe and Winningham, the cast includes Arthur Acuña (Yasuhiro), Kevin Hoffman (Lieutenant Rando), Ted Koch (Charles) and Eric Brent Zutty (Christopher).

Sheik and Sater are currently developing two new musical theatre projects: *Nero (Another Golden Rome)* and *The Nightingale*.

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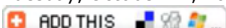


WHISPER HOUSE: Kyle's Blog - 'GEARING UP FOR THE OLD GLOBE'



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Tuesday, October 27, 2009; Posted: 03:10 PM - by [BWW News Desk](#)



Grammy and Tony award-winning songwriter and composer [Duncan Sheik](#) returns with his new album **WHISPER HOUSE**, from Sony Music. **WHISPER HOUSE** marks Sheik's first solo album since 2006's critically-acclaimed *White Limousine* and comes on the heels of the success of *Spring Awakening*. **WHISPER HOUSE**, which will have its world premiere at the [Old Globe Theatre](#) in January 2010, is a collaboration with up-and-coming young playwright [Kyle Jarrow](#), already an Obie winner for *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*.

It's 1942 - at the height of World War II- and Christopher, an imaginative young boy, is sent to

live with an aunt he's never met: Lilly, a reclusive woman who serves as the keeper of a remote lighthouse. Not yet comfortable in his surroundings, Christopher begins to hear strange music no one else can hear seeping through the walls. It doesn't take long for him to suspect the lighthouse may be haunted, and these ghosts tell him that Yasujiro, a Japanese worker that Lilly has employed, should not be trusted. Is Christopher's imagination getting the best of him? Or are these ghosts warning Christopher about the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

BroadwayWorld is excited to bring you Kyle's exclusive WHISPER HOUSE Blog!

Sorry I haven't written for a long time - it's been a busy couple months and I got caught up in a bunch of other projects. Plus, I've moved three times in the past four months. Seriously. That's New York life for you.

Anyway, now I'm back to writing the *WHISPER HOUSE* blog. And I'll keep on writing it through rehearsals for the world premiere production of *WHISPER HOUSE*, at the [Old Globe Theatre](#) in San Diego. It opens on January 20, and we couldn't be more excited. I'll also be bringing a small video camera to San Diego with me (one of those little flip-camera thingies) so I'll be shooting some rehearsal footage etc while there too.

There's lots of news since I last wrote. We have a cast! They're not yet formally announced as they haven't all signed their contracts yet. But as soon as all that business stuff is set, I'll announce their names here. A phenomenally talented crew. Also, we've been working with a new director, the super smart (and, I must say, very

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well-dressed) [Peter Askin](#)-director of Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Trumbo, Privilege, the film Company Man, and [John Leguizamo](#)'s many solo shows among other credits.

[Side note: in terms of stylishness of everyday dress, I would rank Duncan, myself, and Peter as follows...
1. Duncan
2. Peter
3. Me
This ranking is probably not important to anyone in the entire world. But I thought it was worth mentioning.]

In other actually relevant news, the rough draft designs for WHISPER HOUSE are in, and are looking great. The designers are all massively talented people: Michael Schweikardt is doing set design, Jenny Mannis is doing the costumes, Matt Richards is doing lights. Meanwhile, I'm starting with some revisions, preparing the script for the first day of rehearsals in mid-December.

So I'll keep you posted on all that, and more, in the coming weeks...

Happy fall!

Kyle

Kyle Jarrow is a writer and musician based in New York City. He writes for the stage as well as film and television, and he plays in the bands The Fabulous Entourage and Super Mirage. He won the prestigious OBIE Award at age 24 for his Off-Broadway hit A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant, which has subsequently been produced all over the country. Kyle's play Armless won the Overall Excellence Award at the New York International Fringe Festival. Other plays include Love Kills, Trigger, President Harding is a Rock Star, Rip Me Open (co-writer), Hostage Song (music & lyrics), Gorilla Man (script available from Samuel French), and the upcoming Big Money (with Nathan Leigh) and Whisper House (with Tony-winner [Duncan Sheik](#), record now available from RCA/Victor).



For more information on Whisper House visit: www.duncansheik.com/whisperhouse

For more information on Kyle visit: www.landoftrust.com

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Photo of Kyle by Sarah Sloboda

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Lawyers Have Entered *Whisper House* to Address Challenge

By *Kenneth Jones*
30 Jan 2010



Arthur Acuña and Mare Winningham in
The Old Globe's *Whisper House*.
photo by Craig Schwartz

Powell had directed earlier presentations of the pop-rock musical in New York and had come up with certain elements of the world of the musical.

The lawyers of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow, writers of the new musical *Whisper House*, and attorneys for Keith Powell, the show's former director who suggested some creative elements of the work, are in discussions over a challenge by Powell.

A New York City-based actor and director, Powell told the Los Angeles Times that he had an agreement with composer-lyricist Sheik and librettist-lyricist Jarrow to direct the play, and they didn't make good on the promise. He told the paper that he has e-mails that prove there was an agreement that he would direct the show at The Old Globe in San Diego.

The Old Globe is currently offering the world premiere of *Whisper House*, a musical about a haunted lighthouse on the East Coast during World War II. Peter Askin directed.

Powell claims that after developmental versions of the show were presented, Sheik and Jarrow said that Powell could not direct it at The Old Globe unless he signed away his rights to the creation of it.

"I didn't sign those rights away," Powell told the Times. "When I found out they had placed the call to the Old Globe about getting a new director, I didn't sign anything."

Powell told the L.A. Times that the discussions concern the directing promise as well as creative rights he may have.

Powell plays supporting character Toofer on TV's "30 Rock" and was artistic director of Contemporary Stage Company in Wilmington, DE.

As previously reported on Playbill.com, Powell said that he gave Sheik the idea of a musical set in a haunted lighthouse and helped develop it in meetings

and readings. Sheik has said as much, though the current discussion among lawyers seem to focus on the directorial issue.

Sheik told Playbill magazine writer Mervyn Rothstein that the musical started when Powell gave him the idea of creating a theatre work that would involve ghosts and lighthouses. Jarrow wrote a draft, and there was a workshop with no music.

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Six months later, in early 2008, "Keith, Kyle and I went down to South Carolina," said Sheik, "and basically came up with a draft of a complete show, with a set of songs." Powell directed a Manhattan reading in 2008, and a New York Stage and Film workshop in 2009.

The idea for the musical was inspired by a day trip Powell took in Maine a few years ago, when he was acting in New England. He toured some local lighthouses and heard ghost stories about the dwellings.

"I called Duncan Sheik and said, 'I don't know exactly what I want to do with you, but I know I want it to include ghosts and lighthouses,'" Powell told Playbill.com in 2008.

Read the Playbill magazine feature about *Whisper House* [here](#).

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31 Jan 2010Arthur Acuña and Mare Winningham in
The Old Globe's *Whisper House*.
photo by Craig Schwartz

Mare Winningham will leave the Old Globe Theatre's world premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's musical *Whisper House* after the 7 PM performance Feb. 7 owing to "scheduling reasons."

Celeste Ciulla will assume the role of Aunt Lily, who takes her orphaned nephew into her haunted lighthouse. Ciulla appeared in Old Globe's Shakespeare Festival in 2009, playing Volumnia in *Coriolanus*.

Whisper House continues to Feb. 21 in San Diego, CA.

Playbill.com failed to report a cast change that happened in the days leading up to the Jan. 21 opening of *Whisper House*. A.J. Foggiano took over the role of nephew Christopher on opening night, replacing Eric Brent Zutty.

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Whisper House, a ghost-story musical set in a haunted New England lighthouse during World War II, began previews Jan. 13.

Emmy Award-winning actress Winningham is also known as a singer, and was acclaimed for her soulful, folksy Off-Broadway performance in *10*

Million Miles. For her work in *10 Million Miles*, Winningham received the Lucille Lortel Award and a Drama Desk Award nomination in 2008.

Sheik, the alt-rock singer-songwriter who won a Tony Award for his score to the musical *Spring Awakening*, wrote the new show's music and lyrics, and Jarrow penned book and lyrics.

Peter Askin directs. The musical director is Jason Hart. The dance director is Wesley Fata.

"Set in 1942 at the height of World War II," according to Old Globe, "*Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lily in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of

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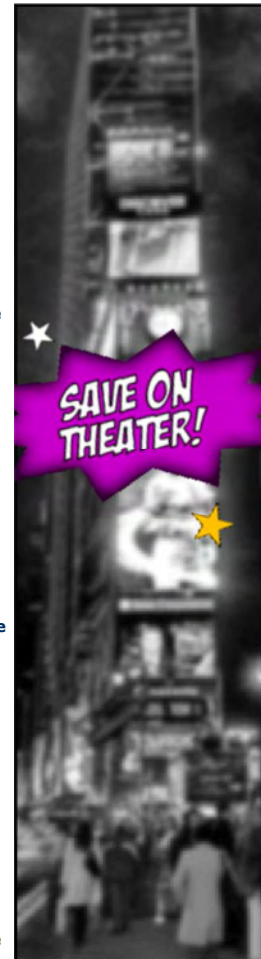
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In addition to Brook, Foggiano, Poe and Winningham, the cast includes Arthur Acuña (Yasuhiro), Kevin Hoffman (Lieutenant Rando) and Ted Koch (Charles).

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Winningham Closes the Door on *Whisper House* Feb. 7; Ciulla in the Wings

By *Kenneth Jones*
07 Feb 2010



Arthur Acuña and Mare Winningham in
The Old Globe's *Whisper House*.
photo by Craig Schwartz

Mare Winningham leaves the Old Globe Theatre's world premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's musical *Whisper House* after the 7 PM performance Feb. 7 owing to "scheduling reasons."

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Peter Askin directs. The musical director is Jason Hart. The dance director is Wesley Fata.

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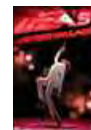
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CARMEL VALLEY NEWS

December 24, 2009

Emmy Award-winner Mare Winningham returns to Globe stage

Old Globe Executive Producer Lou Spisto recently announced the complete cast and creative team for the World Premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House*. Emmy Award-winner Mare Winningham headlines the new musical, Sheik's follow-up to his Tony and Grammy Award-winning Broadway sensation, *Spring Awakening*. Peter Askin helms the show, with music and lyrics by Sheik and book and lyrics by Jarrow. The musical director is Jason Hart and the dance director is Wesley Fata. *Whisper House* will run in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 13 – Feb. 21. Previews run Jan. 13 – Jan. 20. Opening night is Jan. 21 at 8 p.m. Tickets to *Whisper House* are currently available by subscription only. Single tickets will go on sale on Dec. 13 at noon and can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org,

by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, *Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

January 17, 2010

GETTING IN THE SPIRIT

If there's an unearthly quality to some songs on "Whisper House" – the Duncan Sheik album whose music is woven through the Old Globe's new stage production – it might be that ghosts looked over his shoulder as he wrote.

Sheik composed many of the songs while he and writer-lyricist Kyle Jarrow were on a little field trip to the haunted corners of Charleston, S.C. The mordantly funny track "The Tale of Solomon Snell," about a man inadvertently buried alive, comes straight from a story they heard (during a graveyard tour) about hysteria during a long-ago outbreak of yellow fever.

Jarrow explains that a wealthy victim sometimes would arrange in advance to have a string tied to his or her finger before burial. "The string went to a bell, and you'd pay some guy to wait so that if you woke up (from a deathlike coma), you'd ring the bell and they'd dig you out." (Snell's would-be savior gets drunk and misses the bell.)

In a strange way, the album served as a bell-ringer all its own. It came out a full year ago, after a production of the stage version at a theater in Delaware fell through. The Globe heard the album and Sheik's pitch, and pulled the show from purgatory.

Sheik says that while it's unusual for the score of a theater piece to be completed so far ahead of the actual show, it helped him get across the concept to Globe CEO/executive producer Louis G. Spisto and others at the theater.

He adds that it's a technique once used frequently by Andrew Lloyd Webber, the composer behind "Cats" and numerous other shlockbusters.

"Not that I remotely feel I'm following in the footsteps of Andrew Lloyd Webber," Sheik is quick to add.

Now, that would be chilling.

— JAMES HEBERT

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'Whisper House': Ghosts in the machine

January 16, 2010 | 8:15 am



It's a technical staple of the modern Broadway musical: Not altogether invisibly, a tiny microphone is taped to the performers' heads or attached behind their ears, so that when they start singing, their voices are magically amplified.

But David Poe, who plays a singing ghost in Duncan Sheik's and Kyle Jarrow's new musical, "[Whisper House](#)," was having none of it. Real rock and rollers, he said, pick up microphones when they're performing. And so the creative team behind the world premiere of the musical at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre took a look at the show's lighthouse set and started fashioning set dressing -- a bedroom lamp in one scene -- into microphones. When Poe and his other leading ghost, Holly Brook, now sing, they look very much like modern rockers.

And yet the show's story is set decades ago -- in the midst of World War II panic. Can modern music enliven a period drama? It worked brilliantly in Sheik's and Steve Sater's "Spring Awakening."

Audiences will soon find out if the same is true in "Whisper House."

Here's [an in-depth look at the show](#) from Sunday's Arts & Books section.

-- John Horn

Photo: David Poe and Holly Brook, the two ghosts in the new musical "Whisper House," sing during a run-through at the Old Globe. Credit: Don Bartletti / Los Angeles Times

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SAN DIEGO DOWNTOWN NEWS

January 2010

'Whisper House,' 'La Boheme' and a small 'boom'



THE LIVELY
ARTS
By
CHARLENE
BALDRIDGE

January offers diverse and splendid opportunities for fine entertainment in the lively arts. Get your New Year cultural mojo on with the following:

At The Old Globe

At the top of my list is Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's world premiere musical "Whisper House," opening in previews at the Old Globe Jan. 13 and continuing through Feb. 21. Sheik wrote the Tony Award-winning "Spring Awakening" and Jarrow, the Obie Award-winning "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Project." The new musical concerns 11-year-old Christopher, who is sent to live with his lighthouse-keeping aunt when his daddy is killed in World War II. As it happens, the lighthouse is haunted by ghosts that only Christopher sees. For information go to www.theoldglobe.org or phone (619) 23-GLOBE.

At the Lyceum

San Diego Repertory Theatre presents Peter Sinn Nachtreib's "boom," an end-of-the-world bedroom farce that concerns a geeky biologist (Steven Lone) and the savvy but reluctant woman (Rachael Van Wormer) he's picked



Steven Lone, Rachael Van Wormer and Sylvia M'Lafi Thompson star in San Diego Repertory Theatre's "boom," at the Lyceum. Photo Erin Bigley

to help him repopulate the planet. Opens in previews Saturday, Jan. 9 and continues Wednesdays through Sundays, through Jan. 31 in the Lyceum Theatre, 79 Horton Plaza. For info and tickets, visit www.sdrop.org or phone (619) 544-1000.

At the Civic Theatre

San Diego Opera opens its season at the Civic Theatre Jan. 30 with Giacomo Puccini's beloved "La Boheme." The production features the return of German soprano Anja Harteros in her role debut as Mimi. Sensational Polish tenor Piotr Beczala (catch him on YouTube!) makes his San Diego Opera debut as her Rodolfo. Also playing 7 p.m. Jan. 30 and Feb. 2, 8 p.m. Feb. 5 and 2 p.m. Feb. 7.

Info at www.sdopera.com or phone (619) 533-7000.

• Broadway San Diego presents "Riverdance" Jan. 5-10, and "Jesus Christ Superstar" (with Ted Neely) Jan. 15-17. Information: www.sandiegosymphony.org

At Copley Symphony Hall

San Diego Symphony under the baton of Jahja Ling starts the New Year with Sergei Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5, performed at 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Jan. 8 and 9, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 10. Also featured is violist Che-Yen Chen in performance of George Frideric Handel's Viola Concerto in B minor at Copley Symphony Hall, Seventh and B Street, www.sandiegosymphony.com or (619) 235-0804.



Kyle in the News

January 18, 2010 By: [jeffrey](#) Category: [Press](#)



Kyle Jarrow discusses important play business with some other gentleman who also has something to do with the play.

Awkward's very own [Kyle Jarrow](#) was featured yesterday in a big article in the [LA Times](#)! He has created a new musical called *Whisper House* with Duncan Sheik that will be opening in San Diego soon. Duncan Sheik is the composer of the gazillion-Tony-award winning musical *Spring Awakening*. Also, according to [Wikipedia](#), he broke a *Billboard* record when his song "Barely Breathing" stayed in the top 100 for 55 weeks. That makes sense, because if you could program a music-creating machine to perfectly distill America's tastes into a 3 minute pop song, it would sound exactly like "Barely Breathing."

Anyway, good job Duncan Sheik, but this isn't really about you. According to Kyle, this is what the play is about:

I first started writing this in the heat of the Iraq war — that fear is something that guides a lot of life, that there is all this stuff telling us to be afraid," said Jarrow, whose playwriting credits include "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant" and "Armless." "How do you process fear and not let it control your life? That's one of the biggest questions of modern living."

That sounds awesome! I will go see that play. We should all go see that play. If you don't live in Southern California, don't worry, you'll get your opportunity. Because it's going to Broadway! Probably. We don't know yet. But of course it will, because all signs point to it being the pinnacle of human theatrical achievement. Suck it, Aristophanes!

Congratulations, Kyle!

The Follow-Up To Spring Awakening, Duncan Sheik's Whisper House

Saturday, January 16, 2010



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One Response to "The Follow-Up To Spring Awakening, Duncan Sheik's Whisper House"

tyler Says:

January 17th, 2010 at 11:59 am

is it good? whats it about?

i really love spring awakening. it's fantastic. so i'm curious about this 😊

Saturday, January 9, 2010

On the Radar: Whisper House



Notes to Self: 1. When buying Green Day's *American Idiot* CD, also purchase Duncan Sheik's *Whisper House*. 2. Seek help! You are excited about another show with a "dark side."

OK, to be fair to "Self," I have always been drawn to ghost stories and such things. You know, early Stephen King (love my girl *Carrie*) and Dean Koontz, and, of course, the master of creepy - Edgar Allan Poe. So it should be of no surprise to myself that the content alone of the new musical ***Whisper House*** intrigues me and gets my creative juices flowing. The story and point of view are more than interesting: Christopher, an 11 year-old, lives in a haunted light house with his Aunt Lilly during WWII and following his father's death. But get this - the story of their grief and longing is told as seen through the eyes of the ghosts who live there, too! COOL!

Now add to it that Duncan Sheik, who wrote the music to one of my all-time favorite shows, ***Spring Awakening*** wrote the music and lyrics (along with a book and additional lyrics by **Kyle Jarrow**) to the show, and my imagination is firing on all cylinders!!!





The CD Cover and one illustration

The "show" started as a concept CD released by Sheik. In addition to the music, the CD includes illustrations (above) depicting different moments in the story. Sheik will also be doing a mini-tour, singing songs from the show.



Artwork for the Old Globe production

The World Premiere production debuts next week at **San Diego's Old Globe Theatre**, running January 13 - February 21, with the official opening on January 21. The production stars **Mare Winningham**, most recently seen in another "On the Radar" show, *Bonnie and Clyde*. The male and female ghosts are all played, respectively by **David Poe** and **Holly Brook**, who sing all of the songs. *Whisper House* is directed by **Peter Askin**.

Sheik is also working on two shows with his *Spring Awakening* collaborator, **Steven Sater**: *Nero (Another Golden Rome)* and *The Nightingale*.

And all of this is good news for the future of musical theatre!

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Coddon In The City: Dress Codes

Why must arts patrons dress down in this town?

By David Coddon

Posted on Mon, Feb 15th, 2010

Last updated Fri, Feb 12th, 2010

Aloha shirt? Check.

Slim-boot jeans? Check.

Air Jordans? Check.

I'm all set for a night at the theater. San Diego style.



Don't dress like this to attend *Whisper House*--
unless you're a cast member.

Courtesy photo

Dressing down is just the ticket for all too many patrons of the arts in this town. Take opening night recently in Balboa Park for the [Old Globe's](http://www.theoldglobe.org/) (<http://www.theoldglobe.org/>) world-premiere *Whisper House*. I found myself whispering before curtain and after to anyone who would listen about the fashion faux pas of the first-nighters: baggy T-shirts, faded polyester, shoes you'd wear to chase your dog around the park. The only explanation for the fact that no one saw was dressed in shorts was the weather: cold and rainy. I've seen people in shorts at the theater. I've seen people in shorts at the city's finest restaurants. Diegans – and tourists visiting San Diego – will wear shorts just about anywhere and just about anytime.

Why, oh why, are we so persistently, infuriatingly casual?

Listen, there's nothing wrong with dressing for comfort and sun in our neck of the woods. Many of us live in San Diego because the sunshine is so ubiquitous, whatever the season. Getting back to those tourists again, they come to town from snowy and rainy climates because they want some of that sunshine themselves. They bring sweatshirts and Hawaiian shirts with them and, by God, they're going to wear 'em, whatever the local weather. So I accept it.

But people, you've got to pick your spots.

Guys, please leave the baseball caps at home when you patronize a restaurant whose menu isn't printed on plastic. Or at least take the caps off when you sit down. Trust me, you look like rooters from the backwoods who've rolled into New Orleans' elegant Brennan's for Sugar Bowl weekend.

No ballcaps at the theater, either. No ballcaps at the opera (I dare you to try it.) Gaslamp Quarter restaurants? Go ahead. Bu

you can restrain yourselves, Petco Park is only a few blocks away, and the baseball season only a couple months away.

Now, I'm not suggesting we walk around after dark in black tie and/or formal gowns. They don't do that in L.A. either, unless someone's handing out movie awards. Even theaters on Broadway welcome casually dressed crowds. The Great White Way' more like the Good White Way these days, in fare as well as fashion.

But as a native San Diegan, I can say with authority that the city has become more sophisticated when it comes to the arts, culture and entertainment while sacrificing little of its laid-back, beach-town appeal. Isn't it about time we turned up the sophistication dial on ourselves to match? Break out the collared shirt (consider even tucking it in) for that next production at Globe or the Valentine's Day dinner out with your special someone. Leave the shorts in the bottom drawer.

You've got Casual Friday to look forward to. And Saturday. And Sunday. And Monday. And Tuesday ...

Keywords [Whisper House](http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com_search_adv&checkBot=0&searchword=Whisper+House) (http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com_search_adv&checkBot=0&searchword=Whisper+House) [Globe](http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com_search_adv&checkBot=0&searchword=Old+Globe) (http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com_search_adv&checkBot=0&searchword=Old+Globe) [dress code](http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com_search_adv&checkBot=0&searchword=dress+code) (http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com_search_adv&checkBot=0&searchword=dress+code) [David Coddon](http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com_search_adv&checkBot=0&searchword=David+Coddon) (http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com_search_adv&checkBot=0&searchword=David+Coddon)



David Coddon

About the author: [David Coddon](mailto:barrettsd@aol.com) (<mailto:barrettsd@aol.com>) is a longtime voice on the San Diego arts, entertainment cultural scene. The former editor of the San Diego Union-Tribune's "Currents Weekend" and "Night&Day" sections, he wrote a popular column on the arts, "For What It's Worth," and chronicled in particular the glitter and impetuosity of the film industry. He is now a contributor to a number of Southern California publications and is pursuing his MFA at San Diego State, where he expects to complete the novel that's been burning inside him all these years. [More by this author](http://www.sandiego.com/writers/david-coddon) (<http://www.sandiego.com/writers/david-coddon>)

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A legal challenge for 'Whisper House' creators

January 27, 2010 | 2:50 pm



Two of the creators of the new stage musical "[Whisper House](#)" at the Old Globe are being challenged by a New York-based actor-director who says that he was slated to direct the production.

Keith Powell said today that his lawyers are in discussion with lawyers for Duncan Sheik, who wrote the music and lyrics for "Whisper House," and Kyle Jarrow, who wrote the book and co-wrote the lyrics for the show.

Powell claims that he had an agreement with Sheik and Jarrow to direct the musical but that the pair reneged on it. He added that he has e-mails that prove that there was an agreement to direct the show, which was not recognized.

Powell said that at one point before the musical opened at the Old Globe, Sheik and Jarrow sat down with him and said that Powell's work on the show could not continue unless he relinquished his rights to the project.

"I didn't sign those rights away. When I found out they had



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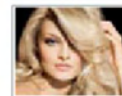
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placed the call to the Old Globe about getting a new director, I didn't sign anything," said Powell in an interview Wednesday from New York. Peter Askin eventually took over as director on the project.

Powell declined to elaborate further on the nature of the talks between the legal teams, except to say that part of the discussion involves the rights he has on the project.

A manager for Duncan Sheik said he had no comment on the matter. Jarro did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Both Sheik and Jarro are clients of Creative Artists Agency.

A spokesman for the Old Globe also declined to comment on the legal issues.

Powell said that he hasn't made a decision as to whether he will pursue a lawsuit against Sheik and Jarro.

"We'll see what happens after [the lawyers] have their conversation. It's an unfortunate option so I'm hoping it doesn't come to that," said Powell.

An experienced theater director, Powell is the former artistic director of the Contemporary Stage Company in Wilmington, Del.

More recently, Powell has been concentrating on his screen acting career. He currently has a supporting role on NBC's "30 Rock," on which he plays the role of Toofer, a writer on the show-within-the-show, "TGS."

Powell said that he brought the idea for "Whisper House" to Sheik around the time the songwriter's "Spring Awakening" was getting off the ground. Later, Jarro came aboard the project to write the book.

Set in 1942, "Whisper House" tells the story of a young boy who is sent to live with his aunt, who works as the keeper of a lighthouse. The boy begins to hear ghostly presences that warn him about potential danger ahead.

In other "Whisper House" news, the Old Globe confirmed Wednesday that Mare Winningham, who plays the aunt, will leave the production early due to "scheduling reasons." Winningham's last performance of the show will be Feb. 7. "Whisper House" is set to continue its run through Feb. 21.

During previews, producers replaced actor Eric Brent Zutty, who was cast in the lead role of the boy, with his understudy, A.J. Foggiano. The theater said that the replacement was due to artistic reasons.

-- David Ng

Photo (top): a scene from "Whisper House" at the Old Globe in San Diego. Credit: Don Bartletti / Los Angeles Times

Photo (bottom): Duncan Sheik. Credit: Jemal Countess / Getty Images

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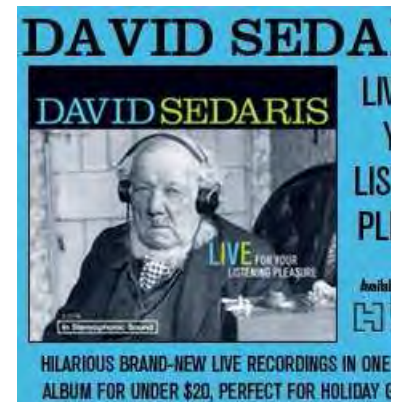
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THEATER NEWS

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Mare Winningham to Depart Duncan Sheik's *Whisper House* February 7

By: **Andy Propst** · Jan 28, 2010 · San Diego

Emmy Award winner Mare Winningham will play her last performance in Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's *Whisper House* at [The Old Globe Theatre](#) on February 7. The actress will be leaving the production early because of scheduling reasons. No replacement has been announced. Directed by Peter Askin, *Whisper House* continues through February 21.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, *Whisper House* is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook. The company also features Arthur Acuña (Yasuhiro), Kevin Hoffman (Lieutenant Rando), Ted Koch (Charles), and A.J. Foggiano (Christopher).

The creative team includes Jason Hart (musical direction), Michael Schweikardt (scenic design), Jenny Mannis (costume design), Matt Richards (lighting design), and Dan Moses Schreier (sound design).

For further information, visit www.theoldglobe.org.



Mare Winningham
(© Cliff Lipson)

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February 7, 2010

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What's up with changes at 'Whisper House'?

You know you're either with a seriously dedicated theater crowd or seeing some seriously impressive tech when the scenery gets its own applause at a play.

It was a little bit of both on the opening night of Neil Simon's "Lost in Yonkers," now playing at the Old Globe. This is the first proper production in the Globe's new White Theatre, the arena-style stage that replaces the venerable but ever-makeshift Cassius Carter space. (A short run of "I Do! I Do!" played the White in December.)

Just as "Yonkers" opens, a quartet of suspended window frames are hoisted almost noiselessly toward the ceiling and out of sight. That's what earned the clapping; the effect couldn't have happened at the Carter, which had no overhead fly loft (nor a below-stage pit, also used to good effect in "Yonkers").

While that's raising praise, other happenings these days at the Globe are raising eyebrows, and they center mostly on the theater's current mainstage show, "Whisper House."

Word came recently that Mare Winningham, the biggest "name" star in the music-infused piece by composer Duncan Sheik and writer and co-lyricist Kyle Jarrow, would leave the production after today. The Globe said the change was made for "scheduling reasons." (Winningham's casting was announced two months ago; the show's dates have been firm since May.)

Winningham will be replaced by Celeste Ciulla, a versatile regular of the theater's Summer Shakespeare Festival.

Earlier, Eric Brent Zutty, the announced actor for the role of young Christopher, was replaced by A.J. Foggiano during previews. The Globe cited artistic reasons for that move.

Meantime, Sheik and Jarrow reportedly are the subject of a legal challenge by Keith Powell, who helped conceive "Whisper House" and was its original director. (He's better-known as a star of NBC-TV's "30 Rock.") At issue is Powell's credit for the show and whether his being dropped from

it (in favor of Peter Askin) violated a contract. The Globe itself is not involved in the legal dispute.

In interviews with the *Union-Tribune* in December, Jarrow and Sheik (the "Spring Awakening" composer whose next project is a just-announced musical adaptation of the 1980s novel "American Psycho") said the move largely had to do with Powell's "30 Rock" time commitment. They were already negotiating Powell's credit at that time.

Sheik said of the situation then that "Kyle wrote a play and came up with all these characters and this entire plot and this entire scenario, and I wrote a bunch of songs. And that's what the piece is."

"I really like Keith a lot, and it was a drag that it wasn't able to work out. But it did become clear that it was going to be better to do (the show) with somebody with a lot more experience, which Peter has."

"Whisper House" continues through Feb. 21.

- JAMES HEBERT



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ARTS NEWS

What's up with changes at 'Whisper House'?

BY JAMES HEBERT, UNION-TRIBUNE THEATER CRITIC
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2010 AT 12:04 A.M.

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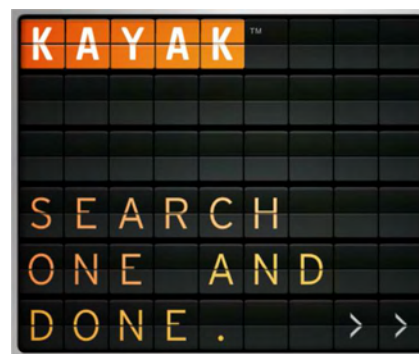
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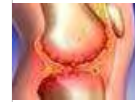
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JAMES HEBERT

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29, 2010

You have to wonder if that haunted lighthouse in the Old Globe's new "[Whisper House](#)" is attracting some ghostly mojo.

News spread yesterday that Mare Winningham, who stars as the spinster aunt and lighthouse keeper Lilly in Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's music-infused play, is leaving the production effective Feb. 7 for what's being termed "scheduling reasons."

Less than an hour ago, word came from the Globe that Winningham's replacement will be Celeste Ciulla, a versatile regular of the theater's Summer Shakespeare Festival who starred most recently as the warmongering Roman mother Volumnia in Darko Tresnjak's production of "[Coriolanus](#)."

Meantime, the [L.A. Times](#) has reported that [Keith Powell](#), who was originally set to direct "Whisper House," is now suing composer Sheik and writer Jarrow for dropping him from the show. (He was replaced fairly late in the process by Peter Askin.)

When i [interviewed](#) Sheik and Jarrow last month, we talked at some length about why Powell was off the show. Although some of our chat was off the record, in general they characterized the decision as due to Powell's busy schedule (he plays Toofer on the NBC-TV comedy "30 Rock"). Sheik, while praising Powell, also suggested that his lack of experience in directing musicals had become an issue, and that the show (which is not quite a true musical, but does have about 10 songs) needed someone with a track record such as Askin's.

I'll post more as updates become available.

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BWW TV: Sheik and Jarrow's WHISPER HOUSE at The Old Globe

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Thursday, January 28, 2010; Posted: 10:01 AM - by [Audra Stafford](#)

ADD THIS

We've got the first video footage from the World Premiere of [Duncan Sheik](#) and [Kyle Jarrow](#)'s Whisper House. Emmy Award winner [Mare Winningham](#) headlines the new musical, Sheik's follow-up to his Tony and Grammy Award-winning Broadway sensation, Spring Awakening. [Peter Askin](#) helps the show, with music and lyrics by Sheik and book and lyrics by Jarrow. The musical director is [Jason Hart](#) and the dance director is [Wesley Fata](#). Whisper House will run in the [Old Globe Theatre](#) until Feb. 21. Tickets to Whisper House can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, Whisper House is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by [David Poe](#) and [Holly Brook](#), and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? Whisper House is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.



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November 13, 2009 6:40 PM

Duncan Sheik's 'Spring Awakening' comes to O.C.

By RICHARD CHANG
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Story Highlights

The singer-songwriter has departed world and is focusing on musical the

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ARTICLE

PHOTOS

Duncan Sheik, the young, sensitive man who once crooned the top 10 hit "Barely Breathing" in the 1990s has grown up. Well, kind of.

He has left the pop star life behind and is now composing music for theater. His work on the rock musical "Spring Awakening" – opening Tuesday at the Orange County Performing Arts Center – won him two Tony awards, for best orchestration and best original score. The show carried away a total eight Tonys in 2007, including the prize for best musical. The soundtrack also won a 2008 Grammy Award for best musical show album.



"Mama Who Bore Me" (reprise) with Kimiko Glenn, Gabrielle Garza, Christy Altomar and Sarah Hunt. From "Spring Awakening," which plays at the Orange County Performing Arts Center from Nov. 17-29.

PAUL KOLNIK,

'Spring Awakening'

- **Where:** Segerstrom Hall, Orange County Performing Arts Center, 600 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa
- **When:** Nov. 17-29
- **Showtimes:** 7:30 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday; 1 and 6:30 p.m. Sunday
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"Spring Awakening" explores the angsty teen world of boarding school students in 1890s Germany. Initially, it's a weird setting for rock songs such as "The Bitch of Living," but the off-Broadway musical wound up winning over Broadway and the critics.

We caught up with Sheik, 39, who discussed his journey from pop darling to outcast to musical theater champion.

Orange County Register: It's been almost three years since "Spring Awakening" first hit Broadway. What's this whole experience been like?

Duncan Sheik: It's been a long three years. I say that mostly in a nice way. It's kind of interesting right now, because "Spring Awakening" is kind of winding down for me in my life. I'm involved in other projects when I'm doing these interviews for the tour, for international productions.

I think this is maybe the fourth iteration of the cast. Some people have been doing it a long time. The touring cast is every bit as strong as the Broadway cast. I'm happy about that, because you hear horror stories.

OCR: Steven Sater is your writing partner. He writes the lyrics and you compose the music. How do you write music to lyrics that have already been written?

DS: Steven and I first started working together in 1999. He had a lyric or two in a play of his. He asked me to set that to music, and I had never done anything like that. I said, "Well, let me read the play, see how I feel about it." I found that it was something that came really naturally to me. That was surprising, because I had never done it before.

I did that for a couple songs. Then he began faxing me lyric after lyric after lyric. Eventually, we had a stack of 25 songs. The best of those songs became my third record, "Phantom Moon."

OCR: How did you guys come up with the ideas behind "Spring Awakening"?

DS: Steven gave me a copy of the Frank Wedekind book, the original "Spring Awakening." He said, "Let's adapt this to musical theater." My initial response to his idea was, "That's not really what I do, Steven." It's not a genre that, to be honest, I'm particularly fond of.

In the subsequent 10 years or so, I've become a real aficionado of musical theater. There are things in Broadway music that are fake and not my cup of tea. We had many conversations about how we might try and do this.

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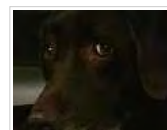
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Stylistically, I wrote the same songs that I might try and write for my own record. Steven was fine with that idea. This idea of putting kind of alternative rock music to a story about teen angst – it was accidentally a perfect fit.

Alt-rock in its various forms has been the soundtrack to teen angst. When it all of a sudden clicks, we found it to be a very lucky guess.

OCR: This musical started off-Broadway and wound up winning all these awards. Were you surprised by its success?

DS: It was hugely surprising. We had spent a good five years, six years working on the show. Everyone told us – even other members of the creative team – that this show will never go on Broadway. It's not a Broadway show. We always hoped, but we were kind of told pretty explicitly that it will never happen.

We got incredible critical response. It's interesting – during the first three weeks of previews in New York, we were losing a quarter of a million dollars in a week. Then the reviews came out on opening night. Never in my wildest dreams would I imagine the positive response. In theater, critical response really matters. It's not like normal music. You can get good reviews and still, nobody buys your record.

OCR: You've had to reinvent your career a couple of times. You went from clean-cut pop singer-songwriter to bearded troubadour to theater and found success there.

DS: After my fourth album "Daylight" came out, I was no longer on a major label. "White Limousine" was on an indie label. Between 2003 and 2006, it was a very, very difficult time. It was a real struggle for me. I had a lot of irons in the fire, in terms of both "Spring Awakening" and other shows. When "Spring Awakening" became the success that it became, it kind of gave me some confidence again, that what I was doing was meaningful, that I was part of the cultural argument.

Early in my career, I had a wonderful core fan base. I felt like it was getting smaller and smaller. It was very difficult to make the records that I wanted and make a living. "Spring Awakening" was a huge shot in the arm. It gave me a renewed sense of hope and renewed burst of creative energy.

OCR: Were you disappointed with the sales of "White Limousine" (2006)?

DS: I've been disappointed with the sales of every single one of my records. My first record sold three-quarters of a million copies. Everything after that seems not so great.

OCR: You've told us before you weren't comfortable with the pop music world and the image that industry was trying to shape for you. What's your opinion on the business now?

DS: The music industry is broken. Everything is so loose. It used to be, you're on a label and your songs get released on that particular label. Now it's a free for all. Anyway you can get your music out there is good.

I don't have the answer on how to monetize music. I do feel that I'm really lucky that I have these other mediums to work for. There's a real audience that will spend \$50, \$60 or \$100 to see a show. I think it never was an issue with the music itself. It's how things are marketed. I wasn't always comfortable with that stuff.

OCR: What kind of music do you listen to now?

DS: I still listen to the same music that I listened to in college – Talk Talk, the Cure, the Smiths, Depeche Mode, all this '80s English pop. I really do try and keep that spirit alive in myself. I'm hopefully still thinking I can connect to the youthful energy in some way. Sometimes I feel like I've never really grown up and become an adult.

OCR: In the interest of full disclosure, we went to college together at Brown. Is there anything you carry with you from college?

DS: It's funny. Things that I read in my various classes that I took, having to do with culture and media, I think they've had kind of a slow burn. They influence my thinking about what it means to create art, art that's commercial and how that functions. It was really a formative time.

OCR: Have you gone back to Brown or Providence to visit or perform?

DS: I've been to Providence to play some shows. I haven't played at Brown. I went on campus, went to the bookstore. I enjoyed the fact that it was like, the same sets of people, but different human beings in the same costumes.

OCR: What are you working on now?

DS: I have another musical, "Whisper House," opening in mid-January at the Old Globe Theater in San Diego. It's a ghost story set in World War II. The songs are sung by these whimsically malevolent ghosts. The actors in the show never sing; the ghosts sing.

I'm working on another kind of big musical with Steven Sater. It's an adaptation of (Hans Christian Andersen's) "The Nightingale."

And finally we're doing something about the Roman emperor Nero. It's potentially done and ready to be staged, once we find the right director and theater. But I've learned that the speed of theater is very similar to plate



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Dayton Daily News

Local singer shares stage with Emmy winner

By [Terry Morris](#) | Monday, January 18, 2010, 10:40 AM

Singer and songwriter David Poe, who grew up in Dayton, is far more than an apparition despite playing a ghost in the new musical “Whisper House.”

He is one of the featured performers in the show, which stars Emmy Award winner Mare Winningham.

The live stage premiere is under way through Feb. 21 at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego.

Set during World War II in a New England lighthouse, the show’s songs are all performed by the ghosts — Holly Brook and Poe.

A graduate of Miami University, Poe is the son of longtime Sinclair Community College president David Ponitz and community arts advocate Doris Ponitz. He has recorded several albums.

RANCHO SANTA FE REVIEW

January 14, 2010

Emmy Award-winner Mare Winningham to perform at Old Globe Jan. 13-Feb. 21

Old Globe Executive Producer Lou Spisto recently announced the complete cast and creative team for the World Premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House." Emmy Award-winner Mare Winningham headlines the new musical, Sheik's follow-up to his Tony and Grammy Award-winning Broadway sensation, Spring Awakening. Peter Askin helms the show, with music and lyrics by Sheik and book and lyrics by Jarrow. The musical director is Jason Hart and the dance director is Wesley Fata. Whisper House will run in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 13 – Feb. 21. Previews run Jan. 13 – Jan. 20. Opening night is Jan. 21 at 8 p.m. Tickets to Whisper House are currently available by subscription only. Single tickets will go on sale on Dec. 13 at noon and can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

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Posted date: 1/18/2010

Stormy Weather Ahead for New Board Chair?

SDBJ Insider

By TOM YORK

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL STAFF

It's a cash crunch for the county. Dark clouds are gathering as Pam Slater-Price is unanimously elected to head the county Board of Supervisors for 2010. The weather could prove stormy for Slater-Price, given that fellow politicians in Sacramento could be planning raids on local tax monies to balance the perennially deficit-plagued state budget ... Maybe we can get a legal opinion on that? The San Diego County Taxpayers Association hosts a luncheon with San Diego City Attorney Jan Goldsmith on Jan. 20 at the Town and Country Resort & Convention Center. Tickets are \$35 for members. RSVP to Amy Harris at amy@sdcta.org ... On Feb. 10, the San Diego Press Club hosts a panel discussion on 50 different ways to advance your writing career, a must-attend event for we who take pen in hand or fingers to keyboard? Presenters include familiar TV host Dennis Morgigno of Cox Channel 4; former TV reporter Kimberly Edwards, now a spokeswoman for the UC San Diego Medical Center; Lee Swanson, public information officer for the San Diego Fire Rescue Department; and Jan Rieger, a publicist who is serving as president of the Press Club. Send a note to sdpressclub@cox.net to reserve a spot ... Come celebrate. Speaking of news gatherers, the online-only VoiceofSanDiego.org marks its fifth year in business with a community gathering Feb. 3 at Liberty Station's McMillin Event Center in Point Loma. There is a \$20 charge for those who haven't yet donated to the nonprofit news operation. E-mail Summer Polacek at summer@voiceofsandiego.org by Jan. 28 for a place in line ... In the case-you-haven't-heard department, San Diego is tabbed one of 18 finalists to host World Cup soccer games should the U.S. win its bid to host the tournament in 2018 or 2022. "This is a big feather in our city's cap," responds Mayor Jerry Sanders in a news release. Actually, it's really big. The event could generate \$350 million to \$500 million for the local economy ... The Princeton Review ranks UCSD among the nation's top 50 "Best Value" public colleges for 2010. The publication cites the campus' prowess in mathematics and science, plus, of course, the weather! ... Just in time to celebrate St. Valentine's Day! Stephen Sondheim's hit musical, "A Little Night Music," is coming to Lyric Opera San Diego starting Feb. 12. The show scheduled for the Birch North Park Theatre was the source of several hit tunes in the 1970s, including the haunting "Send in the Clowns." So, no clowning around, call 619-231-5714 for dates and ducats ... Meanwhile, The Old Globe has a potential hit on its hands as the world premiere of the new musical "Whisper House" gets under way for a five-week run through Feb. 21. The music and lyrics are written by Duncan Sheik, the genius behind the masterful Broadway hit, "Spring Awakening." Go to OldGlobe.org for more ticket information. Till next time!

Contributing Editor Tom York writes the SDBJ Insider. You can reach him at tyork@sdbj.com.

It's Not As Easy As It Looks.



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WEEKLY EDITION

January 18-24, 2010

SDBJ News

Supervisors to Reconsider North County Housing Project

With its 3-2 vote Jan. 13 to reconsider the proposed development of the 2,327-acre Merriam Mountains project, the county Board of Supervisors breathed new life into a bitter fight.

Ivy Re-Brands as Hyatt's Andaz Hotel

Historically, downtown San Diego hotels that don't sit along the waterfront struggle in a recession. The Ivy Hotel — a chic property that made its debut in 2007 in the heart of the Gaslamp Quarter — is no exception.

Manufacturing Job Losses Mounting Countywide

San Diego lost 135 more manufacturing jobs last month when Koch Membrane Systems Inc. announced it was moving its production line from Scripps Ranch to the company's headquarters in Wilmington, Mass.

DefenseWeb Helps Launch Soldiers Into Cyberspace

The U.S. Army maintains camps in South Korea and bases in Europe. With the help of a San Diego contractor, it has an outpost in cyberspace too.

WEEKLY EDITION

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That '80s show: Duncan Sheik on board to compose 'American Psycho' musical

February 2, 2010 | 2:09 pm

Drenched in equal parts blood and hit '80s pop tunes, Bret Easton Ellis' novel "American Psycho" chronicled the fissured state of mind of Patrick Bateman, a homicidal New York yuppie who harbored a taste for designer suits and blunt instruments.

The 1991 novel's runaway success spawned a movie starring Christian Bale, which opened in 2000. A musical theater adaptation has been in the works for a while and now appears to be on the fast track, with Duncan Sheik signed on to compose the songs.

Sheik, who won two Tony Awards for "Spring Awakening," will write the music and the lyrics for the show, it was announced on Tuesday. Playwright Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa is set to write the book.

In a statement, Sheik said that after re-reading Ellis' novel this summer, "I came to feel that what some people (including myself) may have seen as an over-the-top literary folly of the early nineties was in fact a pretty timeless tale of alienation and solipsism."

He added: "And, really, what could be more subversive fun than murderous bankers breaking into song?"

Sheik's score will channel the spirit of the '80s alongside pop hits from the era, according to promoters. They did not say when or where the musical will be staged.

Most recently, Sheik [worked](#) on the musical "Whisper House," which currently is running at the Old Globe in San Diego.

Aguirre-Sacasa is an accomplished playwright who has recently been working on HBO's series "Big Love." His new play, "[Doctor Cerberus](#)," is set to have its world premiere at South Coast Repertory beginning April.

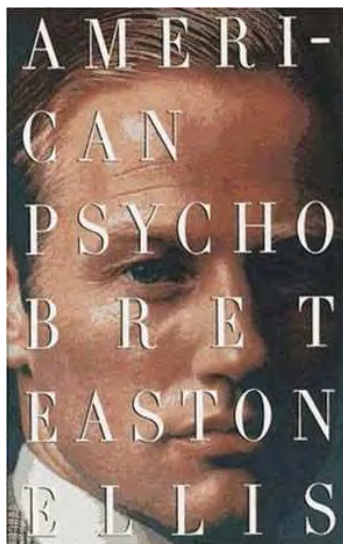
-- David Ng

Credit: Vintage Books

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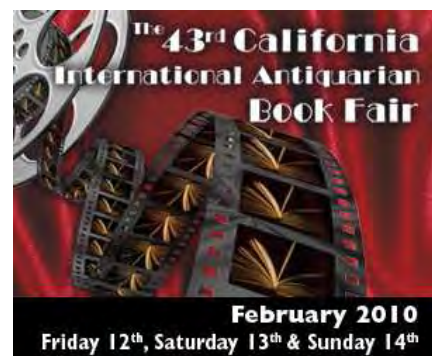
[Theater review: 'Whisper House' at San Diego's Old Globe](#)



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Oscar-Nominated Song from "Nine" Gets Music Video

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Duncan Sheik and Robert Aguirre-Sacasa Will Make American Psycho Sing

By [Kenneth Jones](#)
02 Feb 2010



Whisper House composer Duncan Sheik
photo by Aubrey Reuben

Tony Award-winning songwriter Duncan Sheik and busy playwright Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa will collaborate on a new stage musical based on the gruesome novel "American Psycho," about a charming Wall Street banker who is also a serial killer.

News of the musical first surfaced in 2008; The Johnson-Roessler Company, The Collective and XYZ Films announced the writers of the project on Feb. 2.

Sheik, the alt-pop singer-songwriter who wrote music to the Tony Award-winning *Spring Awakening*, will write music and lyrics, and Sacasa, a prolific regional and Off-Broadway playwright (*Based on a Totally True Story*, *Bloody Mary*, *Rough Magic*, *Dark Matters*, *Good Boys and True*, *The Mystery Plays* and *Say You Love Satan*), will write the libretto.

Sheik's score, according to a statement, "will channel the spirit of the 1980s alongside celebrated hits from the era."

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The 1991 novel by Bret Easton Ellis showed the world of a charming yuppie who murders without remorse. The book was alternately viewed as a satire or as trash. It was particularly criticized for its scenes of misogyny. A film version comically underlined the character's cold-blooded

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nature as a sign of the times. Christian Bale starred.

The novel shocked reader and critics, and sold over 1.6 million copies worldwide. Producers of the new musical regard the book as a "landmark satire."

American Psycho, according to the producers, "explores the designer lifestyle and twisted mind of Patrick Bateman, a young and handsome Wall Street investment banker in 1980s Manhattan. Bateman's days are driven by his obsessive and over-the-top materialism; by night, his mask of sanity slips away as he descends into a chilling indulgence in drugs, prostitution and murder."

Sheik said in a statement, "After re-reading Bret Easton Ellis' book this summer I came to feel that what some people (including myself) may have seen as an over-the-top literary folly of the early '90s was in fact a pretty timeless tale of alienation and solipsism in a world where commercialism rules everything and art is only valued for its surfaces. And, really, what could be more subversive fun than murderous bankers breaking into song?"

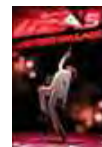
Ellis stated, "I am a huge fan of Duncan and Roberto and am excited to be collaborating with them. I trust their creative vision of my book and know they will deliver a memorable show to all 'American Psycho' fans and beyond."

The Johnson-Roessler Company's David Johnson, Craig Roessler and Jesse Singer are producing alongside The Collective's Aaron Ray and XYZ Films' Nate Bolotin. Ellis and Edward R. Pressman will serve as consulting producers.

Sheik's musical *Whisper House*, written with Kyle Jarrow, is currently getting its world premiere at The Old Globe in San Diego. The two-time Tony winner — for Best Orchestration and Best Original Score (for *Spring Awakening*) — was Grammy Award-nominated for Best Male Pop Vocal Performance for his hit 1996 single "Barely Breathing."

In tandem with his many stage projects, Sacasa is currently writing for HBO's Emmy-nominated hit series "Big Love."

No production timeline has been announced for *American Psycho*.



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Duncan Sheik, Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa to Write *American Psycho* Musical

 By: **Andy Propst** · Feb 2, 2010 · New York

Duncan Sheik will write music and lyrics and Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa will pen the book for a musical version of Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*. A timeline, along with casting and a creative team, for the project will be announced at a later date.

Ellis' 1991 novel centers on a Wall Street banker who is also a serial killer. The book incorporates multiple references to the popular music of the 1980s, the era in which the story is set, and it is expected that Sheik's original songs will reflect the period in a production that will also use hits from the era.

Sheik won a Tony Award for the score for *Spring Awakening*. His new musical *Whisper House* recently opened at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego. His musical *Nero* received a developmental staging at New York Stage and Film in Poughkeepsie in 2008.

Aguirre-Sacasa, a writer on the HBO series *Big Love*, has written such plays as *Based on a Totally True Story*, *Good Boys and True*, and *Dark Matters*.


 Duncan Sheik
 (© Joseph Marzullo/WENN)

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Duncan Sheik & Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa Set to Pen 'American Psycho' Musical



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According to [Variety](#), [Duncan Sheik](#) and [Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa](#) are set to write a musical adaptation of 'American Psycho' based on the 1991 Bret Easton Ellis novel. Sheik is set to write the music and lyrics and Aguirre-Sacasa will pen the book.

[Variety](#) reports that "producers have said they expect the original score to share [an] '80s flavor" as the novel is set in that decade and makes several references to '80s popular music. The book and 2000 movie of the same title starring Christian Bale center on a "Wall Street banker who's also a serial killer."

[Variety](#) states that specific production timelines have not yet been set.

[Duncan Sheik](#) initially found success as a singer, most notably for his 1996 debut single, "Barely Breathing," which spent 55 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100. He has since expanded his work to include compositions for motion pictures and the Broadway stage. Sheik won two Tony Awards, as composer and arranger, for the Broadway production of Spring Awakening. Written with lyricist [Steven Sater](#), Spring Awakening also received the Tony Award for Best Musical. Sheik is currently developing two new musical theater projects. Nero (Another Golden Rome) had a workshop production this summer at [Vassar College](#), featuring Wicked star [Idina Menzel](#) and Spring Awakening ingénue [Lea Michele](#). The Nightingale is slated for a 2010 opening at San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater. His latest, Whisper House, written with [Kyle Jarrow](#), is currently playing at The [Old Globe Theatre](#) in San Diego. His albums include "[Duncan Sheik](#)" (1996), "Humming" (1998), "Phantom Moon" (2001), "Daylight" (2002), "White Limousine" (2006), "Brighter/Later: A [Duncan Sheik](#) Anthology" (2006) and "Greatest Hits: A [Duncan Sheik](#) Collection" (2007).

[Robert Aguirre-Sacasa](#) is the author of the new radio play DOCTOR CERBERUS. Aguirre-Sacasa has, until recently, been an author for Marvel Comics. A graduate of Yale, he has seen his plays premiered at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington D.C., the [Manhattan Theatre Club](#), and Steppenwolf in Chicago. DOCTOR CERBERUS will premiere with an L.A. Theatre Works taping and broadcast.

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Home / Entertainment / Entertainment Columnists / Pam Kragen: Backstage

BACKSTAGE: 'Miss Saigon' highlights Moonlight summer season

- Story
- Discussion

By PAM KRAGEN - pkragen@nctimes.com | Posted: February 3, 2010 1:20 pm | No Comments Posted | Print

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The helicopter in **"Miss Saigon"** will touch down at Vista's **Moonlight Amphitheatre** this summer as the closing act of the company's just-announced summer season.

Moonlight's 30th anniversary season will open July 14 with Rodgers and Hammerstein's **"Oklahoma!"**, which will be directed by Moonlight Stage Productions producing artistic director Kathy Brombacher (with musical direction by Elan McMahan). It will run through July 31.

Next up is George and Ira Gershwin's tap-heavy **"Crazy for You,"** running Aug. 11-28. And the season closes with the company premiere of **"Miss Saigon"** (Sept. 8-25), directed by Steve Glaudini and choreographed by Carlos Mendoza (who teamed on past Moonlight hits **"Cats"** and **"West Side Story"**). Based on Puccini's opera **"Madama Butterfly,"** **"Miss Saigon"** resets the tragic love story in war-torn 1970s Vietnam (the show is for mature audiences).

As it did last year, the 2010 summer season will have just three shows, which will each run three weeks (in the past, the company produced four shows that ran two weekends apiece).

"The season is a salute to the history and future of the Moonlight Amphitheatre," Brombacher said. **"Oklahoma!"** was one of the first shows we presented, and it's a production we haven't produced in 14 years. **'Crazy for You'** is a testament to the theater's reputation for great choreography, and this show is a tap-dancing spectacular. We are introducing **'Miss Saigon'** to our audiences for the first time. It's a show that will beautifully demonstrate the type of high-tech production capabilities we are now able to present in our new stage house."

Subscriptions (priced from \$62 to \$105) go on sale April 24. Single tickets (\$22-\$45) will be available May 15. Call 760-724-2110 or www.moonlightstage.com.

"Shrek," "Hair" and "Next to Normal" are among the recent Broadway shows that will visit San Diego as part of Broadway/San Diego's just-announced 2010-2011 season.

The seven-show season (with the option of three add-on events), which opens in October and continues through mid-2011, will be presented both at the San Diego Civic Theatre and the Balboa Theatre in downtown San Diego. Subscriptions are now on sale by calling 619-570-1100 or visiting broadwaysd.com. Here's the lineup:

"Burn the Floor" ---- Oct. 12-17, Civic Theatre. High-energy Latin/ballroom dance show in its first national tour.

"Disney's Beauty and the Beast" ---- Oct. 26-31, Civic Theatre. Based on Disney's animated fairy tale, this show makes its second visit to San Diego.

"The Color Purple" ---- Dec. 3-5, Civic Theatre. Based on Alice Walker's novel about a poor black woman who triumphs over adversity, the Tony-nominated musical returns for a brief, five-show stop (presented as an extra season event).

"West Side Story" ---- Jan. 4-9, 2011, Civic Theatre. A touring production of the current Broadway revival of this 50-year-old classic that resets **"Romeo and Juliet"** in a racially mixed New York City neighborhood.

"Next to Normal" ---- Jan. 18-23, 2011, Balboa Theatre. Directed by former La Jolla Playhouse chief Michael Grief (**"Rent"**), this Tony-winning contemporary musical is the story of a family struggling to cope with the middle-aged mother's mental illness.

"The Wizard of Oz" ---- Feb. 15-20, 2011, Civic Theatre. A new, special-effects and choreography-laden tour pays homage to the classic 1939 MGM film about a young Kansas girl who rides a tornado over the rainbow to a surreal fantasy world.

"Stomp" ---- April 19-24, 2011, Balboa Theatre. Back after a four-year absence, this percussion musical features musicians performing on all manner of homemade instruments, from trash-can lids to matchboxes (extra season event).

"Mamma Mia!" ---- May 31-June 5, 2011, Civic Theatre. Featuring the music of ABBA, this ever-popular crowd-pleaser is the story of a mom who relives her wild youth when three ex-lovers show up on the eve of her daughter's wedding (extra season event).

"Shrek the Musical" ---- July 5-10, 2011, Civic Theatre. Based on the Oscar-winning DreamWorks film about a grumpy ogre who finds true love with an enchanted princess, this just-closed Broadway musical has an original 19-song score.

"Hair" ---- 2011 dates TBA, Civic Theatre. The 2009 Tony winner for Best Revival, this hit-laden musical is the story of a troupe of peace-loving Greenwich Village hippies during the Vietnam War era. For mature audiences.

The 2009-10 season is still under way, with five shows yet to go: "Legally Blonde: The Musical," March 30-April 4; Cirque Dreams: Illumination," April 13-18; "Rain: A Tribute to the Beatles," May 15; "The 101 Dalmatians Musical," June 1-6; and "In The Heights," July 27-Aug. 1.

Meanwhile, Broadway/San Diego's producers announced the launch of their first-ever **Broadway in Riverside** season at the Fox Theatre in downtown Riverside.

The three-show season will include "Annie," running Feb. 2-7; "Jesus Christ Superstar" with Ted Neeley, March 30-April 4; and "Hairspray," April 20-25. Visit www.broadwayinriverside.com.

At least three local singers picked up Grammys at the 52nd annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles on Sunday.

Bonsall resident **Jason Mraz** won two awards (his first after numerous nominations over the years): Best Male Pop Vocal Performance for the single "Make It Mine," and Best Pop Collaboration With Vocals for "Lucky," his duet with Colbie Caillat.

Poway resident Steve Vaus, better known as children's entertainer **Buck Howdy**, won a Grammy in the "Best Spoken Word Album for Children" for his new album "Aaaah! Spooky, Scary Stories & Songs." He's had four nominations in the past three years. During his acceptance speech, Vaus joked that it cost him more to valet park his car in L.A. the day before the ceremony than it cost to produce the award-winning album.

And Judas Priest, led by Hillcrest resident **Rob Halford**, won Best Metal Performance for "Dissident Aggressor," a track from its album "A Touch of Evil ---- Live."

The Black Eyed Peas, who won three Grammys on Sunday, have added a San Diego date to their "The E.N.D. World Tour." The quartet will perform at the San Diego Sports Arena on April 3. Tickets go on sale at noon Saturday at all Ticketmaster outlets or by calling 800-745-3000.

San Diego's **Evoke Dance Theatre** is in the midst of a weeklong residency with the North County Higher Education Alliance (a collaboration among Cal State San Marcos, Palomar College and MiraCosta College). The hip-hop troupe will participate in lectures, workshops and student performances at all three campuses this week, culminating in a performance for the public at 8 p.m. Friday at MiraCosta. Tickets are \$12. Call 760-795-6815 or visit www.miracosta.edu/dance.

Mare Winningham, the Emmy Award-winning star of the Old Globe's "The Whisper House," will leave the production at the end of this week.

Because of a scheduling conflict, Winningham's last performance will be at 7 p.m. Sunday. Celeste Ciulla, a veteran of the Globe's Summer Shakespeare Festival, will take over for the final two weeks of the run.

In other casting news, **Zeljko Lucic**, the Serbian baritone cast in the title role of San Diego Opera's upcoming "Nabucco," has withdrawn from the production for personal reasons. American baritone Richard Paul Fink will assume the role in the production that opens Feb. 20 (rehearsals started Monday). This is the second cast change for the Nabucco role. Italian bass-baritone Ferruccio Furlanetto was originally booked to star in the part, but he removed the role from his repertoire last year and Lucic was hired to replace him.

Pam Kragen is the entertainment editor of the North County Times.

Posted in Kragen on *Wednesday, February 3, 2010 1:20 pm* Updated: 1:25 pm. | Tags: Nct, Entertainment Preview, Columns, Pam Kragen

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12/11/09 – 12/20/09 Real-life married couple Paige Davis and Patrick Page will star in a special engagement of I Do! I Do!, the classic Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt musical based on The Fourposter by Jan de Hartog, in The Old Globe's new Sheryl and Harvey White Theatre. The well-loved classic, by the creators of The Fantasticks, spans five decades in the life of a married couple – from the nervousness of their wedding day to the wisdom of old age.

The story of Michael and Agnes and their 50 years of marriage famously takes place around a large four-poster bed and introduced the standard, "My Cup Runneth Over." Written as a star vehicle for theater legends Mary Martin and Robert Preston, the original Broadway production of I Do! I Do! received seven Tony Award nominations, with Preston winning Best Actor.



I Do! I Do!

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San Diego Symphony
619-235-0804
www.sandiegosymphony.com

Spend the holidays with the San Diego Symphony! The holidays at the San Diego Symphony are truly exciting with Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, Holiday Pops and *Salute to Vienna*. The grand "Ode to Joy," will feature the Symphony and San Diego Master Chorus. The Holiday Pops shine with Broadway's Michael Cavanaugh, Mariachi Champaña Nevin and a holiday sing-a-long. On Jan. 1, *Salute to Vienna*, is an uplifting performance of music, song and dance!



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San Diego, CA 92104
www.sunshinedentistry.com



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The Old Globe
1363 Old Globe Way
San Diego, CA 92101-1696
619 234-5623
www.theoldglobe.org



Give the gift of the theatre this holiday season. The Old Globe, with three theatres in Balboa Park produces 15 shows annually - from Broadway bound musicals to classics and Shakespeare. Duncan Sheik's (*Spring Awakening*) new musical, *Whisper House* will premiere in January. For tickets or gift certificates, call 619 234-5623 or log on to www.theoldglobe.org.

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

December 17, 2009 NIGHT & DAY



SHEIK'S QUITE CHIC

Duncan Sheik, the Grammy- and Tony-winning singer-songwriter and composer, first found fame as a singer in 1996 with "Barely Breathing." But now, on the heels of the award-winning "Spring Awakening," he's hot again and is coming to San Diego with his new musical, "Whisper House," showing at the Old Globe from Jan. 13 to Feb. 21. Before the opening of "Whisper House," Sheik and special guest David Poe will perform in concert Jan. 11 at the Old Globe.

theoldglobe.org

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Travel Tip: Pop Culture and Cinema in United States

Whisper House



Duncan Sheik
Photo courtesy of Old Globe Theater, San Diego

Whisper House

UNITED STATES
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA • OLD GLOBE
THEATER • 13 JANUARY - 21 FEBRUARY 2010

Whisper House (world premiere musical)
Music & Lyrics: Duncan Sheik
Book & Lyrics: Kyle Jarrow
Directed by Peter Askin

Tony and Grammy Award-winning songwriter
Duncan Sheik follows up his Broadway
sensation, *Spring Awakening*, with this new
musical.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II,
Whisper House is the story of an 11-year-old
boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in
a haunted New England lighthouse following the
death of his father. All of the songs in the
musical are performed by the ghosts, played by
David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the
boy's subconscious thoughts and
fears. Moreover, these ghosts tell him that
Yasuhiro, a Japanese worker that Lilly has
employed, should not be trusted. When
Christopher begins to hear strange music
seeping through the walls, is his imagination
getting the best of him, or is he receiving
warnings of the very real dangers that lie
ahead?

In addition to Brook, Poe and Winningham, the
cast also includes Arthur Acuña (Yasuhiro),
Kevin Hoffmann (Lieutenant Rando), Ted Koch
(Charles) and Eric Brent Zutty (Christopher).

Duncan Sheik introduced the story of *Whisper
House* last January in the form of a CD of the
same name. The collection of songs, written
specifically for the theatrical production, marked
Sheik's first solo album.

Duncan Sheik initially found success as a
singer, most notably for his 1996 debut single,
"Barely Breathing," which spent 55 weeks on
Billboard's Hot 100. He has since expanded
his work to include compositions for motion
pictures and the Broadway stage.

[Old Globe Theater Website](#)

Contact:

Old Globe Theater
1363 Old Globe Way
San Diego, CA 92101-1696
Tel: (1) 619 234 56 23

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GAY & LESBIAN TIMES

January 7, 2010

Thursday, Jan. 14

'Whisper House': Duncan Sheik and company will perform *Whisper House* at the Old Globe Theatre at 8 p.m. Tony and Grammy Award-winning songwriter Duncan Sheik follows up his Broadway sensation, *Spring Awakening*, with this haunting new musical. At the height of World War II, Christopher, an imaginative young boy, is sent to live with an aunt he's never met: Lilly, a reclusive woman who serves as the keeper of a remote lighthouse. Not yet comfortable in his surroundings, Christopher begins to hear strange music no one else can hear seeping through the walls. It doesn't take long for him to suspect the lighthouse may be haunted, and these ghosts tell him that Yasujiro, a Japanese worker that Lilly has employed, should not be trusted. Is Christopher's imagination getting the best of him? Or are these ghosts warning Christopher about the very real dangers that lie ahead? *Whisper House* is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown. Tickets start at \$36. The Old Globe Theatre is located at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. For more information, call 619-234-5623 or visit www.theoldglobe.org. ●



Thursday, Jan. 14

RANCHO SANTA FE REVIEW

January 7, 2010

Emmy Award-winner Mare Winningham to perform at Old Globe Jan. 13-Feb. 21

Old Globe Executive Producer Lou Spisto recently announced the complete cast and creative team for the World Premiere of Duncan Sheik and Kyle Jarrow's "Whisper House."

Emmy Award-winner Mare

Winningham headlines the new musical, Sheik's follow-up to his Tony and Grammy Award-winning Broadway sensation, Spring Awakening. Peter Askin helms the show, with music and lyrics by Sheik and book and lyrics by Jarrow. The musical director is Jason Hart and the dance director is Wesley Fata. Whisper House will run in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 13 – Feb. 21. Previews run Jan. 13 – Jan. 20. Opening night is Jan. 21 at 8



**Mare
Winningham**

p.m. Tickets to Whisper House are currently available by subscription only. Single tickets will go on sale on Dec. 13 at noon and can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

Set in 1942 at the height of World War II, Whisper House is the story of an 11-year-old boy, Christopher, who lives with his Aunt Lilly in a haunted New England lighthouse following the death of his father. All of the songs in the musical are performed by the ghosts, played by David Poe and Holly Brook, and embody the boy's subconscious thoughts and fears. When Christopher begins to hear strange music seeping through the walls, is his imagination getting the best of him, or is he receiving warnings of the very real dangers that lie ahead? Whisper House is a touching and beautiful story about how we should embrace, rather than fear, the unknown.

NORTH COUNTY TIMES

January 10, 2010

MONDAY, JAN. 11



DUNCAN SHEIK — Singer/composer who scored Old Globe production "Whisper House"; 8 p.m.; Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, 1363 Old Globe Way, San Diego; \$25-\$75; 619-234-5623.

LIFESTYLES&arts

Need last-minute gift ideas?

BY JOSÉ A. LÓPEZ

Is there someone who just happened to fall through the cracks of your holiday shopping list and want to get a quick gift?

Maybe there's someone you haven't been able to shop for and are considering just stuffing cash into a card. Or maybe your shopping is all done, and you want to reward yourself with an evening out.

Whatever the reason, there still might be time to give the gift of entertainment.

Whether it's live theater or music, tickets are now available for several shows that are coming up in the near (and not so near) future.

Best of all is many venues now sell tickets online, and you might be able to print them out from home without braving the last-minute shopping crowds.

Here's a list of some upcoming entertainment options happening around the area and beyond.

• **Poway Center for the Performing Arts:** The Center, at 15498 Espola Road, will present an evening with Booker T. Jones (of Booker T & the MGs) at 8 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 16 as part of its professional performance series.

Booker T is a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award-winner (and is nominated for two Grammy Award for his latest effort "Potato Hole," which features the band The Drive-By Truckers and Neil Young.

Tickets are \$42 for adults and can be bought at www.powayarts.org.

At the Web site, you'll also find tickets for the other shows in the performance series. These include: "FDR" starting Ed Asner on Feb. 20; Robert Dubac's "The Second Coming," sequel to "The Male Intellect: an Oxymoron" on Sunday, March 27; and a concert with Leon Redbone on Saturday, April 24.

• **POWPAC, Poway's Community Theatre:** Up next for the theater at 13250 Poway Road is "Self Help," a comedy by Norm Foster about a married couple of theater actors who cast themselves as nationally renowned self-help gurus.

It plays Jan. 15 to Feb. 7.

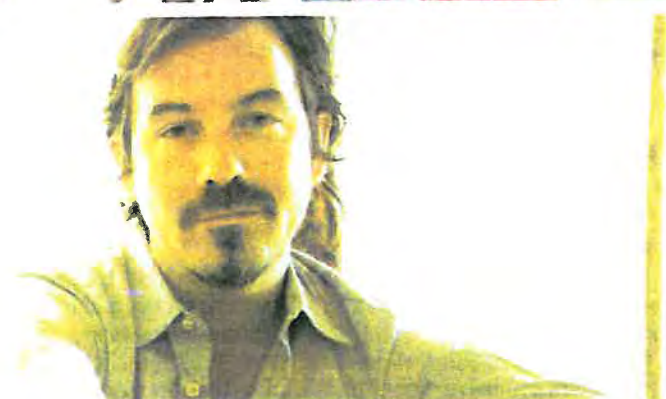
For more information, go to www.powpac.org. Other plays in the season include "Independence" March 5-28 and "The Philadelphia Story," playing April 23-May 16.

• **Broadway/San Diego:** Tickets are now on sale for the tour of "Riverdance" (Jan 5-10) and "Jesus Christ Superstar" (Jan. 15-17) starring Ted Neeley. Other shows coming up include "Legally Blonde," "101 Dalmatians," "Rain: A Tribute to the Beatles," and Tony-winner "In the Heights. For more information, go to www.broadwaysd.com.

• **California Center for the Arts, Escondido:** Singer, songwriter and actor Kris Kristofferson will perform at the center's concert hall at 7 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 17. Tickets are \$40-49 and can be found at www.artcenter.org.

• **La Jolla Playhouse:** Tickets are now on sale for "Aurelia's Oratorio," playing Feb. 3-28 and for John

See **SHOWS**, Page 42



Shows coming to the area next year include, clockwise, Broadway San Diego's Legally Blonde (Photo by Joan Marcus); Songwriter and playwright Duncan Sheik "Spring Awakening" who will give one-night concert ahead of the premiere of his new play, "Whisper House," at the Old Globe; and Booker T. Jones at the Poway Center for the Performing Arts.

SHOWS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

Leguizamo's "Diary of a Madman" March 4-14. Go to www.lajollaplayhouse.com for more information.

• **North Coast Repertory Theater:** Tickets are now on sale for "Glorious! The True Story of Florence Jenkins: The Worst Singer in the World" (Jan. 16 to Feb. 7) and "Little Women" (Feb. 20 to March 14). Go to www.northcoastrep.org.

• **Old Globe Theatre:** Tickets are now on sale for the world premiere musical of "Whisper House," (Jan. 13 to Feb. 21) by songwriter Duncan Sheik, acclaimed for his Tony-winning musical "Spring Awakening." Tickets are also available for a one-night concert by Sheik on Jan. 11. For information, go to www.TheOldGlobe.org.

• **San Diego REPertory Theatre:** Tickets are now available for Peter Sinn Nachtrieb's "Boom," playing Jan. 9-31 at the Lyceum Theater in Horton Plaza. For information, go to www.sdrep.org.

• **Lawrence Welk Resorts Theatre:** Tickets are now available for "Steel Magnolias" (Jan. 7-Jan. 24) five shows by Vicki Lawrence and her popular "Mama" character (Jan. 27-30) and the rest of the season including "Pirates of Penzance," "Footloose," "Noises Off," The Smother Brothers and "The Full Monty." Go to www.welktheatresandiego.com for details.



Debbie David and Frank Remyiatte and Debbie David play actors playing gurus in the PowPAC's upcoming comedy "Self Help."

PHOTO PROVIDED BY TONY EISENHOWER

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Debbie David and Frank Remyia play actors playing gurus in the PowPAC's upcoming comedy "Self Help."

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ON-AIR NOW
Oz
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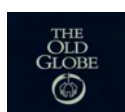

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Duncan Sheik Live in Concert at the Old Globe Theatre

Duncan Sheik Live in Concert

with Special Guest David Poe



The Old Globe Theatre
 Monday, January 11th, 2010



One Night Only! [Click HERE](#) for more details and to purchase tickets.

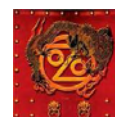
Duncan Sheik (Music and Lyrics) is a Grammy and Tony Award-winning singer-songwriter and composer. Sheik initially found success as a singer, most notably for his 1996 debut single, "Barely Breathing," which spent 55 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100. He has since expanded his work to include compositions for motion pictures and the Broadway stage. Sheik won two Tony Awards, as composer and arranger, for the Broadway production of *Spring Awakening*. Written with lyricist Steven Sater, *Spring Awakening* also received the Tony Award for Best Musical. Sheik's and Sater's creative partnership began with the album, *Phantom Moon*, released on Nonesuch in 2000. His albums include "Duncan Sheik" (1996), "Humming" (1998), "Phantom Moon" (2001), "Daylight" (2002), "White Limousine" (2006), "Brighter/Later: A Duncan Sheik Anthology" (2006) and "Greatest Hits: A Duncan Sheik Collection" (2007). His concept album for *Whisper House* was released earlier this year on RCA Victor. www.duncansheik.com

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The Gin Blossoms

Madison talks to Jesse Valenzuela from The Gin Blossoms
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Madison raps with Pat, Jimmy, & Scott. Plus an in-studio performance of Hey Soul Sister
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Timothy B Schmidt

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Jeff Corwin

Jeff came into KPRI to discuss his book, global warming, and much more!
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Veteran's Day

[Listen](#) to Madison's Veteran's Day Story
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What's Up in SD Special Events Calendar January 2010



Duncan Sheik

The Da Vinci Experience

Through January 3
San Diego Air and Space Museum
Balboa Park
2001 Pan American Plaza, San Diego
Does it surprise you that Leonardo da Vinci remains one of the most fascinating people history has ever known? We didn't think so. And it doesn't surprise the San Diego Air and Space Museum either, which is why it brings you *The Da Vinci Experience*. Get on over there, because the exhibit's in its final days. Check out how Da Vinci's conceptual designs for many technological wonders were centuries ahead of their time, including over sixty functional models, eleven of which are full-sized. You'll love absorbing the knowledge, and your kids will love the hands-on experience.
619-234-8291
sandiegoairandspace.org
[Wheelchair Accessible](#)

Duncan Sheik

January 11
The Old Globe Theatre
1363 Old Globe Way, San Diego
Catch Grammy and Tony Award-winning singer-songwriter and composer **Duncan Sheik** for one night only at The Old Globe Theatre. Initially finding success as a singer (most notably for his 1996 debut single, "Barely Breathing," which spent 55 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100), he has since expanded his work to include compositions for motion pictures and the Broadway stage. Sheik has two Tony Awards, as composer and arranger, for the Broadway production of *Spring Awakening*. Written with lyricist Steven Sater, *Spring Awakening* also received the Tony Award for Best Musical.
619-23-GLOBE (234-5623)
theoldglobe.org
[Wheelchair Accessible](#)



White Denim



Whale and Dolphin Watching

Oceanic Art

Through February 28
San Diego Museum of Art (SDMA)
Balboa Park
1450 El Prado, San Diego
Maybe it's our constant exposure to sweet ocean breezes, but we really dig ancient Oceanic culture. So SDMA's *Oceanic Art* exhibit really floats our boat. Come check out nearly 100 pieces that represent ancient Oceanic traditions from Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. Included are elaborate hand-carved sculptures, jewelry, weapons, and more.
619-232-7931
sdmart.org
[Wheelchair Accessible](#)

Picasso, Miró, Calder

Through January 17
San Diego Museum of Art (SDMA)
Balboa Park
1450 El Prado, San Diego
Modernist art aficionados rejoice. This exhibition brings together Pablo Picasso (1881 – 1973), Joan Miró (1893 – 1983), and Alexander Calder (1898 – 1976), unquestionably three of the greatest artists working in the twentieth century. *Picasso, Miró, Calder* is just a taste of the incredible exhibits to come in 2010. Get on over here and rediscover some of your favorite artists from the height of the modern age.
619-232-7931
sdmart.org
[Wheelchair Accessible](#)



Picasso, Miró, Calder



Oceanic Art

Whale and Dolphin Watching

Through March
Hornblower Cruises and Events
1066 N. Harbor Dr., San Diego
Spend whale-watching season with Hornblower Cruises and Events. Annually, approximately 28,000 gray whales pass by the San Diego coast. Treat yourself to the awe-inspiring sight of these majestic giants while aboard a comfortable yacht. Each 3.5-hour whale-watching adventure is narrated by an experienced captain with information exclusively endorsed by the San Diego Natural History Museum. Other wildlife, such as sea lions, blue herons and three kinds of dolphins almost always put in appearances.
619-725-8888
hornblower.com

White Denim

January 17
8:30pm
Casbah
2501 Kettner Blvd., San Diego
We love the Casbah because it's such an underestimated, intimate venue – the perfect place to get up-close-and-personal to your favorite bands. And the drinks are pretty reasonably priced. This month, pleasepleaseplease check out **White Denim**. The Austin, TX-based, acid blues meets garage rock trio will blow your proverbial mind. And you'll enjoy it. We promise. Bonus: **Brazos** opens. Sorry kids, 21+ with ID.
619-232-HELL
casbahmusic.com
[Wheelchair Accessible](#)

All information subject to change. Please contact each individual event for up-to-date schedules, prices and more information.

SAN DIEGO INTERNATIONAL TIMES

January 1, 2010

YU YU

"Whisper House" 「ウィスパー ハウス」

灯台に潜む幽霊と少年の交流 / D・シーク作のミュージカル

Holly Brook as Female Ghost



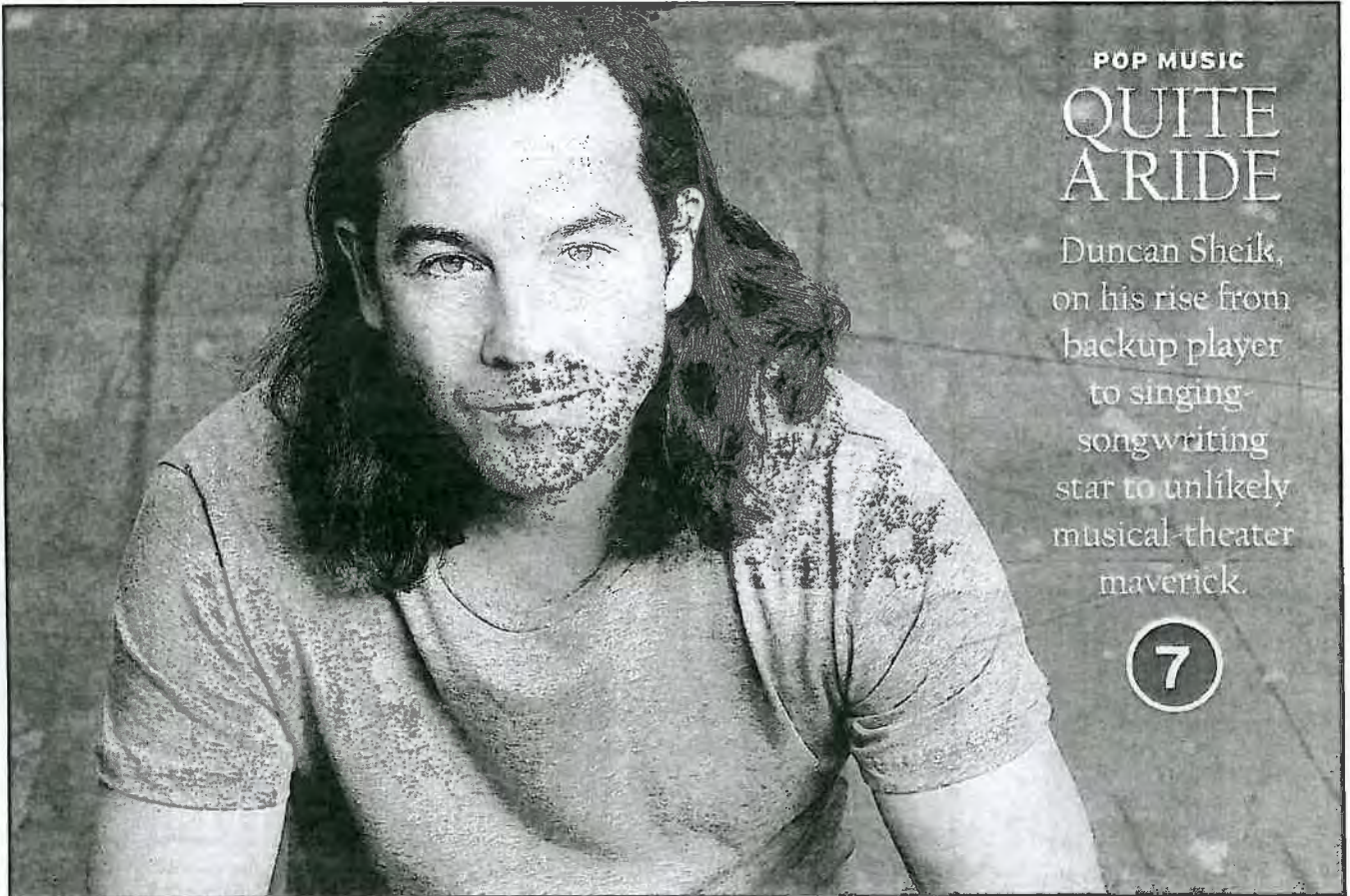
⑤&⑥ 第二次世界大戦中の 1942 年。想像力の豊かな少年クリストファーは会ったこともない叔母リリーの元へ送られる。孤独好きのリリーは人里離れた灯台の管理人をしていた。新しい生活環境に慣れないクリストファーは灯台の壁から幽霊が奏でる音楽を耳にする。幽霊は彼にリリーが雇っている日本人ヤスヒロを信用するなと告げるのだが…。

① THE GLOBE THEATRES (Old Globe Theatre), 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park / 619-239-2255 (T)。期間— 1/13 (水) ~ 2/21 (日)。上演— 火・水曜: 7pm、木・金曜: 8pm、土曜: 2pm & 8pm、日曜: 2pm & 7pm。チケット— \$55 ~ \$105。http://www.oldglobe.org

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

January 7, 2010

NIGHT & DAY



POP MUSIC

QUITE A RIDE

Duncan Sheik,
on his rise from
backup player
to singing-
songwriting
star to unlikely
musical-theater
maverick.

7

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Culture Lust

Culture Lust Weekend: Booker T. Jones, Indie Illustrators, and Duncan Sheik's Spiritual Side

By [Angela Carone](#), [Meredith Hattam](#)

January 14, 2010

I'm getting on a plane heading east and south, so while I indulge in some good ole' southern comfort food, we offer this bounty of arts and culture events for the weekend.

ART



[Enlarge this image](#)

Credit: Courtesy of the Lux Institute

Above: "Spears" by Iva Gueorguieva

Bulgarian-born painter [Iva Gueorguieva's](#) lush, oversized canvasses echo her chaotic upbringing and the drama in the everyday world through swirling dreamscapes, abstracted narratives, and bold brushstrokes. As the [Lux Institute's](#) latest in-house artist, you can track her creative process in the next few weeks as she devises one of her largest works to date—a mixed-media piece that's 100 by 150 inches.

Once a must-have amongst Da Vinci's inner circle, the camera obscura is making a comeback this weekend at the [New Children's Museum](#) thanks to local artists Shane Anderson and James Enos, who have recreated the device with materials culled from recycled military storage cameras. Their version is mobile, so teens can control the view, and, just as the masters, sketch the projected image of their choice.

You probably don't think twice about those 2 seconds of cell convos caught around town, but artist [Wendy Richmond](#) aims to change that with her latest interactive exhibit, "Overheard." Premiering at UCSD's [The Gallery at Calit2](#) this weekend, the installation's creation was sparked by cell phone snippets overheard in NYC, and combines textual graphics with interactive reenacted recordings of the sound bites. For a less refined (but hilarious) look at eavesdropping, we also like the blog [Overheard in N.Y.](#)



[Enlarge this image](#)

Above: One of Ken Garduno's moody illustrations.

[Subtext](#) is bringing us a new slew of subversive indie artists this Friday in "Strange Days," featuring works by L.A.-based artists [Ken Garduno](#), [Tom Haubrick](#), and [Eric Davison](#). From Garduno's Bond Girl-like nymphs to Davison's surrealist eye, each holds a promise of the peculiar—and we're completely cool with that.

Sculptor [Greg Brotherton's](#) dystopian wonderland will be unveiled this Saturday at the [Oceanside Museum of Art](#) in "Discoveries in Dystopia." We're already huge fans of Brotherton's edgy, industrial aesthetic and steampunk-inspired entities, so we can't wait to get a peek at his twisted take on the future.

BOOKS

Paging all Tolkien aficionados—next Wednesday, the [San Diego Public Library](#) will launch its Literature Talk series with an in-depth discussion of "The Lord of the Rings," led by the UCSD Literature Department's Dr. Stephen Potts. It's at the library's central location downtown, so swing by and brush up on your Elvish.

THEATRE

Duncan Sheik, "Spring Awakening's" creative team, and phantasmal houseguests? We're in, as [The Old Globe](#) premieres its hotly anticipated ["Whisper House"](#), all about an 11-year-old boy who lives in a New England lighthouse with his aunt—and a few otherworldly denizens. The musical features original songs and lyrics by [Duncan Sheik](#), who also won a Tony Award for composing Broadway's ["Spring Awakening"](#)—and will bring new meaning to his 90's hit "Barely Breathing..." (sorry, we had to)



[Enlarge this image](#)

Above: "The Whisper House" will premiere at The Old Globe this weekend.

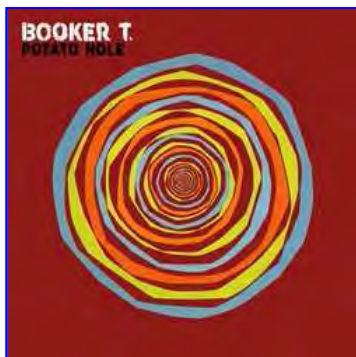
[The MOXIE Theatre](#) debuts "Expecting Isabel" this weekend, its dramedy on one N.Y. couple's fertility woes (and the paths they must take to overcome them).

Meanwhile, the [San Diego Repertory Theatre's](#) brings us "boom" this Friday. The storyline is hard to describe, but it involves the apocalypse, Craigslist, and a journalism student. Just be there.

Skip the [American Idol](#) onslaught this week (or don't) and catch "Glorious" at the [North Coast Rep](#), the true story of Florence Foster Jenkins, the self-proclaimed worst singer in the world. Despite her tuneless ways, Jenkins still sold out Carnegie Hall nightly during the 1940's. Her mantra? "People may say that I cannot sing, but no one can say that I didn't sing." A woman after our own heart.

Speaking of S.D.'s bounty of burgeoning theater stars, this Monday, they'll be honored at the 13th Annual Patté Awards for Theater Excellence, hosted by the effervescent (and Emmy-winning) Pat Launer. Newsflash: the awards show was also newly nominated for an Emmy itself. Tickets are available on [their website](#) for a fun Monday after a culture-crammed weekend.

MUSIC



[Enlarge this image](#)

Above: Booker T. Jones' latest album, "Potato Hole," is currently nominated for 2 Grammy awards.

Memphis soul man of legend, [Booker T. Jones](#), may have already claimed a Grammy lifetime achievement award, but he's up for two more statues this year, so catch him while you can at the [Poway Center for the Performing Arts](#) this Saturday.

Another tuneful titan will take the stage tonight, as gypsy jazz ambassador [John Jorgenson](#) and his quintet hit up [Anthology](#). Jorgenson, who's collaborated with the likes of Bob Dylan and Elton John, is one of the pioneers of the U.S. gypsy jazz scene, and his performance is a nod to Django Reinhardt, the master of the genre.

Connections Chamber Music Series, brainstormed by composer [Matthew Tommasini](#) and the California Quartet, will debut its inaugural performance this Sunday at the Encinitas Library. "The Silver Screen in Concert," the first in its spring/summer-long series, boasts big-screen compositions and accompanying film clips, a must-hit for film and music buffs alike.

They're not quite so incognito nowadays, but dynamic DJ duo [Prince Zohar and Eddie Turbo](#) have spun for many an underground dance-off. Catch their globe-trotting blend of beats, ¡GEMATRIA!, this weekend at The Office, featuring Cumbiatronics, African Rave, and Arabic street jams, to name a few.

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JK's TheatreScene

MAYBE (PROBABLY) ON ITS WAY

I recently blogged about a show that is beginning its first reviews, **Duncan Sheik's** [Whisper House](#). Anything new from this Tony-winner (for *Spring Awakening*) is at least worth looking at, right? Here are some really nice production photos from its premiere at the Old Globe in San Diego. (Photos by Craig Schwartz)





NORTH COUNTY TIMES

January 17, 2010

"WHISPER HOUSE" OPENS — The Old Globe presents Mare Winningham in the world premiere of Tony-winning composer Duncan Sheik ("Spring Awakening") and Kyle Jarrow's new musical for families set during World War II about a 11-year-old boy who lives in a New England lighthouse haunted by spirits; 8 p.m. (also 8 p.m. Friday; 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday; 2 and 7 p.m. Jan. 24); runs through Feb. 21; Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego; 36-\$89; 619-234-5623 or www.the-oldglobe.org.



ABOUT ME



JAKE RATHMAN
GENESEO, IL,
UNITED STATES

I am a freshman at Millikin University studying Information Technology. I used to be a music major, so I still hold that very close to my heart.

[VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE](#)

TWITTER UPDATES

- Katelyn Epperly. THE. American idol.. I hated this show until I knew someone on it [18 minutes ago](#)
- @erikdonner then why are they your friends? :) [about 2 hours ago](#)
- @SingMeToHeaven you got it girl! [about 4 hours ago](#)
- SO excited!!!! RT @frankenteen: there is going to be a live #glee concert tour! [about 5 hours ago](#)
- Oh my... The tools in this class. It is gonna be a long semester [about 7 hours ago](#)

BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ 2010 (7)

▼ 01/17 - 01/24 (2)

[Whisper Watch: The Follow-Up Post](#)

THE Katelyn Epperly

► 01/10 - 01/17 (1)

► 01/03 - 01/10 (4)

MY BLOG LIST

MIKA

Heat 23-01-10
9 hours ago

e Actors are the Opposite of People

When is a book more than a book?
23 hours ago

e The Album Archive

Evil Dead: The Musical
2 days ago

e Andrew Keenan

19 JANUARY 2010

Whisper Watch: The Follow-Up Post

Earlier this month I wrote a post about Duncan Sheik's newest musical "Whisper House". Broadway.com has just released the a new [article](#) about the show, and it comes with very promising pictures! The set looks gorgeous, as well as the costumes! I still maintain that this looks to be a very promising show!

Below are my favorite of the publicity shots (Thanks to [broadway.com](#))!



Look at how simple yet complex it is. Can you see the lighthouse? (Notice the ghost-like silhouettes on the walls!)



Beautifully staged, and the lighting is simply awesome.



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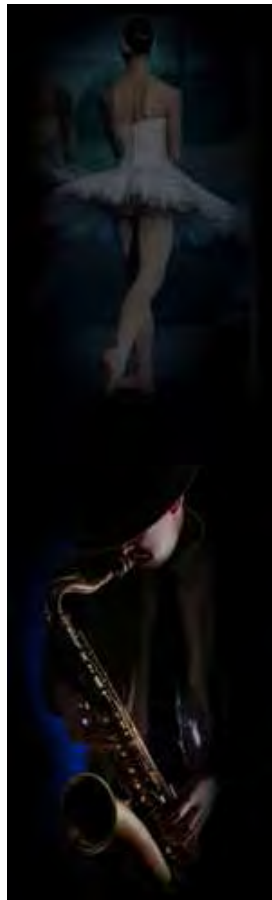
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1/24/2010



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violin

The Old Globe Presents:

Whisper House

1/13/2010 - 2/21/2010



Tony and Grammy Award-winning
songwriter Duncan Sheik follows up
his Broadway sensation, Spring
Awakening, with this haunting new
musical.

The Open Fist Theatre Company Presents:

**STAGE DOOR by George S. Kaufman and Edna
Ferber**

1/14/2010 - 3/13/2010



In 1930s NYC, a group of quirky,
smart, and savvy actresses bring the
Footlights Club to life in this funny,
touching, and relevant piece about
love for the theatre, the pressures of
Hollywood, and sticking to one's
principals (or not).

Odyssey Theatre Ensemble Presents:

A Song at Twilight

1/17/2010 - 3/7/2010



Noel Coward's witty and poignant
farewell to the stage stars Orson
Bean, Alley Mills and Laurie O'Brien.

LAPhil Presents:

Maazel Conducts Bruckner

1/21/2010 - 1/24/2010



Featured Artists: Los Angeles
Philharmonic Lorin Maazel,
conductor Program: Bruckner:
Symphony No. 8 For those who want
to experience an immense
symphony, and to hear the
resplendent glory of a full orchestra, Bruckner is your
man.

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NORTH COUNTY TIMES

January 21, 2010

PREVIEW SECTION



"WHISPER HOUSE"

The Old Globe presents the world premiere musical, featuring a score by "Spring Awakening" composer Duncan Sheik.

See Page 13



"BOOM"

San Diego Repertory Theatre starts the season off with a bang with a funny, quirky comedy on the end of the world as we know it.

Review on Page 21

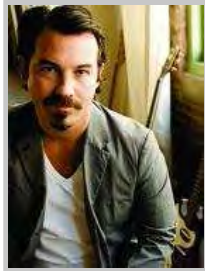
CHANGE CITY

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posts categorized "The Old Globe"

Trés Sheik (/style/tr%C3%A9s-sheik)

By AnnaMaria Stephens | *Riviera magazine* | January 25, 2010



/tags/old-globe)

(/style/tr%C3%A9s-sheik)

Watch out, Tommy. Move ovah, Joizy Boys. The latest rock opera hits the stage this month, christening—and haunting—the Old Globe (<http://www.theoldglobe.org>)'s new \$22 million Conrad Prebys Theater Center. [read more](#) (/style/tr%C3%A9s-sheik)

Tags: [Style \(/channels-0\)](#), [Culture Feature \(/category/tags/culture-feature\)](#), [Duncan Sheik \(/category/tags/duncan-sheik\)](#), [Music \(/category/tags/music\)](#), [musical \(/category/tags/musical\)](#), [The Old Globe \(/category](#)

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Monday, Feb. 8 2010 - Updated:

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LOCAL NEWS NEWS BY REGION NEWS BY TOPIC



SEAN M. HAFHEY / UNION-TRIBUNE

What's up with changes at 'Whisper House'?

You know you're either with a seriously dedicated theater crowd or seeing some seriously impressive tech when the scenery gets its own applause at a play.

TOP HEADLINES

Culture bargain: Check out these museums on the cheap
San Diego Symphony broadening its reach
Opera Diary: If it's Tuesday, this must be ...
Valentine's Day 2010 in San Diego
La Jolla Playhouse's lineup has local gems



THINGS TO DO

PERFORMING ARTS VISUAL ARTS DANCE EVENTS RESTAURANTS MOVIES VENUES

7 pm tomorrow [Lost In Yonkers](#)
9 pm tomorrow [Comedy Night With Mal Hall](#)
7:30 pm Wednesday [Circus Vargas](#)
7:30 pm Wednesday [The Piano Lesson](#)
8 pm Friday [San Diego Ballet's Romeo et Juliet](#)

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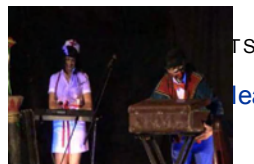
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[Akram Khan Company: The future of modern dance](#)
[Circus Vargas reaches out to families](#)

THEATER BLOG: HOUSE SEATS

And "Venus" was its name: Local play lands plum Disney workshop

Hats off (and mouse ears on) to Vox Nova Theatre Co., whose musical "The ...

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[Stormy weather](#)
[Winners' circle](#)
[Quiet riot](#)

