

For the Tony Awards, it's 'the best of times'

One critic casts her lot with "Red" for best play and "American Idiot" for best musical.

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While there weren't any Rodgers and Hammerstein revivals that opened this past season on Broadway, there were, as the *New York Times* Business Section reported, 13 TV commercials produced by major brands utilizing the duo's well-known melodies.

In fact, the trend toward comfort food for our mental palates is also reflected in the plays and musicals vying for honors at tonight's 64th annual Tony Awards on CBS at 8, hosted by Sean Hayes, and broadcast from Radio City Music Hall.

Topping the list with 11 nominations, "La Cage aux Folles," revived by London's Menier Chocolate Factory, was as perfect a confection as I've seen on Broadway and I don't hold any particular fondness for this show.

As directed by Terry Johnson, the production was far less glitzy than the revival of 2004: The chorus was half the size and the show's affect, as well as its effect, was a lot less polished. Even Kelsey Grammer's Georges looked like he'd run himself a bit ragged over the years.

But what made this production a standout is Douglas Hodge's portrayal of Albin.

While Hodge certainly wasn't the prototype of a sex idol, he knew how to turn on the heat. So when he thrust his inhibitions aside and transformed into the flaming entertainer, the excitement he unfurled was visceral and galvanizing.

In that steamy little nightclub, "La Cage aux Folles," Harvey Fierstein's story about family values and Jerry Herman's anthems to gay pride and self-love finds a warm and human meeting ground. It was a delicious 21st-cen-



KEVIN BERNE, THE HARTMAN GROUP / ASSOCIATED PRESS
Christina Sajous and Stark Sands starred in "American Idiot," the Green Day musical, which gets at least one vote for best musical for its artistic innovation.

tury version of comfort food, and it came wrapped in retro camp, gender-bending humor.

With another 11 nominations, "Fela!" — the Afrobeat musical about popular Nigerian musician and singer Fela Kuti — runs head-to-head with "La Cage."

While the subject isn't intended to console or placate, this tale of a presidential candidate who fought heroically against the political corruption and oppression of his time, was a sustaining one as it fortified our belief in the power of the individual to overcome even under the most brutal circumstances.

Cynics may characterize the production's popularized version of African dance and music as pabulum for the

masses, but there's no overlooking the physical and spiritual energy of Sahr Ngaujah, the show's star.

Even jukebox musicals that hardly seemed like strong contenders when they opened fared well with Tony noms, particularly "Memphis" with eight.

"American Idiot," on the other hand, which threatened to take the stage by storm with its Grammy Award-winning punk rock score by Green Day, received only three nominations, the same number the Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash '50s sing-along "Million Dollar Quartet" scored.

The Tonys' affections for old-guard values is also apparent in recognizing straight plays.

Most outstanding, of course, was the revival of August Wilson's "Fences,"



MONIQUE CARBON, RICHARD KORNBERG AND ASSOCIATES / ASSOCIATED PRESS
Sahr Ngaujah starred as Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo Kuti in "Fela!," which tied "La Cage aux Folles" for the most nominations with 11.

starring Denzel Washington and Viola Davis. Following rave reviews, the production scored 11 nominations. The traditional, albeit tragic, tale set in the 1950s, depicted an African-American family fraught with the conflict between reality and the American Dream. And Washington's bravura portrayal of a man who suffers the slings and arrows of his own overreaching desires may indeed register a Tony win for Best Actor in a category that boasts only Hollywood stars. Christopher Walken, Jude Law, Alfred Molina and Liev Schreiber are the other contenders.

While this year's Tony contenders reflect a conservative sensibility, they also demonstrate indifference for the overblown such as "Enron" and "The Addams Family."

With only two nominations and none for its two stars, Nathan Lane and

Bebe Neuwirth, the latter was virtually snubbed. So were Hollywood A-listers Hugh Jackman and Daniel Craig who starred in the two-hander "Steady Rain" early in the season.

Regardless of the recession-era temperament that pervaded the season, my prediction is that the Tonys will cast a vote for artistic innovation, handing "American Idiot" the award for Best Musical.

As for Best Play, the likely winner is "Red," a two-hander about artist Mark Rothko and his assistant. (It's really a pompous lecture about art.)

My favorite in that category is "Next Fall." Geoffrey Naufft's simple, realistic drama about a gay couple speaks to the nuances of faith, familial love and relationships.

Hounds

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For those who may be quick to roll their eyes at the very notion of her services or dismiss them as further evidence of pet pampering taken to the extreme, she points to Gizmo as evidence of why animals are deserving of such care as well.

"I don't look at my job as a pamperer. I look at it as I'm helping (dogs) find comfort and release and wellness," she says. "I know Gizmo is happier and more comfortable. He has a really good life for his age."

Still, Innaurato acknowledges that when she enrolled at the PetMassage Training and Research Institute in Toledo, Ohio, five years ago, the field was very much in its infancy and had more than its fair share of skeptics.

While the benefits of equine massage for high-level performance and contest horses have been a standard in care for several decades, the idea that dogs could benefit from the same kind of soothing, muscle-relaxing sessions has taken a little longer to catch on.

"When I mentioned it to people, they thought I was out of my mind," says Innaurato, of Mount Laurel, N.J. "But I feel like there's been a whole new turn."

Indeed, schools that teach animal massage are popping up all over the country and certified practitioners are hanging their shingles not only on private businesses but as part of veterinary practices as well.

Innaurato often receives referrals from Karen Hoffman, one of the veterinarians on staff at Mount Laurel Animal Hospital, where Innaurato also works as a vet technician. At the hospital, Hoffman relies on her to help calm down dogs who are upset and to help detect neck and disc injuries. The massages, says Hoffman, are especially beneficial to dogs suffering from arthritis, muscular skeletal injuries, disc problems in the back or neck or any disease that causes a loss of muscle mass.

And, yes, she believes that many vets don't even think about massage as a complementary therapy, but says the treatment just makes sense, especially as veterinary care moves more from "the vaccine as a mainstay to preventive medicine."

"From a human perspective, I've been getting massages for 10 years and I know they release a lot of toxins from your muscles that you hold tight in the blood and lymphatics, so I would imagine that for any dog fighting a chronic illness, it would be critical," says Hoffman.



"Veterinary medicine comes first," says pet massage therapist Trish Innaurato, here working with Gizmo.

She has been using Innaurato's services on her own standard poodles for the last three years. She started with her oldest dog, Freya, who was having trouble getting around, and included shorter massages for her other three dogs.

"Freya was able to move around easier afterward, and I've definitely seen it relax all of them mentally. It just calms them right down," says Hoffman.

While older animals or athletes tend to be the most likely candidates for a massage, Lisa Speaker says any animal can benefit at any age, though she acknowledges that dogs and horses still constitute the majority of the population seen.

Speaker, who founded the Rocky Mountain School of Animal Acupressure & Massage in Colorado and serves as its executive director, has helped 7-week-old puppies overcome swimming puppy syndrome (when their legs grow laterally, making it difficult to get up and walk, in instances where breeders have left them on their bellies for too long). She's also massaged a dairy cow before and knows of a student who's worked on an elephant in Africa. Cats can be tricky, and her guess is that birds and reptiles would not be the best clients.

"It's hard to say because every animal is different just like every human being is different," she says. "Yes, any animal can benefit — but that's not to say that all animals want a massage or that it's safe to give them a massage."

Beyond providing pain relief and helping with conditions such as arthritis, she notes that massage can even help rehabilitate dogs suffering from depression, especially if there's been a loss of another dog or family member in the household, or an addition to the household.

For some dogs, it may take two to three visits to feel comfortable with a massage therapist. Sessions can last anywhere from five to 60 minutes, depending on the dog, and can be provided as frequently as once a week to once a month based on the dog's need. According to Speaker, average costs vary from \$45 to \$60 a session.

"An animal owner usually sees results in two to three sessions," she says. "It can be a physical result or a behavioral result such as playing more, sleeping better, taking the stairs more fluidly or eating better."

According to Carol McCoy, a small animal massage practitioner who offers classes in pet massage at Indian Walk Veterinary Center in Newtown, a massage is also a great way to help animals get more accustomed to touch, making those vet visits and routines such as teeth-cleaning a lot less nerve-racking for pets.

While pet massage therapists are quick to point out that massage is in no way a substitute for veterinary care, McCoy, who also owns Peaceful Paws Massage in Perkasi, notes that pet owners who get their pets regular massages or learn a

few light massage techniques themselves can actually take a more proactive role in their pets' health.

"The big thing I like about massage is that you can find chronic problems with your animal faster so you can get it to the vet faster," she says. "You get to know an animal's body better. You can find lumps and bumps and warm spots on the body. You just get to be more in tune with your animal."

For many pet owners who feel like their animals are part of the family, it's just natural to want to take care of them the same way they would another family member.

When Lisa Graham's long-haired dapple Dachshund, Romeo, was diagnosed with arthritis in his back and neck — disc herniation and other back problems typically plague the breed — after he suddenly refused to walk one day, she sought out McCoy, whose card she'd seen in a health food store, to offer him some relief.

Graham, who lives in Hatfield, was worried about all the pain medication that Romeo was given. He was 11 at the time.

"If the dog's on pain medicine for the rest of his life, his life will be shortened. I thought, 'He's either going to have kidney problems or liver problems or something,'" says Graham. "Plus, I figured if I felt better after a massage, he would feel better, too."

By the end of Romeo's first visit with McCoy, she saw an

improvement.

"He could move his head up and down. He was more energetic and playful," says Graham, who started Romeo, now 12, on a regimen of weekly massages before switching to one session every three weeks. "(McCoy) got rid of his three big knots — he's got three sensitive spots on his neck, the middle of his back and the hind back — and the difference in that dog is unbelievable."

"People who hadn't seen him for a while said he looked younger. He's running around ... we play fetch. He just seems happier to be outside and to walk. You can tell he seems to be enjoying life a little more, and he chases the cats a lot more. All in all, I'm not sure I would still have Romeo this year if it weren't for Carol."

While Romeo still occasionally experiences disc-bulging in his back, he has been off the pain medication prescribed by the vet and remains active from one massage session to the next.

The \$35 Graham pays every three weeks for a 45-minute massage has absolutely been worth it.

"I don't look at it as pampering at all," says Graham. "The same way that I go to a chiropractor and a massage therapist to stay aligned and stay emotionally and physically well is the same reason that I take Romeo. When he gets home from our Thursday night massages, he's just so relaxed and happy. He smiles a lot anyway, but I think he really smiles then and in his way, he's, like, 'Thank you.'"

The right touch

Massage can help animals with a variety of conditions. Here are a few of the most common:

- Arthritis and associated problems such as degenerative disorders, stiffness and muscle cramps
- Socialization and training of young dogs
- Anxiety
- Skin conditions and allergies
- Muscular skeletal injuries
- Ruptured knee ligaments
- Behavioral issues such as excessive licking, self-mutilation, ripping furniture and excessive shyness
- Emotional trauma
- Swimming puppy syndrome

The benefits

Pets, just like humans, are likely to feel more relaxed after a massage, but such therapeutic touch also has several other benefits, including the following:

- Gets young puppies accustomed to touch to make visits to the vet and the groomer less stressful
- Improves muscle tone and mobility
- Helps improve performance and prevent injuries in athletes
- Reduces inflammation and swelling in joints
- Improves disposition and attitude
- Stimulates circulation and releases endorphins
- Keeps dogs younger and more active
- Can help calm dogs prior to surgery and promote healing after
- Releases toxins from the body

Sources: Lucky Dog Massage, Peaceful Paws Massage, Rocky Mountain School of Animal Acupressure & Massage