

PIPPIN

A Proposal for Staging

By Gibson DelGiudice

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I. ARTIST STATEMENT

The Show

At Carnegie Mellon University, in 1967, a young songwriter named Stephen Schwartz co-developed¹ a show called *Pippin, Pippin* – about the son of Charlemagne launching a revolution against his father – for the Scotch 'n' Soda club, which produced an original musical every year. Schwartz, who'd scored previous shows during his two years there, thought it'd be fun to do something like a musical *Lion in Winter*, with court intrigue and crackling dialogue. The show was successful as college projects go; he hired an agent and began auditioning it for producers, in hopes they'd take the show to Broadway.

After achieving commercial success with his next musical, *Godspell*, Schwartz managed to interest a producer, Stuart Ostrow, in the show, provided a new script was developed. Once the show was revised by its new librettist Roger O. Hirson, now called *The Adventures of Pippin*, an entirely new score had to be written as well. It now told the story of a man named Pippin going on a quest for fulfillment and self-awareness, and the traveling troupe of Commedia dell'Arte players who play out his life for him, so that he can experiment in relative safety. This pleasant, cute, sentimental, harmlessly naughty musical allegory of a young man in search of himself struck pay dirt when Ostrow hired respected director/choreographer Bob Fosse to stage the show.

Fosse had a reputation for dark, disturbing musical theatre (and film; see *Cabaret*), and he had a more sophisticated, surreal vision for the piece. While Fosse asked for no official credit, he greatly rewrote the script², shaping the again-retitled *Pippin* into his kind of show. He re-made it into a dark, cynical, sexual, slickly decadent morality play. Pippin's quest for fulfillment and identity became a parade of frightening, disturbing incidents in which Pippin found less and less satisfaction.³ And he created the part of the Leading Player, a narrator and "best buddy" who accompanied Pippin on his quest, and also controlled events as they played out. Originally opening with the troupe of players arriving in a field with their wagon of props, Fosse's opening set them on the stage the audience was watching – complete realism. In Fosse's version, the Leading Player and his troupe wanted Pippin to do their Grand Finale (setting himself on fire), and made sure Pippin failed at everything he tried, so the finale would be his only remaining option. Going one step further, he even blunted the original happy ending, turning it into a compromise instead of a victory; instead of finding true happiness, Pippin had to settle for less than he really wanted.

Schwartz and Hirson didn't care for the rewrites, or the show's ultimate style. The former in particular, while acknowledging Fosse had contributed an enormous amount to the show both conceptually and in pure dance terms, found his choreography too heavy on bumps-and-grinds. Further, with much added shtick, Schwartz thought

¹ Fellow student Ron Strauss originally conceived the project; when Schwartz basically took over, Strauss left. Per Schwartz, none of the original *Pippin, Pippin* was in the final show.

² Hirson strongly denies that Fosse rewrote any part of the show, but historians and people involved with the show generally back this up.

³ For example, Fosse turned the otherwise conventional love song "With You" into an orgy.

Fosse's vision lost sight of important themes and subtext in favor of glitz and laughs, and that he was making the show *too* cynical. But he was the director, he was very intimidating, and when Schwartz complained, Ostrow sided with Fosse and barred the composer from rehearsals.⁴

Discord aside; when *Pippin* opened in October 1972, it was generally regarded as genuinely innovative and exciting. The reviews were positive, proclaiming that Fosse's unusual conception and direction had made the show into an incredible piece of theater. *Pippin* won five Tony Awards that year, including Best Director and Best Choreographer for Fosse, and Best Actor in a Musical for Ben Vereen (the Leading Player). Later, a successful 2013 Broadway revival included illusions by Paul Kieve and circus acts created by Gypsy Snider and performed by the Montreal-based troupe Les 7 Doigts de la Main, and won four Tonys of its own, including Best Director for Diane Paulus and Best Actress in a Musical for Patina Miller (also the Leading Player).

My Background with the Show

Have you ever noticed that most times when people blame their mediocre productions on mediocre material, it's almost always the production's fault instead? I've often found, with many heavily criticized pieces, that if you give a show your greatest effort, your deepest thought, and always assume a problem is yours and not the show's, it'll reveal itself as the masterpiece only the fans knew it was. Such is the case with *Pippin*.

Luckily, I'm not alone in this assessment. For the most part, many of the people who used to call *Pippin* silly, shallow, and irrelevant have shut their mouths. The more time has passed, the more folks understand this isn't a show about Charlemagne's son; it's about a spoiled, aimless college grad trying to find himself in the morally and emotionally barren landscape of the 21st century. Further, they realize the entire show must be happening in Pippin's head, that in fact he's his own tormentor. Only from that perspective does everything in the show make sense. It caught on with me as a college student very much in the same shoes as Pippin at the top of the show for good reason.

But as I became a fan, I realized the problem with the original production persists: thanks to obscuring razzle-dazzle, people still miss the show's red meat. I think it's one of the best musicals in existence, and not just because of Bob Fosse's original direction and choreography. *Pippin*'s a rich, complicated, smart piece of theater – witty, controversial, complicated, and surreal – about a very real, very flawed central character that addresses some extremely important issues in modern life.

But as powerful and immensely entertaining as the circus-driven Diane Paulus revival was, marrying Schwartz's original concept⁵ with Fosse's basic ideas that shaped *Pippin* into what it is today and attacking the piece at least as imaginatively as the original's

⁴ After it closed on Broadway, with no love lost between Schwartz and Fosse, Schwartz had his ideas restored to the script and many of Fosse's changes taken back out for future productions. In more recent productions, however, many of Fosse's changes are reintroduced, along with a new, even more nihilistic finale very much in keeping with Fosse's ideas and tone for the show.

⁵ Sort of; his ragtag troupe of players became more of a group of sinister carnies and clowns, like a real-life Pandemonium Shadow Show.

combination “circus, ballet, musical comedy, minstrel show, magic, rock concert, and vaudeville spectacle” (as original producer Stuart Ostrow put it), it didn't make it more relevant to a modern audience. Don't get me wrong, for people who already got the show, it worked. But for anyone who came in *not* getting the show, for example those seeing it for the first time who paid less attention to the text and more attention to the sex (and visual sparkle), the meaning zoomed over their heads.

I'm not looking to vastly reinvent *Pippin*, or prove some great conceptual point. I just want to relay the message in a relatable manner without relying too much on visuals that confound the eye and confuse the mind.

Ara Pro Concreta

II. PLAY ANALYSIS

To relay *Pippin's* message, of course, one must first be clear about what that message is. It's now much better known than it used to be, thanks in part to the tireless efforts of theater scholars like Scott Miller, but let's review anyway.

Pippin is a young man with no idea what he wants from his life. Luckily, a traveling troupe of players appears who've helped other young men in Pippin's predicament. They offer to play out his life for him – with colored lights, music and dance, comedy and drama – so he can try things in his search for fulfillment. With the players' help, his quest becomes a roller coaster ride of entertainment and dangerously seductive excesses. What Pippin doesn't realize, though, is that the players' only goal is for him to do their Grand Finale. They make sure he bombs everything, so the finale will be his only remaining opportunity to find perfection.

But it's not until the big moment arrives that they tell Pippin what he has to do. They want him to get in a box and set himself on fire – “a glorious synthesis of life and death, and life again!” They want him to commit suicide, live on stage. When Pippin resists, the Leading Player offers the opportunity to the audience. We can do the finale instead of Pippin. The Player says to us, “If you should decide to do so, we'll be there for you, waiting. Why, we're right inside your heads.”

Until that moment, the show may have struck the viewer as a morality play gone wrong: Pippin thinks the world owes him happiness. When he can't find it, he's angry, confused, and bitter. *And* he's being told he has to settle for the fulfillment of *none* of his ideals. What are we supposed to learn from *that*? “Life sucks, get a helmet,” as Denis Leary would put it? But then the Leading Player tells us, “Why, we're right inside your heads,” and like that, the show lays all its cards on the table. *Whoa*.

The players aren't real. Or at least, they don't literally exist; they're not some weird medieval Manson Family taking in young men and murdering them. The players are in Pippin's mind. They're a figment of his imagination (and/or our collective imagination). To quote Stephen Schwartz:

...the way to think about the Players is to realize that they are actually in Pippin's head, just as we all have those internalized voices that tell us we're not good enough, rich enough, beautiful enough, etc., and that we have to make our goals conform to the shallow and misplaced goals we see touted by the media and our so-called societal leaders. The Players are not so much malevolent as they are eternally cynical and dissatisfied, because nothing in real life can be glamorous enough or spectacular enough to achieve the sort of romanticized perfection we carry in the movie in our heads.

Pippin isn't really Pepin the Hunchback, son of Charlemagne, living in the Middle Ages. His family is populated by perverse stereotypes, his fantasies filled with frightening characters of his own creation. The spectacle is symbolic of what Pippin is building “extraordinary” up to be in his head, of what he thinks he must achieve; it's not literal. The whole show is Pippin's fever dream, a hallucination full of the magic he never found in his life, all happening in the moment before he kills himself. In reality, Pippin's been

causing himself to fail at everything throughout the show, and he's been convincing himself to commit suicide. The show has essentially been "Negative Filtering: The Musical" – Pippin with a (metaphorical) gun to his head, considering what led him here through the lens of cognitive distortion.

Consider "Corner of the Sky," the classic "I Want" song. It reads like a straightforward anthem of individuality and drive. So why, in Bob Fosse's staging, did the players respond with sarcastic applause, muted laughter, and rolling eyes? You'd think the phrase "Oh, my sweet summer child..." – and all it implies – was invented by this bunch. Well, when a depressed suicidal person looks back at how hopeful they once were with jaundiced eyes, that's often their reaction: "God, what was I thinking? I was so earnest... so cocky... so *clueless*."

Or look at "Extraordinary." The real point of the song, like much of the score, is in the subtext. By that point in the show, we've seen no evidence anywhere in the story that Pippin is extraordinary, or that he ever will be. It's not a song about how extraordinary Pippin is; it's a song about how *not* extraordinary he is, and that merely declaring it doesn't make it so. The rest of the show puts the folly – and the lie – to his words.

As for the one sequence that doesn't fit with the rest of the show's mold, where he "tries" everyday life... it's so different because for once, bearing in mind of course the implied unreliable narrator, Pippin *didn't* fail at it. It took time to find his footing, and – at least at first – he didn't even try, but he ultimately rose to the occasion when called upon to be a lover and father. When Catherine and Theo break ranks with the troupe, they're not real people fed up with playing their emcee's sick game. It symbolizes Pippin's realization that he *doesn't* totally suck, because he made it work with them. It's not being a war hero or a game-changing politician, and it's definitely not an exciting whirlwind of events to which everyday drudgery pales in comparison, but *he made it at life, period*. He has someone, *something*, to live for, and maybe average living is all the "extraordinary" he needs. Maybe *that's* his "corner of the sky." (Now, if only he could protect his stepson from the same journey...)

Why else would the costumes and dialogue be sprinkled with anachronisms, making no pretense at being a period piece, despite its characters' names and being technically set in Charlemagne's France? Because that's just a jumping-off point; it's really about here and now. It's about coming of age, rites of passage, and the lack of guidelines for today's young adults, and the hopelessness that has become more and more prevalent among them.

We create outrageous expectations for our youth and then sabotage their chances at attaining them, asking them to grow up faster with each generation. We rarely offer them role models and destroy the ones they have. We tell them they can have anything they want, but it's not true. And we wonder why murder and suicide among teenagers continues to increase. Maybe Pippin knows why. To some, when everything else is trashed, all that's left is the Grand Finale. But that doesn't have to be the case. You don't have to do extraordinary things to be extraordinary. Sometimes succeeding at the ordinary is enough. And you don't have to follow all the rules and get everything "right" to do that.

III. VISION

Guiding Theme

In re-reading *Pippin* for these notes, it suddenly occurred to me how much the book reminded me of a reality show. For being mostly written in the early Seventies, there are lots of moments directly addressed to the audience crying out for “dramatic announcer” (in the case of the Leading Player) and “confession cam” (such characters as Fastrada and Catherine) presentations. At times, the show’s as over the top as the best *Real Housewives* episodes. And – perhaps most compellingly – Pippin starts (and goes through much of) the show as a typical reality show lead: an annoying, immature, self-involved kid with zero self-awareness, hung up almost entirely on shallow bullshit.

Paired with the original Bob Fosse blocking and choreography (more about that below), I’d stage *Pippin* as the ultimate reality show, a collection of scenes inspired by specific TV series, with his family and fantasies resembling common figures and archetypes of reality television and docudrama. Part of this would include a “show within a show” aspect, with stagehands, “camera crew,” etc., altering sets and props or dressing / preparing actors for their scenes, an eerie reflection of the carefully curated nature of such television programming, with its “frankenbytes” and selective editing. This makes Pippin’s growth into a relatively normal – if emotionally traumatized – adult, and departure from the players, more recognizable and relatable to today’s audience.

Dramaturgy

As I mentioned in a previous footnote, the script to *Pippin* has been a point of contention almost since the day it opened, in part because the writers balked when Fosse insisted on certain changes. As Schwartz explains in Carol de Giere’s career retrospective book, *Defying Gravity*, “After *Pippin* opened, when the show was being released for stock and amateur productions, Roger Hirson and I went through the script and de-Fosse-ized it, such as removing many of the Leading Player’s interjections.”

This tamer, watered-down version was all that was available for amateur productions... until the early 2000s, when Schwartz and Hirson began, of their own accord, to gradually reintroduce Fosse’s contributions to the original script. Says Schwartz, “In recent years, I’ve come to feel that the show is better with them, and we’ve put the majority of them back in. [...] my attitude towards and perception of the show has changed over the years, probably because I am no longer 24 years old, and I see through far more mature (and perhaps more cynical) eyes than I did then. I have come to appreciate the theatricality and subtextual richness of undercutting both expectation and sentimentality, which is something Bob Fosse understood better than I at the time. Indeed, I have come to joke that in many ways, I have ironically become the guardian of Bob’s vision.”⁶

⁶ Or, as more cynical fans of the original production suggest, Schwartz was tired of hearing endless questions about where the funniest stuff, or the stuff that made the show work, went. (I would argue “some from Column A, some from Column B” personally.) Either way, Bob’s still not credited for any of his work on the script, but that can’t be changed. Billing is settled contractually, after all, and incredibly unlikely to be altered.

More importantly for my concept, Fosse (and his script doctors, including Paddy Chayefsky) eerily presaged the way people actually talk today on reality TV, which reinforces my opinion that it's worth exploring now that context has arrived at last. So, for starters, to the extent that it's possible, utilizing the "director's cut" of the 1981 *Pippin* video and a copy of the frozen Fosse script which recently surfaced in trading circles, I'd restore every book contribution Fosse made that's not in the current version.

Then there's the question of an intermission. As the Paulus revival pointed out, attention spans aren't what they used to be... which is why I'm puzzled that they turned the show into a long(ish) two-act piece. The original *Pippin* had *no* intermission, and zoomed from start to finish with the help of a brisk pace and sprightly choreography / direction. As many of the original show's attendees can attest, having no chance to flee this strange, almost avant-garde piece (albeit with a catchy pop score) forced them to confront what the show was saying about youth – and, by extension, about themselves when they were young – and to see it through to its conclusion. Rather than an arbitrary act-break that occurs after "Morning Glow," I'd drop the intermission and let it run straight through. (The revival's entr'acte, which had its origin in a moment in the Fosse version of "Glory" that sent up USO entertainment circa WWII, would be moved back to its original spot before the infamous "Manson Trio" dance segment, with the lyrics once again referring to Charles instead of Pippin.)

Aside from that, there are three other (comparatively minor) things I'd like to do. They follow in show order below.

Move the Act Two opener in the old MTI script to the show's start.

- For those unfamiliar with said opening, context is needed: before the Broadway revival became the standard licensed edition, the new quasi-Fosse revised version ended Act I after Charles' resurrection with a tease of the Finale (a "false start," if you will) followed by a reprise of "Magic to Do" when Pippin, inspired by the finale's first line (which is all we hear), decided he needed to think and ran off, and the Leading Player was forced to improvise and thus set in motion the events of Act II, reassuring the audience that they'd get the big climax promised at the show's start. Act II then opened with Pippin alone on stage, pacing agitatedly and singing "Corner of the Sky" to himself, a capella; the Leading Player came across him, and segued into "On the Right Track," having figured out during intermission how to suck him back in and not allow him a moment to decide against the suicide he's inexorably leading himself to in reality.
- Minus the segue to "On the Right Track" or the Act I closing that sets it up, I feel this is the perfect bookend to the "Theo ending" which now closes the show – at the beginning, Pippin's frustrated that he hasn't made it in life like he planned and is debating whether or not to do it, maybe even has his finger on the trigger, and is then "blessed" by the appearance of the players, and at the end, Theo now wants his shot in the spotlight as well, doomed to fall prey to the same forces.

Re-include music in Pippin's return home.

- This scene was always a struggle for its authors. The incidental song "Welcome Home" appeared in the original production (and, until the revival became standard, was still in the licensed script), but Stephen Schwartz never felt it worked well. In the Deaf West revival, he replaced it with a new song that introduced all of Pippin's family called "Back Home Again" (eventually re-named "Back in the Bosom," as in "the bosom of the family"). When reading the lyrics, I always pictured a wicked parody of theme songs to Eighties family-oriented sitcoms like *Growing Pains* and *Full House*, which fits the show really well to me, given these are all characters in Pippin's head and any Gen X-er could relate, but it turns out it was a calypso number for no particular reason.
- In the Paulus revival, they cut the music completely and combined Charles hearing petitions with Pippin's arrival home, splicing two different parts of the scene into one moment. A wise move in terms of shaving run-time, but I still think it could use music.
- Even if we only try this in rehearsal, I think it's worth trying to see if the scene can work in its newly condensed format with the original music for it included: a) Charles hears petitions and dismisses everyone; b) Pippin's home, cue first chunk of "Welcome Home" as father and son discover how awkward it is to talk with each other now that they're on relatively equal footing; c) a re-orchestrated "Back in the Bosom" throughout the scene, kicked off by Pippin's frustrated "Father, what does that even mean?" and filling the role of "title credits sequence with establishing vignettes of cast" for every reality show (think *The Osbournes*, and its Richard Cheese-style rendition of "Crazy Train"); d) after "...fornicating I'm getting," Charles begins to "sign off" with second half of "Welcome Home" (up through "We'll talk again soon..." as in Fosse version) before Pippin tells him he wants to be a soldier.

Slightly reconfigure the "Theo ending."

- For those only familiar with the revival, the show originally ended as follows: after the players left Pippin, Catherine, and Theo on the empty stage, Catherine asked Pippin how he felt, trying to ascertain if he thought his decision to live, and be with her and Theo, was a mistake. Pippin's reply as scripted was "Trapped... but happy... which isn't too bad for the end of a musical comedy. Ta-da!" following which they left the stage, presumably to start their happy, simple life together. According to most sources, Bob Fosse thought "...but happy" was a cop out. After all, Pippin can't yet be sure his decision was the right one. He *hopes* it will be, but surely he hasn't gone from having no idea what he wants (as in the rest of the show) to knowing exactly what he wants in only a few minutes. Pippin's made a choice, but he's still scared. He knows he's given up some of his ideals and must accept compromises for the first time. Fosse cut "...but happy." Schwartz wasn't pleased, feeling Fosse had already made the show too cynical. But when he was barred from rehearsals, "...but happy" remained out. It was one of the first things Schwartz reinstated for licensing...
- ...until he witnessed a 1998 Edinburgh Fringe production directed by Mitch Sebastian, which introduced both the casting of Theo as a disaffected teenager and the "Theo ending" as we now know it. Both were promptly written into the version of the show now licensed by MTI, and they were also seen in the Paulus

revival. As Schwartz jocularly put it, "The ending of *Pippin* was the biggest bone of contention among the original creative team. Roger and I argued endlessly with Bob [...] about [...] Pippin's last line [...] we even went to arbitration over it. It turned out the answer [to '...but happy' or not] was: Neither."

- I dig what Mitch brought to the table, but Pippin just singing another verse of "magic shows and miracles" and then getting his happy ending is still trite, even with the moment where Theo replaces Pippin as the object of the players' destructive desires. So many shows "must" end "happily ever after" in the world of musical comedy; it's dangerous to apply that ending carelessly. Besides, Catherine *would* have questions for Pippin after everything they've endured together, both in the "everyday life" sequence and in the last few minutes. So before Pippin sings again, I'd restore the dialogue where she asks if he feels like a coward or compromiser, which he denies, and then asks, "How do you feel?" He looks from Catherine to Theo, and then gradually smiles, as if genuinely discovering hope for the future. He's made a decision, and it might not honestly be an all-bad thing. He lets this sink in for a beat, and *then* he sings, smile growing as he does. And now his character growth doesn't seem quite so tacked on at the end. It's still not perfect, but the show's point is "not everything can be perfect," so at least it's in line with the tone and ideas of the play.

Music and Lyrics

On a general note, new productions have attempted to resolve the "subject matter dissonance" that resulted from Schwartz's original music being attached to the increasingly dark and seedy script by completely re-orchestrating the score to match. By and large, the Paulus revival's new orchestrations and arrangements do the trick, fitting in more neatly with the show than the originals. The only exceptions would be moving the "Cake Walk" back to before "War Is a Science" and restoring some old dance music, seeing as most new stuff served circus tricks rather than choreography.

More specifically, there's the matter of the "Manson Trio" segment. What *Pippin* lover is unfamiliar with this section of "Glory," where sexy dancers (in stockings and garter belts, if they're showgirls) sashay through an implied field of maimed soldiers and corpses? Not only does it err on the artsy side of prurient, as Fosse's best work did, but it foreshadows Pippin's eventual move from the horrors of war to the outer reaches of sexual excess, given sex was a barely concealed subtext to everything that happened in the show's original blocking. But how many know that it has lyrics? Ben Vereen needed filler on one of his Seventies solo albums, so he put Schwartz up to adding lyrics to the "Manson Trio" music, and "The Good-Time Ladies Rag" was the result. It's a generic, old-timey, raunchy lyric encouraging a young man to sample ladies of the evening.

Upon discovering its existence, I contemplated adding it to the show. It'd tie in with the pseudo-USO aspect of the segment that comes before it; "smile and show your legs" numbers like this happened all the time in such entertainments (witness Maggie Smith's tune in *Oh, What a Lovely War*). Perhaps, tying in with the DJ-style recitation of war casualties, it could even be sung (pre-recorded) by someone other than the Leading Player and their dancing partners. But I'm not married to this notion. The "Manson Trio" has worked just fine without lyrics thus far, after all.

Casting

False appearances and artificiality play a big part in *Pippin*. His whole life's just a play, populated by sets, props, and actors; nothing is real. He's surrounded by a family who isn't really his family; they're just portraying his family. To play with this notion, I'd like to cast the same performer as both Charles and Berthe to remind the audience these people are only actors, figments of the mind, and not Pippin's real family.

With Pippin being the only real person in the show, it's important to delineate him from the players. In addition to what I discuss above about the character's annoying, self-absorbed, spoiled-rotten nature, played very big, very animated, almost to the point of complete idiocy, the audience must nonetheless see themselves in him. He's a hapless, confused young man, surrounded – for the most part – by overzealous lunatics. And, given he's almost considering suicide, it's certainly possible this may even stem from schizophrenia. Needless to say, there are lots of layers to consider.

Last but certainly not least, there's been a lot of debate regarding the Leading Player's gender in casting. Many purists decry the fact that a woman's frequently cast in the role these days because they feel it adds an unnecessary sexual element to Pippin's seduction. (I often respond by asking if they've seen the rest of the show.) Personally I don't object to casting the role as female; it gives the show a much more contemporary feel, to have a woman in the position of authority. Having said that, I'd cast the best performer regardless of gender. Hell, I'll take a non-binary Leading Player if they give the best audition; such casting would really highlight the fact this is all in Pippin's head and not rooted in any rigid, conservative view of reality!

General Staging and Design Ideas

In general, I view the scenic design as an exercise in reality television. Much of *Pippin*'s environment will draw on a very bright, colorful palette that'd dazzle the audience from start to finish, with one exception: the "everyday life" sequence would have more earthy hues of gold and brown throughout. The audience needs to subliminally feel that this isn't "enough," for Pippin or for them. As for wardrobe, when it comes to reality TV, a few things come to mind: flashy, sexy, and lacking substance. With *Pippin* already halfway there in the original staging, it doesn't seem a big leap to keep Pippin shirtless – for one reason or another – through much of the play's duration, and for costumes and makeup in general to be highly sexualized and stylized, perhaps with subtle anachronisms to play into the show's hopping through time. The only exception to this rule would be the Leading Player's costume. Patricia Zipprodt's amazing surreal take on the "minstrel" look for Ben Vereen in the original has become such a hallmark of the show that I can't bring myself to toy with it.

When it comes to staging, first of all, don't fix what ain't broken. The revival included choreography "in the Fosse style," which (as in the *Chicago* revival) means using some of his actual routines for the show and adding new dances developed in that mien. I'd go further and restore every step of the original choreography. The dance aspect of this show is one thing a good director dares not tamper with; Bob Fosse was, in my opinion, the ultimate master of storytelling through movement, and tinkering with perfection

would be like adjusting the deck chairs on the Titanic (i.e., there's little point, as it won't really change the outcome). The revival proved it's possible to hire a choreographer well versed in the art of Fosse, and blend some fresh ideas with Fosse's original style – as far as I'm concerned, Chet Walker blended them well – but it's unnecessary when you already have something that works.

Secondly, in my book, you're not doing *Pippin* right if you're not making people a little uncomfortable in the process. After all, he has to be disturbed enough to consider suicide. If you follow Fosse's darker vision of *Pippin*, the show must be unsettling, decadent, and outrageous. It's important for Pippin to be unnerved, even repulsed, by much of what he experiences. The orgy must be genuinely perverse. If they start off as common sexual fantasy figures (such as a cop, a construction worker, a Catholic school girl, a hooker, a dominatrix, a sailor), all of the above should be half-naked by the time Pippin calls a halt. If Fastrada's dialogue and relationship with her son Lewis is to be infused with sexual undercurrents and incestuous connotations, I want to see her kissing him, rubbing up against him, even offering him her breast (instead of her thumb, as in the Fosse staging) when he acts out.

No room for tame or watered-down in this show; we promised magic.

Ars Pro Concrete