

Style

THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2008

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Signature's 'Glory Days' Ends One-Day Broadway Run

By NELSON PRESSLEY
Special to The Washington Post

Out, brief candle: "Glory Days," the musical that made the great leap this spring from Arlington's Signature Theatre to Broadway, has closed the day after opening to hostile reviews.

The modestly scaled show raised eyebrows for its fast track to the big time. Penned by two locals — 23-year-old composer-lyricist Nick Blaemire and 24-year-old librettist James Gardner — the 90-minute, pop-driven musical deals with four friends sorting out their differences a year after high school.

Artistic director Eric Schaeffer's production opened at Signature in January, and moved virtually intact to the Circle in the Square.

The Broadway glare proved to be a bit

See GLORY DAYS, C7, Col. 1

THE TV COLUMN

Lisa de Moraes

Jason Gets The Hook (or Is He Just Off It?)

America's prepubescent chick-hood is prostrate with grief after Jason Castro got booted off "American Idol" last night, but he is relieved, telling show host Ryan Seacrest it saves him the bother of trying to learn three whole songs next week.

Tuesday night, performing two tunes he already knew proved too much for our pretty blue-eyed boy with the pottable hair. First he mauled Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff," after which he mangled the lyrics to Bob Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man." "I picked two songs I knew and even that I screwed up," he

chuckles while chatting with Seacrest last night before his unveiling as this week's official hook-getter.

"Somebody told me that I shot the Tambourine Man. . . I thought that was pretty funny," he guffaws.

During a taped infernal for the Cirque

See TV COLUMN, C7, Col. 1

Falling Into A Musical Wonderland

With 'Final Alice,' Del Tredici Turned Avant-Garde Around

By STEPHEN BROOKES
Special to The Washington Post

It was the most outrageous thing the music establishment could have imagined. Here was Sir Georg Solti leading the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in a new work by a leading avant-garde composer, and there were. . . arias! With actual melodized Contemporary music, as everyone knew, was supposed to be thorny and atonal stuff, with no use for the outdated conventions of the past. Yet here was bar after bar of lush, unrepentant harmony, hummable tunes, symphonic gestures right out of Mahler. Even a fugue.

To the ruling avant-garde it was a slap in the face — and as a final insult, the audience leapt to its feet, cheering, when the piece came to a close.

It was Oct. 7, 1976, and the work was "Final Alice" by 39-year-old composer David Del Tredici. Until that moment, he'd been a card-

See ALICE, C5, Col. 1

—TOP SECRET—

Eyes Only: [redacted]

In Its [redacted] Offices, the National Security Archive Houses Stockpiles of [redacted], Gotten From the Government by [redacted]

By PETER CARLSON | Washington Post Staff Writer

Stoned on speed, Elvis Presley arrived at the White House wearing a purple velvet suit and bearing gifts for President Richard Nixon — a Colt .45 pistol and some silver bullets.

It was Dec. 21, 1970, and Elvis had a mission: He wanted Nixon to give him a federal narcotics agent's badge so he could carry dope and guns wherever he went. Nixon didn't give Elvis the badge, but he did pose for pictures with the King of Rock-and-Roll.

Nineteen years later, newspapers reported that the Elvis-Nixon photos were the most requested pictures in the federal government's vast photo collection, and Tom Blanton responded the same way he responds to so many other interesting news stories: He filed a Freedom of Information Act request.

"When the president meets with anybody, there's a whole paper trail, so we filed a FOIA request and got the entire file released," says Blanton, who is the director of the National Security Archive, a private research group devoted to prying documents out of the federal government's files and making them public.

The fruits of Blanton's Elvis-Nixon FOIA turned out to be gloriously goofy:

There was Elvis's handwritten letter to Nixon requesting a meeting and bragging that "I have done an in-depth study of drug abuse." And a White House staffer's memo suggesting that Nixon ask Elvis to "record an album with the theme 'Get High on Life.'" And the official notes of the historic meeting: "Presley immediately began showing the President his law enforcement paraphernalia, including badges from police departments. . . ."

Blanton posted the documents on the National Security Archive's Web site,

and for years they were the most downloaded items on the site. But in 2003, the Elvis-Nixon meeting was de-throned by another of the archive's postings — documents detailing the 1983 meeting of two other legendary characters, Donald Rumsfeld and Saddam Hussein.

The archive obtained those documents by FOIA, too. One State Department cable showed Rumsfeld cozying up to Saddam, who was then involved in a long, bloody war with Iran: "Rumsfeld told Saddam US and Iraq had shared interests in preventing Iranian and Syrian expansion. He said US was urging other states to curtail arms sales to Iran."

Blanton loves government documents. It's an acquired taste that has also been acquired by his colleagues at the



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
Elvis Presley's 1970 meeting with Nixon left one of the most popular paper trails.

See SECRETS, C4, Col. 1



Steinbeck's novels remain astonishingly popular.

JONATHAN YARDLEY

Second Reading

In 'Cannery Row,' a Preserved Simplicity

An occasional series in which The Post's book critic reconsiders notable and/or neglected books from the past.

As a teenager, even into my early 20s, there wasn't a writer dead or alive whose work I treasured more than John Steinbeck's. During the 1950s I devoured his novels — "The Grapes of Wrath," of course, but also all the rest, including "In Dubious Battle," "The Long Valley," "Of Mice and Men," "The Moon Is Down" and "East of Eden," which was published when I was 12 — with adolescent passion and utterly without discrimination. My devotion was so blind that, in

1960, I actually let a friend persuade me to trade my crisp new copy of Dwight Macdonald's brilliant "Parodies: An Anthology From Chaucer to Beerbohm — and After" for his review copy of Steinbeck's "Travels With Charley in Search of America."

Well, time marches on. "Travels With Charley" vanished from my library ages ago, precisely when and where I haven't the foggiest idea, and just a few weeks ago I set things right by purchasing, for not much more than a song, a nice used copy of "Parodies" in its original dust wrapper. Over the

See YARDLEY, C8, Col. 1

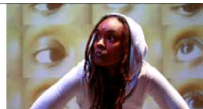


STYLE ON THE GO
Something Different for Mother's Day? | C3

THE RELIABLE SOURCE Huckabee, from campaign trail to diabetes speaker | C3

PERFORMANCE Clarice Smith Center goes with the political flow | C5 >

BOOK WORLD Tracking Osama bin Laden: A humorist's quest | C3



The Security Archive, Spilling Government Secrets

SECRETS. From CI

archive. Over the past 23 years, they have filed more than 35,000 FOIA requests and collected more than 5 million pages of government documents. Some of the documents are mind-numbingly boring; of course, but others are nothing short of astonishing.

A CIA guidebook called "A Study of Assassination," which advised right-wing Latin Americans on the most effective ways to bludgeon, stab and shoot their enemies.

A National Security Agency study revealing that the agency "deliberately skewed" its account of the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, which led to the escalation of the Vietnam War.

A 2002 Pentagon PowerPoint briefing on plans for the upcoming invasion of Iraq — code name "Polo Step" — that assumed that only 5,000 American troops would remain in Iraq by the end of 2006.

Perhaps the most famous documents obtained by the archive were the CIA's so-called "Family Jewels," which detailed the agency's illegal wiretaps and attempts to assassinate foreign leaders. The archive filed its FOIA request for the "Family Jewels" in 1992. Fifteen years later, in 2007, the CIA finally released them, and they made headlines around the world.

"We're doing the Lord's work, as my daddy would say," Blanton says with a laugh. "Information doesn't belong to the government, it belongs to all of us."

Blanton is 53, but he looks much younger, a good advertisement for the dubious proposition that spending your entire adult life poring through government documents has a fountain-of-youth effect. He's sitting in his office at the archive, which is headquartered in George Washington University's Gelman Library. His room, like all the others, is piled high with cardboard boxes, each of them piled high with documents. And more documents arrive nearly every day, delivered by a uniformed agent of the federal government — a mail carrier.

"Every day is Christmas — you're opening a present from the government," Blanton says. "Look at this. It came in last week. I haven't even gone through it yet."

He picks a document of his desk, which is littered with documents. The heading reads, "Defeating An Insurgency: Seminar War Game."

"It's a war game that was conducted just a year ago in McLean, Virginia, with the Air Force, Army, Navy and Special Operations Command."

He flips through the pages until something catches his eye. "Okay, there were three war games," he says. "One was Egypt, one was Colombia, one was Kurd versus Arab."

He flips a few more pages, then softly mutters a word that is frequently muttered by the archive's staff of document buyers when they peruse the latest fruits of FOIA.

"Interesting."

Rogue Research

The National Security Archive is the house that FOIA built and a mecca for document buffs.

Despite its official-sounding name, the archive is not a government agency. It's an independent, nonprofit institute created in 1985 by a handful of reporters, historians and activists who'd been filing FOIA requests for documents related to American activities in the guerrilla wars being fought in Central America. Its first director was Scott Armstrong, a former Senate Watergate Committee staffer and Washington Post reporter. Armstrong filed a grant from the Ford Foundation and an endowed office space at the Brookings Institution and so he was filing hundreds of FOIA requests, many related to the big scandal of the '80s, the Iran-contra affair.

Naturally, these activities made him extremely unpopular with the Reagan administration.

"Scott was regarded as quite a dangerous individual, to put it mildly," recalls former Justice Department attorney Daniel J. Metcalfe, who served for 25 years as the federal government's FOIA coordinator. In 1986, Metcalfe issued a directive warning federal FOIA officials to be wary of Armstrong, but that didn't stop the archive from obtaining and releasing countless Iran-contra documents.

"Iran-contra is what made us," Armstrong recalls.

In January 1989, Armstrong learned that the Reagan administration planned to erase all White House e-mails before leaving office. A few days later, quickly, the archive filed a lawsuit to prevent the destruction of the e-mails. The case was called *Armstrong et al. v. Reagan et al.* To win a long story short, the archive on the strong beat Reagan, the e-mails were released and Blanton collected the best of them in a book titled "White House E-Mail," published in 1995.

By then, Armstrong had left the organization, Blanton was director and the archive had moved to its current box-filled world of offices in GWU's Gelman Library.

Once perceived as a hotbed of radicals, the National Security Archive is now a major Washington institution with a staff of 35 and an annual budget of more than \$3 million, most of it donated by foundations. The documents it has gathered have been quoted in countless newspapers, books and documentary films. The archive has won Emmy, Peabody and Polly Awards, and in 2004, avant-garde artist Jeremy Holzer exhibited 30 of its documents on the walls of tall buildings in Bregenz, Austria,



From left, Peter Kornbluh, Joyce Battle, Malcolm Byrne and Tom Blanton in their offices at the National Security Archive, where piles of government documents are pored over.



Files obtained by the archive show: Donald Rumsfeld in 1983, left, copying up to then-Iraq President Saddam Hussein while Iraq was at war with Iran; and a 2002 Pentagon briefing (code name "Polo Step") on the invasion of Iraq, right, that assumes that only 5,000 U.S. troops would remain in Iraq by 2006.

in a work she called "Truth Beyond Power." Among the world's document buffs — a small but tenacious tribe of journalists, researchers and historians — the archive is legendary for its profile and skillful practice of the art of the FOIA request.

"They craft the best FOIA requests around," says Metcalfe, the archive's former adversary, who is now a law professor at American University. "If anybody does it better, I haven't seen it."

"They do it extremely well," says Steve Aftergood, a researcher at the Federation of American Scientists, who is himself no slouch at the art of FOIA. "Within the government, it is known that they are persistent and they're willing to litigate if necessary and they're not going away. All of those things provide incentives for agencies to take their requests seriously."

Every year, the archive files roughly 2,000 FOIA requests and collects about 75,000 documents, many dealing with the most important events of the past 60 years — the Cuban missile crisis, Vietnam, the collapse of the Soviet empire, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran. The documents are studied by staffers who specialize in each issue, collected into "electronic briefing books" and posted on the archive's Web site, and readers around the world download nearly a half-million pages a day.

Meanwhile, hundreds of researchers come to the archive every year to study the documents — grad students, journalists, historians, even the occasional re-

tired spy writing his memoirs. In the winter of 2007, an Egyptian millionaire named Ashraf Marwan arrived at the archive to do some research. The son-in-law of Egyptian dictator Gamal Abdel Nasser and an adviser to Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, Marwan was widely reputed to be a spy for Israel. He was also widely reputed to be a clever Egyptian double-agent who fed disinformation to the Israelis. At the archive, he studied documents on the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and told archive analyst William Burr that he was doing research for his memoirs.

A few months later, in June 2007, Marwan jumped, fell or was pushed from the fourth floor balcony of his apartment in London and was found dead on the sidewalk.

"Police have been advised," the Times of London reported, "that the only known copy of Dr. Marwan's memoirs disappeared from his flat on the day of his death."

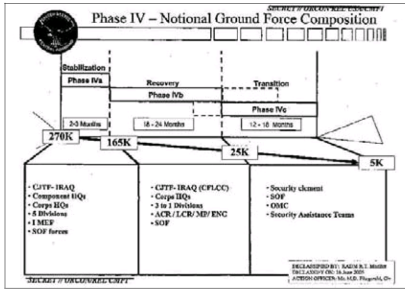
Redaction in Action

Sometimes, working at the National Security Archive is like living in a Kafkaesque bureaucratic hell.

You're interested in some specific government action so you file a FOIA request, asking for the documents related to it. Then you wait. And wait. And wait. Months go by. Sometimes years go by. Then, if you're lucky, you get a stack of documents — thousands and thousands of pages. Pulsing with excitement, you start reading, only to find yourself slogging through reams of mindlessly boring drivel, some of it so dull that being forced to read it would probably violate the Geneva Conventions. But you wade through it and finally you come to the good stuff, the diamonds hidden in this dung heap and — they've been blacked out, obliterated — by some censor, or as the bureaucrats call it, "redacted."

Redaction is the bane of an archive staffer's existence, and they love to tell redaction horror stories.

Peter Kornbluh, an archive analyst who specializes in Latin American affairs, remembers receiving



The CIA's "Family Jewels," obtained by the archive after 15 years, detailed the agency's illegal wiretaps and attempts to assassinate foreign leaders.

the Defense Intelligence Agency's profile of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet only to find that "it was entirely redacted except his name and the phonetic pronunciation of his name."

Malcolm Byrne, the archive's director of research and resident Iran specialist, tells the story of the CIA's secret study of the famous coup it staged in Iran in 1953, overthrowing the prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, and installing the shah in power. In 1999, the archive filed a lawsuit to obtain the 200-page study. The CIA responded by redacting every word in the document except for one sentence: "Headquarters spent a day featured by depression and despair."

Joyce Battle, the archive's Iraq expert, recently filed a FOIA request asking the FBI for documents relating to any possible connection between Iraq and the 1998 bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. "They released 122 documents," she says. "That was pretty exciting, but when I took a look at them, virtually all of them were redacted in their entirety."

Faced with a totally blacked-out document, she asks a researcher to do it. "You can appeal," says Battle, "and do that often."

In fact, the archive files hundreds of appeals every year. 549 of them in 2006 alone. When that doesn't work, the archive sometimes files lawsuits, more than 40 of them over the past 23 years. In January, for instance, the archive filed suit to obtain grand jury records related to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the communist spies executed in 1953.

In the long run, Blanton says, documents tend to come out. That CIA study of the Iran coup was leaked to the New York Times by a "former official" in 2000. And Kornbluh finally did manage to obtain a non-redacted version of the DIA's Pinochet profile.

"You could see that one of the things they redacted was that his favorite cocktail was a pisco sour," Kornbluh says, amused, before adding this: "The declassification of U.S. government documents is so capricious, that's why you need a National Security Archive."

After waiting for years, Kornbluh ended up obtaining 24,000 pages of documents on Pinochet and the 1973 CIA-backed coup that brought him to power. He used them to write his 2003 book, "The Pinochet File."

"Those documents allow you to be a fly on the wall," he says, "as the decisions that change the world are made."

Wall of Shame

The office deck at the National Security Archive consists mainly of cardboard boxes stuffed with government documents, so it's not surprising to find that the decorations on the office walls consist mainly of government documents, enlarged and framed.

"We just sort of went around and said, 'What's your favorite document?'" Byrne explains.

He's giving an impromptu tour of this gallery of greatest hits. There's a page from Oliver North's notebook from his Iran-contra days. And a copy of Richard Clarke's now-famous January 2001 memo warning Condoleezza Rice of the threat from al-Qaeda. And the notes from a 1987 White House meeting in which Reagan's defense secretary, Caspar Weinberger, urges his colleagues to give more support to Saddam Hussein in his war with Iran:

"We should not only be supportive of Iraq, but should be seen to be supportive."

And there's a Defense Department memo, written at the height of the 1994 Rwandan genocide that killed an estimated 800,000 people, rejecting a suggestion that the new Afghan leader, the broadest of the radio stations that were inciting the mobs of machete-wielding murderers. The flights would cost too much, a Defense official wrote: "approximately \$850 per flight hour."

Byrne reaches up and grabs one of his favorite documents off the wall. It's an enlarged copy of an order that's handwritten in Russian, the order for Soviet troops to invade Afghanistan in 1979.

"This is the invasion order," he says. "It came out of the Soviet archives when Yeltsin put the Communist Party on trial. . . . This is a good example of how our view of history has changed now that we've been educated in the other side's documents."

American documents reveal, Byrne says, that the Carter administration believed the Soviets invaded Afghanistan as part of a long-range strategy to expand southward in pursuit of warm-water ports. But Soviet documents show that the Russians invaded because they feared that the new Afghan leader, who'd been educated in the United States, might be an American spy.

"This is something," Byrne says, "that you constantly see in these documents — how little we or anybody else knows about our adversaries."

A letter by Elvis Presley to Richard Nixon, left, requests a meeting with the president.

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