



airs Sunday, June 11, at
8 p.m. live
ET/delayed PT on CBS.

And the Tony Awards Go to ...

Charlotte St. Martin and Heather Hitchens share the lead in bringing the annual TV broadcast to Broadway fans

by DAVID MASELLO

BROADWAY MIGHT RUN NORTH TO SOUTH through Manhattan, but the effect Broadway theater has on America stretches coast to coast. The two most important residents who “live” on Broadway are **Charlotte St. Martin**, president of The Broadway League, and **Heather Hitchens**, president of the American Theatre Wing. They are responsible for what we see onstage at the Tony Awards, as well as the general goodwill that characterizes the annual event.

“I like to say that Broadway tells the stories of our lives,” says St. Martin, who since 2006 has headed The Broadway League, which is the trade association for the industry. “One of the reasons Broadway is doing so well is because there is something for everyone onstage. The Tonys introduce all those stories to

anyone interested in live theater.”

Hitchens, who is charged with overseeing and shaping the American Theatre Wing’s vital grant-making, professional development, and educational and media programs, adds, “People love watching the Tonys because it’s live TV. The awards are the beginning conversation with a national audience about Broadway.”

While St. Martin and Hitchens are not actually onstage during the show, they work together behind the scenes and with their individual organizations to grow audiences, maintain the integrity of what is produced, lobby for actors, playwrights and audiences—and once a year, they put on the ultimate show. “Most actors will tell you they can’t not act,” says St. Martin, who attends 100 nights of theater a year (not including those on trips to the West End). “Actors say that on a Broadway stage they feel most alive. Major film stars like **Viola Davis** and **Denzel Washington** purposely come back to the theater to hone their craft.”

“For playwrights and actors, the Tonys give them that stamp of approval, an amazing recognition of their work,” adds Hitchens. “It’s important to remember, too, that theater is not only important from the artistic standpoint as the place to tell stories, but it’s also business.” Broadway theater has a \$12.6 billion economic impact on the New York City economy.

While brand-name actors perform on Broadway, St. Martin is particularly aware of new talent. Another of her starring roles involves her commitment to the Jimmy Awards, kind of a Tony Awards for high school students. “Fifty thousand students from 1,000 schools compete for best actor and actress,” she says. “These kids are so talented you wouldn’t believe it.”

“We are in the empathy business,” Hitchens says. “Broadway plays help advance thinking and social change and generate empathy all around. We need that right now especially.” ■



St. Martin (far left) and Hitchens.

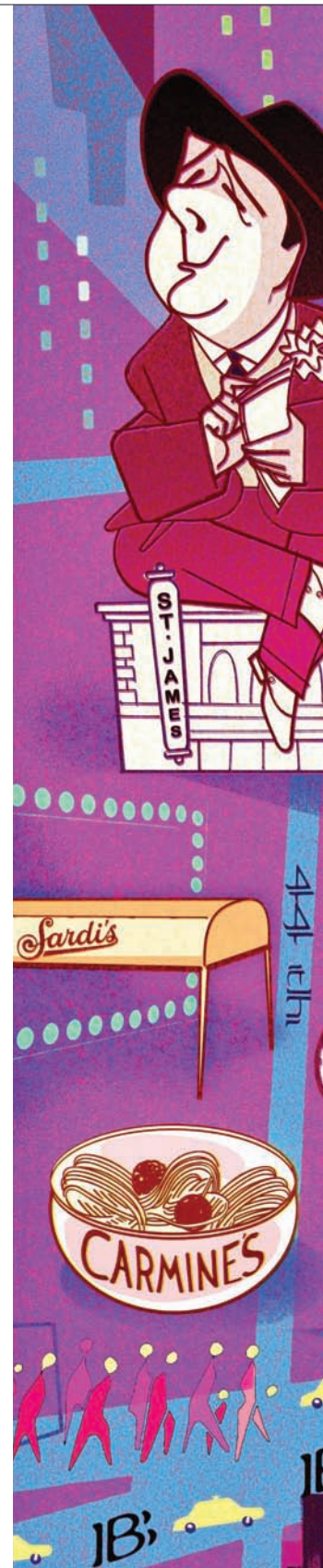


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