

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Back to the 1980s Off-Broadway

David Sheward · Tuesday, March 31st, 2026

That distinctly weird, transitional decade, the 1980s, provides the time frame for two wildly funny Off-Broadway productions. This was a time when America was rejecting the liberal ideals of the hippie-Vietnam era and moving into the narcissistic, ego-driven period of “Me first and the rest of you be damned.” Both shows use parody to lampoon the excesses of the time. One examines serious conflicts while the other is a silly spoof. The more complex work is *Cold War Choir Practice*, Ro Reddick’s imaginative, surprisingly riotous take on Reaganomics, nuclear threats, and race relations co-presented by MCC Theater, Clubbed Thumb and Page 73. Set in 1987 and written with a sharp satiric edge, this insightful and mercilessly dark comedy focuses on African-American adolescent Meek (intense and winning Alana Raquel Bowers) who becomes embroiled in international espionage when she corresponds with a Russian pen pal.



Alana Raquel Bowers, Andy Lucien, and Crystal Finn in *Cold War Choir Practice*.

Credit: Maria Baranova

Matters get complicated when Meek's estranged uncle Clay (solid Andy Lucien), a prominent black conservative, brings his mysteriously ill white wife Virgie (appropriately shattered Crystal Finn) home to the family's Syracuse, NY, roller-skating rink for the holidays. Meek's choir Seedlings of Peace and Virgie's cultish women's affinity group are involved in attempting to steal Clay's state secrets. Meek's dad Smooch (fiery Will Cobbs) and grandma Puddin (fun and feisty Lizan Mitchell) clash with Clay and Virgie, trying to fathom their family member's transformation from radical Black Panther follower to Reagan White House advisor.

Reddick employs a *Dr. Strangelove*-type comic perspective to portray the nervous breakdown our world was undergoing as it teetered on the brink of apocalyptic holocaust. She also provides hilarious original songs, mocking the Reagan administration's cavalier capitalist ideals, striving for "one global America and markets that are free." These are sung by a cartoonish trio of stereotypical white-bread ladies who also play a gaggle of spies (funny and freaky Grace McLean, Suzzy Roche and Nina Ross). Ellen Winter ably doubles as the choir leader and music director.



Will Cobbs, Lizan Mitchell, and Alana Raquel Bowers in *Cold War Choir Practice*.

Credit: Maria Baranova

Meek is the innocent victim desperately trying to make sense of an adult world gone mad. In a season with many adult actors playing children (*Spelling Bee*, *Marcel on the Train*), Bowers delivers an intelligent, emotionally fraught performance as the lonely, middle-school-aged Meek. She skillfully conveys the young girl's yearning for affection and meaning as her world is threatened with nuclear annihilation. Knud Adams' focused direction combines the musical interludes with slapstick and satire, all while maintaining a balance between serious interaction and raucous comedy. (I loved how the actors implied they were rollerskating without actually wearing skates.) Afsoon Pajoufar's suggestive set allows for cinematic shifts and multiple settings, facilitated by Masha Tsimring's subtle lighting and Kathy Ruvuna's sound design (explosions included).



Grey Henson in *Bigfoot! A New Musical*.

Credit: Marc J. Franklin

The new musical *Bigfoot* (at City Center's Off-Broadway space) also pokes fun at the Reagan era's blatant materialism but is a total goof in the tradition of such off-beat, monster-themed tuners as *Bat Boy*, *The Toxic Avenger*, *Zombie Prom*, and *Little Shop of Horrors*. In the zany book by Amber Ruffin and Kevin Sciretta, the titular behemoth is actually a gentle soul secretly performing good deeds for the citizens of the beleaguered town of Muddirt, while the unscrupulous mayor uses fear of the man-beast to further his own nefarious ends. That's about it as far as the plot goes. Ruffin and Sciretta's jokes hit about half of the time as do the spoofy, catchy songs with lyrics by Ruffin and music by Ruffin and David Schmoll.

The six-member cast, under Danny Mefford's slam-bang direction, has a frenetic time tickling horror-movie tropes. Grey Henson delightfully underplays Bigfoot as a cuddly teen who just wants to be liked. (Ricky Reynoso's costume design and J. Jared Jans and Cassie Williams' wig, hair and make-up design create the perfect creature—part whimsy and part nightmare.) Crystal Lucas-Perry hits high notes and hilarity as Bigfoot's human mother. Katerina McCrimmon is ferociously aggressive as a hired hunter out to trap the beast and Jason Tam sweetly supportive as a sympathetic doctor. *SNL*'s Alex Moffat is a hissably greedy mayor and Jade Jones sparkles in multiple roles, even riotously switching back and forth in one scene, ripping off and reapplying a moustache. A frantic, somewhat forgettable romp but good for a few laughs while it lasts.



Jody Long, Jennifer Ikeda, Anna Zavelson, and Jully Lee in *Chinese Republicans*.  
Credit: Joan Marcus

While Alex Lin's *Chinese Republicans* is set in 2019 rather than the 1980s, this tight but cliched drama (at Roundabout's Laura Pels Theater) centers on the affects of Reagan's policies on a group of Chinese-American women facing gender-and-race-based discrimination at a NYC investment bank. Lin's script is uneven with powerful character development and sequences on sexism and racism vying with unfunny attempts at comic relief. (One sequence with a Caucasian waiter getting doors slammed in his face goes nowhere.) Several plot twists come across as contrived. There was an imaginative fantasy vignette where two of the women face an imaginary quiz show testing their skills at Mandarin. We can have done with more such flights of fancy as in Caryl Churchill's similar and more imaginative *Top Girls*. Despite structural weaknesses, Chay Yew's well-paced direction, Wilson Chin's versatile revolving set and the layered performances of Jennifer Ikea, Jully Lee, Jodi Long and Anna Zavelson offer insights into these women's motivations and difficult choices.

***Cold War Choir Practice*: March 10—April 5. MCC Theater, Clubbed Thumb and Page 73 at MCC Theater, 511 W. 52nd St., NYC. Running time: 90 mins. with no intermission. [mcctheater.org](http://mcctheater.org).**

***Bigfoot!, A New Musical*: March 1—April 26. Benson Drive Productions, et al, in association with Manhattan Theater Club at City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St., NYC. Running time: 90 mins. with no intermission. [nycitycenter.org](http://nycitycenter.org).**

***Chinese Republicans*: Feb. 26—April 5. Roundabout Theater Company at the Laura Pels Theater/Harold and Miriam Sternberg Center for Theater, 111 W. 46th St., NYC. Running time: 90 mins. with no intermission. [roundabouttheater.org](http://roundabouttheater.org).**

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