



Theater

AUTOS

Search Shows, Reviews and Tickets

More in Theater »

Go

Broadway

Off Broadway

Off Off Broadway

London

Critics' Picks

Buy Tickets

Special Offers

It Might Be Your Ticket, if the Show's in New York



Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

A TKTS official likens the booth to a stock trading floor.

By ERIK PIEPENBURG
Published: January 1, 2010

If **off-track betting** collided with Broadway, the combination might emit the kind of roar coming from inside the TKTS booth in Times Square, where discounted theater seats are sold. Desperate faces plastered against windows give wads of \$20 bills to no-nonsense cashiers who bark the names of shows as if they were taking bets on the ponies:

ArtsBeat Guide to TKTS

[Secrets of the TKTS Booth](#)

[Answers to Your TKTS Questions](#)

Multimedia



- “No ‘In the Heights.’ ”
- “ ‘Memphis’? You got it.”
- “ ‘Ragtime,’ same thing.”
- “ ‘God of Carnage’? Two.”

“It’s like working on a Wall Street trading floor,” said Bill Castellano, the head treasurer for the city’s three TKTS locations. (The other booths are at South Street Seaport and in downtown Brooklyn.)

On a bitterly cold afternoon this week, Mr. Castellano was overseeing the operations and inventory of the busy Times

Next Article in Theater (2 of 28) »

Ads by Google

what's this?

New York Facelift Expert

Top Plastic Surgeon. Minimal Scars, Less Downtime. Seen On Fox, Times
www.DrSamRizk.com

Save on Heating Oil Now

Get Lower Heating Oil Prices! Join the Nation's Largest Buying Group.
www.HeatUsa.com/Heating+Oil

Rock Of Ages Merchandise

Rock Out All Day With Rock Of Ages Merchandise!
www.RockOfAgesMusical.com

Burn the Floor

Ballroom. Reinvented. Heating up Broadway through Jan 10!
www.BurnTheFloor.com

VelaShape in NYC

Non-Surgical Cellulite/Fat Reduction Lose Inches, Save \$ with Packages
www.skintherap.com

Solar Salon

Luxury UV and Spray Tanning in a comfortable setting. Free Trial!
www.uppereast.com/solar-salon

Advertise on NYTimes.com

SIGN IN TO RECOMMEND

TWITTER

E-MAIL

SEND TO PHONE

PRINT

SHARE



MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED

1. Adult Learning | Neuroscience: How to Train the Aging Brain
2. David Brooks: The God That Fails
3. Paul Krugman: Chinese New Year
4. And the Pursuit of Happiness: By George
5. State of the Art: The Pogie Awards for the Year's Best Tech Ideas
6. In Boston, Where Change Is in the Winter Air
7. As Honor Students Multiply, Who Really Is One?
8. 36 Hours in Tucson, Ariz.
9. Safety of Beef Processing Method Is Questioned
10. Broadband, Yes. Toilet, No.

Go to Complete List »

Broadway Give and Take

Enlarge This Image



Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times
Bill Castellano, the head treasurer for the TKTS booths, in the new one at Father Duffy Square.

Square outlet, where thousands of reduced, same-day tickets to shows on and Off Broadway are sold every day of the year. The booth, at West 47th Street, where Broadway and Seventh Avenue intersect, was renovated as part of the \$18 million overhaul of Father Duffy Square completed in the fall of 2008, when TKTS also began accepting [credit cards](#), replacing a longstanding cash-only policy.

But some things don't change. The booth has been run since its inception in 1973 by the [Theater Development Fund](#), a nonprofit organization that promotes and subsidizes the performing arts.

On this day a staff of 11 — some seated, others standing, only one a woman — each conducted transactions with hundreds of people shivering in a tightly coiled line outside. Because it was the busy theatergoing week between Christmas and New Year's, only 35 shows were discounting tickets, down from the usual 50 or so. Each production has the discretion to offer as many discounted tickets as it wants, or none.

"Hair," for example, had 36 obstructed-view seats and one with a full view. "Rock of Ages" had only one seat. "God of Carnage," offered in a separate line for plays only, was selling briskly.

A patron's request for tickets to a [Tom Stoppard](#) drama not playing in New York was met with a stare.

"People are asking for a lot of stuff we don't have," said Ryan DePaulo, a cashier, as he handed four tickets to "Shrek" through the window. "They don't check the board," a reference to the electronic listings of available shows posted outside the booth.

By the end of the day, 3,831 tickets had been sold at the booth, returning \$219,600 to the shows, according to a fund spokesman. (The total for all three booths that day was 5,737 tickets sold and \$354,099 for the shows.)

"We're marrying what the shows need, which is to sell the seats that haven't sold, with what the people need, which is access to the seats," said [Victoria Bailey](#), the Theater Development Fund's executive director.

The popularity of the striking red glass staircase that covers the booth — from inside, the operation looks more like a spaceship than a booth — has been a boon for TKTS. Several staff members said the new fiberglass structure and its amenities — a break lounge, a roomy bathroom, heating and cooling systems — were marked improvements over the previous TKTS home.

"In the old days we were nothing but a construction trailer," Mr. Castellano said.

The workers, who are all members of the Treasurers and Ticket Sellers Union, are asked to be equal parts ambassadors, interpreters and bank tellers. Although they are prohibited from recommending shows, they know theater sightlines and locations, as well as shows' running times and age appropriateness.

"It's fast-paced, and you don't have time to be lazy," said Kiah Johnson, as he printed out "Ragtime" tickets.

Charlie Stuis said selling tickets was "a little easier" than his service in the Navy. "I move my hands a lot, but I don't have to run or anything," he said.

Before computerized ticketing systems were installed, each box office delivered a stack of tickets to the TKTS booth the day of the show. Now tickets are sent electronically and printed on the spot.

Order a **low-cost**
subscription today.



“Customers get real-time opportunities to buy just about any seat that’s available at the theater,” Mr. Castellano said. “We used to have to send runners out to get more tickets.”

How robust the action is at the booth boils down to three ingredients: product (ticket availability), people (no customers, no business) and weather (fair weather usually means good sales, but “when we have blizzards, you’d be surprised how busy we are,” Mr. Castellano said).

There are several dos and don’ts for getting the most out of TKTS, including these:

Read the listings (they change every 17 seconds), know what show you want to see and settle on backup choices before you reach the window.

Have your cash or credit card in hand.

Questions are fine, but don’t dawdle; step aside if you need time to make a decision. On the other hand, don’t feel pressured into making a rushed decision.

And no, “Wicked” will not be available.

The quickest way to get good seats is to ask what show has the best availability. On this particular afternoon, the three top-selling shows were “Finian’s Rainbow,” which is closing on Jan. 17; “Shrek the Musical,” which closes on Sunday; and “Memphis.” A list of shows that have been offered recently is at TDF.org.

“It’s not a common occurrence that we’re going to have fifth-row center on the aisle for every single show,” Mr. Castellano said.

For tourists who remember the old TKTS experience, when it was cash only, and there were few windows, the new booth is a welcome change.

“It’s easier because you can use a credit card,” said Nancy Silander, a visitor from Connecticut who bought five \$33 balcony seats to “Finian’s Rainbow.” “But there are still the lines.”

[Sign in to Recommend](#)

A version of this article appeared in print on January 2, 2010, on page C1 of the New York edition.

[Next Article in Theater \(2 of 28\) »](#)



[Click here to enjoy the convenience of home delivery of The Times for 50% off.](#)

E-MAIL
PRINT

Related Searches

- [Theater](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)
- [TKTS Booth \(NYC\)](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)
- [Theater Development Fund](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM

