

Play to Win

PREDICTING the Tony Awards, it turns out, isn't much harder than tap-dancing on the ceiling.

For almost a decade, David S. Thompson, chair of the department of theater and dance at Agnes Scott College, has spent a week each spring in and around Times Square, watching shows; talking with critics, performers, and theatergoers; and then predicting the Tony Award winners (his accuracy rate is about 70 percent). It's his work—a grant and conference-travel funds contribute to this annual spring fling—but it's also delightful, delicious, and delectable.

"I'm just a kid at heart," he says, describing a big number from one of this season's musicals, *Mary Poppins*, in which Bert, the chimney sweep, tap-dances up the side of the proscenium arch and across the ceiling. "He has taken off his jacket, and he's wearing a fitted vest, so nothing seems to flop downward," Mr. Thompson says, still charmed. Whether or not you can see the wires, he says, is irrelevant.

During this year's Tony tour in mid-May, Mr. Thompson made his Broadway debut among audience members seated on the



MARILYNNE HERBERT, HALSTEAD COMMUNICATIONS

David Thompson's Selected Predictions

Best Play:

The Coast of Utopia

Best Musical:

Spring Awakening

Best Revival of a Play:

Journey's End

Best Revival of a Musical:

Company

stage as jurors in *Inherit the Wind*. Many actors, he says, regularly watch their audiences file in

and take their seats in order to "tap in to the mood of the evening." During his eight tours, Mr. Thompson has become attuned to the mood on Broadway, and that helps him make his predictions (see list at left).

He's seen the clever and the poignant, the "jaw-dropping and teeth-chattering," and the just plain awful, such as *Dance of the Vampires*, in 2002. The first few scenes of that show, he says, weren't so bad, but then came the musical tribute to garlic. "Oh, now it begins," he recalls thinking.

—SIERRA MILLMAN