

# The New Criterion

## Theater

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### Friends & neighbors

by [Brooke Allen](#)

On *In the Heights* at the Richard Rodgers Theatre, *Almost an Evening* at the Theatres at 45 Bleecker Street, *Parlour Song* at the Atlantic Theater, and *The Four of Us* at Manhattan Theatre Club.

A couple of weeks ago I went to see a low-budget, concert-style production of the 1960s musical *Half a Sixpence* at an off-Broadway revival house. *Half a Sixpence* was a crowd-pleaser that had successful runs both in London and New York; having been taken to see it as a child (I must be one of the only people left to have a vivid memory of its Broadway run), I was curious to know whether its unsophisticated charms would hold up in the cynical and knowing yet dumbed-down twenty-first century.

Well, not really—and I couldn't quite figure out why. The lack was not in the Edwardian setting, or the substance of the story, for the show's authors had based it on the H. G. Wells novel *Kipps*, a clever sociological parable that still has much to tell us. It was more the style of the telling that rings false now, for *Half a Sixpence* epitomizes the big, brassy, Sixties musical (think *Oliver ...* **Brooke Allen's** latest book is *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers* (Ivan R.

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