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THEATER; A New Season Promises Adventure: [Review]

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Abstract

For a guaranteed pre-New York discovery, consider "The America Play" by Suzan-Lori Parks, wherein a "foe-father" in what the playwright calls "the great hole of history" could be taken for Abraham Lincoln. The play is booked into the Joseph Papp Public Theater in Manhattan after a world premiere at Yale Rep in January. Another Public Theater attraction, "The Swan" (the swan is a man as far as the audience can tell) by Elizabeth Eglhoff, is scheduled for Theater Works in Hartford.

Theater Works's favored playwright is Lee Blessing whose new work called "Patient A" bumped the originally scheduled season opener, "Kiss of the Spider Woman," in its pre-musical dramatic form. "Patient A" was commissioned by the family of Kimberly Bergalis, who died of AIDS. The concerns of Mr. Blessing, an issue-driven playwright who wrote "A Walk in the Woods," will also be heard at Square One Theater Company in Stratford where "Two Rooms," which is about an American hostage and his waiting wife, is to be seen in February.

Discovery does not discount the value of such names. Count among them also Spalding Gray and Eric Bogosian in new monologues at Yale Rep. And, most conspicuously, Al Pacino will perform in the two plays he did last year at Circle in the Square in Manhattan. In "Chinese Coffee" he's a down-and-out contemporary novelist; in "Salome" he's the nasty, lascivious King Herod. The two plays will be offered in modified repertory -- one play four times a week, the other three times a week, for a total of four weeks -- at the Rich Forum in Stamford. A film about the making of "Richard III," in which Mr. Pacino starred in 1979 on Broadway, will be shown free to subscribers on Sundays and Mondays during the run of the plays. And late in the season Mr. Pacino is to pop into the saloon of Harry Hope as the doomed truthsayer Hickey in Eugene O'Neill's "Iceman Cometh" at the Long Wharf.

Full Text

IT looks like the Connecticut theater season started before it started, and with a thunderclap. One hopes that the boldness and success of two early openers provided a foretaste of thrilling things and inspired in theatergoers a sense of discovery.

Could the season have had a grander inauguration than "The Madness of George III"? That the Rich Forum in Stamford sold standing room tickets during the two-week American premiere of a witty English play with a great performance by Nigel Hawthorne shows that people go for class.

And controversy also sells. Note the over-the-top box office reports from the Long Wharf Theater in New Haven about the one-week engagement of "Fires in the Mirror," Anna Deavere Smith's one-woman, 26-character account of racial confrontations in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, N.Y.

Granted, such acclaimed prize winners arrived bearing status points. Now it's up to venturesome theatergoers to seek out their own discoveries. Like the playwriting debut of Gloria Naylor, who wrote "Bailey's Cafe," her story about black women in the 1940's, simultaneously as a novel, published last year, and as a play. The stage version will be developed in a private workshop production at Hartford Stage Company in preparation for a celebratory opening to coincide, to the day, with the theater's 30th anniversary on April 1.

Company One, Hartford's enterprising group, can be depended on for discovery, even for free, with its staged readings, known as Script Teas. Sojourner Truth meets Napoleon in one (by Jake Ann Jones), the playwright John Binnie imagines Judy Garland going to Scotland in another, and Lisa Jones, who made an impact last season with "Combination Skin," will be represented by three one-act plays, collectively titled "Stained," about generational conflicts in black family life. "Great Hole of History"

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Discovery can also lead to staged readings by new playwrights in the Maxwell Anderson Playwright Series in Greenwich. Or to the work "False Admissions" of Pierre Carlet de Marivaux (1688-1763) in an adaptation by Timberlake Wertenbaker, who is returning to Hartford Stage where her play, "Our Country's Good," had its American premiere.

Then there are the so-called "clowns of horror," Mump and Smoot, who are hellbent on following their Existentialist piece, "Ferno" -- which had a successful one-night stand during the Special Events series at Yale Rep last season -- with "Caged . . . with Wog," a piece about the relationship between the captor and the captive. Both works are to be seen alternately for a full run at Yale Rep this season.

There is no shortage of plays with mysterious plots. Consider, for example, "Scotland Road," which Theater Works describes as a Gothic romance about a rescue of a young woman from an iceberg. Consider, too, a mystery playwright, the pseudonymous Jane Martin whose works attract consistent attention at the Actors Theater of Louisville, under the artistic direction of Jon Jory. He will stage "Keely and Du" for Hartford Stage while Susie Fuller will take charge of another Jane Martin play, "Criminal Heart" at Stamford Theater Works.

Those who failed to discover Theatre de la Jeune Lune in "Children of Paradise: Shooting a Dream," a singular event at Yale Rep last season, can come upon the Minneapolis-based company, this time in "The Green Bird," a commedia dell'arte piece about a missing king, an imprisoned queen, an evil queen and two children under a spell.

In addition to the world premiere musical called "The Times," the Long Wharf has announced a brand new play by Arthur Miller. In "Gellburg" Ron Rifkin and Dianne Wiest will be seen as a Jewish couple in Brooklyn in 1938. The Value of Names

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BRIDGEPORT

DOWNTOWN CABARET THEATER, 263 Golden Hill Street, 576-1636.

Through Nov. 6: "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story."

Nov. 12 through Feb. 5: "Me and My Girl."

Feb. 11 through May 7: "Evita."

May 13 through Aug. 6: "A Chorus Line."

DARIEN

CLUB CAROUSEL (formerly Connecticut's Broadway Theater), 65 Tokeneke Road, 655-9660.

Through Nov. 7: "South Pacific" with Jamie Farr as Luther Billis.

EAST HADDAM

GOODSPEED OPERA HOUSE, 873-8668.

Wednesday through Dec. 19: "Promises, Promises," the 1968 Burt Bachrach-Hal David-Neil Simon musical.

GREENWICH

MAXWELL ANDERSON PLAYWRIGHTS SERIES readings at the Greenwich Arts Center, 299 Greenwich Avenue, 847-4124.

Saturday and next Sunday: "Both Your Houses" by Maxwell Anderson.

Nov. 6 and 7: "The Unknowable Killing of Little Boy Blue" by David Boles.

Dec. 4 and 5: "Ruth" and "Faith," two one-act plays by Jonathan Levy.

March 26 and 27: "Thirst for Freedom" by Walt Wilson.

April 23 and 24: "The Other Bed" by Theodore Hirsch.

June 4 and 5: "That Old Feeling" by Paul Nathan.

HARTFORD

COMPANY ONE at the Wadsworth Atheneum, 600 Main Street, 233-4588.

SCRIPT TEAS: Readings in the Museum Cafe at 3 P.M. Free admission.

Oct. 16 to 17: "Sojourner Meets the Man . . . (on the Moon)" by Jake Ann Jones.

March 12 to 13: Three one-act plays by Lisa Jones: "Aunt Aida's Hand," "Stained" and "Ethnic Cleansing."

April 16 to 17: "Beyond the Rainbow" by John Binnie.

MAINSTAGE SEASON: Jan. 27 to Feb. 22: "John Dory" by Craig Wright.

April 5 to 15: An evening of one acts including "Casualties" by Allison West.

THEATER WORKS, 233 Pearl Street, 527-7838.

Oct. 29 to Nov. 28: "Patient A" by Lee Blessing.

Jan. 7 to Feb. 6: "Scotland Road" by Jeffrey Hatcher.

March 11 to April 10: "Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll" by Eric Bogosian.

May 13 to June 12: "The Swan" by Elizabeth Egloff or "The American Plan" by Richard Greenberg.

HARTFORD STAGE COMPANY, 50 Church Street, 527-5151.

Through Nov. 6: "The Merchant of Venice," directed by Mark Lamos.

Nov. 13 to Dec. 18: "Keely and Du" by Jane Martin, directed by Jon Jory.

Jan. 1 to Feb. 5: "The Women" by Clare Boothe Luce, directed by Anne Bogart.

Feb. 12 to March 19: "Present Laughter" by Noel Coward.

March 26 to April 30: "Bailey's Cafe" by Gloria Naylor, directed by Novella Nelson.

May 7 to June 11: "False Admissions" by Pierre Carlet de Marivaux, 18th-century comedy.

NEW HAVEN

LONG WHARF, 222 Sargent Drive, 787-42282.

Tuesday to Nov. 7: World premiere of "The Times" with score by Brad Ross, book and lyrics by Joe Keenan, directed by Gordon Edelstein.

Nov. 16 to Dec. 19: "Sight Unseen" by Donald Margulies, directed by John Tillinger.

Jan. 4 to Jan. 9: "Under Milk Wood" by Dylan Thomas, performed by National Theater of the Deaf of Chester.

Jan. 18 to Feb. 20: To be announced.

March 1 to April 3: World premiere of "Gellburg," by Arthur Miller, directed by John Tillinger.

April 12 to May 8: "Faith Healer," Brian Friel's play in Dublin's Abbey Theater production.

May 17 to June 26: "The Iceman Cometh" by Eugene O'Neill, directed by Arvin Brown, with Al Pacino.

YALE REPERTORY THEATER, York and Chapel, 432-1234.

Oct. 21 to Nov. 6: "Oleanna" by David Mamet, directed by Stan Wojewodski Jr.

Nov. 27 to Dec. 18: "The Green Bird" by Carlo Gozzi, directed by Vincent Gracieux and performed by Theatre de la Jeune Lune of Minneapolis.

Jan. 13 to Feb. 5: World premiere of "The America Play," by Suzan-Lori Parks, directed by Liz Diamond.

Feb. 17 to March 12: "As You Like It," directed by Stan Wojewodski Jr.

March 18 to April 19: Mump and Smoot in "Ferno" in repertory with "Caged . . . with Wog."

SPECIAL EVENTS SERIES: Nov. 11 and 12: Urban Bush Women in performance art at Yale Rep.

March 24, 25 and 26: "Gray's Anatomy," a new monologue by Spalding Gray, at University Theater, 222 York Street.

April 16: "Old Dogs, New Cats," a new work by Eric Bogosian.

SHUBERT PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, 247 College Street, (800) 955-5566.

BROADWAY SERIES: Tuesday through Oct. 17: "Camelot" with Robert Goulet.

Nov. 9 to 21: "The Secret Garden."

Nov. 17 to 19: "The Sound of Music" with Marie Osmond.

Feb. 8 to 20: "The Sisters Rosensweig" by Wendy Wasserstein, with Mariette Hartley.

April 26 to May 8: "Crazy for You" musical with George and Ira Gershwin songs, starring Karen Ziemba and James Brennan.

STAMFORD

STAMFORD THEATER WORKS, Sacred Heart Academy for the Arts, 200 Strawberry Hill Avenue, 359-4414.

Through Oct. 17: "A Piece of My Heart" by Shirley Lauro, directed by Susie Fuller.

Nov. 3 to 21: "Spike Heels" by Theresa Rebeck, directed by Steve Karp.

Feb. 2 to 20: "Belmont Avenue Social Club" by Bruce Graham, directed by Steve Karp.

April 20 to May 8: "Criminal Hearts" by Jane Martin, directed by Susie Fuller.

STAMFORD CENTER FOR THE ARTS, Rich Forum, 307 Atlantic Street, 325-4466.

Oct. 26 to Nov. 7: "Tommy Tune Moonlighting."

Dec. 3 to Jan. 2: "Chinese Coffee" by Ira Lewis in repertory with "Salome" by Oscar Wilde, with Al Pacino starring in both.

March 1 to 13: Christopher Reeve in a play to be announced.

May 10 to 22: "The Sisters Rosensweig" with Mariette Hartley.

RAINBOW THEATER, Leonhardt Studio, Rich Forum, 307 Atlantic Street, 325-4466.

Through Oct. 16: "The Deadly Game" by James Yaffe.

Dec. 2 to 18: "Relatively Speaking" by Alan Ayckbourn.

Feb. 17 to March 5: "Children of Darkness" by Edwin Justus Mayer.

May 5 to 21: "An Italian Straw Hat" 19th-century French farce by Eugene Labiche and Marc-Michel.

STRATFORD

SQUARE ONE THEATER COMPANY, 2422 Main Street, 375-8778.

Nov. 5 through 20: "Painting Churches" by Tina Howe.

Feb. 11 through 26: "Two Rooms" by Lee Blessing.

May 6 through 21: "Hay Fever" by Noel Coward.

Photograph

Anne Pitoniak and Julie Boyd, left, in "Keely and Du," at the Hartford Stage. Evan Pappas and Juliet Lambert, right, in "Promises, Promises," at the Goodspeed Opera House. (Richard Trigg/Actors Theater of Louisville; Diane Sobolewski)

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Details

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