

Ron Pennington

Curtain Calls

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Two weeks ago, I began a review of some of the more memorable events in Los Angeles theatre during 1980. Last week, I got sidetracked by the U.S. Film and Video Festival in Park City, Utah, where it was revealed that Henry Fonda and Charles Durning are scheduled to costar in "Answers," three new one-act plays by Ernest Thompson ("On Golden Pond" and "The West Side Waltz"), at the Westwood Playhouse in April and May. It turned out that this bit of information was a little premature, however. This project is being discussed and there have been negotiations with the Westwood Playhouse, but no contracts have been signed at this time. . . . Another show that is being discussed for the Westwood Playhouse is "An Evening With Georgia Brown and Her Friends." This was given a work-in-progress presentation at the Los Angeles Actors' Theatre last September and it was one of the true delights of 1980. . . . LAAT also provided several other outstanding evenings last year, particularly the West Coast premiere of Steve Carter's "Eden," which featured excellent performances under the skilled direction of Edmund J. Cambridge, and Melodie Johnson's "The Lady of the House," which was one of the best new scripts developed in Los Angeles during the year. The latter offered a sensational performance by Nan Martin.

"E^vita," which last week celebrated its first anniversary at the Shubert Theatre, was once again the most exciting event of the year. . . . One of the more encouraging developments of 1980 was the fact that the Provisional Theatre, which has long been one of Los Angeles' more impressive experimental theatre groups, finally presented a regular local season at the Embassy Theatre. "Still Time" and "Inching Through the Everglades" were two of the better productions of the year and a special award should go to the anonymous donor who came through to allow the Provisional to complete its first Equity season. . . . Rounding out the list of Equity productions that helped brighten 1980 were Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford's provocative musical, "I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road" (which is continuing at the Huntington Hartford Theatre), and the elegant new revival of "My Fair Lady," starring Rex Harrison and Cheryl Kennedy, which is as fresh and entertaining as it was when first pro-

duced 25 years ago (this continues through March 8 at the Pantages Theatre).

There was an abundance of activity in the Equity-waiver scene last year — according to my records, there were a total of 348 Equity-waiver productions — and one of the more outstanding efforts in this area was Ron Sossi's superb staging of Bertolt Brecht's "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" at the Odyssey Theatre. This imaginative production benefited from excellent ensemble work, with especially noteworthy individual performances from Beth Hogan and Franklyn Seales. The Odyssey also scored with its production of Elizabeth Swados' "Nightclub Cantata," directed by Bill Castellino, and its presentation of the Mabou Mines. The latter was in association with the Mark Taper Forum and Lee Breuer's "A Prelude to Death in Venice," performed by Bill Raymond and a three-foot-high puppet, was brilliant. . . . Another riveting performance was given by Joseph Chaikin in "Tongues" and "Savage-Love," two performances pieces on which he collaborated with Sam Shepard, which was offered at the Mark Taper Forum Lab. . . . Among the new plays viewed here, Patrick Meyers' "Feedlot," which was given its West Coast premiere at the Back Alley Theatre, was the most impressive. . . . Other noteworthy Equity-waiver productions included the Cast Theatre's "Working," which was most impressive due to the strong ensemble work and the manner in which director Scott Green and choreographers John and Cissy King utilized the small stage to amazing advantage. . . . Joseph Stern and William Devane scored with their Actors for Themselves production of David Mamet's "A Life in the Theatre," skillfully directed by David Birney and beautifully performed by Stephen Elliott and Bruce Davison at the Matrix Theatre. . . . Los Angeles finally got an Equity dinner theatre during 80, Scott Hardy's Dinner Theatre in Glendale, which made an impression with Rick Talcove's "Ping Pong" (which was developed in an Equity-waiver production in 1976). Vera Miles helped make this evening a success and she received particularly good support from George McDaniel. . . . Now, on to even better things in 1981.

(Ron Pennington has been reviewing theatre for *The Hollywood Reporter* since 1971.)