

LOS ANGELES
City News
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A handy entertainment and information guide

On Stage in L.A.

"Found A Peanut"

YOU CAN BE A KID AGAIN

By Jenee Gill
 Staff Writer

They're not all too sure that they want. A younger sister threatens "to tell Mom," bullies badger them for the money, and the two boys turn against each other. The story is not all too typical, but the children's reactions and feelings are. They have questions and fears about death. They don't all treat each other nicely and discover money brings out the worst in them. Sound familiar to any adults out there?

"Found A Peanut's" success is due to an excellent cast and truly effective direction by Michael Arabian. For anyone wary of the idea of adults portraying children, this production will dispel all qualms. These "children" move, act, and behave sincerely. Only their physical stature is a reminder of their adulthood, and we see just how similar children and adults can be. "Found A Peanut" is a funny, touching and thoroughly entertaining production suitable for children and adults alike.

The production runs through September 21 with performances Wednesday through Sunday evenings at 8 p.m. There are post-production discussions on Wednesdays, and Sunday matinees are at 3 p.m. Ticket prices range from \$13 to \$15. A special family discount is offered—half price for all young people (recommended for ages 10 and up) accompanied by an adult. "Found A Peanut" plays at the Back Alley Theatre at 15231 Burbank Boulevard in Burbank. For additional information call (818) 780-2240.



Scott (played by Jeffrey Rogers) tells Melody (Lycia Naff) all about the way things really are in the grown-up world, while timid Jeff Schmalowitz (William DeAcutis) looks on.

Contrary to what most adults would undoubtedly like to believe, childhood and adulthood are not altogether different. Donald Margulies' humorous and insightful play, "Found A Peanut," puts an end to this myth. Casting adult actors as children in a seemingly typical kid-like scenario, "Found A Peanut" eliminates the gap between the child and the adult. The result is a revealing look at the close parallels between the worlds of kids and grown-ups.

As one becomes accustomed to the prematurely busy eight-year-olds and deep-voiced boys on stage, it also becomes apparent that these "children's" lives are not all that more simplistic or innocent than any adult's. Though the plot is truly a child's fantasy, it is brought into realistic perspective by recognizable grown-up issues. Two boys discover a buried bag of money while digging a grave for a dead bird, and suddenly they are faced with a responsibility

"Found A Peanut"—Through Sept. 21. A play for children and adults alike. Directed by Michael Arabian and written by New York playwright Donald Margulies, this evocative and innovative play features adult actors portraying children. In it, we see how the child's world—with its fears, joys, and rivalries—is a mirror of the adult world to come.

Theater
 Review

Found a Peanut

by Lenore Blossom

Found a 'Peanut, Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys, Wednesday through Sunday evenings at 8 p.m.; Sunday matinees at 3 p.m. \$13 & \$15 with special family discounts and half price for youngsters (recommended age 10 to 18) accompanying an adult. For information call (818) 780-2240.

Are adults really children in larger bodies or vice versa? It's the chicken or the egg all over

again; which came first, the child or the adult? The neighborhood gang at the Back Alley Theatre offers a nostalgic if often painful glimpse back in *Found a Peanut*.

This delightful allegory by playwright Donald Margulies is a sentimental journey back to the future for adults and a peer group adventure for any young people in the audience.

Found a Peanut is an hour and a half one-act beautifully staged on Rich Rose's stupendous set, a Brooklyn backyard in 1962 on the last day of summer vacation.

A talented adult ensemble convincingly portrays children ranging in age from 5 to 14. The performances are so finely tuned the heart alternately aches and rejoices as we become acutely

aware of the adults these children will become.

Jeff (William DeAcutis) is the sensitive Jewish boy already tagged "faggot" by the neighborhood bullies Ernie (Ben Mittleman) and Shane (Kenny D'Aquila). Mike (David O. Cameron) is his best friend who is stronger than he realizes and together they bury a bit of their childhood (symbolized by a dead bird) at summer's end.

Playwright Margulies approaches a slice-of-life scenario in a difficult manner. Adults playing children could easily become embarrassing, but Michael Arabian's direction of six well-cast actors never seems forced.

Margulies' dialogue is a sensitive use of childish prattle which openly exposes the fears that continue to haunt in adulthood. All six characters are both selfish and generous of heart, afraid as well as courageous and each has that remarkable quality we lose as we grow old, the ability to forgive and forget.

Here, in one backyard foray is the search for love, power, wealth and acceptance so thinly disguised in these children that we delight in human nature, once again believing the struggle is the victory.

Found a Peanut is a rare treat for children and their parents and even includes a discussion group after Wednesday evening performances moderated by child psychologists and family therapists.

Critics Corner

Small Print
 Messenger

July 11, 1986

ARTS Music/Theater/Books/Shows

Shaner on The Arts

● *Found A Peanut*, by Donald Margulies, ventures into the backyard as a group of grown ups play a bunch of kids, making the point that human behavior is ageless and that fear, need, love, hate, loyalty, greed, insecurity, anger, rivalry and all those natural motivators are bred in the bone, carried in the blood. Smashing performances by all, with especial accolades to Lycia Naff, Ben Mittleman and Leslie Jordan. A play to be enjoyed, on different levels, by both children and their parents. Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd. Van Nuys. Wed thru Sun at 8. Sun. Mat. at 3. Post performance discussion Weds. thru 8/10. 818/780-2240.

● *Johnny Johnson* is a Kurt Weill/Paul Green collaboration written in 1936, soon after Weill's arrival in America. It sings against war through the voice of Johnny Johnson, a Jimmy Stewart simulacrum who puts aside his own life to promote peace between nations. At three hours, in a very hot theatre, the musical is far too long and the songs far from memorable. A cast of around 30, doubling and tripling roles, does a valiant job, ably and funnily directed by Ron Sossi, but the material is finally too simplistic to tune with today. Odyssey Theatre, 12111 Ohio Avenue. Wed. thru Sat. 8 P.M. Sun. 7 P.M. Mats. 7/13 and 7/27 at 3 P.M. Thru 8/3. 213/828-1626.

● *L'Amante Anglaise*, by Marguerite Duras, is simply an interrogation of a man and a woman—his wife, who has confessed to the brutal slaying and dismembering of her cousin. A haunting exploration into the mechanism of a marriage and the psyches of two strayed souls. Grace Zabriskie illuminates the stage with the essence of woman and of madness, or is it exalted sanity? Hal Bokar reveals a crawling subconscious under the low key interrogation of an excitingly warm, empathetic Paul Verdier. This earnest waiver house is doing a smashing job of making the esoteric theatrically available, with no tip of the hat to 'Hollywood' or commercialism. Stages, 1540 N McCadden Pl. Mon. 8 P.M. thru 8/4. 213/465-1010.

Shaner on Arts is from the pen of Madeleine Shaner, a native of Britain, who has been involved in the arts for the past 30 years.