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STAGE WATCH

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highest level."

For director Greenwald, who has been working in film and television for the last six years, "having my passions so intensely aroused has been tremendously exciting. Half the play is subtext," he said. "We've been looking for ways to clarify that. Some of Richard's rage should turn people off, but, as the play unfolds, what seemed unacceptable becomes at least understandable—whether you accept it or not. We went into this knowing we'd be touching exposed nerves. We've seen a lot of grown men cry."

Knee-deep in rewrites, Thompson emphasized: "This isn't just a labor of love, it's my essential play. It comes from a point of real anger and pain. Some plays, like 'West Side Waltz,' come from an effort at a certain style. This one's from the gut."

"It's not only about the death of a child; it's about dealing with loss. There's a terrible line: 'Face it, embrace it, erase it.' That's not merely glib. It's a sociological statement."
But does it work?
"We're making a four-scene play into a three-scene play," Thompson replied, "which won't mean much to anyone who hasn't seen it, but the momentum that builds up in the second half of the piece is almost unstoppable. Again, it's a question of balance."
"This play is not unhopeful."

What went wrong with "The Wrong Box" that prompted its closure after its Nov. 20 preview?
"There is no one thing that would suffice as an answer," said Matthew Rushton of the Catalina Production Group, a producer (with Roger Berlind) of the musical that had a dry run at the Cast Theatre last year.

"It was problems in all areas. Some aspects were wonderful, some weren't working at all."
Economics also forced the issue. This latest production was mounted at the Gene Dynarski Theatre under an Equity contract—and the option on the material had to be renewed by Dec. 1. "When it became clear we couldn't solve all the problems in the here and now," Rushton said, "we passed."

Elizabeth (Betsy) Forsythe Hailey's "A Woman of Independent Means" at the Back Alley is strutting her independence. After keeping critics at bay for weeks, the show, featuring Barbara Rush, will be letting them in Dec. 9, 10 and 12. Encouragement to do so has come

chiefly from audience reaction—so positive that the one-woman play, adapted by Hailey from her novel of the same name, has been extended to Jan. 20.

If the news about Betsy is all good, the news about her playwright husband Oliver Hailey is both bad and good. The bad news is that Oliver, who had been running the playwrights' unit at the Back Alley for two years, has resigned. He and Back Alley producing co-director Laura Zucker cited classic—and similar—reasons for the parting of their ways: growing artistic differences. Bill Froug of UCLA will take over Hailey's duties.

"Our differences really go back to '24 Hours,'" Zucker said, referring to an earlier bill of one-acts. "I've always had a lot of regard for Oliver, and that does not change. He just felt our choices were not choices he could support any longer."

"We have divergent tastes," Hailey echoed, "and we handle people differently. The parting made me sad, but I have too good a time working with playwrights to stay away from it. I'm lining up something else."

The good news is that Hailey's play "Tryptich," done at UCLA in 1979, will open at Chicago's Apollo Theater on Jan. 4. The Hailey family leaves for the Windy City Christmas Day on Amtrak.

Said Oliver Hailey: "We'll pretend it's the Twentieth Century Limited and fantasize a lot."

Inside Moves: "Get Happy" has extended again at the Pilot Theatre (through Dec. 18) and would like to move to the Westwood Playhouse after Jan McKellen's stint in "Acting Shakespeare." The interest was confirmed by the Westwood's Norman Malbaum who added, "The producers are actively raising the funding. They hope to get back to me by the end of this week."

Also interested in the Westwood at some future date is "Bluefish Cove," which has a new co-producer aboard, Jerry Wheeler. A movie deal is reportedly imminent—and a possible move to San Francisco's Alcazar. Stay tuned.

And speaking of the Westwood, guess where "Movie Star," one of its long-running hits, is surfacing next? At the La Mirada Civic—a long way from Broadway. . . .

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Woman of Independent Means Opening Announced



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