

Shaner on The Arts

• **Italian American Reconciliation**, written and directed by John Patrick Shanley. Huey needs his soul back. When he divorced Janice, she kept it. Unable to recommit to the fiery Teresa, he sends friend Aldo (Alden—get it?) to recover it for him so he can get on with his life. The premise is a simple one and as complex as everyday life, and as funny and as sad and as ludicrous and as tragic and as deeply painful. Shanley investigates love with a sharp probe and a strong microscope. The words need trimming in the interests of theatricality, but they're important enough that we should hear them, especially channeled through this remarkable cast. As Aldo, Joe Pantoliano lives, a sensitive, strong, warming monument to male bafflement. Patti D'Arbanville as Janice, a latter day Juliet on her urban balcony, pushing love away, gives a super performance, tough and touching. The writing of Huey's role is not as true as the rest—this isn't a very likable character—but Leo Rossi eventually takes command of it. Nichelle Nichols as the black Aunt May, brought into Little Italy by marriage, triumphs as the voice of experience painfully gained. Elizabeth Peña (Teresa) is hot and angry, sweet at heart. This is a person. The actors connect as actors and as the characters they play in this tidy and intelligent production, where the actors are their own stage hands and the show is a lesson in staging for small theaters. Shanley has recreated a neighborhood and an extended family that we ultimately all belong to. I could have wished the play had more shape, the better to contain all its elements, but meanwhile I'll settle for some very good theater, lovingly presented. (Gnu Theatre, 10426 Magnolia Bl., N. Hollywood. Thurs.-Sun. 8:00. Indef. 818/0508-5344.)

• **Boys and Girls/Men and Women**, written and directed by Gina Wendkos. A play about the sexual mores that are inculcated by parents and peers and replayed throughout a lifetime. A kind of sexual "Chorus Line" that can be viewed on several levels, not the least being for its pure entertainment value. Here there are a lot of laughs and some good dirty fun. We can laugh at Brian (Peter Berg) and Scott (Ron Cogan) and Esther (a terrific Yearly Smith)—16-year-olds who want to get there while their hormones are still raging, but don't quite know how. At a deeper level, where we look for meaning, there's the nudge of recognition—"You better believe it." The mating game, in all its aspects, is funny when it's not tragic. At 15%, David (Darren Modder) honestly believes if you don't use it, you lose it. Eddie (James Di Stefano) told him so. At 30-odd, the game has changed. . . or has it? What was funny is less so. Scatology has turned into vulgarity. Eddie hasn't changed, except his name—he calls himself Vinnie now. He still knows the score and insists on broadcasting it. Pals, Alan Abelew and Kurt Fuller listen. And Gloria (Kathy Bell Denton), Anna (Jan Lewis) and Stella (Janet Borrus) have learned the rules of the game. But comes a time when no one wants to play any more. Wendkos writes honestly, but the truth can get graphic and at this socio-economic level, amorality and vulgarity are spelled the same. Buyer beware. Acting is all around excellent, direction is fast and imaginative, multi-dimensional performance art by Wendkos is superb. Language, on a scale of A to Z is very definitely XXX. (Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, 12111 Ohio Ave., W. L.A. Thurs.-Sat. 8:00; Sun. 7:00. Indef. 213/826-1626.)

• **Early Girl** by Caroline Kava, directed by James Gardner/Allan Miller. The play is about seven "working girls" in a house of prostitution, somewhere "out there." The action takes place in the kitchen and sitting room provided for the girls' use between tricks. Despite some foul language, one instance of full nudity, some skimpy bathing suits and the suggestibility of the situation—all those men offstage waiting to do unmentionable things to these pretty young women—there's nothing titillating about the play. This could be a college dorm or the coffee room in a factory. There's some business going on offstage—a lot of dollar bills tucked into bras, running for vibrators, screams and whips—but not much happening on stage. Seven pretty girls and not an honest performance among them. . . it's hard to credit and maybe the fault lies elsewhere. The play goes nowhere; the dramaturgy is deeply flawed; conflicts are contrived and unbelievable; situations are set up on faulty premises; hysteria mounts to the point of total inaudibility and motivations are murky. If any interest is to be generated in this subject matter, it should come from the internal lives of these women, their battles with conscience, the desperation that has driven them to this debased life. None of this is evident in this shallow play. These girls sprang fully grown from the head of Barbie doll. Back to the drawing board, Caroline. (Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Bl., Van Nuys. Thurs.-Sat. 8:00; Sun 2:00 & 7:00. Thru 9/27. 818/780-2240.)

Modelaine Shaner is the author of this exclusive report

Sports Slants

By Sholom Mayven

Volleyball Takes Center Court

AN INTERESTING form of volleyball will return to Los Angeles for the next three weeks. It is **Team Cup Volleyball 1987**, and it will showcase American players of international stature in six-man unique scoring. It is too complicated to explain in words, so come on out to the fabulous Forum and see for yourself.

The four teams participating will be headed by captains who conducted a draft selection, so the teams will be evenly matched, promising a great show for spectators.

The captains are Karch Kiraly, Steve Simmons, Dusty Dvorak and Sinjin Smith. Members of their squads will come from the top pro beach players and from the United States national team.

Competition will take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays—Sept. 8 and 10, 15 and 17, and 22 and 24. First match each evening will begin at 6:30 p.m. For further information, call 213/419-3275.

A postscript. . . You will note that volleyball has made the big time because

of the sponsors of the tournament: Maui an sportswear, Sheratels, ASICS Tiger and the Sports Cha

To continue with ball, the 1987 US Competition is scheduled for Oct. 13-17. Parting will be the national teams of the United States (number one in the world), the U.S.S.R. (number two), Argentina (number three) and France (number four).

Mary Dunphy, on from Pepperdine University is coach of the team. Doug Beal played with the U.S. team in the 1969 and 1971 Pan American Games, and coached the U.S. gold medal team in the 1984 Olympics. He is the director of the United States national program.

The American team has taken four gold medals in the past three years: the 1985 World Championships, 1986 World Championships and 1987 Pan-Am Games.

The Soviets have been a top contender in the world scene, with a record in recent years.

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