

Entertaining Spirit in Little Musicals

By DON SHIRLEY

Most of the highlights of my year of reviewing were in the genre of little musicals.

The year began with a spirited revival of the Bock-Harnick trilogy of one-act musicals, "**The Apple Tree**," at Long Beach's Studio Theatre: a production that treated the show's big themes and small frivolities with equal conviction and success.

The revue "**Bittersuite: Songs of Experience**" appeared in June and is still playing (after cast changes) at the Back Alley. Composer **Elliot Weiss** and lyricist **Michael Champagne** write tart and tuneful songs that occasionally sound alike but more often paint wickedly precise sketches of people growing older

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but not necessarily wiser. **Rick Roemer's** staging is virtually seamless.

Another little musical, "**Angry Housewives,**" wasn't much of a show, but it almost redeemed itself with the funniest single scene I saw all year. A few of the numbers from the "**Blame It on the Movies**" revues almost did the same. "**Hair**" finally found its way at the Heliotrope, though it took two openings before this production got it right.

A couple of worthy but seldom-seen Broadway musicals found their way to the outskirts of Los Angeles: "**Baby**" at the San Bernardino Civic Light Opera and "**It's a Bird . . . It's a Plane . . . It's Superman!**" at the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts. Both deserve bigger and better productions in the city itself.

Not one new play I reviewed this year would receive my wholehearted endorsement. Milcha Sanchez-Scott's "**Roosters**" at Los Angeles Theatre Center and David Michael Erickson's "**Appetite**" at the Cast came closer than most. James Johnston's "**The Goldfish Bowl**" was a surprisingly scabrous barroom one-act, at the Mise en Scene.

Michael Holmes' adaptation of "**Acting: The First Six Lessons,**" at Chandler Studio, was a fascinating adaptation of material that isn't particularly stage worthy. **ComedySportz**, "**Hamlet Improvised**" and **Thin Ice** offered some new angles on the improv genre, more or less in that order of success.

A few solo performances broke

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Valerie Miller and Christopher Holder in "Bittersuite: Songs of Experience" at the Back Alley.

through the solipsism and tedium that too often paralyze the form. The most successful was **Kedric Robin Wolfe's "Let Me Explain"** at the Wallenboyd, which is now part of his ongoing "Flights of Fear and Fancy" at the Odyssey. Ralph Hunt's "**Two Alone**" at Stages has some exceptional moments.

Revivals: Room for Theater closed with graceful stagings of Preston Sturges' "**Strictly Dishonorable**" and Elmer Rice's "**Dream Girl.**" The ongoing "**How the Other Half Loves,**" at the Tiffany, features peerless work by **Paxton Whitehead, Yardley Smith** and **Ron Boussom.** **Rick Cluchey's** staging of Samuel Beckett's brief "**Come and Go,**" at Ensemble Studio Theatre, was haunting.