

The 1989 Lineup on Stage

Playwrights Strive to Leave Their Marks on Local Theatrical Scene

By CHRISTINE ZIAYA

William Shakespeare's words will ring through the San Fernando Valley, as will the words of David Mamet and a host of lesser-known playwrights ready—and hoping—to make their mark during the 1989 theatrical season.

Over the next few months, Valley theaters will stage a variety of thespian fare ranging from classic to modern, famous to unknown.

The Gnu Theater in Burbank opens the year with Mamet's critically acclaimed "American Buffalo," a play that opened on Broadway in 1977 with Robert Duvall, Kenneth McMillan and John Savage. The Gnu's production of this comedy-spiced drama will offer Dennis Christopher, Robert Costanzo and Joe Spano.

"I feel strongly about the show," said Jeff Seymour, the theater's artistic director. "The play is done by one of America's best playwrights. Some people consider this play Mamet's best. It's a nice story about friendship and loyalty."

The play's painstakingly arranged set includes hundreds of knickknacks and paraphernalia, and 700 pounds of concrete poured to form a set of stairs. The sound of rain pouring down on the steps in the final scene adds an element of reality—a fine point that Seymour deliberately strove for.

The play opened Thursday and is expected to run through February.

"We've been lucky here. People like the space. Actors like the accommodations," Seymour said of the 50-seat theater.

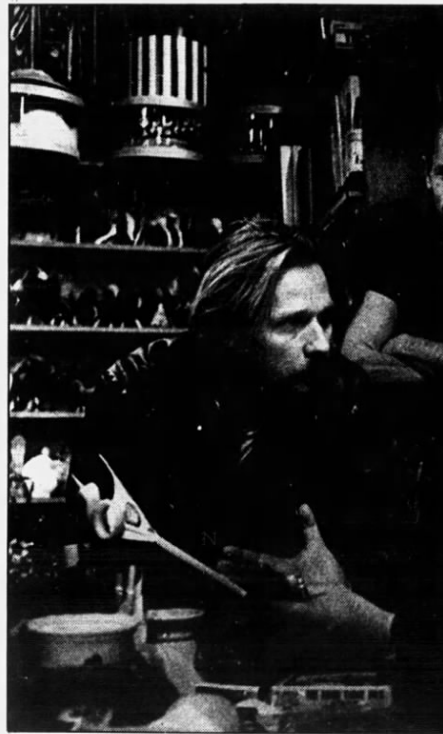
The Actors Alley Repertory Theater in Sherman Oaks has also chosen a proven success to begin its season. Shakespeare's "Richard III" is set to open Feb. 3 and run through March 18.

Twenty-three actors will appear in this epic melodrama, with some of them playing several roles to fill out the play's 65 characters. In Shakespeare's day, men played all the parts. In Sherman Oaks, several of the repertory theater's actresses will play male roles.

Extensive sets were needed as well, with Chez Cherry designing various castle chambers and a battleground. Jordan Charney, the theater's artistic director, said he decided to take on Shakespeare because he believes that small theaters "have a responsibility to present that which you wouldn't get a chance to see somewhere else."

The three-hour play will present a challenge to both his actors and the audience.

"The show is worth the investment," Charney said. "Seeing it may open people up to a whole new experience."



Dennis Christopher, Joe Spano and Robert Costanzo, from left above, are featured in "American Buffalo" at the Gnu Theater. Walter Raymond, right, is King Richard III in the Actors Alley Repertory Theater's production of "Richard III."

At the Back Alley Theatre, producer Laura Zucker is gearing up for the Los Angeles premiere of John Olive's "The Voice of the Prairie." The play is set to preview Feb. 23 to March 5, with the official run March 9 to May 14.

"The Voice of the Prairie" has had some 15 productions nationwide and earned critical acclaim in its 1987 West Coast premiere at the Old Globe Theater in San Diego. Bob Clark, known for directing the films "A Christmas Story" and "Tribute," will direct this version.

Set in the early days of radio, "The Voice of the Prairie" delves into the spirit of entrepreneurship and

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