

Awards

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The 21st Annual L.A. Weekly Theater Awards Nominees

ENSEMBLE

→ *The Conception*, Oxblood Theater Company at Glaxa Studios

The House of Bernarda Alba, Deaf West Theater Company at the Ventura Court Theater

The Illusion, Namaste Theater Company at the Actors' Gang Theater

The Rocky Horror Show, Tiffany Theater

Terminal, Non-Prophet Hatching Company at Theatre/Theater

LIGHTING DESIGN

Ken Booth, *The Rocky Horror Show*, Tiffany Theater

Aaron Francis/Norman Gilmore, *Burning Chrome*, Sacred Fools Theater Company at the Heliotrope Theater

Matthew O. O'Donnell, *The Living*, Colony Studio Theater

David Robkin, *Will Strip for Food*, Glaxa Studios/Tamarind Theater

→ Rand Ryan, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Deaf West Theater Company at the Ventura Court Theater

Ron Scarborough, *The Conception*, Oxblood Theater Company at Glaxa Studios

John Zamora, *My Sister in This House*, Hole Brain Productions at the McCadden Place Theater

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THE 21ST ANNUAL L.A. WEEKLY THEATER AWARDS

THE EVENING'S AWARD RECIPIENTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

PRODUCTION OF THE YEAR:

The Greeks, Odyssey Theater Ensemble

REVIVAL PRODUCTION OF THE YEAR:

The Adding Machine, Sacred Fools Theater Company at the Heliotrope Theater

MUSICAL OF THE YEAR:

Medea: The Musical!, Hudson Mainstage Theater

LEADING FEMALE PERFORMANCE:

Bernadette Sullivan, *Scenes From an Execution*, Zoo District

LEADING MALE PERFORMANCE (TIE):

Loren Bass, *Othello*, Pasadena Shakespeare Company;
Leland Crooke, *900 Oneonta*, Odyssey Theater Ensemble

COMEDY DIRECTION:

Rainn Wilson, *The New Bozena*, Hudson Mainstage Theater

ONE-ACT DIRECTION:

Bjørn Johnson, *Dutchman*, Authentic Company at the Theater at the Improv

ENSEMBLE:

The House of Bernarda Alba, Deaf West Theater Company at the Ventura Court Theater

COMEDY ENSEMBLE:

Eight Ways To Meet Your Neighbor, Buzzworks Theater Company at the Tamarind Theater

SOLO PERFORMANCE:

Steven Berkoff, *Shakespeare's Villains*, Odyssey Theater

PRODUCTION DESIGN:

Reefer Madness!, Hudson Backstage Theater

SUPPORTING FEMALE PERFORMANCE:

Beth Hogan, *The Greeks*, Odyssey Theater Ensemble

SUPPORTING MALE PERFORMANCE:

Jon Cryer, *900 Oneonta*, Odyssey Theater Ensemble

COMEDY PERFORMANCE BY A MALE (TIE):

Nicholas Gilhool, *Medea: The Musical!*, Hudson Mainstage Theater;
Chris Wells, *Harry Thaw Hates Everybody*, Indecent Exposure Theater Company at the Los Angeles Theater Center

COMEDY PERFORMANCE BY A FEMALE:

Elsa Wolthausen, *Medea: The Musical!*, Hudson Mainstage Theater

ONE-ACT PERFORMANCE BY A MALE:

Steve White, *Dutchman*, Authentic Company at the Theater at the Improv

COSTUME DESIGN (TIE):

Robert A. Prior/Teresa Shea, *Voluptuous Madness*, Fabulous Monsters at Highways;
Salvatore Salamone, *Tagteam Lovefest 2000*, Actors' Gang

LIGHTING DESIGN:

Ron Scarborough, *The Conception*, Oxblood Theater Company at Glaxa Studios

SET DESIGN:

Robert A. Prior, *A Fairy Tale*, Actors' Gang

MAKEUP:

Marie Del Prete, *Ugly's First World*, Actors' Gang

SOUND DESIGN:

John Zalewski, *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, Evidence Room at the Ivy Substation

ONE-ACT PERFORMANCE BY A FEMALE:

April White, *Dutchman*, Authentic Company at the Theater at the Improv

PLAY WRITING (TIE):

John Fisher, *Medea: The Musical!*, Hudson Mainstage Theater;
Paul Mullin, *Louis Slotin Sonata*, Circle X Theater Company at the Hollywood Court Theater

ONE-ACT PLAY WRITING:

Alyson Croft, *Cellophane City*, Blue Sphere Alliance at the Lex Theater

DIRECTION (TIE):

Bart DeLorenzo, *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, Evidence Room at the Ivy Substation;
Wesley Walker, *The Conception*, Oxblood Theater Company at Glaxa Studios

ORIGINAL MUSIC (TIE):

Golden State Klezmers, *Kabbalah*, Blue Sphere Alliance at the Lex Theater;
Jef Bek, *Scenes from an Execution*, Zoo District

CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:

Ellen Geer

QUEEN OF THE ANGELS AWARD:

Polly Warfield

SPECIAL COMMENDATION FOR PROPS:

Stan Freitag/Darrin W. Jaques, *Burning Chrome*, Sacred Fools Theater Company at the Heliotrope Theater

SPECIAL COMMENDATION FOR VIDEOGRAPHY:

Adam Soch, *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*, Evidence Room at the Ivy Substation

Reviews

Los Angeles Times



FRIDAY

MAY 14, 1999

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Calendar

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

A 'House' Divided but Built on Solid Ground

Theater Beat

In Deaf West Theatre's production of Federico García Lorca's "The House of Bernarda Alba" at the Ventura Court Theatre, Phyllis Frelich is a solid, oppressive presence as the sadistically strict mother, Bernarda, and Deanne Bray's earthy, rebellious Adela sparks a suitable challenge.

Their fiery portrayals blaze much brighter than the rest of the cast. Linda Bove is both comical and no-nonsense as Bernarda's servant, but as the other daughters, Antoinette Abbamonte, Margaret Arnold, Freda Norman and Cami Varela, are overwhelmed by Frelich and Bray.

Unlike the Deaf West productions that mix signing actors onstage with speaking actors, this production has only one onstage actor who speaks, the senile grandmother (April Shawhan). Voice actors Lynn Milgrim, Dashia Quintero, Madeleine Weissenberg, Jennifer Snipstad and Laurie Woolery sit in balconies above the stage, providing voice interpretation of the English translation by Michael Dewell and Carmen Zapata.

This sounds daunting, yet under Larry Arrick's direction, Bray's every movement expresses carnal liberation and the sensual joy of love. Bray and her voice interpreter, Snipstad, merge into one powerful entity. Frelich, who has a more understated role, still connects with the audience and with voice actor Milgrim.

Yet without an ensemble capable of rising to the same level, you don't feel the immensity of the tragedy in the end, the horribly repressive future that will, ironically in this production, be marked by silence.

On Bob Steinberg's hacienda courtyard set, the barred windows suggest both protection and a jail. The House of Bernarda is a place where good reputation and social status imprison, resulting in women desperate for love or lust.

—JANA J. MONJI

• "The House of Bernarda Alba," Ventura Court Theatre, 12417 Ventura Court, Studio City. Thursdays-Saturdays, 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7 p.m. Ends June 13. \$12-\$20. (818) 762-2773; (818) 762-2782 (TTY). Running time: 2 hours, 15 minutes.

The House of Bernarda Alba at Deaf West Theatre

By PATTAYLOR

STUDIO CITY—As I've told you in the past, being in the audience seeing theatre performed by non-hearing actors is a mind-blowing, rewarding experience! Deaf West Theatre, operating in Hollywood for years, is moving over to the Valley...lucky for us! Their North Hollywood Theatre will open in the Fall, but for this play they are using the Ventura Court Theatre.

This production is a dark, interesting period piece, written by Federico Garcia Lorca, and translated to English by Carmen Zapata and Michael Dewell. A turn of the century drama, set in rural Spain, we meet Bernarda, a dominant, wealthy widow and her five repressed, love-starved daughters. Sheltered totally from the outside world by their mother, sibling rivalry *explodes*, when the eldest is betrothed to a handsome man.

Under the focused direction of Larry Arrick, this compelling cast of nine women, and their interpreters, give awe-inspiring performances.

Stunning costuming handled by Maro Parian and appropriately minimalistic set by Bob Steinberg, lend well to the mood of the tale.

As Bernarda, Phyllis Frelich gave a chillingly strong performance as the strict family head. This fine actress originated, and won a Tony award for the Marlee Matlin (who was in the audience opening night) role in "Children of a Lesser God."

Linda Bove was impressively multi-dimensional as the family caregiver/maid. Bove is in her 28th year as "Linda the Librarian" on

Sesame Street.

Freda Norman, another oft working deaf actress, was terrific as the betrothed daughter.

Wonderful performances also by Deanne Bray, as the sexy, high-spirited sister, Missy Keast as the maid, and April Shawhan as the deranged grandmother.

The other sisters played by Antoinette Abbamonte, Margaret Arnold and Cami Varela, did great jobs as well.

Honestly, there wasn't a single weak performance!! All were mesmerizing! The voices/interpreters sitting just offstage, do an impressive job of synchronizing their voices to the actors' gestures. A difficult task, I'd imagine. Especially excellent this show were Lynn Milgrim (the voice of Bernarda) and Jennifer Shipstad (the voice for three characters). The other translators include Laurie Woolery, Madeline Weissenberg, and Dasha Quintero.

We then went to *Mezzo Mondo* nearby for an opening night bash. It was a unique trip to "party" with mostly deaf people... Great food, good wine, and believe it or not...great conversation, with the help of attending translators. Interesting observation...just as hearing folks at a party lose inhibitions with a drink or two, I noticed after an hour or so, that deaf party guests were signing three times as fast as earlier! We had a ball!

Every Dear West production I've seen/reviewed, has been fascinating and commendable. The work they do is amazing! Treat yourself to a new life experience and catch one of their shows...

Running Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm; Sundays at 2 and 7 pm through June 13 at the Ventura Court Theatre, 12417 Ventura Court (one block North of Ventura) in Studio City. For tickets call Voice (818) 762-2773 or TTY (818) 762-2782.

Wednesday, May 19, 1999



NEWS

Signs of the Times

Tony Award-winning Phyllis Frelich and Linda Bove team up for Deaf West's production of *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

by Laura Weinert

As the first professional resident Sign Language theatre west of the Mississippi, Deaf West Theatre continues to break new ground with its current production of Federico Garcia Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*. Adapted to be performed in American Sign Language with simultaneous voice interpretation, the production will feature actresses Phyllis Frelich and Linda Bove.

Frelich may be best known to audiences for her Tony Award-winning performance as Sarah in Mark Medoff's *Children of a Lesser God*, a role she originated at the Mark Taper Forum. She later went on to receive an Emmy nomination for Hallmark Hall of Fame's *Love Is Never Silent*. Linda Bove is marking her 30th year as Linda the Librarian on *Sesame Street*, having won an Ovation award for Deaf West's production of Euripide's *Medea* (in '95). She also starred in the Broadway and national touring companies of *Children of a Lesser God*. Founding members of the National Theatre of the Deaf, organized in 1967, Frelich and Bove went on to join fellow NTD alumnus Ed Waterstreet at Los Angeles' Deaf West Theatre, founded in 1991, which has been innovative in its attempts to find ways of producing plays that will appeal to both deaf and hearing audiences.

Set in rural Spain at the turn of the century, *The House of Bernarda Alba* tells the story of five emotionally repressed sisters who are kept prisoner from the outside world by their domineering mother. Deaf West has adapted the play so that in the production the characters themselves are deaf. "I think that the characters being deaf will actually enhance the play," Frelich said in a recent interview with *Back Stage West*. "We hope that the audience will see that the family is really living in a prison. They're afraid of what the neighbors are going to think about them."

Linda Bove elaborated, "We can use our own life experiences, because deaf people have been so isolated. We understood the feeling of isolation, we can relate to that."

Frelich and Bove described the process of adapting Carmen Zapata's English translation of *The House of Bernarda Alba* into American Sign Language. "We have people we call ASL masters," explained Bove. "We have one to three, depending on the amount of work needed. They work one-on-one with the actors to try to help them translate each line conceptually. It's sort of like having a vocal coach. We encourage the actors to make their own choices for the signs, to find the equivalent."

"Any good play will work for both hearing and deaf actors,"



Photo by Levon Parlan

Phyllis Frelich and Linda Bove in *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

Frelich added. "We're all human, we have our humanity in common, and so that's really where we work from."

In the current production, the actresses are working with veteran Broadway, film, and television director Larry Arrick, who, while unable to sign, does have ample experience working with deaf productions. Yet the actresses explained some of the challenges that can arise with a mixed deaf/hearing production.

"There are a couple of directors who might feel overwhelmed and frozen by sign language. They think, 'Oh, wow, this will be a nice challenge.' But then they get in there and they get scared because they didn't realize how visual a medium it is. They might do blocking where someone's moving around while somebody else is trying to sign, and for me, a deaf person, I don't know who to watch. Do I watch the actors moving on one side of the stage or do I watch the actor who's signing? My

vision is split," Bove commented.

"The director needs to know where the focus should be," Frelich remarked.

"We listen with our eyes. Acting is acting and reacting. How do you react? You have to look and listen," Bove added.

The play will be staged with hearing actors in the balcony simultaneously speaking the lines. "Of the hearing actors, only one knew sign before the show. They've been with us since the beginning of the rehearsal process and they've been watching us. They find their own way to match and sync. They'll notice, 'Oh, I see the sign line ends there,' so they know they have to speed it up or slow it down to sync up with us," Frelich elaborated.

"We were just talking about that," Bove said laughingly. "What if we jump lines? What are the hearing actors going to do? Will they jump with us? Maybe not!"

Frelich and Bove have worked hard to find and create roles in the world of theatre, film, and television, which are still just beginning to open their doors to the deaf community of actors. Yet their work is a testimony to the fact that times have changed.

"Theatre for deaf people is so new; we're still very young," Frelich explained. "After all, hearing people have had theatre since Shakespeare's time, we've got NTD that was just founded 30 years ago. But in those 30 years, we've grown a lot. We've got to go through that same process."

Sponsored by the Department of Special Education and Sprint, among others, "The House of Bernarda Alba" continues through June 13 at the Ventura Court Theatre. For more information, call (818) 762-2773 (voice) or (818) 762-2782 (TTY).

BACKSTAGE WEST

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THE ACTORS TRADE WEEKLY

May 20, 1999

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REVIEWS

THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA

at the Ventura Court Theatre

Reviewed by Anne Louise Bannon

Some years ago, while visiting friends in Belgium, I saw a U.S.-made film dubbed into French and was amazed at how much of the original performance was lost. Watching Deaf West Theatre's production of Federico Garcia Lorca's tragic play gives me the same sensation—that I am missing a significant chunk of Phyllis Frelich's formidable performance in the title role simply because her signs are "dubbed" by speaking actor Lynn Milgrim.

Don't get me wrong, Milgrim's voice work is superlative. So is Frelich and the rest of the cast. It's ensemble work of the highest order and well worth seeing. Set in Spain, the play by Lorca (as translated by Carmen Zapata and Michael Dewell, with Freda Norman and Jackie Roth as the ASL Masters) explores what happens when the just-widowed Bernarda (Frelich) holds her five grown daughters all but captive in their home. Since none of the local boys are high-class enough, she refuses to let her daughters marry, until the oldest, Angustias (Freda Norman), attracts the attentions of a never-seen but very handsome young man, Pepe. It turns out that Pepe's attraction is to the fortune Angustias inherited from her father, Bernarda's first husband, and the other sisters not only know it, but react in jealous rage.

It is tempting to suggest that because spoken language expresses its emotions through tonal values, sign language is without emotion, but nothing could be further from the truth. Watching Frelich's sharp, commanding signs play off Norman's anxious ones, you know a certain depth has been achieved. It's just that some subtleties are missing. Or is it that we must consider both the signing and the voice actors' work as combining to make one performance, more or less? Heaven knows the voice actors work seamlessly with the signing ones. The words are clear, taut, perfectly expressing what's onstage. In some instances, it almost seems as though the signing actors are actually speaking. (When April Shawhan comes onstage as the demented grandmother, it's a little shocking when she does actually speak.)

Bob Steinberg's set is simple yet realistic, as are Maro Parian's costumes. It would seem director Larry Arrick's aim was to go for the laughs in the script to play up the eventual tragedy. Certainly, the audience with me was giggling all the way up to the most dramatic moments of the denouement, but that actually seemed to undermine the ending a bit.

As hearing-oriented as I am—and I tend to focus on what I hear before I do on what I see—I am consistently blown away by Frelich's work. She's just that good an actress. She carries the show with her strength, the counterpoint to the raging passion of her daughters, particularly

Antoinette Abbamonte as the crippled Martirio and Deanne Bray as the rebellious Adela. But I really somehow want to see her work without someone else's voice superimposed on it. Maybe Deaf West could try subtitles instead of dubbing?

"The House of Bernarda Alba," presented by Deaf West Theatre at the Ventura Court Theatre, 12417 Ventura Court, Studio City. May 9-June 13. Voice (818) 762-2773, TTY (818) 762-2782.

The House of Bernarda Alba

“Do you feel the silence? There is a storm brewing in every room.” Indeed. “This house of turmoil” is The House of Bernarda Alba. And at Deaf West Theatre, the silence is palpable. This is a silence which is exquisitely filled with the inaudible sounds of hearts breaking, lives being crippled and a family destroying itself.

I was a virgin to Deaf West Theatre. Me, a hearing person, always thought that someday I’d go because I should, but never got around to it. Little did I know that the real reason to go to Deaf West Theatre isn’t to be altruistic or charitable or a good little arts supporter, but because you owe it to yourself to see some really great theatre.

In mourning for her dead husband, controlling Bernarda Alba



Phyllis Frelich,
Linda Bove
and Freda
Norman.
Photo: Levon
Parian

(Phyllis Frelich) runs her house like a prison, ostensibly to protect her five daughters from the ways of the world and the cruel men in it—“To be born a woman is the worst punishment.” The other matriarch here is by comparison warm and fuzzy, housekeeper

Poncía (Linda Bove). Poncía looks after Bernarda, the girls—and I use the term loosely, as the eldest daughter Angustias (Freda Norman) is pushing 40—and also Bernarda’s crazy mother who’s locked away, Maria Josefa (Jennifer Snipstad, the only actress who voices her own role). But all is about to change, as Angustias has been left money and suddenly finds herself engaged to the town’s most available young man. Oh, and it’s not her thinning hair and aging body he’s after. Especially not if the youngest and most beautiful daughter Adela (Deanne Bray) has anything to do about it.

So one of the girls has a chance to get out of the house, this oppressive place where silence and secrets and storms are the rule. And one of the girls does.

Lorca’s *The House of Bernarda Alba* seems to be the perfect vehicle for this company. I understand the means of reaching a hearing audience varies with the play and director; in this case, the actresses onstage (except Snipstad) all sign and six women speak from the sidelines. For the hearing audience, the physicality onstage and disembodied voices off give the heightened text and actions an extra stylized touch, enhancing the bold character portrayals and dramatic storyline. Director Larry Arrick’s sure hand moves the production along swiftly, and he elicits tragic and beautiful performances from literally every actress. Truly, the level of talent coupled with strong production values—Bob Steinberg’s set, Rand Ryan’s lighting, costumes by Maro Parian and Beverly Nero’s sound design are only a few of those who deserve credit here—make for the kind of top-quality theatre that’s not to be missed.

So quit talking about it already and go.

The House of Bernarda Alba by Frederica Garcia Lorca, produced by Deaf West Theatre at the Ventura Court Theatre, 12417 Ventura Court in Studio City. Playing Thursday – Saturday at 8 pm, Sunday at 2 & 7 pm through June 13. Tickets \$12 – \$20. Call 818/762-2773; 818/762-2782 [TTY].

—Meg Donovan

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Articles

THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA

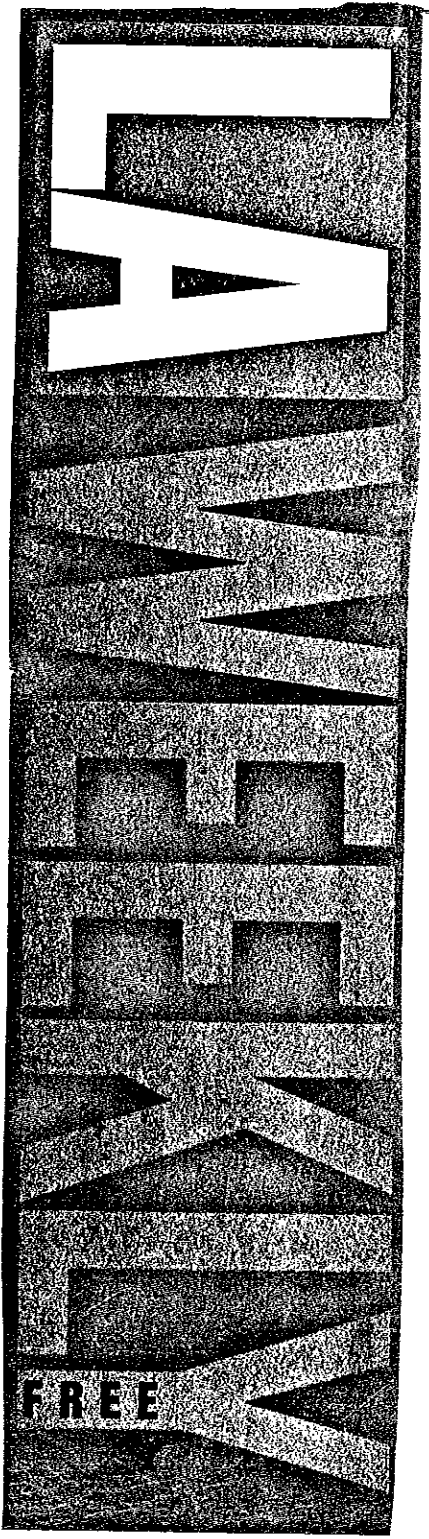
Federico García Lorca, the most popular Spanish poet of his generation, wrote this 1936 classic about his culture's outdated sexual codes for women shortly before he was shot at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Director Larry Arrick's faithful revival of Lorca's tragedy (translated by Michael Dewell and Carmen Zapata) is presented in American Sign Language by a cast of deaf and hearing actors, with voice interpretation by offstage actors. On the day of the Alba patriarch's funeral, his tyrannical wife, Bernarda (Phyllis Frelich), orders her five daughters into eight years of mourning during which they are not allowed to leave the *casa* or have male visitors. When the eldest, Angustias (Freda Norman), who has inherited her father's wealth, receives a proposal from handsome young Pepe El Romano, her sisters react with varying degrees of jealousy and rage. The youngest daughter, Adela (played with passion by raven-haired beauty Deanne Bray), holds a secret that will soon tear the family apart. April Shawhan is chilling as the raving-mad grandmother who appears in a wedding dress — in stark contrast to the black shawls of the other women. The beautiful set (Bob Steinberg) and lighting (Rand Ryan), and fine direction and ensemble bring out the magic of Lorca's lyrical story. Deaf West Theater at the Ventura Court Theater, 12417 Ventura Court, Studio City; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 & 7 p.m.; thru June 13. (818) 762-2773; TTY (818) 762-2782.

—Miriam Jacobson

We also recommend: *Abracadabra*, *The Baby Dance*, *Barnum's Kaleidoscope*, *Beijing Spring*, *Bells Are Ringing*, *Boiler Room*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sunday Show*, *California Schemin'*, *The Clairvoyant*, *The Complete Works of Wm Shkspr (Abridged)*, *The Conception*, *Crime Scene*, *Dead Lawyers*, *Dreamers*, *Dutchman*, *Enigma Variations*, *Evita*, *The Fever*, *The Girl From Nowhere*, *Hair*, *Having Our Say*, *The Hostage*, *The Illusion*, *The Impromptones*, *The J. Keith van Straaten Show*, *King Levine*, *The Last Session*, *Late Nite Catechism*, *Lettice and Lovage*, *Love Is Always the Matter*, *Lulu*, *Mancard*, *The Master Builder*, *Me So Sunday*, *Naked Boys Singing!*, *900 Oneonta*, *Oedipus the King*, *Outlaws*, *The Owl and the Pussycat*, *Poseidon Adventure — The Musical*, *The Quiet Room*, *Reefer Madness!*, *Relationships in the '90s*, *Self-Portrait Nude — The Love and Death of Egon Schiele*, *Solos in Harmony*, *10-10-32Acme*, *Too Old for the Chorus*, *Van Gogh's Ear/A Lesson From Gauguin*, *The Women's Usher Board*, *You Bet Your Honkey*.



The House of Bernarda Alba



PICKS OF THE WEEK