

BY JIM VOLZ

Send Me Back to School!

The schools are alive with the sound of music, and the professional theatres are providing the most exciting theatrical work for young audiences in and around Los Angeles. **South Coast Repertory** is touring a wonderfully poignant Richard Hellesen and Michael Silvershear musical on the joys of grandparents, titled *My Mom's Dad*; and the **Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts** is hosting *The Magic School Bus—Live!*, based on the award-winning television series. *My Mom's Dad*, directed with humor and pathos by John-David Keller, is touring California schools through May 26, while *The Magic School Bus* zips into town for two performances on March 11.



Megan Follows and John Getz in "The Seagull," Old Globe Theatre, San Diego, CA.

Craig Schwartz

The **Mark Taper Forum's** P.L.A.Y. (Performing for Los Angeles Youth) program includes the West Coast premiere of José Cruz González's *The Highest Heaven* (touring Southern California schools through March 4), and Luis Alfaro and Lisa Peterson's *Black Butterfly*, *Jaguar Girl*, *Pinata Woman* and *Other Superhero Girls*

Like Me, scheduled for a later school tour and a June 2 performance at Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center. Set during the Great Depression, *The Highest Heaven* follows a 12-year-old Mexican-American boy who becomes separated from his family after they are deported from the United States. *Black Butterfly* is a "homegirl poetry jam," spun from the lives of teenage girls from East Los Angeles and set to the songs of a live D.J.

Cats, Coyotes, & New Plays

On the adult stage at **South Coast Rep**, José Rivera's world premiere of *References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot* delighted audiences willing to take the leap between Rivera's imaginary world where the moon plays a violin and the coyote dances with a cat, and his hard-hitting world where a career soldier and his puzzling, demanding wife work to find common ground. Svetlana Efremova-Reed is a terrifically centered actress (and one sensuous cat), while Robert Montano keeps the play afloat as the soldier...and the moon.

The Salvador Dali piece emerged from last year's Pacific Playwrights Festival, created by South Coast Rep to showcase the works of new writers. And the show will go on! The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation recently announced its continued support of the festival with a three-year, \$300,000 grant. According to SCR Producing Artistic Director David Emmes, "The Pacific Playwrights Festival gives us an event with national reach, and in its first two years it has fielded an impressive array of plays by such writers as Nicky Silver, Howard Korder, Marlane Meyer, José Rivera, Richard Greenberg, and Donald Margulies."

A Busy Season in San Diego

Perhaps the busiest theatre in Southern California over the past few months is the **Old Globe Theatre** in San Diego. Tom Stoppard's new translation of Chekhov's *The Seagull* features Mariette Hartley as Irina and Julian Gamble as Sharmayev in a Jack O'Brien-directed production through March 12; while Conor McPherson's *The Weir*, directed by Joseph Hardy, runs next door in the **Cassius Carter Centre Stage**.

Next up at the Old Globe are Steven Dietz' *Private Eyes*, directed by Brendon Fox, March 25 through April 30; and Joe DiPietro's *Over the River and Through the Woods*, directed by Craig Noel, March 30 through April 30. "Private Eyes began as a lie," claims playwright Dietz. "And like a lie, the play grew." As audiences discovered when they first viewed this romantic thriller at Kentucky's Humana Festival in 1997, the audience must decide where the truth lies! Regarding *Over the River*, Globe Artistic Director Jack O'Brien notes that "Our dear friend and mentor Craig Noel, who sets an unprecedented 65-year record as an artistic leader in the community and in this country—returns to the director's chair to lead this remarkable cast, including the incomparable Marion Ross."

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