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By Diane Anderson-Minshall

Lesbian Theater Awards

With so much emphasis on dykes in Hollywood, it's a surprise that the lesbians of theater get as little attention as they do. After all, it's our theatrical thespian sisters — not Tinseltown — who weave rich tapestries of queer, feminist, gender-bent and ethnically diverse imagery for the entire world to see. The hardest part is knowing that after their 12-week run, the story is over and the lesbian playwright, director or actor moves on to another story while the play merely lingers in our memories. As a thanks for those memories, here are our 2006 Lesbian Theater Awards.

1. The Break Up Notebook: The Lesbian Musical (Hudson Backstage Theatre, Los Angeles): The SoCal girls started the year off right with playwright Patricia Cotter's hilariously sardonic comedy that combined lesbian heartbreak (our lovely heroine, Helen, has just been dumped), dyke dating, queer weddings and pop musical numbers to bring audiences to their feet. (hudsontheatre.com)

2. The Long Christmas Ride Home (Bobbindoctrin Puppet Theatre, Houston, Texas): Bobbindoctrin Puppet Theatre and Unhinged Productions teamed up to produce the Houston premiere of *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, an adult puppet play by lesbian and Pulitzer Prize-winner Paula Vogel that's not a thing like *Avenue Q*. Fusing traditional theater and Bunraku puppet techniques, the funny and heartening *Long Christmas* weaves a

story about one troubled family on a snowy Christmas Eve. (bobbindoctrin.org)

3. Exposed: Experiments in Love, Sex, Death, Art (CounterPULSE, San Francisco): The sold-out, West Coast premiere of Annie Sprinkle's latest work, at the National Queer Arts Festival, set audiences abuzz. *Exposed* takes place in a love laboratory, exploring everything from lesbian courtship and artificial insemination to breast cancer and community. Audience members were given the chance to interact with the lab technicians and real-life lovers, Sprinkle and professor and experimental artist Elizabeth Stephens. (loveartlab.com)

4. Does This Monologue Make Me Look Fat? (The Columbus



The play's the thing for (clockwise from left): Boston's *All the Kings Men*, the 1940s-ish *Why D'Ya Make Me Wear This, Joe?*, still sexy Annie Sprinkle in *Exposed: Experiments in Love, Sex, Death, Art*, Atlanta's very powerful *Playmaking for Girls* and Bobbindoctrin Puppet Theatre's *The Long Christmas Ride Home*.

National Gay and Lesbian Theatre Festival, Columbus, Ohio): Minneapolis playwright and actor Amy Salloway's utterly fearless, absolutely hysterical confessional goes through seven intersecting stories — covering everything from her rebel uterus to a surrealist lesbian adventure — about one woman finding self-acceptance. It won Columbus' award for Best Comedy Solo Show, which was of little surprise. (columbusfestival.com)

5. Stripped and Teased: Scandalous Stories With Subversive Subplots (International Gay and Lesbian Theater Festival, Montreal, Canada): Queer performance artist Kimberly Dark's compelling one-woman show looks at strippers and consumers and posits questions about the ways women "construct" themselves for social viewing. (kimberlydark.com)

6 The Harlem Renaissance (BlackOut 2006, Charlotte, N.C.): At BlackOut 2006, this first annual theater event in North Carolina, a multiple actor, dancer, musician and spoken-word artist production offered up a fascinating view of the impact of LGBT and same-gender-loving black people in history, including Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Langston Hughes. (carolinablackpride.com)

7 Playmaking for Girls (7 Stages Main Stage Theatre, Atlanta): In Synchronicity Performance Group's one-night-only production, teenage girls recently released from Atlanta detention centers gathered to perform eight hard-hitting short plays based on their lives. By integrating the young actors with seasoned pros, the plays take on a level of depth and personal intimacy that audience-driven works often lack, and as such they become powerful tools for validating these girls' voices. (synchrotheatre.com)

8. All the Kings Men (Various locations, Boston): It's not easy to dismiss the Kings as a simple drag troupe when their performances are superb comic storytelling set to music in a modernist twist on Shakespeare. (atkm.com)

9. Why D'Ya Make Me Wear This, Joe? (Fresh Fruit Festival, New York): The story of two women falling in love with each other while their fiancés are off to war in the South Pacific, *Joe* is lovingly performed as a 1940s-ish female version of *Brokeback Mountain* (minus Ang Lee) written by award-winning director Vanda and directed by Melissa Attebery. (freshfruitfestival.com)

10. Mastering Sex & Tortillas! (La Peña Cultural Center, Berkeley, Calif.): This sexy and erotic comedy tackles race, sex, gender and immigration (hey, they make it all work) from a queer Chicana perspective. Partners Adelina Anthony and Coral Lopez are an absolute riot (Anthony's high-femme professor of Lesbian 101 is screamingly funny), and viewers will never look at a tortilla the same way again. (adelinaanthony.com)

Honorable Mentions: *The Idiot King* at Wow Café, New York; *The Twelve Days of Cochina* at Theatre Rhinoceros, San Francisco; *Beauty and the Breast* at Exit Theatre, San Francisco; *Caged Dames* at Bailiwick Repertory Theatre, Chicago; *Queer Wedding Sweet: A Fabulous Jewish Wedding Musical and Queer Vaudeville Extravaganza* at the Jewish Community Center, New York; *Wonder Woman: The Musical* at the Columbus National Gay and Lesbian Theatre Festival; *My Yolanda Love* at Queer Soup Theater, Boston; *The Children's Hour* at TimeLine Theatre, Chicago. ■

For more about lesbian theater, go to curvemag.com.