

Top Theater Performances of 2009

by Bonnie Goldberg, Weekend Correspondent

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How tempting it is to sit back and review all the highlights of 2009. I'll do just that, but stick to what I know: theater.

Topping the list is "Dividing the Estate," directed by Michael Wilson at the Hartford Stage. Written by the late Horton Foote, the play concentrates on the kind of family bickering that occurs when something of value, in this case a Texas plantation house and 5,000 acres, is greedily desired by the children, before mama even enters the ground.

From Texas, the land where Horton Foote found his inspiration, we travel all the way to the continent of Africa, where Athol Fugard sets his fascinating dramas to discover "Coming Home," a contribution presented by Long Wharf Theatre. Here we follow the bittersweet tale of a woman who is dying of AIDS and in need of a loving guardian for her son.

The glamour and glitz of the goddess we know as Marilyn Monroe was beautifully brought to life by Sunny Thompson in "Marilyn: Forever Blonde" at Ivoryton Playhouse. The portrayal revealed the vulnerable soul of a woman who only wanted to be loved.

Scott Keeton took on the persona of his personal idol Johnny Cash when he grabbed the ring of fire at the Downtown Cabaret Theatre in Bridgeport and paid tribute to the late great musician. His royal treatment of Cash was evident in more than two dozen of his hits.

Paying homage to his idols was also the aim of Jon Peterson when he created "Song Man, Dance Man" at Seven Angels Theatre in Waterbury. From George M. Cohan to Fred Astaire to Anthony Newley, Peterson tapped his way to perfection as he followed the footsteps of these tremendous entertainers.

The lazy, hazy days of summer brought a trio of delights. The first was the International Cabaret Conference at Yale that again had a headline of stars like Tovah Feldshuh, Amanda McBroom and Sharon McNight belting out their personal favorites as part of the faculty for wannabe cabaret singers.

The Eugene O'Neill Center in Waterford held a series of conferences for puppetry, plays and musicals, all new efforts being showcased for the first time before an audience. Treat yourself to a front row seat next summer and witness the birth of exciting innovative works first hand.

The Summer Theatre of New Canaan contributed an outstanding evening of musical theater with "Camelot," revealing the magical and mystical land inhabited by King Arthur and his brave knights. Here loyalty is tested and love is the prize worth fighting and even dying for.

For an out-of-the-box artistic experience, look no further than the exciting new musical “POP,” unveiled at the Yale Repertory Theatre. Cultural icon Andy Warhol is framed in the cross hairs of a gun held by one of the entourage members surrounding him, but who?

For holiday treats, “Emmet Otter’s Jug-Band Christmas” was clearly the winner with its bevy of furry and fuzzy friends. This holiday classic tells the tale of love and friendship and is guaranteed to warm the heart. Thank you, Goodspeed musicals, for a new Christmas tradition.

Hopefully you had the opportunity to enjoy a number of these highly-entertaining theater performances of 2009. As always, there will be more to come in the new year.