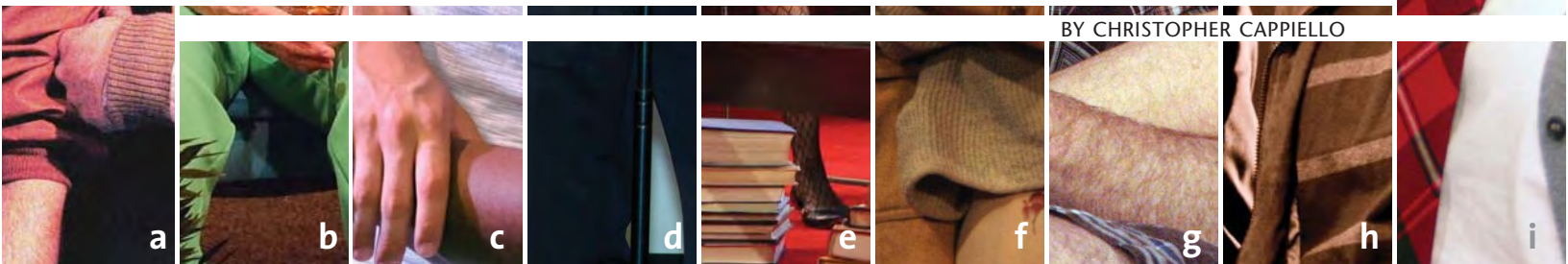




# TOP 10

BY CHRISTOPHER CAPPIELLO



Looking back at *Frontiers'* theater coverage this past year brought smiles to my face as I remembered fantastic productions that had crept to the corners of my mind. From flashy New York imports to homegrown jewels that will go on to live elsewhere, here are 10 terrific shows that brightened our theatrical landscape in 2011.

## Caught

David L. Ray's contemporary drama about a gay couple planning their 2008 Malibu wedding actually opened in late 2010, but it came too late for our consideration last year. Kevin P. Taft reviewed the extended Zephyr Theatre run in early 2011, and like so many others, found Deborah Puette's performance a standout, as she gradually revealed the complex, troubled layers under the Bible-thumping exterior of Darlene, sister to one of the grooms. (PHOTO G: MICHAEL LAMONT)

## God of Carnage

If ever a production lived up to the hype, it was this star-studded Broadway transplant that brought Jeff Daniels, Hope Davis, James Gandolfini and the magnificent Tony-winning Marcia Gay Harden to town in Yasmina Reza's razor-sharp comedy about adults behaving badly. Davis' stunningly realistic projectile vomit wasn't even the most explosive thing on stage as two well-to-do Brooklyn couples spiraled into savagery in the aftermath of their sons' schoolyard altercation. (PHOTO E: JOAN MARCUS)

## The Temperamentals

I was envious that Kevin got to cover Jon Maran's moving docudrama about the founding of the Mattachine Society and the birth of the gay rights movement in Los Angeles. Staged by the uber-talented Michael Matthews (he's on this list twice!) for the reliably strong and provocative Blank Theatre Company, the play portrayed a pivotal pre-Stonewall piece of LGBT history with a knockout ensemble. (PHOTO H: GREG GORMAN)

## House of the Rising Son

The opening of the well-equipped and welcoming

Atwater Village Theatre was one of the year's happiest theatrical happenings, and Ensemble Studio Theatre L.A.'s premiere of local scribe Tom Jacobson's creepy and highly original drama was a sensational way to get our attention. The always-inventive Jacobson ingeniously wove a tapestry of gay male history, evolution and the supernatural, all under the sharp direction of Michael Michetti.

## Standing on Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays

One of the year's most delightful and moving evenings was this pastiche of short plays by well-known writers like Moises Kaufman, Paul Rudnick and Doug Wright, all read by a rotating band of famous faces at The Gay & Lesbian Center. The surprise of the evening came from the hyper-masculine Neil LaBute, whose "Strange Fruit" told a couple's tragic story with heartbreaking parallel narrations. (PHOTO D: CHUCK GREEN)

## BASH'd

In June I took the gamble of calling the Celebration Theatre's production of Chris Craddock and Nathan Cuckow's self-styled gay rap opera "the most exhilarating, original and moving piece of theater you'll see this year," and I'm happy to say I stand by those words. Chris Ferro and Sean Bradford created a coterie of indelible characters as they rapped out the story of two star-crossed gay lovers on the Canadian prairie under the breathtaking direction of Ameena Kaplan. (PHOTO C: SEAN LAMBERT)

## Bakersfield Mist

I thought Jenny O'Hara gave the performance of the year as a Bakersfield bartender who is convinced she has an original Jackson Pollack on her hands in Stephen Sachs' intelligent and hilarious two-hander that ran

for months at the Fountain Theatre. Loosely based on real events, the 90-minute piece has been optioned for London and New York. Here's hoping they take O'Hara with them. (PHOTO B: ED KRIEGER)

## What's Wrong with Angry?

The Celebration Theatre's revival of Patrick Wilde's 1993 coming-of-age drama about a gay English schoolboy didn't tell us "it gets better," it showed us how it gets better. The hilarious Kelly Schumann stood out in a terrific cast that, under the direction of the talented Mr. Matthews (again!), made a 20-year-old work immediate and relevant. (PHOTO I: MIGUEL MONTALVO)

## Peace in Our Time

The biggest surprise of the year was the emotional impact of Barry Creyton's taut and crafty adaptation of this obscure Noel Coward play that imagines life in one London neighborhood if the Nazis had defeated the Brits. The Antaeus Company has the deepest bench of any troupe in town, and their double-cast production—directed by Casey Stangl—gave many a chance to shine. (PHOTO F: GEOFFREY WADE)

## As Is

I knew too many folks involved in the New American Theatre's revival of William M. Hoffman's 1985 drama to review it, but was delighted that Kevin thought so highly of it. Set at the height of the AIDS crisis, Hoffman's episodic play still moves and enrages, particularly with director John Farnemesch-Bocca's inspired opening, in which the entire talented ensemble moved in eerie unison wearing rubber Ronald Reagan masks, reminding us of the HIV-positive blood on his silent hands. (PHOTO A: DANIEL G. LAM)