

Champion Drama

All the world's onstage in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles is flexing more than its sports muscles in this Olympic season. Whatever shreds of a cultural inferiority complex remain are being swept away by the huge Olympic Arts Festival. L.A. may still be the place where you can see shadows of palm trees painted on a shopping-center wall, where a sign solemnly announces a sale of artworks from the collection of comedian Shecky Greene. But, tired of its reputation as a cultural Mondo Bizarro, L.A. is striking back. Angeleno Ray Bradbury has gone so far as to proclaim Los Angeles the true capital of the country, boasting that "there is no intelligentsia, no hierarchy, no clique of snobs, no gangs of six or ten or twelve who direct literary or music or watercolor traffic and bruise you with their batons if you don't obey. . . . Our ideas, free to fly or to be shot down, will go on moving to restructure a waiting world."



'Twelfth Night': Universal Shakespeare

Los Angeles has a right to feel its arts oats in this festival, and nowhere more than in the spectacular explosion of theater from around the world. Last week, in true Olympic spirit, two world-class teams, Britain's Royal Shakespeare Company and France's Le Théâtre du Soleil, put on astonishing displays of theatrical art. Audaciously seizing the greatest writer in the English language, the Théâtre du Soleil, with its productions of "Richard II" and "Twelfth Night," demonstrated the universality of Shakespeare. The company's artistic di-

rector, Ariane Mnouchkine, staged "Richard II" as a Kabuki play in wonderful Japanese costumes and décor. And she conjured up a "Twelfth Night" in the style of India's kathakali theater. Doing the plays uncut in her own French translations, Mnouchkine created two four-hour productions that leapt the language barrier in a blaze of color and action.

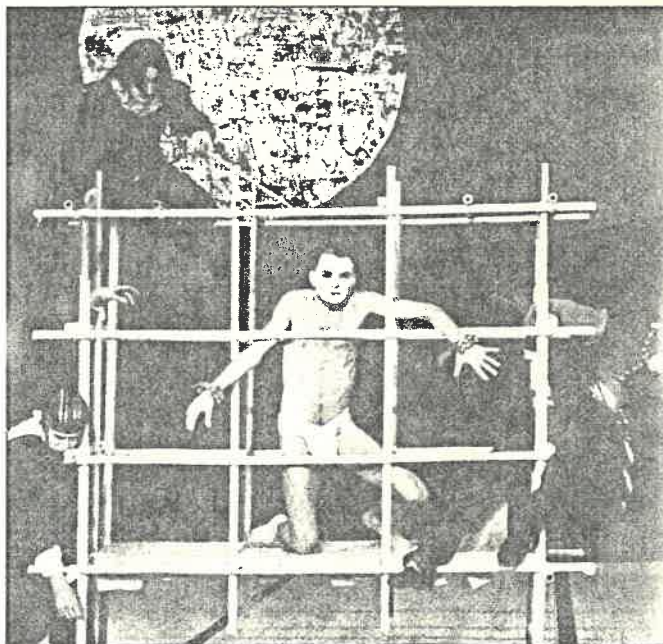
The Théâtre du Soleil mounted its plays on a huge converted TV sound stage, designed to closely duplicate its own theater in Paris. The actors' dressing rooms were open to view so that the audience could watch them making up or munching Granola bars. Appropriately for the Olympics, Mnouchkine's "Richard II" was blazingly athletic. The actors made their entrances racing onstage like the L.A. Rams charging out on the field. At one point, Georges Bigot as Richard stopped a combat between two knights by hurling a baton to the edge of the stage with the power and accuracy of Larry Bird. The Japanese style emphasized the feudal nature of the play's power wars. Mnouchkine turned the court into a steaming den of passion, with treason, betrayal and revolution breaking out like earthquakes. Her visual sense was dazzling: the tower in which Richard is imprisoned was a portable white structure of desolate beauty. The actors mimed horseback riding with childlike fervor. Through the brilliant spectacle, the sense of power feeding upon itself had a tragic impact, and Bigot played Richard like the poet-king he is, his voice broken with an almost erotic heartbreak.

Her "Twelfth Night" was even better. This comedy of switched genders and missed connections was laced with the ravishing confections of a great theatrical chef. The musicians who accompanied both produc-

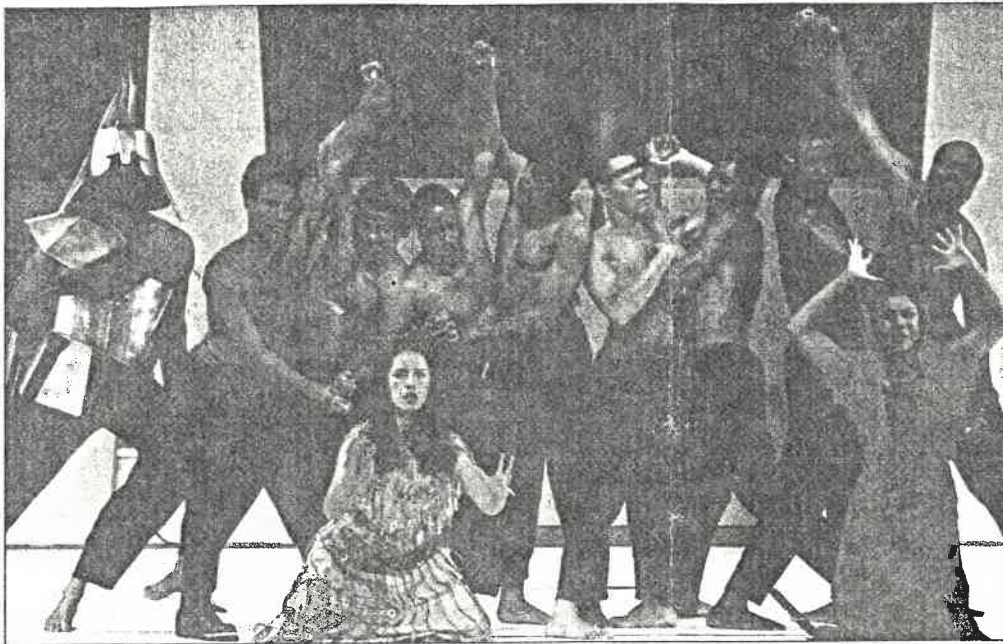


Jacobi with Cusack in 'Much Ado' and as Cyrano: British bite

tions were especially marvelous here, playing an amazing variety of drums, reed instruments and exotic things that clanged and twanged and gonged. The lovesick Duke Orsino (played by the indefatigable Bigot) always entered accompanied by a calflike bleating in perfect tune. The duke was dressed as a rajah in blazing white, and the entire play seemed to take place in some fairy-tale Indja ruled by invisible imps of love. The comic roles were superbly Shakespearean. Sir Toby Belch was played by Philippe Hottier with the balletic lurching of Red Skelton's immortal drunk. A woman, Clémentine Yelnik, played Sir Andrew Aguecheek with the forlorn tenderness of a Hindu Stan Laurel. Joséphine Derenne,



Bigot in 'Richard II': Athletic dazzle with tragic impact



MARK SENNET—SHOOTING STAR

The L.A. Theatre Works' 'Agamemnon': Drawing parallels between Troy and Vietnam

OLYMPIC ARTS

hatred was nothing less than astounding: as he urgently thundered on, slapping his best friend Le Bret, it became clear that he was raving about hate because he couldn't bear to express the unrequited love that was consuming him. As Roxane, the girl who can't see beyond Cyrano's capacious nose to his great soul, Sinead Cusack found the complexity in a character that most often doesn't go beyond two dimensions. Watching poor Cyrano ruin his life because of an excessive schnoz, you couldn't help realizing all this was happening in Los Angeles, the capital of plastic surgery.

Clangorous Poetry: Beside these world-class companies, the little Los Angeles groups provided a welcome shot of small-budget spunk. Steven Berkhoff's interracial adaptation of "Agamemnon," performed by the L.A. Theatre Works, had a driving

splendid as Viola, at one point went into a crying jag that became a complex, wordless aria of grief. Mnouchkine caught Shakespeare's sense of lovers as double agents; the cross-sexual disguises were like Plato's legend of male and female trying to reclaim some ancient moment when the sexes were one.

Rhapsody: Playing Shakespeare in French in the style of Japan and India, Mnouchkine made him seem like the poet of humanity. But the Royal Shakespeare Company's "Much Ado About Nothing" was the true English Shakespeare, the language in all its beauty and bite. Derek Jacobi and Sinead Cusack were delightful as Benedick and Beatrice, the lovers who refuse to admit their love and verbally assault one another like a pair of Elizabethan Don Ricklesses. Terry Hands's production was sweet and subtle, an

irresistible rhapsody on the beautifully bothersome necessity of love. The RSC seems to have entered one of its best periods, with joint artistic directors Hands and Trevor Nunn matching one another in stage magic. Cusack was adorable, racing feverishly onstage in her eagerness to start another fight. Jacobi was funny and romantic; I don't think I've ever heard an actor before who could make a shout sound witty.

Returning the compliment to the Théâtre du Soleil, the RSC staged Edmond Rostand's "Cyrano de Bergerac." This was the best "Cyrano" in living memory, three and a half hours in Anthony Burgess's superb translation. If there were any doubts before, it became clear that Derek Jacobi is a great actor. His Cyrano was shattering, moving, ferociously funny and altogether unforgettable. His speech on

energy and some ringing transmutations of Aeschylus's clangorous and tender poetry. But its parallels between the Trojan and Vietnam wars became too pat and easy. While of no redeeming social value, the Groundlings' "Olympic Trials" was a highly enjoyable spoof of both the Olympics and of the Raymond Chandler private-eye genre. Phil Hartman played gumshoe Chick Hazard with a splendid 5 o'clock shadow and a seedy style that explained his fee of five dollars a day plus expenses. The Groundlings use suggestions from the audience to improvise scenes in the play. This prospect can be gruesome but these young actors invented with wit and style, producing at one point a very funny anthem of gastronomic passion called "Hamburger in My Heart."

JACK KROLL in Los Angeles

TRANSITION

BORN: To Julie Nixon Eisenhower, 35, and husband, David Eisenhower, 36, their third child, 9-pound 8-ounce Melanie Catherine; in Philadelphia, June 18.

DIED: American film director Joseph Losey, 75; in London, June 22. Losey moved to England after he was blacklisted for refusing to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1951 and made such acclaimed films as "The Servant," "Accident" and "The Go-Between." Director of both brilliant movies and spectacular flops, the unconventional Losey once said, "I'm not mellowing with age. The fight hasn't gone out of me. I hope it never does."

Milbourne Christopher, 70, one of America's top magicians; of complications following surgery, in New York City, June 17. Christopher is credited with introducing magic to television in the 1950s at a time

when the profession was in decline. In one TV special he made an elephant vanish; in another he performed what he called the world's most dangerous stunt—catching in his mouth a bullet fired from a rifle.

James H. Rowe Jr., 75, an assistant to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and unofficial adviser to most of the Democratic presidents who followed; of a heart ailment, in Washington, June 17. Rowe was one of the Harvard-educated lawyers who helped form and carry out FDR's New Deal. He later set up a law practice in Washington with fellow New Dealer Thomas Corcoran and managed Lyndon Johnson's unsuccessful campaign for the presidency in 1960.

Lee Krasner, 75, widow of artist Jackson Pollock and a noted abstract expressionist in her own right; in New York City, June 19. Though Pollock praised her work, most

people looked on Krasner as a wife (and later widow) first, an artist second. Her teacher, Hans Hofmann, once said of her canvases: "They are so good you would not know they were done by a woman." But Krasner finally gained independent recognition for her paintings, which were characterized by bold, outlined images.

Estelle Winwood, 101, British character actress whose career spanned almost 90 years; in Los Angeles, June 20. Winwood, who had what she called "a sad face," often played eccentric but ladylike characters such as the fairy godmother in the 1955 movie "The Glass Slipper." Winwood once said that when she was in school, her classmates nicknamed her "Cow Eyes," and she later told actresses not to worry about their looks because "the very thing that makes you unhappy in your appearance may be the one thing to make you a star."