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Theater

Major Theaters & Companies--Tickets for most plays usually cost \$10 to \$35, although big-name performances at the major theaters can fetch up to \$75 for the best seats. **Theatre League Alliance** (tel. **213/688-2787**; www.TheatreLA.org), an association of live theaters and producers in Los Angeles (and the organization that puts on the yearly Ovation Awards, L.A.'s answer to Broadway's Tonys), offers same-day, half-price tickets via **Web Tix**, an internet only service at www.TheatreLA.org. Tickets are available Tuesday through Saturday from 4am to 6pm, and from 8pm to 11pm; purchase them online with a credit card and they'll be waiting for you at the box office. The site features a frequently updated list of shows and availability, you can also sign up for e-mail alerts. In town without your computer? You can log on at any public library, Internet cafe, or office service store (like Kinko's).

The **Ahmanson Theater** and **Mark Taper Forum**, the city's top two playhouses and home to the Center Theater Group (www.taperahmanson.com), are both part of the all-purpose **Music Center**, 135 N. Grand Ave., downtown. The **Ahmanson Theater** (tel. **213/972-7401**) is active year-round, either with shows produced by the in-house Center Theater Group or with traveling Broadway productions. Each season has guaranteed a handful of high-profile shows, such as Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*. The 1999 season opened with the only American run of Royal National Theatre's standout production of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, which starred Sir Ian McKellan. Ahmanson audiences also delighted to *Cinderella* by ballet impresario Matthew Bourne. The Ahmanson is so huge that you'll want seats in the front third or half of the theater.

The **Mark Taper Forum** (tel. **213/972-0700**) is a more intimate, circular theater staging contemporary works by international and local playwrights. Neil Simon's humorous and poignant *The Dinner Party* and Tom Stoppard's witty and eclectic *Arcadia* are two recent productions, each ideally suited to this intimate setting. Ticket prices vary depending on the performance. *Insider tip*: 2 hours prior to curtain time, the Mark Taper Forum offers specially priced \$12 tickets, which must be purchased in person with cash.



Big-time traveling troupes and Broadway-bound musicals that don't go to the Ahmanson head instead for the **Shubert Theater**, in the ABC Entertainment Center, 2020 Avenue of the Stars, Century City (tel. **800/233-3123**). This plush playhouse presents major musicals on the scale of *Cats*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and *Les Misérables*. The smash hit musical *Rent* reprised in Los Angeles at the Shubert in 1999.

Across town, the moderately sized **Geffen Playhouse**, 10886 Le Conte Ave., Westwood (tel. **310/208-5454**; www.geffenplayhouse.com), presents dramatic and comedic productions by prominent and cutting-edge writers. UCLA purchased the theater--which was originally built as a Masonic temple in 1929, and later served as the Westwood Playhouse--back in 1995 with a little help from L.A.'s philanthropic entertainment mogul David Geffen. This charming playhouse is often the West Coast choice of many acclaimed off-Broadway shows, and it also attracts locally based TV and movie actors eager for the immediacy of stage work. One recent highlight featured Annette Bening in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. Always audience friendly, the Playhouse prices tickets in the \$25 to \$38 range.

One of the most highly acclaimed professional theaters in L.A., the **Pasadena Playhouse**, 39 S. El Molino Ave., near Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena (tel. **626/356-7529**; www.pasadenaplayhouse.org), is a registered historic landmark that has served as the training ground for many theatrical, film, and TV stars, including William Holden and Gene Hackman. Productions are staged on the main theater's elaborate Spanish Colonial revival.

For a current schedule at any of the above theaters, check the listings in *Los Angeles Magazine*, available at most area newsstands, or the "Calendar" section of the Sunday *Los Angeles Times*, or call the box offices directly at the numbers listed above.

Smaller Playhouses and Companies-- It's a little-known fact that on any given night there's more live theater to choose from in Los Angeles than in New York City, due, in part, to the surfeit of ready actors and writers just chomping at the bit to make it in Tinseltown. Many of today's familiar faces from film and TV spent plenty of time cutting their teeth on L.A.'s busy theater circuit, which is home to nearly 200 small- and medium-sized theaters and theater companies, ranging from the 'round-the-corner, neighborhood variety to high-profile, polished troupes of veteran actors. With so many options, navigating the scene, which is often a gamble, can be a monumental task. Your safest bet is to choose one of the theaters listed below, which have each established excellent reputations for their productions of consistently high quality; otherwise, consult the *L.A. Weekly*, which advertises most current productions, or call **Theatre LA** (tel. **213/614-0556**) for up-to-date performance listings.

The **Colony Studio Theater**, 1944 Riverside Dr., Silver Lake (tel. **323/665-3011**; www.colonytheatre.org), has an excellent resident company that has played in this air-conditioned, 99-seat, converted silent-movie house for over 20 years. Recent productions include the musical *Candide* and the classic American comedy *The Front Page*. Having outgrown its current digs, the venerable company intends to relocate to a 200-seater in the 'burbs some time in 2000. Plans to nest in the space formerly occupied by Burbank Natural History Museum (we didn't even know Burbank had one!) are currently afoot.

Actors Circle Theater, 7313 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood (tel. **323/882-8043**), is a 47-seater that's as acclaimed as it's tiny. Look for original contemporary works throughout the year.

The **Actor's Gang Theater**, 6201 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood (tel. **323/465-0566**), is not one to shy from irreverence. Back in 1997 the in-house company, a group of UCLA alums, presented *Bat Boy: The Musical*, the story--originally covered in the always-credible *Weekly World News*--of a 13-state reign of terror committed by a pointy-eared razor-toothed freak of nature from back-country West Virginia. The theater also lends its stage to outside companies, such as the Namaste Theater Company, which performed Tony Kushner's rendition of *The Illusion* in 1999.

The classical theater company **A Noise Within**, 5151 State University Dr. (tel. **323/224-6320**), has performed everything from Shakespeare to Coward to Molière. In 1999, the company moved to the Luckman Fine Arts Complex on the campus of Cal State L.A., located just northeast of downtown. Highlights of the 2000 season included Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Founded in 1965, **East-West Players**, 120 N. Judge John Aiso St., Los Angeles (tel. **323/625-7000**; www.eastwestplayers.com), is now the oldest Asian-American theater company in the United States. It's been so successful that the company moved from a 99-seat venue to the 200-seat David Henry Huang theater in downtown L.A. in March 1998. To commemorate the massacre in Tiananmen square, EWP presented the musical *Beijing Spring* in 1999.

The 24-year-old **L.A. Theatre Works** (tel. **310/827-0889**) is renowned for its marriage of media and theater and has performed more than 200 plays and logged over 350 hours of on-air programming. Performances are held at the delightful Skirball Cultural Center, nestled in the Sepulveda Pass near the Getty Center. In the past, personalities such as Richard Dreyfuss, Julia Louis-Dreyfuss, Jason Robards, Annette Bening, and John Lithgow have given award-winning performances of plays by Arthur Miller, Neil Simon, Joyce Carol Oates, and more. For 7 years now, the group has performed

simultaneously for viewing and listening audiences in its radio theater series. In 1999, L.A. Theatre Works presented Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, which starred John Goodman and Calista Flockhart of *Ally McBeal* fame. Tickets are usually around \$34; a full performance schedule can be found online at www.skirball.org.

Founded in 1981, **West Coast Ensemble Theater**, 522 N. La Brea Ave., between Melrose and Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles (tel. **323/525-0022**), is a nonprofit multi-ethnic assemblage of professional actors, writers, and directors. The ensemble has collected accolades from local critics, as well as many awards for its excellent production quality. Expect to see well-written, well-directed, and socially relevant plays, performed by a talented and professional cast. Ticket prices range from \$15 to \$22.



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