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Spano's championship season

By Lisa McKinnon, mckinnon@insidevc.com
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Joe Spano, right, has earned an Ovation Award nomination for his role as General Burgoyne opposite James O'Neil as Dick Dudgeon in Rubicon Theatre Co.'s staging last year of "The Devil's Disciple."

Depending on where you last saw him, Joe Spano may be burned into your memory as an investigator on "NYPD Blue" or as a middle-aged man smitten by a dog in Rubicon Theatre Co.'s summer staging of "Sylvia."

But it's Spano's performance in yet another role -- that of British General "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne in Rubicon's "The Devil's Disciple" -- that helped the Ventura company nab the first two Ovation Award nods in its four-year history.

A nominations announcement made last week included Spano in the category of best featured actor in a play, while Rubicon's staging of "Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris" was listed in the category of best ensemble performance. The shows were presented at Ventura's Laurel Theatre in November 2001 and January 2001, respectively.

Established in 1989 to highlight the work of Los Angeles-area performers and theater groups, the Ovation Awards are presented by Theatre LA, a nonprofit association of more than 185 theaters and producers. They are described as the only peer-judged theater awards in Los Angeles.

Rubicon was founded in 1998 by James O'Neil and Karyl Lynn Burns as a nonprofit professional theater company. Spano, who lives in Calabasas, first became involved with the company when he participated in its two-nights-only reading of A.R. Gurney's "Ancestral Voices" with Ed Asner in March 2001. He returned several months later to take on George Bernard Shaw's "Disciple" -- although he was initially offered a different role.

"They wanted me to play the Rev. Anthony Anderson and I allowed as how I'd prefer to play Burgoyne," Spano told the Star in August. "I had done the play in my youth (as a third character) and remembered being on stage, wondering what I was doing there because Burgoyne was getting all the laughs."



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Nominated along with Spano are Al Mamcini, "Time of Your Life," Camelot Artists; William Mesnik, "Love's Labour's Lost," A Noise Within; Cooper Thornton, "After the Fall," Fountain Theatre; and Neil Vipond, "Richard III," Circus Theatricals.

Making up the ensemble cast of "Jacques Brel" were George Ball, Kirsten Benton, Stan Chandler and Amanda McBroom, starring next in Cabrillo Music Theatre's "Mame." "Jacques Brel" was directed for Rubicon by Moni Yakim, who helmed the original New York production.

Also nominated in the best ensemble category are "How Kintu Became a Man," Greenway Arts Alliance; "Swing!" Musical Theatre West; "The Exonerated," The Actors' Gang; "The Laramie Project," The Colony Theatre Co.; and "The Last Season," Robey Theatre Co.

An awards ceremony will take place Nov. 24 at the Orpheum Theatre, 842 S. Broadway, Los Angeles. Tickets, \$35 to \$150, are available through Ticketmaster, 583-8700.

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