

CALENDAR THEATER

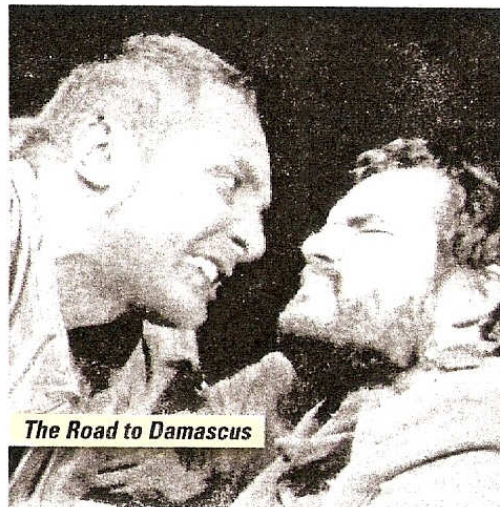
Theater New Reviews continued

Russ) returns home on his birthday after being lost in the Amazon for eight years, the only thing unchanged is his Manhattan apartment. He doesn't know his pre-teen son (J.R. Dziengel) or his emancipated wife, Penelope (Leah Harrison), much less the radical late-'60s world in which he's landed. Like her ancient-Greek namesake, the daughter of Icarus who married Odysseus, Penelope strung her suitors along for years after her husband disappeared and was believed dead, but now she's engaged to a progressive guy and balks at reverting to docile housewife. What the production lacks in tension, it makes up for in the eye candy of Sibyl Wickersheimer's over-the-top taxidermy scenery and Ann Closs-Farley's perfect swinging-'60s costumes. **Actors' Gang**, 6209 Santa Monica Blvd., Hlywd.; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; thru Dec. 4. (323) 465-0566, Ext. 15. (Miriam Jacobson)

THE HUNT FOR RED WILLIE In 1829 County Donegal, the considerable locks of late Prince Wilhelm the Rosy have been woven into a hirsute mask named Red Willie, now worn by Fardy (Josh Thoemke), who's being framed for murder by a British captain looking to worm in on his romance with the daughter of the deceased. Wedging in both long-lost sons and cross-dressing femmes, Ken Bourke's comedy is layered with nods to Shakespearean farce — except the Bard knew better than to expect audiences to swallow the plotline of two men battling for an ingénue so unappetizing, she's introduced with a finger up her nose. Bessy's (Leslie Baldwin) grand entrance isn't meant to be a poke at romantic idealization (though it would be better if it were). Rather, it's just one in a series of anvils Bourke ties around his characters' necks; in attempting to give them all humorous quirks (unbridled lust, unbridled piety and the like), he's packed the stage with unlikable pests who irritate rather than entertain. There's not much director Sean Branney and his cast can do to salvage the night; tough Matt Foyer adds dimension to his dual roles of rakish uncle and warm-hearted father. If only the comedy weren't as flat as Arthur MacBride's simple yet effective one-dimensional flip-book set. **Gene Bua Theater**, 3435 W. Magnolia Blvd., Burbank; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; thru Oct. 31. (818) 628-0688. (Amy Nicholson)

MONSTER Playwright Neal Bell cleverly telescopes the wild events of Mary Shelley's 1818 gothic classic

Frankenstein into a manageable dramatic form in his loose adaptation. There's something wonderfully silly about the decision of Victor Frankenstein (Michael Laurino) to build his Creature (Clark Freeman) in the family basement, where his cousin/fiancée, Elizabeth (Megan West), his little brother, William (Frank Smith), his friend Clerval (Ben Correale) and the maid, Justine (Susan Matus), can, and do, wander in at any moment. Bell sticks to the main events of Shelley's novel, but adds his own sexual spin. Victor and Elizabeth may have all the love scenes, but a faint miasma of homoeroticism hovers. And Victor's relation to the Creature is a weird blend of God, father, brother, enemy, friend and lover. Their final meeting on the arctic wastes suggests a kind of Wagnerian love



The Road to Damascus

death. Laurino is a stalwart Victor, and Freeman makes a touching figure of the Creature whose first words are "I wanna go home." The supporting cast works gamely to flesh out the melodramatic stick figures, and, despite a few absurdities, director Andy Mitton turns the piece into delectable Halloween fare, on T.J. Moore's suitably bleak set. **Sight Unseen Theater Group** at Miles Memorial Playhouse, 1130 Lincoln Blvd., Santa Monica; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; thru Oct. 31. (877) 986-7336. (Neal Weaver)

PIPE DREAMS Nicole Blaine is a remarkable young actor with brains, beauty and rich comic delivery.

Her husband, Micky, is a fine co-writer and director who skillfully helps her put together this two-hour one-woman show. That being said, there's no dramatic art in sight, no theater. In its place, we get 90-percent standup and 10-percent bathos. The titular "pipe" refers to the crack that enslaves Blaine's once-fabulous mother and shreds the life of those around her. The performance's mostly funny, Valley-girl-inflected text follows Blaine's ordinary life of youthful tribulations that become insignificant when she discovers her mother's awful secret. Ultimately the exercise is one of self-revelation and public therapy — which Blaine openly acknowledges (crediting an accidental meeting with idol Jennifer Aniston as her inspiration). While audiences will be fascinated by her personal journey and hilarious riffs on her family, a play would be nice, some character interaction, perhaps? — especially with such inherently dramatic material. The wave of solo shows throughout the city may represent an easy genre to stage, and is great for rental revenue, but it does expose the obvious theatrical shortcomings of not having a second actor on the stage. **Hudson Guild Theater**, 6543 Santa Monica Blvd., Hlywd.; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; thru Nov. 6. (323) 960-7745. (Tom Provenzano)

RE-SOURCING Laura Shamas' farce springs from the silly premise that a quartet of laid-off call-in software-tech supporters (Paul Kouri, Corrina Lyons, K.J. Middlebrooks and Andi Matheny), working the phone banks in Arkansas for a Houston-based company named Ameriblaze, would be willing to impersonate Indian workers in order to get their jobs back at a third of their former pay, in order to make some kind of political statement. If you can accept that premise, the social satire is quite pointed. The quartet's guide (Ravi Kapoor) through Indian customs and dialects gets the biggest laugh of the night with his explanation that though Ameriblaze is practically relocating to India and abandoning its U.S. workforce — which is perfectly fine — it's doing so to avoid paying U.S. taxes, which is illegal. Jules Aaron directs the cartoon in big, broad strokes, so that these workers don't look like the sharpest pencils in the box — accentuating the faulty premise. It's as though Shamas and Aaron conspire to subtly undermine the play's fury. The topicality is terrific, but this play, and its characters, really need to be smarter. **NoHo Arts Center**, 11136 Magnolia Blvd.,

N. Hlywd.; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; thru Nov. 21. (310) 285-9467. (Steven Leigh Morris)

THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS A tedious situation — a broken-down car — becomes compelling theater in the hands of writer-director Bill Sterritt and a talented ensemble. Two men are stuck on the road from Beirut to Damascus in a car that won't move. One is a wealthy, Harvard-educated Palestinian doctor, Faruq Abdullah (Kahlil Joseph); the other is Ben Masters (Sean Pritchett), a kidnapped, Columbia-educated American journalist. Faruq is taking his blindfolded captive to Damascus in order to exchange him for a jailed prisoner, but the car won't move, so the kidnapper reluctantly uncuffs his prisoner, who has offered to fix the car. The stifling heat causes both men to hallucinate the women in their lives. The journalist sees the wife (Amanda Niles) who reluctantly accompanied him to Lebanon, while the doctor sees the Palestinian chambermaid (Shaula Chambliss) who radicalized him. Tautly directed, the gripping flashback sequences have been seamlessly integrated into the script, which neatly sidesteps the didactic with black humor. Joseph and Pritchett deliver persuasive performances as the two leads. **SPQR Stage Company** at Studio/Stage, 520 N. Western Ave., Hlywd.; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m.; thru Oct. 31. (323) 463-3900. (Sandra Ross)

A VERY MERRY UNAUTHORIZED CHILDREN'S SCIENTOLOGY PAGEANT The eponymous religious cult may seem like a soft target for satire, but the genius of Kyle Jarrow's 50-minute musical, based on a concept by director Alex Timbers, lies in its use of child actors to puncture both Scientology's wild claims and American gullibility. The evening plays out like a comedy about mind control as written by Nathanael West. Kyle Kaplan is charming and kooky as fantasy writer L. Ron Hubbard, whom he portrays from birth through the years he developed Scientology — a money-making operation whose mythos was clearly a product of Hubbard's own science-fiction imagination. **Powerhouse Theater**, 3116 Second St., Santa Monica; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m.; thru Nov. 21. (866) 633-6246. (Steven Mikulan) See Theater feature next week.