

DC Theater Friday: A localized ‘Native Gardens’ and an inspired ‘A Train’

By [Nelson Pressley](#) September 21

The weekly feature of what’s happening on Washington stages.

This week: the new Karen Zacarías comedy at Arena Stage and a triumph for 1st Stage with “Jesus Hopped the ‘A’ Train,” while the hit “Word Becomes Flesh” is revived at Theater Alliance and Rorschach Theatre returns to “Neverwhere.”

In the ETC. category, see Kelli O’Hara’s concert Saturday, and the National Theatre of Ghana performing Tennessee Williams outdoors Monday and Tuesday.

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PREVIEWING

“Death of a Salesman.” Craig Wallace plays Willy Loman in the Arthur Miller classic, with Kimberly Schraf as Linda Loman. Directed by Stephen Rayne (“[Sabrina Fair](#)”). *Sept. 22-Oct. 22 at Ford’s Theatre, 511 10th St. NW. Tickets \$17-\$64. Call 202-347-4833 or visit [fords.org](#).*

“Love and Information.” Forum Theatre artistic director Michael Dove stages the relentlessly inventive Caryl Churchill’s 2012 drama about modern information overload. A D.C. premiere. *Sept. 28-Oct. 21 at the Silver Spring Black Box, 8641 Colesville Rd, Silver Spring. Tickets \$18-\$38. Call 301-588-8279 or visit [forum-theatre.org](#).*

“The Lover/The Collection.” Michael Kahn begins his next-to-last season as the company’s artistic director with a double bill by Harold Pinter, following his 2011 venture with Pinter’s “[Old Times](#).” *Sept. 26-Oct. 29 at the Lansburgh, 450 Seventh St. NW. Tickets \$44-\$118. Call 202-547-1122, 877-487-8849 or visit [shakespearetheatre.org](#).*

“She Rode Horses Like the Stock Exchange.” Taffety Punk Theatre Company presents a comedy on couples and commerce, from Amelia Roper. *Sept. 27-Oct. 14 at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop, 545 7th Street SE. Tickets \$15. Call 202-355-9441 or visit taffetypunk.com.*

“Stones in His Pockets.” Marie Jones’s two-actor comedy about rural Irish townsfolk coping with a Hollywood film crew. *Sept. 23-Oct. 5 at Keegan Theatre, 1742 Church St. NW. Tickets \$35-\$45. Call 202-265-3767 or visit keegantheatre.com.*

“Widowers’ Houses.” George Bernard Shaw is the Washington Stage Guild’s house playwright, and this is his first staged play, characteristically class-conscious. *Sept. 28-Oct. 22 at the Undercoft Theater, 900 Massachusetts Avenue, NW. Tickets \$50-\$60. Call 240-582-0050 or visit stageguild.org.*

“The Wild Party.” Constellation Theatre founder Allison Arkeel Stockman directs the Andrew Lipka musical — not the Michael John La Chiusa version that likewise made it New York City debut in 2000 — based on the poem of Jazz Age decadence by Joseph Moncure March. *Sept. 21-Oct. 29 at Source Theatre, 1835 14th St. NW. Tickets \$25-\$55. Call 202-204-7741 or visit constellationtheatre.org.*

CONTINUING

“Algaonike’s Tiger.” “Claudia Barnett’s daring, poetic and dryly funny play imagines the life of Aglaonike, the ancient Greek female astronomer. Championing science when her contemporaries swear by mysticism and magic, Aglaonike confronts hucksters, visits the underworld and befriends a tiger (Matthew Marcus). Ann Fraistat is delightful as a no-nonsense Aglaonike.” (Celia Wren) *Through Oct. 1 at Venus Theatre, 21 C St., Laurel. Tickets \$40. Call 866-811-4111 or visit venustheatre.org.*

“The Arsonists.” “An unmistakable response to the stunning — and, to many, alarming — Trump electoral victory last fall, and it’s clear why director Michael John Garcés and Woolly Mammoth Artistic Director Howard Shalwitz (playing a nebbish whose home is invaded by arsonists) decided to stage it almost as soon as the November results were tallied. Max Frisch’s 1958 play, which evolved over nearly a decade and was a response to European countries succumbing to varieties of odious political domination, isn’t an explicit knockoff of a single party, ideology or leader. Its real target is any citizenry that rather lazily doesn’t respond.” (Nelson Pressley) *Through Oct. 8 at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, 641 D St. NW. Tickets \$34-\$69, subject to change. Call 202-393-3939 or visit woollymammoth.net.*

“Clover.” “Written by Laura Rocklyn and Ty Hallmark, ‘Clover’ is an informative and bustling but formally stodgy bio-drama about Marian ‘Clover’ Hooper Adams, the wife of Henry Adams. The play recounts Clover’s career as a society hostess in Washington, the solace she found in photography, and her eventual suicide. In the title role, Rocklyn suggests Clover’s intelligence, wit, nagging depression and frustration with life as a public figure.” (Celia Wren) *Through Oct. 28 at Chaos on F, 923 F St. NW. Tickets \$25. Visit allytheatrecompany.org.*

“The Devil’s Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith.” “The huge reservoir of outrage from which Smith draws her profane interpretive power — and on which she focuses her lung power — comes through in Miche Braden’s subversively

raunchy portrayal. In such numbers as ‘T’aint Nobody’s Bizness If I Do,’ ‘St. Louis Blues,’ ‘I Ain’t Got Nobody’ and ‘I Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl,’ the expressions of tragedy, pain,

passion and seduction allow an audience to sense the presence of Bessie’s devils as well as her better angels.” (Peter Marks) *Through Oct. 1 at Atlas Performing Arts Center, 1333 H St. NE. Tickets \$40-\$60. Visit mosaictheater.org or call 202-399-7993.*

“Disgraced.” “Ayad Akhtar’s incendiary 90-minute drama about a wealthy, powerful, young Wall Street Muslim American derailed by discrimination and self-deception was sharply acted at Arena Stage just last year. The shock-value laughs and affronted gasps are fewer and further between in this version; this respectful performance is missing the play’s intensely keen social sonar.” (Nelson Pressley) *Through Oct. 1 at Next Stop Theatre, 269 Sunset Park Dr., Herndon. Tickets \$35. Call 866-811-4111 or visit nextstoptheatre.org.*

“Don Juan Tenorio.” “Carnival masks look right at home in this melodramatic but visually arresting production, directed by José Carrasquillo from Nando López’s world-premiere script. In this iteration of the Don Juan legend, the notorious womanizer plans and executes his conquests amid dramatic shadows and gothic floods of light. It puts an eye-catching sheen on the play, which Spanish dramatist López has adapted from an 1844 work by José Zorrilla.” (Celia Wren) *Through Oct. 1 at GALA Hispanic Theatre, 3333 14th St NW. Tickets \$20-\$55. Call 202-234-7174 or visit galatheatre.org.*

“I Killed My Mother.” “Erica Chamblee plays Bernadette, who is raised as an orphan in institutions where she is cruelly treated. Some sequences seem to be filtered through a child’s confused perception or fantasy, and one major character may be imaginary, or possibly dead. Natália Gleason Nagy had directed the play in London and Budapest, so she has obviously devoted considerable time and thought to the its workings. The Romania-based writer Andras Visky is obviously an eminent artist. It’s too bad this manifestation of his work is so irksome.” (Celia Wren) *Through Sept. 30 at Spooky Action Theater, 1810 16th St. NW. Tickets \$25. Call 202-248-0301 or visit spookyaction.org.*

“In the Heights.” Lin-Manuel Miranda’s 2008 Tony-winning musical, co-produced by the Olney Theatre Center and Round House Theatre. “An enjoyably faithful, warmhearted facsimile of the original Broadway show. As this incarnation, directed and choreographed by Marcos Santana, so replicates the sound, look and feel of its Broadway predecessor,

you’re always comfortably aware of Miranda’s spirit circulating through the house ... Robin De Jesús steps with pleasing confidence into Miranda’s own shoes to portray Usnavi, the lovelorn bodega owner who narrates the story of an eventful Fourth of July in Washington Heights.” (Peter Marks) *Through Oct. 22 at the Olney Theatre Center, 2001 Olney-Sandy Spring Rd., Olney. Tickets \$37-\$84. Call 301-924-3400 or visit olneytheatre.org.*

“Jesus Hopped the ‘A’ Train.” “A bravura play, and perhaps 1st Stage’s finest work yet. The dialogue can be ear-scaldingly profane, and the heaven-or-hell speeches soar like theological arias. The show’s five actors consistently deliver Stephen Adly Guirgis’s high drama with an inspired mix of saltiness and soul.” (Nelson Pressley) *Through Oct. 8 at 1st Stage, 1524 Spring Hill Rd., McLean. Tickets \$15-\$33. Call 703-854-1856 or visit 1ststagetysons.org.*

“Lela and Co.” “Cordelia Lynn’s two-hander is writerly, unflinching and often grim. All of the play’s male figures are channeled by Renaldo McClinton, whose characterizations are distinctive and robust, if less mesmerizing than Felicia Curry’s heart-rending Lela. ‘Lela & Co.’ is based on a true story, and its descriptions can be harrowing.” (Celia Wren) *Through Oct. 1 at the Anacostia Arts Center, 1231 Good Hope Rd. SE. Tickets \$22. Visit [factory 449.org](http://factory449.org).*

“A Little Night Music.” “What director Eric Schaeffer and crew get so right here are all the risible wry personalities in a delightful waltz through the amorous follies of Swedish aristocrats and other randy, needy mortals. Justice to Sondheim’s most conventionally romantic musical goes unserved if the characters aren’t revealed to be robustly funny. Led by Holly Twyford as a most beguiling and comically self-aware Desiree Armfeldt — vivacious touring actress and singer of ‘Send in the Clowns’ — Schaeffer’s cast meets the formidable challenge of behaving foolishly in high style.” (Peter Marks) *Through Oct. 15 at Signature Theatre, 4200 Campbell Ave., Arlington. Tickets \$40-\$104, subject to change. Call 703-820-9771 or visit sigtheatre.org.*

“Native Gardens.” “An out-loud situation comedy rife with tiresome antics and characters that telegraph American ties minted circa 1957. The premise of Karen Zacarías’s utterly predictable play concerns the bruising battle over a property line in a Washington neighborhood. Fastidious gardening nut Frank (Steve Hendrickson) and volatile wife Virginia (Sally Wingert) face off against the new younger homeowners next door, lawyer Pablo (Dan Domingues) and expectant graduate student Tania (Jacqueline Correa). Yes, it’s the White Couple vs. the Latino Couple, together scrounging for broad yuks in a pair of back yards that might as well be seeded with trigger warnings.” (Peter Marks) *Through Oct. 22 at Arena Stage, 1101 Sixth St. SW. Tickets \$40-\$111, subject to change. Call 202-488-3300 or visit arenastage.org.*

“Neverwhere.” “Neil Gaiman’s tale, adapted by Robert Kauzlaric, sucks an ordinary Londoner into the flamboyant world of London Below, which is full of mystics and pirates, angels and assassins. Rorschach Theatre’s performance seemed bracing in 2013, but a second look reveals how repetitive and cliched the script is. There may be a ripping two-hour show submerged here, one that doesn’t seem to put so much emphasis on scampering through the space and hoping the cast can sustain the ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’-style drollery from London Below’s cutthroats and heroes.” (Nelson Pressley) *Through Oct. 1 at the Atlas Performing Arts Center, 1333 H St. NE. Tickets \$30-\$45. Call 202-399-7993 or visit rorschachtheatre.com.*

“Skeleton Crew.” “The output of playwright Dominique Morisseau has finally found a Washington home — and on the evidence of ‘Skeleton Crew,’ it’s high time it occurred. Autoworkers of color in a cutthroat economy provide the characters and premise of Morisseau’s well-made play, set in the plant’s employee break room and dexterously mounted by director Patricia McGregor. Theatrical embroidery is mercifully kept to a minimum: this is ethics-driven meat-and-potatoes drama, in the Arthur Miller vein.” (Peter Marks) *Through Oct. 8 at Studio Theatre, 1501 14th St. NW. Tickets \$20-\$85. Call 202-332-3300 or visit studiotheatre.org.*

“Word Becomes Flesh.” Theater Alliance revives its hit staging, winner of five Helen Hayes Awards earlier this year, of Marc Bamunthi Joseph’s hip-hop fugue. “‘Word Becomes Flesh’ started as a solo show more than a decade ago and then was adapted for five men; under Psalmayene 24’s direction it pops like an energetic concert. The actors fuse as a tight unit, giving

voice to a 27-year-old man's fear, anger and hope as expressed to an unborn son." (Nelson Pressley) *Through Oct. 8 at the Anacostia Playhouse, 2020 Shannon Pl. SE. Tickets \$14-\$40. Call 202-290-2328 or visit theateralliance.com.*

CLOSING

"The Heidi Chronicles." "Terribly bland-looking, yet Wendy Wasserstein's play is still great company. The dialogue ripples with zingers as the story follows Heidi from the late 1960s through the ERA 1970s and into Ronald Reagan's '80s; the women's-group encounter is especially good as director Jenna Duncan's performers (Melissa Flaim, Hallie Cooper, Alina Collins Maldonado and Madeline Rose Burrows) swap stories and manifesto statements before swearing fidelity forever. It was never that easy, of course, and Heidi's sense of betrayal and disappointment are rendered in fine shades by Beth Hylton." (Nelson Pressley) *Through Sept. 24 at Rep Stage, 10901 Little Patuxent Pkwy., Columbia. Tickets \$10-\$40. Call 443-518-1500 or visit repstage.org.*

"Julius Caesar." "The show takes its stabs at style: Scena Theatre director Robert McNamara, who plays Caesar, and the politicians rhythmically march like robotic brutes in the menacing mode of British bad-boy actor-director Steven Berkoff. But there's not much room to move on the small Lab II platform stage, and the show defaults to rapid connivance and declamation. For one of Shakespeare's most political dramas, it's a pretty unreflective staging." (Nelson Pressley) *Through Sept. 24 at the Atlas Performing Arts Center, 1333 H St. NE. Tickets \$30-\$45. Call 202-399-7993 or visit scenatheatre.org.*

TYA (Theater for Young Audiences)

"How I Became a Pirate." A musical based on Melinda Long's book. *Through Oct. 22 at Adventure Theatre MTC, 7300 MacArthur Blvd., Glen Echo. Tickets \$19.50. Call 301-634-2270 or visit adventuretheatre-mtc.org.*

ETC.

The Capitol Steps. The longtime political satirists, tearing laughs from the headlines. *Fridays and Saturdays in the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center Amphitheater, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW. Tickets \$40.50. Call 202-397-7328 or visit www.capsteps.com.*

"In Cabaret We Trust." TBD Immersive stages a cabaret crossed between Weimar Germany and a potentially grim future Washington, D.C. *Through Sept. 29 at Blind Whino Arts Club, 700 Delaware Ave. SW. Tickets \$35-\$45. Call 866-811-4111 or visit tbdimmersive.com.*

Kelli O'Hara. The "King and I" Tony winner in concert. *Sept. 23 at George Mason University Concert Hall, 4373 Mason Pond Dr., Fairfax. Tickets \$60-\$100. Call 888-945-2468 or visit cfa.gmu.edu.*

Mucho Kluncho Talent Show. A jam-packed evening of across-the-board acts presented by The Klunch. *Sept. 23 at Fringe Logan Arts Space, Trinidad Theater, 1358 Florida Ave NE. Tickets \$20-\$75. Call (866) 811-4111 or visit theklunch.com.*

“Shear Madness.” The indestructible interactive comedy whodunit, at 12,000-plus performances. *Ongoing in the Kennedy Center’s Theater Lab. Tickets \$50-\$54. Call 202-467-4600 or visit kennedy-center.org.*

“Ten Blocks on the Camino Real.” The National Theatre of Ghana will perform the Tennessee Williams play outdoors twice: 7 p.m. Monday at the National Building Museum’s West Lawn, 401 F St NW; and Tuesday 5:30 p.m. on the Red Square at Georgetown University, 3700 O Street, NW. *Pay what you can tickets at globallab.georgetown.edu.*

WAPAVA Presents: “Come From Away.” Excerpts from an archived video performance at Ford’s Theatre of the musical “Come From Away,” with cast member Alyssa Wilmoth Keegan discussing the show. *Sept. 28 at the Chevy Chase Library, 5625 Connecticut Ave. NW. Free.*

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[John Kelly on the D.C. set of “Native Gardens”](#)

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First Post byline, 1992; covering theater for the Post since 1999. His book "American Playwriting and the Anti-Political Prejudice" came out in 2014. 🐦 Follow @nelsonpressley

