

The Best Bay Area Theatre of 2014



Best of 2014

Bay Area Theatre Examiner

Here it is: Bay Area Theatre Examiner's "ten best" list for 2014. First, some caveats: I can't see everything I would like. There are time constraints, and tickets aren't always available. So, there may be many productions that did not make this list simply because I didn't see them. Second, there are many shows that were as good as those listed here — selecting only ten is somewhat arbitrary.

This year, I attended nearly 60 plays, produced by 27 different companies. Most of the shows were of high quality. In fact, 33% received a rating of four or five stars, reserved for exceptional or "must see" work. Only three shows received less than three stars, and none received only one star. I classify all shows receiving at least two stars as "worth seeing" — so this has been a very good year overall.

The following alphabetically ordered list represents my considered opinion of what might be among the best of the best in 2014. Each was awarded a four or five star rating:

"Bauer" by Lauren Gunderson. A world premiere produced by SF Playhouse. Up-and-coming playwright Gunderson's piece about the little known German expressionist painter Rudolf Bauer was distinguished by delightful wordplay and fine performances.

"The Comedy of Errors" by William Shakespeare. Produced by California Shakespeare Theatre. The company had a blast with the wonderful clowning in this production.

"The Crazed" by Sally Dawidoff. Produced by Central Works. This excellent adaptation of a celebrated novel by Ha Jin was full of poetry and political import.

"Everybody Here Says Hello" by Stuart Bousel. Produced by Wily West Productions. I wrote: "Playwright Stuart Bousel displays an impressive grasp of character, an ear for honest dialogue, and a wicked wit in this wonderful piece about a community of attractive young folk, gay, straight, and bi, struggling to achieve satisfying relationships over a period of a few years."

"I Am The Wind" by Jon Fosse. Produced by Do It Live Productions. Will Hand and Do It Live Productions brought the work of celebrated Norwegian genius Jon Fosse to Bay Area audiences for the first time in a remarkable presentation.

"Macbeth At Fort Point" by William Shakespeare. Produced by We Players. I wrote: "Some theatre experiences are remembered for a lifetime: "Macbeth At Fort Point" is likely to be one of those. Those fortunate enough to attend this extraordinary event (it is more than a play) will be revisiting the memories for years to come." Six months later, I haven't changed my mind.

"Pygmalion" by George Bernard Shaw. Produced by California Shakespeare Theatre. Irene Lucio made a memorably brilliant debut as Eliza Doolittle in this extraordinarily well-staged and well-acted production, directed by Jonathan Moscone.

"The Speakeasy", conceived, created and produced by Nick. A. Olivero. Head writer: Barry Eitel. I described this immersive theatre piece as "theatrical art of a high order" and "a marriage of lowbrow and highbrow that is unlike anything else."

"Susannah" by Carlisle Floyd. Produced by San Francisco opera. Floyd's operatic masterpiece has a libretto which is among the finest American dramas of the 20th century, and received a stunning production with brilliant singing and acting by the great Patricia Racette in the title role.

"Ubu Roi" by Alfred Jarry, translation by Rob Melrose. Produced by Cutting Ball Theatre. With this highly original production, Cutting Ball again demonstrated their expertise in interpreting the most celebrated works of the 20th Century avante-garde.

There you have my top ten, although at least a dozen other productions could have made an equal claim to being among the best. Why not attend enough theatre this year so that you can select your own "top ten"? There is plenty of excellent theatre all around the Bay Area just waiting to enhance your life. Be there!

And Happy New Year to all!