

## The 10+ Best Shows of 2006

By Tom W. Kelly

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What a year! During a very busy 2006, the Bay Area happily hosted hundreds of plays, thousands of actors and approximately a buhzillion audience members! From small nomad companies to large resident theatres to big-budget touring shows, the wide diversity of theatre continues both to entertain and enrich our lives. Having seen over 100 plays last year, it was merrily mind-boggling trying to narrow it all down to a Top Ten (or so). That said, here goes, in reverse order:

The fabulous *Love, Janis* (conceived, adapted, and directed by Randal Myler) was heard jamming at Marines Memorial Theatre, produced by Columbia Artists Theatricals & Madstone Productions in association with TUS, LLC & Bartner/Jenkins Entertainment, Inc. It packed in both a lifetime of anguish and great blues/rock from the incredible Janis Joplin. *The Rat Pack Is Back!* is currently playing at the Marines Memorial Theatre, 609 Sutter St., SF. Tix/info, call (415) 441-7444 or go to [www.marinesmemorialtheatre](http://www.marinesmemorialtheatre).

*The Dick n Dubya Show: A Republican Cabaret* (written, performed, sung, and danced by Amos Glick and Ed Holmes) provided big laughs and political satire aplenty at The Marsh SF. The Marsh consistently brings the Bay Area high-quality new works by talented local writers and performers. The Marsh SF, 1062 Valencia St. (at 22nd St.), SF. The fun fare is constantly changing. Tix/info, call (800) 838-3006 or go to [www.themarsh](http://www.themarsh).

*Where the Sun Don't Shine* (written by Peter Budinger and DC Scarpelli), seen at the 2006 Fringe Festival at the EXIT Theatre, produced by nomad company Dr. Emile's Theatre Tremendo. This talented company offers clinically insane players, razor-sharp comic timing, extreme originality, and solid showmanship. Keep an eye on them. Tix/info, go to [www.tremendo.org](http://www.tremendo.org).

### In Ascending Order

10. *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, music and lyrics by William Falsetto Finn with book by Rachel Sheinkin (additional material by Jay Reiss,) produced at the Post Street Theatre. This musical tribute to teen angst amidst puberty solidly entertained from start to finish. Luis Brava's *Forever Tango* is currently playing at the Post Street Theatre, 450 Post St., SF. Tix/info, go to [www.poststreettheatre.com](http://www.poststreettheatre.com)

9. Jane Olivor's *Christmas and Romance* appeared at the Empire Plush Room. Her sumptuous voice entranced one and all in a glorious evening of sensational music. **The Plush Room hosts many, many terrific performers, most notably last year** were Paula West and Maude Maggart, as well as local cabaret performers Vandana Bali, Barry Lloyd, Linda Kosut, and **Lua Hadar**. Empire Plush Room (York Hotel), 940 Sutter St., SF. Tix/info, call (866) 468-3399 or go to [www.plushroom.com](http://www.plushroom.com)

8. *Salome* by Oscar Wilde (with additional material by Mark Jackson) produced by the Aurora Theatre Company. This company consistently provides audiences with solid acting and directing, new plays and/or new takes on old plays, all in an intimate 3/4 round stage. Their next show is *The Birthday Party*

by Harold Pinter (opens Jan. 26). Aurora Theatre Company, 2081 Addison St., Berkeley. Tix/info, call (510) 843-4822 or go to [www.auroratheatre.org](http://www.auroratheatre.org)

7. *Annie Get Your Gun* by Herbert and Dorothy Fields (revised by Peter Stone) produced by Foothill Music Theatre. Jay Manley directs musical hit after hit, and most especially good last year was this colorful, feel-good, foot-stomping, laughter-packed, and love-filled musical set in the Wild West, starring the fabulous Jessica Raaum. Keep an eye on her AND check out some of Foothill's upcoming shows, the next being *Pippin* (opens Feb. 16.) Smithwick Theatre (Foothill College), 12345 El Monte Blvd., Los Altos Hills. Tix/info, call (650) 949-7360 or go to [www.foothillmusicals.com](http://www.foothillmusicals.com)

6. *Killer Joe* by Tracy Letts, produced by Sankowich/Firemused Productions at the Marin Theatre Company and Magic Theatre. Lee Sankowich consummately directed this dark Texas tale of drugs, profanity, squalor, nudity, violence, murder, and more. Bay Area audiences will hopefully continue to see much more of this talented director's work.

5. *Reckless* by Craig Lucas, produced by SF Playhouse. Louis Parnell directed this quirky script, which follows a sheltered housewife (the superlative Susi Damilano) on an unexpected trip that results in lots of laughs and bouts of poignancy. The SF Playhouse's superb productions resonate with humanity and originality. Also excellent this year was *Roulette* by Paul Weitz, directed by Damilano, and starring Bill English. Their next show (opens Jan. 13) is *3 Seconds in the Key* by Deb Margolin. SF Playhouse, 533 Sutter St., SF. Tix/info, call (415) 677-9596 or go to [www.sfplayhouse.org](http://www.sfplayhouse.org)

4. *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley tied with *Jersey Boys* by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, brought to SF by SHN's Best of Broadway. Though these two shows were quite different, they both brought SF audiences the very best in theatre excellence. *Jersey Boys* is still running at the Curran Theatre, 445 Geary St., SF. Check it out! Also terrific last year from Best of Broadway were the remounting of *A Chorus Line* and Matthew Bourne's choreography of *Swan Lake*. The hits keep coming, and for up-to-date info go to [www.shnsf.com](http://www.shnsf.com)

3. *Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, produced by Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Rita Moreno astounded us with her tour de force performance of Amanda Wingfield. Berkeley Rep offers visually outstanding stagings, top-notch tech, strong performances, great new scripts, and anti-war politics. Also fantastic last year were *9 Parts of Desire*, *Mother Courage*, *Ennio*, and *Zorro in Hell*. Coming soon (opens Jan. 17) is *The Pillowman* by Martin McDonagh. Berkeley Repertory Theatre, 2025 Addison St., Berkeley. Tix/info, call (510) 647-2949 or go to [www.berkeleyrep.org](http://www.berkeleyrep.org)

2. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* by Manuel Puig (translated by Allan Baker) produced by the New Conservatory Theatre Center. Matthew Graham-Smith powerfully directed this tense and edgy drama of a political dissident (Brad Cooreman) and an effeminate homosexual (Javier Galit-Cava) incarcerated together in a tiny cell. NCTC consistently provides a bounty of excellent gay theatre, also including this year's *The War at Home*, *Valhalla*, *The Fabulous Adventures of Captain Queer*, *Eyes of Babylon*, and *D\*Face* as well as the musicals *Convenience*, *Insignificant Others* and *Franc D'Ambrosio's Broadway*. Check out their upcoming shows. Tix/info, call (415) 861-8972 or go to [www.nctcsf.org](http://www.nctcsf.org)

1. *Hunter Gatherers* by local gay writer Peter Sinn Nachtrieb, produced by nomad company Killing My Lobster at the Thick House. This tawdry tale follows two couples as they meet, drink wine and proceed to violate a bounty of social taboos. Hysterical, startlingly original, tightly directed (by Tracy Ward), excellently acted - who could ask for more? Hopefully the Bay Area will see much more of Nachtrieb's plays as well as more fun fare from Killing My Lobster. KML's next show (re-opens Jan. 5) is an extension of their hit titled *Killing My Lobster Faces the Music* at ODC, 3153 17th St., SF. Tix/info, call (415) 558-7721 or go to [www.killingmylobster.com](http://www.killingmylobster.com)