Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Ann, Is This Really You?

Sylvie · Wednesday, March 30th, 2022

Holland Taylor's note in the program for *Ann*, the solo piece she wrote and performs at The Pasadena Playhouse, tells you pretty much everything you need to know — especially the part where she mentions that it took her six years to research and write it. What she won't tell you, is that it's even more dazzling on stage than she lets on.

Ann is an almost uncanny living portrait of the famously clever and ever-appealing Ann Richards, a democrat and only the second woman to be governor of Texas. (Taylor tells you all you'll ever want to know about the *first* woman governor of Texas, so I won't spoil her fun.) She also is not shy about acknowledging that there may be a bit more than luck or voodoo that's afoot here. She confided to the *Los Angeles Times* recently that she felt "drafted" to create this role, and while she's never considered herself particularly spiritual, she admits to feeling almost called upon to do it.

Ann, the show, is entirely based on Richards' own words and wisecracks. Since there were plenty of them, you can see why it took six years to make the piece happen. The effort can only have been monumental.

This Los Angeles area premiere, simply and soberly directed by Benjamin Endsley-Klein, comes late in the game. *ANN* opened on Broadway in 2013, where it was nominated for a Tony award, and this 2022 Pasadena Playhouse run has been announced as Taylor's farewell appearance in the role. *What?* OK. It originally had been scheduled for 2020. Blame the pandemic, among other calamities, for keeping it out of local reach.

Well, better late than never (even if the show was beautifully recorded and can be found online). Saturday night's audience audience was packed with admirers, friends and celebrities more than primed to receive it. Some in that audience could barely restrain themselves from anticipating every hilarious punch line before she uttered it.

Holland Taylor in *Ann*, her one-woman show now playing at The Pasadena Playhouse.

You may attribute such exuberance to the Emmy-winning Taylor's long presence on stage, film and especially television (*The Practice*, *Legally Blonde*, *Two and a Half Men*).

Yet there is a sense that *Ann* is some sort of career pinnacle, even in a career as full and as punctuated by success as this one. It is as much an impersonation as it is a performance, partly because the show is so astutely well written that it goes well beyond the drawl and snappy wit, to give us the entire woman.

At its funniest and most pointed, Richards' sense of humor was benign. It was all intelligence and spontaneity and broad smiles, even when it landed with the precision of a hypersonic missile. Her reputation for such healthy marksmanship stayed with her long after her one-term governorship had ended. She never lost her notoriety as a personality loaded with natural charm and and good humor and the kind of ease that invites people in.

Examples of this personality abound in the show, heralded by the string of telephone calls she has in the office, whether it's with the President of the United States or when she badgers her speechwriter or is planning a holiday with her four grown children. We witness the absolute tenderness in her conversations with the kids — not just because some of the relationships are a bit frayed, but because they just need a little nudging. No one demands perfect from one's kids and no one is better at gentle nudging than this Mama.

Telephone snippets are often poor substitutes for action on stage, but not in this case. Here they illuminate the caller. They're reference points. We see it in Ann's desire to stay the execution of a man on death row whose childhood was so horrendous that she feels he cannot be terminally

judged for his bad actions as an adult. She's human first. Everything else comes after. It's not beyond her to ponder the man's fate *and* pin the fringe that is coming off of one of the flags in her office.

Holland Taylor in her one-woman show, *Ann*, now at The Pasadena Playhouse.

Finally: Taylor's words and gestures may be a head-on mirror-image of the Ann Richards we remember, but more arresting — and more significant — is her grasp of every twang and turn in Richards' Texas drawl. The voice is identical and sounds completely natural, which it is *not*. Inflection and tone also are there. It is an impressive accomplishment and Taylor has acknowledged that she sometimes inadvertently slips into that voice while in ordinary conversation — offstage.

If it remains true that this Playhouse run is indeed her farewell in the role, do yourself the favor of catching it while you still can.

What: Los Angeles premiere of *ANN*, written &performed by Holland Taylor.

Where: The Pasadena Playhouse, 39 S. El Molino Ave., Pasadena, CA 91101.

When: Wednesdays-Fridays, 8pm; Saturdays, 2 & 8pm; Sundays, 2pm. Ends April 24.

How: Tickets: $30 and up, available online at pasadenaplayhouse.org or by phone at (626)

356-7529.

Parking: $5, across the street, or various lots in the vicinity.

Running time: 2 hours, 5 minutes (includes a 15-minute intermission)

Proof of vaccination and masks are required for admission. Health and safety guidelines as outlined by the CDC and local health officials must be followed at all times.

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