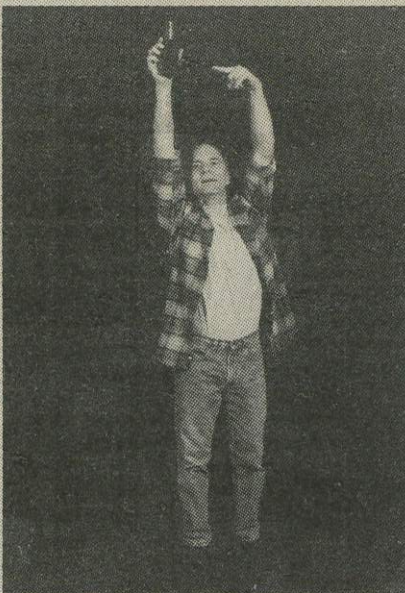


and his compulsively pregnant wife, Lady Magdalena (Chris Edsey), have ensconced themselves in their fortress to watch the chaos from their balcony (no TV in those days). Possessing secret files on Bromley and others in the court (à la Darryl Gates), the inept and wormy captain of arms (Peter Russell), advises his lord to let the city burn; after all, they're only peasants. Amid the conflagration, the Evil Duke Next Door (Steve Gunning) extracts an exorbitant compensation from Bromley, who stole food from the Duke. Enlisting the aid of his serving woman (Carolyn Lardinois English) and her loopy sister (Joy Ellison), Bromley desperately tries to get out of the promise, with comic results. Director Roger Hampton unleashes an outrageous cast that goes overboard with accents, sight gags and slapstick, resulting in a very funny evening. It's too bad the casting wasn't also inspired by the uprising, for there are no people of color on the stage. Melrose Theater, 733 Seward St., Hlywd.; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m.; thru May 29. (213) 660-TKTS. (Martin Hernández)

**MOUTH TO MOUTH** Carol Schlanger has been around the block plenty of times since graduating from Yale Drama School, during which this hopeful actress lost her way and became a homeless hippie, an unwed mother and, ultimately, a somewhat fulfilled housewife. Now the 20-year-plus reunion of her Yale class prompts her to take another look at her life. Flying in and out of various characters in this 90-minute one-woman show, Schlanger alternately embodies and reacts to her former classmates as she compares their successes and failures with her own dullness. Her funniest characterization is that of persnickety Caitland, now a famous stage actress who peppers her conversation with "dahhhhlings" à la Tallulah Bankhead. More fascinating is Schlanger's flirtation with an old pal who is now a big movie star. Bursting in and out of this reunion are flashes of her past, including her relationships with her wood-cutting husband and idealistic son, and her not-quite-required love affair with a much younger man. Director Mark W. Travis keeps Schlanger's wildly flailing emotions and actions just enough in check to allow the audience to stay connected; otherwise, he lets this free spirit run loose. Theater Geo, 1223 N. Highland Ave., Hlywd.; Sun., 3 p.m.; Wed., 8 p.m.; thru May 8. (213) 466-1767. (Tom Provenzano)

**SLOW CHILDREN** Matthew Weiss' romantic comedy, about a policeman who transforms himself into a headbanger after being taken hostage by a glam rocker, adds up to little more than a one-joke play

with a couple of reversals thrown in. Good cop Doug (Ben Meyerson) finds himself handcuffed to a broken-down pullout bed in a Hollywood apartment. Rikki (Craig Borten) says he made the citizen's arrest because the cop was harassing him. Enter sweet-natured roommate and ace guitarist Timo (Wayne Pere). He and Doug become friends despite Rikki's warnings. Doug buddies up with everyone else who arrives, sharing cooking tips with Timo's girlfriend and even falling for Rikki's girl. As Doug tries to talk Rikki into giving him his freedom, Rikki ends up unintentionally shooting Timo, not once but twice, with Doug's gun. While Timo is bleeding to death, Doug's fiancée, also a cop, joins the developing soap opera as a hostage. The big joke is the incongruity of seeing opposites attract — coppers and metalheads. The cast performs admirably, but to what end?



**The Only Thing Worse You Could Have Told Me**

While it must have been exotic to see glamour rockers parade around in full regalia on a Manhattan stage where this play was developed and premiered, for us hard-boiled Angelenos it's rather a bore. The Lost Studio, 130 S. La Brea Ave.; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; thru May 18. (213) 466-1767. (Ellen Krout-Hasegawa)

**THE WOOD DEMON** is inside all of us, according to one of the characters in Anton Chekhov's 1890 warm-up to *Uncle Vanya*. The title character, here played with commanding verve by Mark Harellick, is an idealist (the fore-runner of *Uncle Vanya's* Astrov) — a local physician who plants trees in his spare time and bemoans the desecration of the forests. *The Wood Demon* may well be the first drama of the modern age to grapple with ecology as a central theme. But it's not only Russia's birches that are being wasted, it's also time. So many possibilities for achievement, both professionally and personally, are stifled by inertia and pettiness, emerging through Chekhov's prism of unrequited loves. Though many of the scenes are almost verbatim from *Uncle Vanya*, there are both plot variations and additional characters in *The Wood Demon*, here rendered in Nicholas Saunders and Frank Dwyer's fluid translation. Dwyer has directed the piece in the round with the Anteus Company, an excellent classical repertory troupe that has mercifully strained away the morbidity that characterizes so many productions of Chekhov. With D. Martyn Bookwalter's lush period set — with birch canopies draped over the girders — we're treated to a funny, skillful, sensitive treatment of this bittersweet comedy. The tragic underpinnings are brushed under the proverbial carpet in an interpretation that plays so hard for humor, it's almost glib. Still, you have to be grateful for the life this group has breathed into Chekhov — a rare accomplishment in and of itself. Mark Taper Forum, 135 N. Grand Ave., dwntwn.; Tues.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7:30 p.m.; mats Sat.-Sun., 2:30 p.m.; thru May 22. (213) 365-3500. TDD: (213) 680-4017. (Steven Leigh Morris)

#### OPENING THIS WEEK:

Major Theaters: *Lettice & Lovage*, *Merlin*, *The World Goes Round*

Hollywood, Westside and Downtown: *Ars Erotica*, *Beyond the Ashes*, *An Evening of One-Acts*, *Forbidden Broadway 1994*, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Sacrificial Dance*, *Sleeping with You*, *Summer Brave*

The Valley: *Lysistrata*, *The Ways of the Heart*

Beaches: *Miss Pell Is Missing*, *The Secretaries*