

help cancer patients overcome death anxiety.

Standing Stall: What ever happened to the Gateway to Hollywood? CHRISTINE PELISEK looks for answers.

Plus, HOWARD BLUME and the secrets revealed in *Justice Blackmun's papers* about the upcoming threat to *Roe v. Wade*.

Columns

LETTERS

We write, you write...

A CONSIDERABLE TOWN

Darby Crash is re-Germinated in an impromptu reunion show; DAN KAPELOVITZ attends. MICHELLE HUNEVEN explores the downtown community garden temporarily saved this week by a judge's injunction. And A.W. HILL absorbs the telescope evangelism of maverick physicist John Dobson.

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Interview with Imaginary Bear. By SEVEN McDONALD.

QUARK SOUP

Flow, baby, flow: One command center in downtown L.A., seven engineers, 3,000 wired intersections and 12,000 sensors in the pavement add up to the world's most advanced traffic-control system. BY MARGARET WERTHEIM

ROCKIE HOROSCOPE

Bits

FILM

About a boy: JOHN POWERS on *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and growing up with Charlie Kaufman.

Deep trouble: SCOTT FOUNDAS on the coal-black Chinese comedy *Blind Shaft*.

Taking the bait: RON STRINGER reviews *Dawn of the Dead* and *Taking Lives* — both the 10-minute teaser versions and the full-length features.

BOOKS

The aesthetic of excess: William T. Vollmann on his new 3,000-page tome and the vocabulary of violence. BY DAVID L. ULIN

Plus, tour de force of the *Black Clock*. BY MATTHEW C. DUERSTEN

THEATER

through Russian literature like a spike.) Americans treat their own history like a used napkin — most U.S. college students don't even know who Hubert Humphrey was — yet ask a Russian whom they're voting for in their presidential election, and they'll surely drag Ivan the Terrible into the discussion. Perhaps this willful amnesia is why Americans are at core so optimistic, whereas Russians, who remember everything, are not. Regardless of occupation or social status, a Russian will blithely wait for disaster to strike, which explains why Russians find a higher metaphysical purpose in drinking than working. This is not, for Russians, a tragic moral dilemma, as it is in a play by Tennessee Williams or a typical American production of Chekhov. It's not a dilemma at all, just a fact, sort of amusing but not enough to make you laugh out loud, unless you're under the influence. American drinking comes with Puritan/Catholic/Jewish guilt, which is entirely beyond any native Russian's comprehension. And so on.

Anton Chekhov was a very private man, his regard of fiction's purpose being not to bare the author's soul but to capture the winds of experience through observation, and to weave allegory and poetry and atmosphere from it. This is the opposite of, say, Tennessee Williams, whose light of wisdom shines directly on himself, his pain and his sexual predilections. Williams loved Chekhov and his plays are often described as Chekhovian. Not true. Chekhov wrote from the premise that his personal life is none of our business, whereas Williams wrote from the premise that literature is a form of confession. That latter premise has shaped our theater, film and television culture for more than half a century, culminating in "reality" TV. Which goes a long way in helping to explain why some of our finest stage talents keep bowdlerizing Chekhov's great plays by turning them into moody confessionals, as though they were written by Tennessee Williams, with white wicker furniture, parasols and men in cream-colored suits.

THE ANTAEUS COMPANY is a smart group that knows Chekhov well. Its 1994 production of *The Wood Demon* (a precursor to *Uncle Vanya*) was staged at the Taper in a translation by Nicholas Saunders and Frank Dwyer. In their breezy translations of four Chekhov one-acts, under the umbrella title *Chekhov X 4*, presented in North Hollywood, the duo and the company illustrate the entire range of Russian-American understandings and misunderstandings.

Swan Song concerns a veteran actor (Lawrence Pressman) wandering around an empty provincial theater in the middle of the night. Svyetlovidov (the Russian word *svyet* means "light") decides to pack it in for his career. Before doing so, however, he performs excerpts from his "best" works to an entrapped stagehand (Arye Gross). It's a tender joke about delusions of immortality, but Pressman's grandiloquent interpretation so rattles around between