

REVIEW: Only one original play by the Orange County Playwrights Alliance shines at Brea's Curtis Theatre.

By **ERIC MARCHESE**
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Festivals of new one-act plays are a notoriously hard sell for any theater. You're asking the ticket-buying public to plunk down cash for untried, untested properties.

In the case of the Orange County Playwrights Alliance – or OCPA, as it's known – that problem has been temporarily solved by Fullerton's Vanguard Theatre Ensemble, which agreed to produce a two-weekend festival of original OCPA plays as part of its 2000 season. Better yet, Vanguard agreed to make the festival one of its few productions at the 199-seat Curtis Theatre in Brea.

"The Writes of Spring," as this joint venture is called, is typical of such festivals. One piece is outstanding, while the rest have an obvious workshop feel – only a couple of which offer select pleasures.

The one playlet here of consequence is "Storm Riders" by Johnna Adams. The piece, a tight, smartly written pas de deux between a Texas housewife (Sally Leonard) and her lawn boy (Kirk Blackington), has not only the look and sound but also the

'The Writes of Spring'

- ▶ **When:** Through Sunday. 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday
- ▶ **Where:** Curtis Theatre, Brea Civic and Cultural Center, One Civic Center Circle, Brea
- ▶ **How much:** \$5-\$10
- ▶ **Ticket availability:** Good
- ▶ **Length:** About two hours
- ▶ **Suitability:** Teens and adults
- ▶ **Call:** (714) 990-7722

weight of a significant piece of stagecraft, which should give hope to any of the alliance's budding playwrights.

Adams' script is skillfully layered and offers dialogue that's intelligent, well-crafted and lifelike, giving the show's director, Laurie Freed, and its two actors something to sink their chops into.

It's clear almost from the start that Lainie Winston (Leonard) has more than friendly conversation in mind when she invites Kyle Blaylock (Blackington) in out of the hot sun for a cold drink. She gives the 17-year-old a beer. She tousles his hair. She compliments his physique and his rodeo-riding ability. It's "The Graduate" all over again, only this time, Benjamin is just as interested in Mrs. Robinson as she is in him.

With seemingly stock characters and a potentially cliched situation, Adams takes us to places both familiar and new, making "Storm Riders" a theatrical pleasure.