

Curtain Call

CYM SHORTS: It happens to every critic eventually. One day you look up from your notepad, fingers splotted with ink from your poison pen, eyes glazed over from staring at so many bad shows, and you wonder if there isn't some more interesting niche in the theatre world. For Tony Adler, former critic for *Chicago Magazine* and the *Reader*, that niche turned out to be the administration of a fledgling fringe acting school, The Actor's Gymnasium. The brainchild of Adler and Lookingglass co-founder Larry DiStasi, The Gymnasium was created two years ago to "provide a safe home for performing artists" and "to encourage interdisciplinary work in the theatre."

Looking over the school's course offerings—which favor such intensely physical "circus arts" as juggling, physical comedy and "mime/movement/theatre"—it's hard not to wonder if a third goal of the place wasn't to counteract this city's domination by, on the one hand, heavy-handed method-style realism and, on the other, dumb-ass improv.

Certainly the school's eclectic offerings, for both children and adults, have allowed theatre artists like circus acrobat Sylvia Hernandez (who wouldn't necessarily be anyone's first choice for a revival of "American Buffalo") to stay in the city. And the school also provides a forum for visiting artists to teach their craft, as it did earlier this year when Marcel Marceau came to Chicago.

Once a year, the school's remarkable faculty puts together a benefit show. Last year, the star attraction was Donna Blue Lachman. This Thursday the bill will be dominated by performers appearing in the current fringe hit "The Midnight Circus" (now at the Ivanhoe Theatre; see review). That show stars countless Gymnasium teachers, including Jeff Jenkins and Julie Greenberg, who will do material from their two-person clown act. Sylvia Hernandez and her brother Tony will perform acrobatics. Other performers from "Midnight Circus" will do roustabout shtick between acts.

Tickets are \$7 for the May 15 show only; \$25 for show, reception and silent auction. For more information, call 847.328.2795. (Jack Helbig)

