

TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE

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DANCIN': An up-and-coming Chicago dance troupe, Same Planet Different World, will perform two evenings of diverse works. Co-artistic director Anna Simone Levin's "Mujeres Caidas" is a cheeky sendup of women on the verge of romantic breakdowns. Fellow artistic director Jason Ohlberg stages his double entendre "Venus" and his sensual series of duets "Aria." Premieres include Jeff Hancock's "The Nuclear Finale," a satire on the '50s era, and a new work by Ron De Jesus commissioned for this concert. At 7 tonight and 8 p.m. Saturday, with a young people's performance at 6 p.m. Saturday. Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State. Tickets: (773) 784-6503.

DEFIANT JOAN: In Burning Desires, Joan Schenkar, an experimental, feminist playwright, has taken the classic story of Joan of Arc and transplanted it in 1950s Seattle. Guided by a heavenly host of saints_Gertrude Stein, Marlene Dietrich, Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson_a teenage Joan fights to protect her independence. Opens Wednesday and continues through Dec. 12 at National Pastime Theatre, 4139 N. Broadway. Tickets: (312) 409-0585.

THEATER DREAMS: Anyone who has ever dreamed of performing on the stage can make their dream come true at the annual Victory Gardens Casting Auction. This year, more than 40 roles for the amateur production of the 1950s musical comedy "Once Upon a Mattress" will be up for bids. Aaron Freeman will serve as celebrity auctioneer. The play will be staged Feb. 18-19, with weekend rehearsals beginning in the coming months. Victory Gardens artistic director Dennis Zacek will direct. The auction takes place at 7 tonight, Victory Gardens, 2257 N. Lincoln. Admission is \$30. For more information, call (773) 549-5788.

CIRCUS FUN: The debut of a new work by the Actors Gymnasium Circus will be the centerpiece of a benefit for the organization's scholarship and outreach programs. (The Actors Gym is a circus and performing arts school dedicated to bringing a new physicality to American theater.) The work, Trapezoid Heart_a Circus Show, was conceived and directed by Michael Montenegro, founder of the Zapato Puppet Theater and an Actors Gymnasium faculty member. In the high-flying show, he grafts the characteristics of puppets onto living actors with surprising results. The benefit begins at 6 p.m. Saturday with a buffet dinner, music and silent auction. It concludes at 8 p.m. with the performance of "Trapezoid Heart," featuring guest appearances by Lijanna Wallenda-Hernandez and Tony Hernandez of the legendary Flying Wallendas high-wire troupe. The performance (minus the Wallendas) will be repeated at 1 p.m. Sunday. At the Actors Gymnasium in the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes, Evanston. Tickets: (847) 328-2795.

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