



Craig Schwartz .

# Life Begins at 8:30, So Leave the House at Six

## Our critic takes the Red Line

By [Don Shirley](#)

The rise of gas prices could spell trouble for L.A.'s far-flung theater scene. Audience members might decide that they can't afford the drive on top of parking and tickets.

But don't abandon the idea of leaving your own turf in search of theatrical adventures. Many L.A. stages aren't far from Metro rail stops. True, L.A. isn't New York – with its compact eight miles in its tidy grid. Still, in such L.A. neighborhoods as downtown, Hollywood, NoHo, Pasadena, and Long Beach, plenty of theatrical venues aren't exclusively car-dependent.

Last week, I parked my car (free) at the NoHo Metro station, two nights in a row, and took Metro to the theater.

The first night, I rode a Commuter Express bus from NoHo to Pasadena to see *Looped*. In Matthew Lombardo's play, the celebrated wit and diva Tallulah Bankhead (Valerie Harper) complains (among many other subjects) about how easy it is to get lost while driving in L.A. Can you imagine Tallulah on the Commuter Express?

Based on a real incident, Lombardo's play depicts Bankhead's sporadic attempts to loop one line for a forgettable film at an L.A. studio in 1965. Harper, who's a lot more famous today than Bankhead, is a hoot as the Alabama-reared bad-girl actress.

Fortunately, this isn't a celebrity solo show like Lombardo's *Tea at Five*, seen at the same venue earlier this century. Here, Chad Allen plays the frustrated, repressed hack who supervises the recording session. The friction between him and La Bankhead is moderated by a largely unseen guy (Michael Karl Orenstein) in the booth.

There's nothing profound here, but the conversation is spiked with refreshingly salty talk as well as therapeutic soul-searching.

After the play, I wasn't able to return to NoHo on the Commuter Express – it's intended for daytime commuters, not evening theatergoers. But I walked a few blocks to the Gold Line's Lake Avenue

station, rode the train to downtown L.A., boarded the Red Line, and returned to my car well before midnight.

The following day, I took the Red Line from NoHo to downtown, exiting at Civic Center. Less than a block away is the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, where the plaza is again the temporary home of Shakespeare Festival/LA. This year's play is *The Taming of the Shrew*, set in contemporary L.A.

Transit appears to be on director Ben Donenberg's mind. The production is visually dominated by different kinds of wheels that Angelenos use – but not the expected cars. Instead, the characters zip around on bikes, scooters, skates, and a large golf cart. Perhaps Donenberg wants to help yank Angelenos out of their cars, but if so, it's odd that he neglects the subway that's practically next door (as well as buses). Maybe the lack of wheels on a subway disqualified it from being mentioned.

What do all these wheels have to do with *Taming of the Shrew*? Not much. But they provide extra zing to a production that's already winningly zesty, thanks to a virile and exuberant Petruchio (Geoffrey Lower), a charismatic Kate (Sabra Williams), terrific tomfoolery from a half-dozen clowns, and cool projections by Andrew Wilder.

The problem with a present-day setting for *Shrew* is Kate's concession speech. Although Donenberg tries to prepare us for it by having Kate smile at Petruchio's rascal act sooner than usual, no fashionable 21st-century babe like this Kate would accept servitude so willingly. For that matter, neither would have the 20th-century's Tallulah Bankhead.

Kate, you can still escape. Go a half-block south, hop on the Red Line, and become a 99-seat theater star in beautiful NoHo. Petruchio wants a wealthy wife, so he'll never look for you there.

Looped, *Pasadena Playhouse*, (626) 356-7529. [pasadenaplayhouse.org](http://pasadenaplayhouse.org). Closes August 3.

The Taming of the Shrew, *Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels plaza, downtown L.A., through Sunday. At South Coast Botanic Garden, Palos Verdes, July 23-27. (213) 975-9891. ShakespeareFestivalLA.org.*

For Metro information: [mta.net](http://mta.net).

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