

**BELLE AND A BASTION** Taylor's Ann is a tough cookie.


## Ann



**Bank of America Theatre** (see Touring shows). By Holland Taylor. Dir. Benjamin Endlesley Klein. With Taylor. 2hrs 20mins; one intermission.

With her coiffed “Republican hair” and powder-white suit, Ann Richards tells a graduating class of university students, “Life isn’t fair, but government should be.” A divorced woman, Democrat and recovering alcoholic, Richards was the epitome of a long shot when she ran for governor of Texas in 1990, but as portrayed in actor Holland Taylor’s inspiring new one-woman show, her unflinching demand for fairness in politics made her a figure the entire country could get behind.

The commencement bookends the piece, chronicling Richards’s history from her childhood during the Depression to her career at the state Capitol and beyond. The speech is broken up by an extended glimpse into

the governor’s daily routine, showing a demanding, sometimes abrasive executive. Taylor’s comic biography reveals a woman with a fearless attitude and trailblazing spirit, who understands the limits of what government can do but refuses to be bound by them.

The play’s momentum drops in the second act once Richards leaves office, and the running time could easily be clipped to two hours by keeping the focus on the conflict-heavy parts of Richards’s life. As inspirational as the play’s conclusion is, the governor loses some of her edge by the end.

Taylor’s Richards says the best politicians connect with people and make them feel important, and when she winks at the crowd or cleans her fingernails onstage, she invites her listeners to get as comfortable as she is. Taylor flawlessly captures the Southern charm and bawdy sense of humor that made Richards an immediately likable and captivating politician. —*Oliver Sava*

## Sweet Confinement



**SINNERMAN Ensemble** (see Fringe & storefront). By Anna Carini. Dir. Brea Hayes. With Cyd Blakewell, Calliope Porter, Carini, Howie Johnson, Keith Neagle. 1hr 20mins; no intermission.

Beginning with the startling image of a handsomely appointed master bathroom covered in blood, Anna Carini’s 2008 play offers a bracing soap opera in miniature as a group of lifelong friends reacts to an attempted suicide among their number. Playing out over the course of a single, ultra-tense day, *Sweet Confinement* deftly depicts the fluid loyalties and giddy gallows humor that can be triggered by tragedy.

The traumatized group resolves to clean up the mess, literally and

figuratively, though it inevitably discovers that deep-rooted emotional ugliness can’t be sorted out with bleach and paper towels; some things are thicker than blood. Carini displays skillful plotting, parcelling out the reveals of the friends’ histories carefully and organically. The playwright’s dialogue, on the other hand, is less artful, with an overreliance on clichés and curse words. Director Brea Hayes smartly negotiates the script’s frequent, lifelike 180s between comedy and tragedy, though her pacing seems to wallow too much in the latter. Aside from the key moment of catharsis, when Cyd Blakewell explodes with rage and grief, the cast tends to underplay, seemingly acting for an unseen, close-up camera rather than a live audience. John Wilson’s sharply detailed set provides a vivid backdrop. —*Kris Vire*

## Five Flights



**Immediate Theatre** (see Fringe & storefront). By Adam Bock. Dir. Peter Cieply. With ensemble cast. 1hr 30mins; no intermission.

Adam Bock weaves his story’s threads together like twigs in a bird’s nest: They can seem haphazard and messy during the building, but they come together with a structural soundness that doesn’t reveal itself until every piece is in place. With that overworked bird-related simile out of the way, I can assure you that *Five Flights*, which also trades in avian metaphors, is more artful in their employment.

This 2004 piece, receiving its Chicago debut, centers on a trio of siblings unsure what to do with the crumbling aviary built by their recently deceased father to honor their long-dead mother. Ed (Nick Freed), our witty, rueful narrator, explains that his sister, Adele (Melonie Collmann), has a quirky best friend, Olivia (Emily Gann), who

fancies herself a church planter. Olivia’s newly invented sect, the Church of the Fifth Day, finds the Word in the bird (the fifth day being when God created the creatures of the sky); she wants the aviary to be a place of worship. Ed and Adele’s unseen brother is represented by his wife, the strident Jane (Mildred Marie Langford), who wants to develop the parcel of land. Meanwhile, Ed’s protective apathetic eggshell is cracked by eager suitor Tom (Chris Carr).

This first production by Immediate Theatre, named for the 1980s Chicago troupe of which director Peter Cieply was a member, doesn’t always soar. Cieply and Gann overlay the gag of Olivia’s fluttery physicality, and Langford takes too long to find second and third notes in Jane. But lovely projection design by Michael Fernandez and a warm, truthful performance by Freed help illuminate Bock’s ruminations on faith, grief and the need for human connection. This cosmic, comic tale’s no featherweight. —*Kris Vire*

## Goodnight Moon



**STORYBOOK TRENDING** Poole, Sevigny and Goodrich, from left, spin a yarn.



**Chicago Children’s Theatre** (see Resident companies). By Chad Henry. Dir. David Kersnar. With Alex Goodrich, Sara Sevigny, Becky Poole, Aaron Holland. 1hr; no intermission.

Chad Henry’s musical adaptation of the Margaret Wise Brown bedtime classic crams more sight gags, puns, dance numbers and extraterrestrial travel into one sitting than any number of back-to-back *SpongeBob SquarePants* episodes, and shares that show’s dual appeal for kids and adults. Bedtime-skirter Bunny (Alex Goodrich), mother-figure Old Lady (Sara Sevigny) and troublemaker Mouse (Becky Poole) zip young auds through a one-hour singing and

dancing romp in Bunny’s magical green room.

The vibrant set, utilizing the Crayola palette of the original tale, is gorgeous: Designers Jacqueline and Richard Penrod deftly elevate Clement Hurd’s meticulous illustrations to a three-dimensional wonderland. The room’s accessories morph and move throughout the show. As Bunny, Goodrich is aces at engaging the kids, playing off their energy and improvising reactions to the occasional fidgety outburst.

The serene projection of the moon at the close of the show is its only calm moment; even a seemingly smooth trip to outer space amid dancing constellations ends in a neon, techno-driven rave. That moon makes the perfect nightcap to counteract the caffeine buzz. —*Erin Osmon*