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Theater Talkback: The Year in Miscellany

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The approach of a new year brings reflections on the old. For writers about culture, this is a fancy way of saying it's time to compile a list of the finest achievements of the year in the field you cover, preferably keeping the number to an easily digestible 10.

Accordingly my colleague Ben Brantley and I have assembled our lists. I generally prefer to keep my choices in alphabetical order. These lists are ornery things to put together in the first place, and somehow deciding which show is worthy of crowning the list feels artificial and often impossible. To begin with, comparing, say, a new musical with a Shakespeare revival, and then ranking one above the other, is an absurdity. Also I always feel that being No. 10 on someone's ranked-in-order top 10 list must give little more joy than being left off entirely.

Inevitably there are also worthy achievements that you want to acknowledge but can't. So as you, readers, begin calculating your own lists – yes, here's your chance to feel the peculiar pinch of this part of the critic's job – here are some other reflections, assessments, and fantastical fake awards that I wasn't able to include in my ranking.

Shape-shifter award Young Jean Lee, the playwright and performer whose next project is always as surprising and often as rewarding as her last. After establishing herself as a playwright to watch with “The Shipment,” a seriocomic play about black identity, and then having the temerity to rewrite “King Lear,” Ms. Lee put herself center stage this year, performing a very funny solo show, “We're Gonna Die,” including goofy pop songs and personal reflections on life's many perils, death very much included. In January she tears off in a new direction, with “Young Jean Lee's Untitled Feminist Show” at the Baryshnikov Arts Center. Expect the – well don't bother with expectations. They will be confounded.



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