

Press box generates rich dialogue in ‘Going ... GONE!’

By **Sandra Barrera**

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In “Going... Going... GONE!,” four sports journalists reporting on a game from the press box of a Los Angeles baseball stadium are chit-chatting about home life, existentialism and even baseball.

But by the end of the game, their lives are transformed.

“Which is, you know, a typical baseball game,” says Ken Levine, the Emmy Award-winning writer, baseball announcer and radio host turned playwright, and whose comedy is playing Fridays and Saturdays at Hudson Guild Theatre in Los Angeles through Nov. 6.

“Going... Going... GONE!” is about legacy and how the need to be remembered affects our ability to live in the moment. It stars Annie Abrams as the lone female sportscaster in a press box of newspapermen portrayed by David Babich, Troy Metcalf and Dennis Pearson, and it is directed by Andrew Barnicle.

For Levine, whose credits include hosting the Los Angeles Dodgers Radio Network call-in program “Dodger Talk” for eight years, creating a story about behind-the-scenes baseball journalism came natural.

He’s been in the mix lots of times.

“When I was doing ‘Dodger Talk,’ I spent a lot of time in the press box in the reporters section, and so I got to know all of these guys pretty well,” Levine says. “The kind of conversation that goes on between these guys was often times more entertaining than the game on the field. These were very rich characters.”

The press box conversation takes Levine back to the days of writing for the



PHOTO BY ED KRIEGER

GOING... GOING... GONE!

When: Through Nov. 6.
3 p.m. Sunday and 8 p.m.
Thursday-Saturday.

Where: Hudson Guild
Theatre, 6539 Santa
Monica Blvd., Los Angeles.

Tickets: \$30.

Information: 323-960-
5521. [www.plays411.com/
gone](http://www.plays411.com/gone).

NBC sitcom “Cheers,” for which he got to come up with goofy bar talk.

“It was fun to write four characters who all had different points of view — and they’re funny guys, that’s the other thing,” he says. “They’re very bright and articulate. You don’t get to be these reporters for major Los Angeles newspapers unless you have something on the ball. But they’re also a little jaded and so the comedy felt very organic.”

Levine has followed baseball for most of his life. He was 8 when the Dodgers came to L.A. That’s also when he first heard Dodgers announcer Vin Scully on a transistor radio.

“The thought that ‘Wow! I could be a baseball announcer and travel with the team to exotic places like Cincinnati and Pittsburgh’ was very appealing to me,” Levine says.

After a stint as a Top-40 DJ, Levine launched into a TV career as a head writer on “M*A*S*H,” as well as serving as a creative consultant on “Cheers,” “Frasier” and “Wings.” He’s even

injected baseball into his comedy writing.

The first “M*A*S*H” episode with his writing partner David Isaacs was Season Five’s “Out of Sight, Out of Mind” during which a gas heater blows up and Hawkeye is temporarily blind.

“Ironically, we do a B-story where Hawkeye and B.J. and Klinger and Radar simulate announcing a baseball game to pull a sting on Frank,” he says. “Baseball and writing was there in our very first mix.”

In 1990, he called the plays on “The Simpsons” second season episode, “Dancin’ Homer,” where Homer becomes the mascot of the Springfield Isotopes — a moniker later appropriated and still used by a minor league team in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

But always in the back of his mind was the dream to be a baseball announcer, and so in the 1980s Levine decided it was now or never.

“I went to the upper deck of Dodger Stadium and Anaheim Stadium for two years and broadcast baseball games into a tape recorder, and eventually I got good enough,” he says.

Levine has since called games for the minor and major leagues. He was announcer for the Baltimore Orioles, Seattle Mariners and San Diego Padres, and he filled in as a Dodgers and Angels announcer.

“I found myself sharing the booth with a number of Hall of Fame announcers,” he says, ticking off a list that includes Jon Miller, Chuck Thompson, Dave Niehaus, Jerry Coleman and even “Vinny” — to whom the play is dedicated.

“It’s interesting that everybody but me gets into the Hall of Fame, but, hmm, I’m sure that’s coincidental,” Levine says.