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L.A. Classic Theater Skeds 11-Hour 'Babbitt' On KCRW

By JEFF BASKIN

"Babbitt" — every last word of it — will be going out over KCRW's airwaves this November in an 11-hour production featuring actors of the L.A. Classic Theater Works ensemble group.

The public radio station, which is producing the ambitious project with the ensemble, will air the Sinclair Lewis novel in one fell swoop on Thanksgiving Day, and, during December, repeat the program in daily half-hour installments.

The cast of 34 — which includes Ed Asner as Babbitt, Nan Martin as his wife, Judge Reinhold as the son and Holly Palance and Ally Sheedy as the daughters — has been in and out of KCRW's Santa Monica studios since last October recording the book.

Only a couple more sessions are needed to complete the recordings, said Judith Auberjonois, who is coordinating the project.

Reading was inspired by the Irish Radio Theater's acclaimed word-for-word production of James Joyce's "Ulysses," but the L.A. Classic Theater Works wanted to do an American book, and after numerous reading sessions, the ensemble decided on Lewis' tale of a materialistic, middle-class conformity, Auberjonois said.

KCRW general manager Ruth Hirschman remarked on the musicality of the work. There's an operatic sound as the voices inter-

weave with one another, she said, making for a sound that's not at all like traditional radio drama.

She said it reminded her of Dylan Thomas' "Under Milkwood," which was written for radio and demonstrated a poetic sense of what narrative voices can sound like.

Hirschman said a special computer program was designed to keep track of all the recorded takes. With the book pages recorded out of sequence, a la a film script, and with several recorded takes per a page, the computer was essential so the editor could put all those bits of tape back in proper order.

Director is Gordon Hunt and editor is Eric Bauersfeld, radio dramatist who's worked with KPFA, the Pacifica station in Berkeley, for the past quarter-century. Editing is being done at the Lucasfilm facilities in Marin County.

Rene Auberjonois, a member of the ensemble, arranged the book for recording. There will be some music and sound effects but they'll be kept to a minimum, the focus being on the spoken word.

The L.A. Classic Theater Works is a project of the L.A. Theater Works, producer of the long-running play "Bouncers" at the Tiffany Theater. Aim of L.A. Classic Theater Works is to develop an acting ensemble committed to presenting classic works. "Babbitt" is the group's first project.