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## 'LAUGHING' AS WILD, FUNNY AS IT GETS

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Christopher Durang's "Laughing Wild" is a play that takes chances.

First of all, it risks offending everyone with any religious or political conviction of any kind. Still, those who appreciate scathing humor, no matter what it scathes, will love the show.

Secondly, the first act, which consists of two long monologues, lasts 90 minutes. It's practically an invitation for a few in the audience to assume the show's over and leave at intermission. Big mistake. The second act only lasts 35 minutes, brings some order to all the chaos and is hysterically funny.

Don't you want to know how a chance encounter and subsequent scuffle over a can of tuna in a supermarket reflect the current state of civilization?

Not every theater would have the nerve to attempt this show, but if you're up for it, you'll be glad Petaluma's **Cinnabar** Theater took up the challenge.

The show reunites Laura Jorgensen with husband-and-wife team John and Elizabeth Craven, all active in the **Cinnabar's** once-resident theater company, Western Union.

Elizabeth directs John, as a hapless seeker of whatever truth pop psychology can provide, and Jorgensen, as a modern madwoman who is manic-depressive on a five-minute cycle and laughs like the Wicked Witch of the West.

The show opens with Jorgensen performing a monologue that's legendary in theater circles and often excerpted by auditioning actresses hoping to win a role.

She ranges from lament to attack and from anecdote to rant, contradicting herself constantly and somehow vividly recreating a series of events that surely must mean something. Who knows what? But something.

Jorgensen's incredibly flexible facial expressions and constantly changing posture -- first lounging, then lunging -- make the stories she tells easy to picture. You can visualize the bestial cab driver or the street musician who attempts to befriend her.

By the time you realize the character is a former mental patient, you've already seen yourself in her, just as the author must

have intended.

Following that, John Craven seizes the stage with a performance so soft-spoken and mellow that it's a shock by comparison. Armed with a crystal, incense, chimes and a microphone, Craven blends the styles of religious retreats, self-help seminars and standup comedy.

Craven gives a deft comedic performance as it becomes increasingly obvious that the spell of serenity he's weaving unravels easily. He struggles valiantly to let go of negativity, twitching like a human puppet on an electric fence.

The short second act unites the two characters for the first time in the show, including several re-enactments of their one meeting, a clash in a supermarket over canned tuna.

This is when Durang's humor goes really over the top, with John Craven playing an animated religious icon, the Infant of Prague, dressed like a pope and grinning like a somewhat stunned saint.

If that weren't enough, the Infant is a guest on a talk show hosted by Jorgensen, who claims to have assassinated the real host.

Or is it all a dream? And if so, whose dream is it?

Elizabeth Craven's direction of the two actors brings both characters into such clear focus that their anecdotes seem to fill the stage with other characters, even though it's just a two-person cast.

In the end, whether you understand what Durang has to say or not, whether you agree with it or not, one thing is clear: This is essentially what theater is all about. Not just sets, props or costumes, although there are some. It's about actors creating whole worlds with their acting.

You can reach Staff Writer Dan Taylor at 521-5243 or dtaylor@pressdemocrat.com. THEATER REVIEW

``Laughing Wild''

PHOTO: 2 by JEFF THOMAS

1: John Craven is one of the stars in the **Cinnabar** Theater production of ``Laughing Wild.'' (teaser, D1)

2: John Craven and Laura Jorgensen star in the Cinnabar Theater production of ``Laughing Wild.''

**Infobox:**

"Laughing Wild" \*\*\*

Where: **Cinnabar** Theater, 3333 Petaluma Blvd. N., Petaluma.

When: 8 p.m. today, Saturday and Nov. 4-6 and 12-13, with a matinee at 2 p.m. Nov. 7. Tickets: \$18-\$20.

Information: 763-8920, [www.cinnabartheater.org](http://www.cinnabartheater.org).

Bottom line: Playwright Christopher Durang slays sacred cows a herd at a time in this outrageous onslaught on practically everything. Laura Jorgensen, as a madwoman with a maniacal laugh, and John Craven, as a born victim seeking nirvana, make the playwright's world vivid on a nearly bare stage.

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