

Hilarious dysfunction reigns supreme in 'Baby'

Theatre review by John Busbee – May 12, 2005

"Baby with the Bathwater" is a dark comedy dealing with absolutely dysfunctional parents and their residual impact on their baby. Christopher Durang's absurdist comedy provides a wealth of over-the-top opportunities, which the cast exploits like a New York con artist.

Helen (Andréa Markowski) and John (Joseph Leonardi) display a lack of redeeming qualities: vicious attacks on each other, illogical and harmful parenting techniques, no coping abilities. The catastrophic entrance of Nanny, played to its maniacal hilt by Barb Wagner, quickly worsens the situation as Nanny's baby-nurturing techniques include alternately cooing then screaming, bedtime readings from Mommy Dearest, and a baby toy made of asbestos, lead and Red Dye No. 2.

The absurdity continues at a prize fight pace, with comedic blows

being thrown at a breakneck pace. Leonardi's deliciously spineless John provides some of the show's best texture. Markowski presents a frigid maternal figure, creating wonderful spousal conflict. Lyra Halsten, playing multiple roles, is especially strong as the disconnected Cynthia, then as a teacher providing straight-person counterpoint to Wagner's wacky, self-absorbed Principal. Completing the cast is Dave Williams as the Young Man – recounting with Pavlovian perplexity the urges and memories with which he copes, even through countless therapy sessions.

Lags in pacing and keeping set pieces affixed to the wall were minor flaws, and will fix themselves. Durang's script should clip along rapidly, assaulting the audience with mind-reeling blow after blow. Director Thatcher Williams keeps his actors well on task.

Despite all of the absurdist, dark humor, Durang leaves us with lingering hope at the end. "Baby" adds another cutting edge gem to the Mews' growing diadem of stage presentations.



Happy Birthday to Daisy (Dave Williams) - or Charles Kurault or Ponchitta Pierce or whatever he is calling himself today - while mother Helen (Andréa Markowski), Father John (Joseph Leonardi) and Nanny (Barb Wagner) celebrate in their own way in "Baby With The Bathwater".