

THEATER REVIEW

Parents clean up act in 'Baby with the Bathwater'

Loathsome adults and worthless psychologists turn out a great show.

By JEFFREY BRUNER
REGISTER THEATER CRITIC

Meeting Helen and John, the insane and inept parents from Christopher Durang's "Baby with the Bathwater," put so much into perspective for me.

Clearly a couple capable of screwing up a child so badly also must be responsible for New Coke, the national debt, Vanilla Ice and reality television. Thank goodness Durang takes a sharp stick to these two nut jobs and keeps poking for two very funny hours of comedy at the Vaudeville Mews.

Director Thatcher Williams and leads Andrea Markowski (Helen) and Joseph Leonardi (John) succeed in keeping the audience from completely hating these two loathsome, shallow characters whose selfishness in raising their young child leads to years of hilarious therapy in the second act.

Durang never really gives a rationale for his couples' titanic mood swings. Markowski holds her outbursts at just the right level while Leonardi is a flailing bag of pure exasperation. Then again, the playwright



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".

never really explains the nature of Nanny (a free-spirited Barb Wagner), who's equal parts Mary Poppins and Mrs. Robinson from "The Graduate."

Such are the liberties with wildly absurd works like this one, which uses the first act to set up a nearly nonstop barrage of laughter in the second half. Dave Williams, as the grown-up child, nicely delivers as the straight (and relatively sane) man who

emerges to survive crazy parents, worthless psychologists and not-so-bright educators.

Williams' cast dropped a handful of zingers during opening night Wednesday and a "painting" on the wall refused to stay put, but overall the flaws were few and comedic timing always improves during the run of a show. Although Helen and John won't improve as parents, their loss of common sense is your gain in entertainment.

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Details

WHAT: "Baby With The Bathwater"

WHERE: Vaudeville Mews, 212 Fourth St.

WHEN: Through May 22.

CURTAIN: 7 tonight, Saturday; May 19-21; 3 p.m. Sunday and May 22.

RATING: R for language.

LENGTH: 2 hours

TICKETS: \$12 at the door; \$9 in advance at iowatix.com.