

The Arizona Republic, (Phoenix, AZ)

March 16, 2004

'HOUSE OF YES' DARK, UNCOMFORTABLE AND FUNNY

Author: Chris Curcio, Special for The Republic

Section: Arizona Living

The Nearly Naked Theatre prides itself on offering thought-provoking alternative works not seen on other local stages. Its current production, *The House of Yes*, fits the troupe's goal perfectly.

Wendy MacLeod's play is the darkest of dark comedies. The audience is expected to laugh at a dysfunctional family that blithely covers up incestuous relationships, crazed minds guided by heavy medications and, ultimately, a murder. It took it awhile to become comfortable laughing at such goings-on.

On a stormy Thanksgiving in a ritzy home in suburban Washington, D.C., next door to a Kennedy family compound, the overdressed and bejeweled Mrs. Pascal readies the house for a festive holiday dinner. Her daughter, Jackie-O, a delusional nut case just released from a hospital, chats with one of her brothers, Anthony, a Princeton dropout with an insatiable sexual appetite.

Things start going amiss when their brother, Marty, arrives from New York with his inhibited fiancée, Lesly, who isn't made to feel very welcome. She's quickly seduced by Anthony, while Marty and Jackie-O perform a bizarre re-enactment of John F. Kennedy's assassination.

MacLeod's farce explores the corruption of wealth and the precarious nature of sanity. Once you become comfortable with the absurdist plotting, you can enjoy the off-kilter humor as MacLeod explores her message.

Under David Weiss' direction, the play starts with a meandering pace that detracts from the action's wackiness. After the expository scenes are done, though, the pacing sharpens, the action moves briskly, and the play grows funnier as it almost graduates to slapstick farce before the brutal, but expected, ending.

Jennifer Bemis' Jackie-O is appropriately over the edge with the inability to differentiate reality from illusion. Christian Miller's Marty starts rationally as he appears to be the only one who understands his weird sister and with apparent love for the normalcy Lesly represents. But he shifts cleverly as he retreats into his own disillusionment as the game with Jackie-O intensifies.

Patti Davis Suarez understands Mrs. Pascal's arrogance, bitchiness and blind avoidance of her brood's bizarre behavior, but Suarez is never comfortable playing the role. She's always acting an interpretation rather than becoming the character.

Kyla Andrews' Lesly is appropriately befuddled as she grows more uncomfortable with herself and the unconventional family she encounters. Boyd Branch's Anthony is shy initially, only to awaken abruptly when he sees Lesly as a sexual conquest.

The House of Yes is like the family it explores, a bizarre view of valid issues that tickles the funny bone when its weirdness grows comfortable.

'The House of Yes'

Reviewed Friday at the Little Theatre at Phoenix Theatre, 100 E. McDowell Road.

Continues through Saturday. Admission: \$12-\$15. Details: (602) 274-2432.