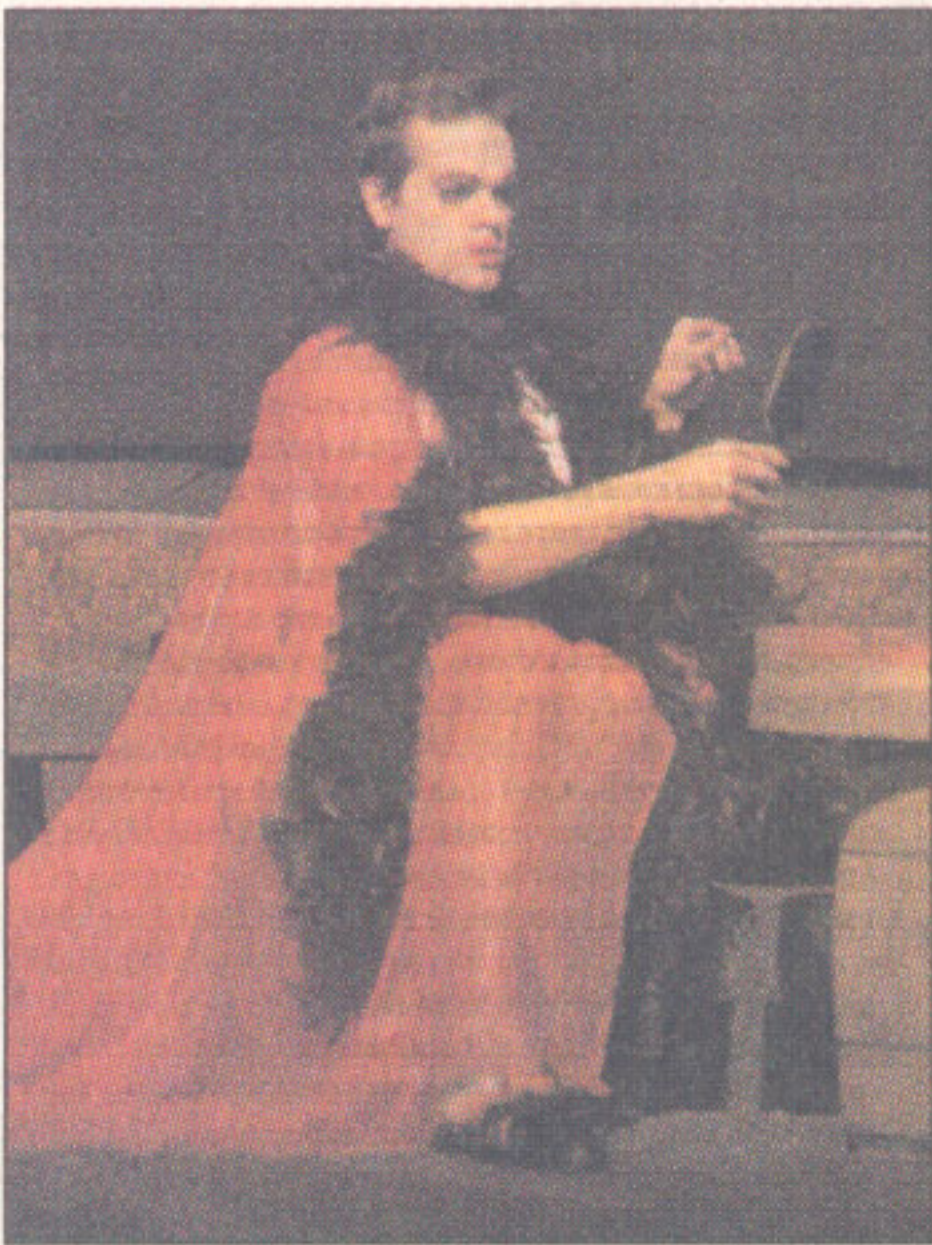


Bas Bleu Theatre opens fall season



***Special to the Collegian**

The Bas Bleu Theatre Company's productions of "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches," Oct. 6, 2004.

BY ANNA WELLE

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An award winning work of art, written by Tony Kushner, is making an impact on Fort Collins.

"Angels in America," an intense, dramatic and comically entertaining play, depicts a multitude of American traits woven into eight different characters; all experiencing the brutal beginning of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s.

The production is debuting as the first show and season opener in Bas Bleu Theatre's new Old Town location in the Giddings Building, 401 Pine St. The the-

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"Angels in America" explores AIDS experiences

ANGELS

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atrical company collaborated with local OpenStage Theatre and the CSU Theatre Program to create one of the largest collective cultural projects in Colorado.

"This is a tremendous undertaking," said Bas Bleu Managing Director, Robert Reid. "It is one of the best plays written in the twentieth century, and (the actors) are giving it everything they've got."

The cast includes award-winning members from production companies in Fort-Collins, Denver and Boulder. Wendy Ishii, Bas Bleu's artistic director, plays Sister Ella Chapter. Denise Burson Freestone and Bruce K. Freestone, co-founders of OpenStage Theatre, play Hannah Pitt and Roy Cohn.

Every member truly brings something to the stage. Laura Norman, a graduate from University of Northern Colorado, plays an unstable housewife named Harper Pitt. Pitt dives into a fantasy-laden reality, delivering

expressive odd and dramatic scenes.

"You get involved in the lives of these characters," said Laura Jones, "Angels in America" director. "You develop empathy and interest."

The complex and developed characters combined represent figures including image-conscious lawyers, closet homosexuals, Mormons, ex-drag queens, Jews and a Valium addict. The intertwining lives explore the ways Americans have experienced AIDS, offering dialogue and relation to the modern epidemic.

"It is a way for our community to raise awareness about a problem that affects everyone," Ishii said.

Topics of politics, after-life, relationships and illness flow along with snippets of moral principles and non-human visitors.

The piece is considered for "mature audiences only" and presents controversial and sensitive subjects.

"I don't think it's up to art to give us answers," Jones said. "Instead, it must ask us the impor-

tant questions. This play asks many vital questions."

Bringing together three major production companies and associating with Rainbow Chorus, Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art and Northern Colorado AIDS Project allows the community to get involved with this important subject. It also requires cohesion between several organizations, which is something Ishii hopes to set as an example.

"All organizations are aware and concerned about getting the community engaged in the theme of this play," Ishii said. "In my very idealistic way, I think if all these very desperate art projects can work together at the grassroots level, they can be an example to (more troubled areas of the world)."

"Angels in America," is the beginning of a new life for the Giddings Building. Historic preservationists and Old Town enthusiasts are excited to see the old blacksmith shop transform into a world-class theater.

Built in 1910, the site was originally used by Frank D. Giddings for Western Steel Headgate

The epic Pulitzer Prize winning "Angels in America" performs as two full-length plays.

- "Part I: Millennium Approaches" debuted Oct. 8
CSU's Director of Theater, Laura Jones is directing.
- Denver guest artist Terry Dodd will direct Tony award winning "Part II: Perestroika" which debuts Oct. 22.

Both parts run Friday and Saturday evenings through Nov. 20.

Tickets are \$17 for adults and \$10 for students.

Bas Bleu Theatre
401 Pine St.

Company. Until 2002, the company produced irrigation and soil-sampling equipment.

Today, the expansive, brick warehouse-like structure is a renovated, intimate, state-of-the-art theatre. A combined lobby and art exhibition area allows the audi-

ence members and artists to socialize together after performances.

The 13-year-old non-profit company, Bas Bleu, was founded by former New Yorker Wendy Ishii and Eva Wright, and is fundamental to the cultural and creative

heart of Fort Collins.

With over 450 events and 1,000 performances under its belt, according to Ishii, Bas Bleu has "worked very hard and built an audience, over time, that is hungry for thought provoking plays."