



Denise Freestone plays an aging rabbi in the Bas Bleu Theatre production of "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches." Photos special to the Reporter-Herald

'Angels' remains relevant

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Tony Kushner's "Angels in America" grew out of the zeitgeist of the mid-1980s and was presented on Broadway more than a decade ago.

With themes like fear and disparagement of gay relationships by a religious group, could "Angels in America" still seem relevant today?

Oh yeah, that's what determined the presidential election last week. So much for the relevance question.

Do the emotional revelations, remarkable scope and writing brilliance of "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches" still hold firm and true since the millennium not only approached, but engulfed us?

Absolutely, as presented by an excellent cast under the direction of Laura Jones in the Bas Bleu Theatre production in Fort Collins.

Bas Bleu Theatre has moved into its developing new performance space and is getting statewide acclaim for tackling "Angels in America," the Mount Everest of American theater, with so much success.

If you go

All remaining performances of "Perestroika" are sold out except for an added performance at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday. There is limited seating for all "Angels in America" shows through Nov. 20. The play is for mature audiences.

Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$12 for seniors, \$10 for students. Bas Bleu Theatre is at 401 Pine St., north of Old Town Fort Collins.

Call 498 8949 for information and reservations. Information and tickets are also available at www.basbleu.org on the Internet.

The new theater is in a historic industrial building that is being miraculously transformed.

Bas Bleu Theatre Company moved from its original, intimate storefront theater into a performance space a few blocks north that is more like an off-Broadway theater.

Stage space has expanded and so has the seating, but this incarnation of Bas Bleu Theatre still has intimacy.

That's why "Angels in America," a play with exposed nerves, is riveting in a very special way at Bas Bleu Theatre.

The draw of Kushner's two-part, seven-hour play, considered the most important play of the last decade, is so great that it brought the leading lights of Fort Collins theater to-

gether.

Bas Bleu Theatre Company's artistic director, Wendy Ishii, is joined by the founding artistic directors of OpenStage Theatre Company, Denise Burson Freestone and Bruce K. Freestone, for the performances.

Actors from Denver and Boulder, as well as Fort Collins, are in the select cast of eight.

Tony Kushner is a homosexual man with strong views and feelings. The politics of AIDS nearly engulfed him during the first part of the 1980s.

Gay men, including many of his friends in the theater, were dying by the hundreds. Yet AIDS was unmentionable within the Reagan administration.

Using the rawest of truths, witty ironies and dramatic fantasies, Kushner wrote "Angels

in America" as a paradox of almost stream of consciousness responses and highly disciplined drama.

His choice of characters is mind-boggling. They include Roy Cohn, the vicious pit bull lawyer and right-hand man for Sen. Joe McCarthy, who is revealed as a self-hating homosexual with AIDS, but in denial of the state of his health and his sexuality.

Bruce Freestone seethes, explodes and burns as Cohn, a character unlike the regal or amusing men he usually plays in Fort Collins productions.

Denise Freestone gets past her outward presentations and costuming to reach into the core of her characters: Ethel Rosenberg, the woman Roy Cohn sent to the electric chair; an aging, stooped Jewish rabbi; a doctor, and a Mormon mother in Utah who doesn't know how to deal with a son in Manhattan who tells her he is homosexual.

In "Millennium," Wendy Ishii is essentially biding time until her grandiose Angel wraps up the first segment impressively. She has strong moments as a rather crazy street person in the Bronx and a nurse treating



Todd Coulter tries to lose his fears in drag.

AIDS patients.

Kurt Brighton's performance grows more impressive throughout the play as Louis Ironson, Jewish and gay and anything but happy. His long-time partner has AIDS and Louis discovers he doesn't have the heart and courage to stay with him.

Todd Coulter is Prior, the ill and abandoned lover who needs Louis desperately. Coulter makes us really care about the witty, precipitously vulnerable Prior. It is a brave performance in every way, including a scene with full-frontal nudity in the hospital.

Darren R. Schroeder is properly reserved and uptight as Joe Pitt, a young Mormon, a lawyer, and a protege of Roy Cohn. Joe is finally forced to confront the homosexuality he has tried to deny within his church and a cold marriage that is driving his wife, Harper, to a life of tranquilizers and hallucinations.

Laura Norman gives a fascinating performance as Harper, looking desperately for a lifeline and a hole in the ozone.

The performance that gleams and brings sheer delight to the audience is Leonard Barrett Jr. as the kind, wise, flamboyant former drag queen, Belize. He is a character to embrace and the audience does just that.

There are strong echoes of the original Belize, Jeffrey Wright, in Barrett's performance, and it doesn't get better than that.

As director of "Millennium Approaches," Laura Jones puts the pieces together with few jagged edges.

"Millennium Approaches" is a smart, smart production. It makes us think and laugh, and for those of a certain age, remember. It also makes us feel.

Terry Dodd, a Denver writer-director, is the director of "Perestroika" which is performed in repertory with "Millennium Approaches."