



Denver Westword

We came, we saw, we stuffed our faces -- and we unstuffed the ballot boxes. After months of eating, shopping, drinking and dialing, our top-secret Best of Denver 2005 team produced the paper now in your hands, our 22nd annual celebration of the city. The Best of Denver edition is not for beginners. Within days of moving to Denver, you know the kick of browsing at the Tattered Cover Book Store (all three of them now), the thrill of seeing a concert at Red Rocks, the joy of yet another day of sunshine on your face (and your unshoveled sidewalk), and the welcome taste of that 1 a.m. burger at My Brother's Bar, Denver's oldest building dedicated to the non-stop dispensing of booze and camaraderie. (If you were lucky enough to be born here, you know all these things instinctively --- and you can also remember when you could actually see prairie on the drive from Denver to Boulder.) The Best of Denver begins with all those wonderful amenities we so often take for granted, and builds off them to capture all the unique people, places, services and shops that are continually redefining this city, making Denver the very best place in the country to live. Enjoy.

Best Theater Production

The Goat or, Who Is Sylvia?

Edward Albee's play about a man in love with a goat makes you question every assumption about sexual mores you've ever made. Just where are the boundaries between the permissible and the impermissible, and what do they mean in the lives of actual people? *The Goat or, Who Is Sylvia?* is skillfully written, funny, silly, profound and disquieting all at once; the script includes one of the most extraordinary scenes in modern dramaturgy, as the wife who's discovered her husband's animal obsession careens from rage to helpless laughter, laughter to anguish and anguish to bitterness, breaking vases and furniture as she goes. Director Nagle Jackson gave this strange, daring piece a top-notch production at Curious, with an expressive cast, intelligent direction and an elegant set.

Details

Address: Curious Theatre Company
Reader Choice: *Kafka on Ice*, Buntport Theater

Best Actress in a Drama

Laura Norman

Angels in America

Angels in America's Harper is a pill-popping young Mormon wife who spends half her time yearning for her faithless husband and the other half in a fantasy. She could easily seem fey or just plain irritating. But Laura Norman moderated Harper's dopey ethereality with a wry humor and a sense of groundedness. Her interpretation was potent, but also wonderfully unassuming.

Best Supporting Actress in a Drama

Denise Perry-Olson
Old Times

Harold Pinter's *Old Times* is a bleak, enigmatic play, but Denise Perry-Olson's sensual energy and radiant smile animated it. Her Kate -- sophisticated, sexy and well-traveled -- flirted equally with onetime best friend Anna, and with Anna's husband, Deeley. It sometimes seemed she was about to stride off with Bas Blue's entire production.

Best Performance by a Child

Brittany Heileman
Tongue of a Bird

Tongue of a Bird is a pretentious, forgettable play about a woman pilot searching the mountains for a lost child. But it had a bright spot in teenage actor Brittany Heileman. She appeared to the protagonist in visions, her face bloodied, in a performance that was sharp, quick, cheerful and without a trace of sentimentality. Heileman is that rarest of beings: a young actor you really want to watch.

Best Guide From Death to Life

Todd Coulter
Angels in America

The dying Prior in *Angels in America* is often whiny, snappish or unreasonable, but he has intellect and dignity, too. In the Bas Bleu/OpenStage Theatre and Company production, Todd Coulter gave all these characteristics their due. Late in the play, Prior receives a reprieve, thanks to new AIDS drugs, and from then on, he becomes a kind of guide into the future. It was wonderful to watch this revivification, and Coulter's final blessing was touching.

Best Crossover Performer

Leonard Barrett Jr.

In PHAMALy's *Guys and Dolls* -- and with a nod to Marlon Brando -- Leonard Barrett Jr. shone as the seductive conman Sky Masterson. In *Angels in America*, he played a completely different role: that of Belize, a former drag queen. Here his acting was playfully self-aware without being self-conscious; he was sometimes funny and

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sometimes wise. When, without sentimentality, he told the dying protagonist Prior that he'd be with him all the way, he touched us to the core. The theater community has a satisfying double threat in Barrett Jr.

Best Theatrical Collaboration

Angels in America

Last year, Bas Bleu, which has been presenting theater in Fort Collins for over a decade, moved from its exquisite small theater building to a roomier location. For the first event in the new space, the group staged a two-evening production of Tony Kushner's brilliant seven-hour epic, *Angels in America*, in collaboration with OpenStage, another Fort Collins institution. The presentation benefited greatly from the combination of resources. *Angels* boasted some of the best talent around, including OpenStage founders Denise Burson Freestone and Bruce K. Freestone in pivotal roles, and directors Laura Jones and Terry Dodd. This was an understated but emotionally committed production that did full justice to Kushner's mind-bending script.

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Best All-Around Woman of the Theater

Wendy Ishii

Wendy Ishii is the artistic director and co-founder of Bas Bleu, a major theatrical force in Fort Collins. She has also gained attention for her work on the plays of Samuel Beckett with faculty from Colorado State University. Ishii's energy and vision keep Bas Bleu going: Her efforts to secure funding facilitated the company's recent move to a larger home. And in performance after performance, she has also proved herself an extraordinary actress. As an all-powerful but eccentric angel in this year's *Angels in America*, she ripped off the roof. Which, come to think of it, seems only fitting.

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Best Season for an Actress

Mare Trevathan

Mare Trevathan brings a combination of subtlety, conviction and luminosity to every role she undertakes. In Harold Pinter's *Old Times* for Bas Bleu, she was the mysterious Kate, whose husband and onetime best friend spent the evening vying for her attention. She was also somewhat muted as the wife of an adulterous husband in Curious Theatre Company's *The Long Christmas Ride Home*. More marital problems followed in Curious's *The Goat or, Who Is Sylvia?*, when Trevathan's character, Stevie, learned that her husband had fallen in love with a goat. Trevathan juggled these complexities with the combination of passion and cool intelligence she brings to all her roles.

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