

# Entertainment

## P.J.' takes a theological turn in Boulder modern miracle drama

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To my surprise, Mark McQuown's play *P.J.* at the Guild theatre in Boulder turns out to be a modern miracle play. Four years ago, when the same play was performed at the own Hall Arts Center in Littleton, I saw it as a psychological drama with New Age overtones.

As played in Boulder, the title character, P.J. (short for Paul John), is now a holy fool — shorn of carnal desires, endowed with inhuman strength and bowed under the weight of God's inescapable will. Even his bandaged hands,

cried painfully, suggest wounds of stigmata. The script is little changed from its Littleton premiere except for the excision of a subplot about a psychiatrist's laughter. This time author McQuown is the director.

As a whodunit, the play's mystery lessens on second

### ■ A few words with Mark McQuown/53

viewing. As a fable on nature of miracles, it holds its own.

P.J. (El Armstrong) is a burn victim in the psychiatric unit of a hospital. For most of the first act the audience is forced to grasp at clues as to what put him there. The setting is the office of the hospital psychiatrist, Dr. Shearson, empathetically played by Bill Cramer.

Only the audience is privy to the interior sounds of P.J.'s hallucinations. It puts them one up on the doctor who sees only the patient's outward terror. Armstrong is required to play variations on a borderline psychotic, an amnesiac and a

P.J.

A play by Mark McQuown presented by Sirius Theatre at the Guild Theatre, 4840 Sterling Drive, Boulder. Directed by Mark McQuown, set design by Steven Hook, costumes by Lynn Durgom, sound by El Armstrong, lighting by Bob Shannon. With El Armstrong, Bill Cramer, Carrie Danielson, Kirk McCrea. Performances at 8 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays through June 25. 443-2866.

schizophrenic. He becomes almost catatonic at the recollection of a street accident. The audience hears the background noise but is forced to piece together the scenario.

In this incarnation, P.J. seems much more the saintly ascetic than the menacing psychotic of the first version. Dr. Shearson is troubled by the fact that his discipline forbids him to diagnose P.J.'s ailment as divinely inspired. Cautiously, the doctor summons the courage to listen to P.J. without prejudice. The message issuing from the patient's behavior is that God does talk to men.

Still in the script are some stream-of-consciousness speeches. No clues are given as to their origin.

P.J.'s former roommate and lover, Shelly, is played with fiery strength by Carrie Danielson. As a medical orderly, Kirk McCrea is too self-consciously concerned with stage business.

This time the play allows some leeway for those who, to quote a character, "don't believe in this New Age stuff." Dr. Shearson is a thoughtful man perplexed by a situation beyond his ken. As a matter of fact, he and Shelly stand for the majority in the audience — the cynical disbelievers and doubting Thomases.

Unfortunately, as Shearson and Shelly emerge as stand-ins for the audience, P.J. recedes into the shadowy persona of holy fool. The result this time around is more theology than twilight-zone tingle.



Carrie Danielson plays a doubting Thomas to El Armstrong's incarnation of a holy fool in Mark McQuown's *P.J.* at the Guild Theatre.