

'P.J.' explores disturbed mind

Local play studies religious, scientific conflict

By Teri Hansen

Campus Press Staff Writer

Guided by "voices in the night," a severely disturbed young man answering to the name of Paul John leads a psychiatrist into the world of the unknown in Mark McQuown's play "P.J."

Suffering from amnesia, P.J. is on a spiritual journey that blurs the lines of reality and escapes the laws of modern medicine.

"P.J." is about the young man's spiritual revelations and his psychiatrist's struggle between physical fact and religious faith.

P.J. appears in a New York psychiatric ward, his hands badly burned and his sanity severely shaken. While there, he undergoes frequent personality shifts, which come as suddenly as a closing door.

Dr. Hugh Shearson struggles to find the real P.J. amidst flashes of an aggressive past, sexual distress, a child's plight and a metaphysical power beyond explanation. The conventions of modern medicine are shaken in the wake of faith.

P.J. displays insight and strength beyond "normal" capacity. He rips the door off a burning car to save a little girl, knows the winning horses at a race track and knows the intimate details of the doctor's life without ever being told.

Why doesn't P.J. have the spiritual wisdom to save

himself? This is the essence of P.J.'s plight.

"P.J.", written and directed by McQuown, demands intense characterization and energy. El Armstrong's performance as P.J. is exceptional. He gives a strong performance and demonstrates versatility.

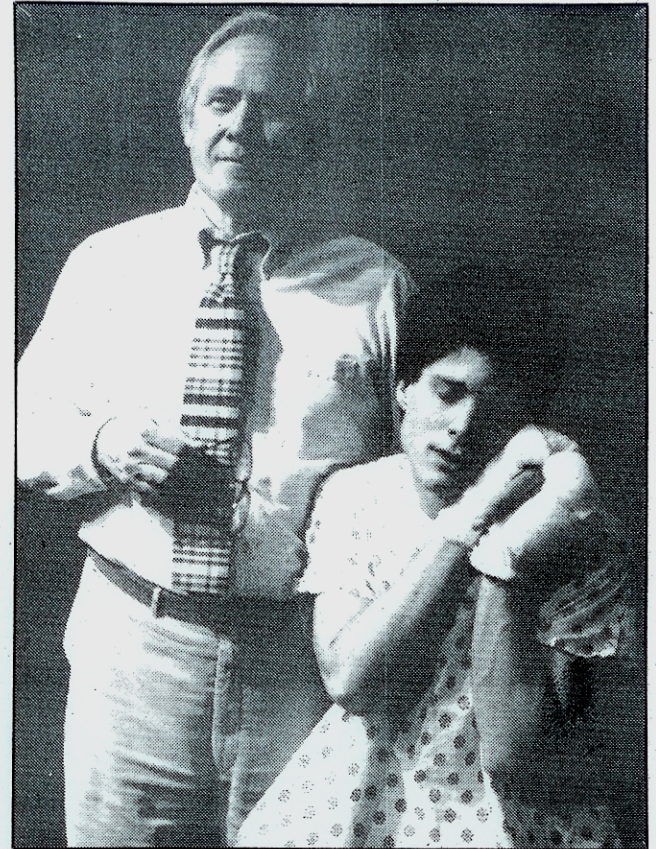
Bill Cramer is more than convincing in his role as Dr. Shearson. He has the technical aspects of the psychiatric profession mastered, but at times seems out of touch with his patient.

Carrie Danielson's performance as Shelley, P.J.'s girlfriend, is melodramatic at best. Her role is mostly emotional, which is a difficult task to maintain, but her character's concern for P.J. is lost.

The scenes between Dr. Shearson and Shelly suffer when the characters are absorbed in their own emotional performance, which pulls the focus away from P.J.

Armstrong's portrayal of P.J., however, successfully entices and unravels McQuown's ideas into a play about a miracle — the bridge between spiritual and physical.

"P.J.", winner of the 1984 Colorado Playwrights Festival, is playing at 8 p.m. Thursday through Sunday at the Guild Theater, 4840 Sterling Drive. Tickets are \$7.50, \$4.50 for seniors. The play will run through June 25.



El Armstrong, left, and Bill Cramer star in the Colorado Theater Festival production of 'P.J.', by a CU playwright.