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## ART

# Controversial plays open tonight

By Ming Rodrigues  
Emerald Contributor

Sometimes sexually explicit, often violent and shocking, Christopher Durang's plays are not comforting. Seemingly oblivious to the new climate of censorship, Durang attacks social norms and beliefs with cutting wit and humor.

The University Theatre will stage two Durang plays tonight at 8 p.m. that are guaranteed to offend.

But his plays do more than roil passions.

"Durang doesn't just rub your face into the horrors of life and leave it at that," said Robert Urbinati, a theater arts graduate student who's directing *Titanic*, one of the Durang plays opening tonight.

"His message runs deeper, provoking us to think about why life can be so ugly and how we can find a better way or reason to live," he said.

Craig Willis, director of the other Durang play *Laughing Wild*, said the work is a weapon against campus puritans who want to censor anything that offends.

"In a growing PC environment where the censorship movement is mounting, we've found in Durang a comic voice expressing our protest against such suppression of rights," Willis said.

"We're able to present the knowledge to our audience that, while we're likely to offend and provoke some of them, there are others who'll be cajoled into laughing and seeing beyond what is provoking them."

An absurdist farce, *Titanic* is an innocently obscene black comedy about a group of characters scrambling to find some meaning to the chaos of existence while the ship they're aboard is sinking fast. Durang tackles marriage, parenting, and heterosexuality with malevolent glee.

For Urbinati, the tough part was striking a balance between characters straight out of a Noel Coward British comedy, with the absurdist factor, and the serious message of the play.

"There was always the threat of pushing one aspect a little too far and then completely ruining the intention of the play," said Urbinati.

Though a little more sedate by comparison, *Laughing Wild* is nonetheless a comic approach to the politics of sexuality, Willis said.

"Essentially, it is a play about the struggle of individuals to maintain their rationale in a society that's highly irrational," he said.

The plot goes like this: A woman has trouble communicating with a stranger she meets in the tuna-fish aisle of a supermarket. So she figures the best way to get by him is to resort to violence. Two monologues ensue where both the man and woman tell their version of what took place.

Enter Durang's acid commentary on social issues. The two trash out their views on everything from Dr. Ruth Westheimer and Mother Teresa to Alcoholics Anonymous and religious teachings on sexuality.

A graduate from the Yale School of Drama, Durang cur-



*Laughing Wild*

rently works off-Broadway and is the author of several other plays such as *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*, which won an Obie Award, and *A History of the American Film*, which was nominated for a Tony. Durang's *Beyond Therapy* was also adapted for a motion picture.

*Titanic* and *Laughing Wild* open tonight in the Arena Theatre, 1109 Old Campus Lane. Additional performances are scheduled Thursday through Saturday, April 16-18, and Wednesday and Thursday, April 22-23. All shows start at 8 p.m. sharp.

Tickets are available at the University Theatre box office in the Robinson Theatre lobby. Admission is \$3 for students and \$4 for the general public. Box office hours are 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 6:30 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. on performance nights.

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