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STARTS FRIDAY MARCH 8TH

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CHANNEL SURFING

*In Word of Mouth, James Lecesne flips through
the bands of a metaphysical shortwave radio*

by C. Jay Wilson Jr.

It's hard to believe that James Lecesne's *Word of Mouth* is a one-man show. The performance features an effortless succession of diverse characters, each distinctly accomplished physically through the strategic employment of a minimalist costume arrangement—a hat, scarf, or suspended wig. The depth of Lecesne's characterizations is fulfilled through marvelous conversions of tone, gesture and vocal delivery, all of which provide the framework for a

of apparitions of the Virgin Mary in hopes of curing her terminally ill daughter. Perhaps his most endearing portrayal, however, is his animated depiction of Trevor, a gay teenager desperately in love with Diana Ross, who attempts suicide by swallowing aspirin only after his self-inflicted shock treatments fail to deliver him of his nascent homosexual feelings. In a brilliant display of flamboyant gesticulations, Lecesne captures the hilarious drama of Trevor's exaggerated plight, while still managing to communicate the sobering reality of gay teenage suicide that exists as a visible backdrop to the projected comedy.

Theater

compelling evening of theater that has amazed critics and audiences alike on both coasts. The same is in store for Portland.

Having completed a successful off-Broadway run with his show—which garnered him the 1995 Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Award for best solo performance—Lecesne mounted a "magic carpet" tour of *Word of Mouth*, which landed him in San Francisco for another extended run. He will make his way to Portland via Aspen, Colo., where his show is being produced for an HBO comedy special.

Word of Mouth, subtitled "The Story of the Human Satellite Dish," opens in the Brooklyn apartment of a rather vociferous Italian family, where the voices of dead relatives are being channeled through a shortwave radio. This setting establishes the central narrative that offers the cohesion of the performance along with an array of colorful characters, the distinction between whom is executed often solely with Lecesne's quick pivot on stage and instant development of another role. We are introduced to the hot-blooded Frankie, Frankie's equally volatile mother, who hasn't quite abdicated her "Miss Coney Island" throne, and a chain-smoking Jewish woman with a penchant for delivering her raspy-voiced commentary.

The shortwave radio exists as the metaphysical medium through which the audience is propelled on a journey across the globe and into the soliloquies of four characters, each coping with the universals of death and alienation. A proper elderly woman—one of Lecesne's more startling characterizations—unfolds her story, interrupted by a discourse with her dead servant, as she prepares to leave Africa. Brian communicates his story, first from a hospital waiting room as his wife undergoes chemotherapy and later as a janitor of that same hospital after his wife's death.

Even as Lecesne chooses to explore subject matter of a serious nature in many of his sketches, he strives to approach it with his most entertaining flair. Through another characterization he deftly unfurls the comic nuances of Shirley, a woman from Georgia who dedicates her life to the pursuit

of apparitions of the Virgin Mary in hopes of curing her terminally ill daughter. Perhaps his most endearing portrayal, however, is his animated depiction of Trevor, a gay teenager desperately in love with Diana Ross, who attempts suicide by swallowing aspirin only after his self-inflicted shock treatments fail to deliver him of his nascent homosexual feelings. In a brilliant display of flamboyant gesticulations, Lecesne captures the hilarious drama of Trevor's exaggerated plight, while still managing to communicate the sobering reality of gay teenage suicide that exists as a visible backdrop to the projected comedy.

Lecesne's performance is part of his cathartic response to the loss that he has encountered in his own life. Lecesne confesses that not only did he want to answer questions for other people, he really wanted to answer those questions for himself. *Word of Mouth* acknowledges the brevity of existence and emphasizes the universal need to tell our own stories. Lecesne tries to convince us that we must "not let the time go by without having said what [we]



James Lecesne as Shirley in *Word of Mouth*

want to say in life," an agenda that he communicates effectively through the memorable characters of his comically poignant show.

Word of Mouth runs March 8-10 and 14-17 at *Echo Theatre*, 1515 SE 37th Ave. in Portland. Sunday shows are at 7 pm, all others are at 8 pm. Tickets are \$13-\$14 from Fastix, 224-8499, Music Millennium and *Jelly Bean Cards*, and \$15-\$16 at the door.