

"rip-roaring, crowd-pleasing success"

- Santa Cruz Sentinel



Plays until October 23rd, 2004



"Outrageous Success"
Santa Cruz Sentinel

"like stepping into a life-size comic book"
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**Playing October 1st through October 23rd, 2004
at Broadway Playhouse in Santa Cruz
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Full Review from the Santa Cruz Sentinel, October 7th, 2004

Campy 'Beach Party' an outrageous success

By ANN BENNETT
SENTINEL THEATER REVIEWER

It was a beautiful day at the beach, and all the surfers and sunbathers were out in full force — a typical scene here in lovely Santa Cruz. Except that this scene is at the Broadway Playhouse at the Santa Cruz Art League, and the familiar balmy beach scene has metamorphosed into an outrageously funny play that defies description.

Pisces Moon Productions, widely known and well-respected for their serious and professional dramas, has taken a sharp turn into campy comedy. In many cases, this would be cause for alarm; for Pisces Moon, however, it's a rip-roaring, crowd-pleasing success.

"Psycho Beach Party" is a wild evening of hilarity that will happily distract you from all the real-life agonies of today's news — and do it with splendid disregard for anything even remotely resembling sanity.

The play, written by Charles Busch, is a spoof of 1960s surfing movies — but that's an understatement to start with. The comedy is pure farce, the story of an underdeveloped 15-year-old girl who wants to join the cool camaraderie of the surfing community, only to discover that girls aren't welcomed by the macho clan of surfers.

Set in Malibu in 1962, the plot includes a flock of stereotypes gone mad: surfers, yearning teenagers, mean mommies, lascivious teeny-boppers, and — to add an extra touch of surrealism — a mysterious midnight stalker who gets satisfaction from shaving, well, heads, mostly.

All of this is funny enough to begin with, but the script lifts it into an exaggerated plateau of visual comedy, and Pisces Moon takes it a few levels beyond that. The show captures all the idiosyncrasies Santa Cruz audiences love and blows them into a new dimension. It's not often that we get to laugh at the things we claim to cherish around here.

Director Susan Myer stages "Psycho Beach Party" as a cartoon, and it's a fine decision. The set, costumes, props, hair-dos and even (or maybe especially) the acting are all caricatures that illustrate the silliness of the play with fine precision. The set, designed and created by Myer and Bernie Visel, is inspired by pop artist Roy Lichtenstein. It's a vivid, primary-colored, two-dimensional piece of cartoon art that goes beyond the stage itself. The theater walls and even the props make use of this bright and simplistic style, and it underscores the script perfectly. Costumes by Linda Turner and Christopher Sugarman reflect the same extravagance of comic strip chic with fine results.

Obviously I'm not going to spoil your fun by telling you anything about the plot (such as it is) or even the characters (such as they are). I couldn't anyway; the show is beyond normal description.

The cast is cleverly listed twice, and I'm not going to tell you about that, either. Just make sure you don't get one of the blue programs, which are impossible to read in the theater.

Flynn Witmeyer is super as the irrepressible Chicklet, Christopher Sugarman is spectacular as Marvel Ann, Frederick James gives motherhood a whole new image, and Jay Mosely plays Kanaka with nice insouciance. Zachary Krone sparkles as Star Cat, Becky Armor intellectualizes with ease, and Patsy Reese does a splendid impersonation of Marilyn.

Surfers Adrian Balbontin and Jeff Dinnell contribute fun and poignancy, and Amber Edwards, Jenne Lotz, Kathleen Palmer and Iris Weiss add to the fun, along with a cute turn by Charlotte Reynolds.

The whole cast is delightfully free of any obligation to act with insightful commitment, so everybody has a fine time indulging in the fun of overacting like crazy and nobody resists the temptation to camp it up whenever possible.

"Psycho Beach Party" is about as outrageously funny and hilariously disrespectful as it can get. There's no subtlety to be found anywhere, and nobody gives a fig for nuance. It's just the kind of delightful silliness that we all need occasionally, and Pisces Moon certainly knows how to pull it off

with their own quirky style.

NOTES FROM THE PRODUCERS: THE STORY

“Psycho Beach Party” tells the story of Chicklet, an underdeveloped 15 year-old who would like nothing more than to surf with the Malibu cool cats. However, this is 1962, and, as Star Cat (aka Herbert Mullin) says, “Girls can’t surf. Heck, a surfboard’s even a phallic symbol!”. Plus, her Mommie Dearest has a thing or two to tell Chicklet about boys, while rebuking her with slaps from a jockstrap. Another thing getting in poor Chicklet’s way is her alter egos, especially the evil Ann Bowman, who is bent on world domination, beginning with Sacramento. Finally, there’s a mysterious midnight stalker who has been wreaking havoc on the beach boys and bunnies, including the budding gays, Yo-Yo and Provoloney, the luscious Marvel Ann, Chicklet’s nemesis, Chicklet’s existentialist best friend Berdine and starlet-in-hiding Bettina Barnes.

[Click here to read the full review from the New York Times](#)

[or here for the full review from the Village Voice](#)

Preview from *The Good Times*, Sep 30, 2004

The Beach is Back

Pisces Moon sets the stage for the ultimate beach party—with a ‘psychotic’ twist

By Christa Martin

Pisces Moon never does anything half-baked. If the locally acclaimed theater company produces a drama, it gives meat and bones, gritty stuff. A comedy? The players deliver laughs. And when it serves up a campy, drag-driven story, director Susan Myer and her team give a delicious 100 percent. And this is just what Pisces Moon plans to do with its upcoming show, “Psycho Beach Party,” a play that will prance into Santa Cruz’s Broadway Playhouse on Friday, Oct. 1 and run until Oct. 23.

The plot is a bit confusing to explain, but basically, think Rocky Horror Picture Show with a retro surfer vibe. Then make it even bigger and bawdier, set to a cartoon backdrop. It’s not “The Laramie Project.” What it is, however, is a shot for Pisces Moon to get back in touch with its roots.

“We were doing this serious stuff for a while: [“Never the Sinner,” “Swimming in the Shallows,” “Five Flights”] ... we decided to go the exact opposite ... it’s time to lighten up,” says Myer, the director, who co-produces the show along with her business partner Christopher Sugarman. The two spearhead Pisces Moon.

And lighten up is exactly what they will do with “Psycho Beach Party.” The play boasts a cross-dressing crowd: men playing women, women playing men, and sometimes gender specific casting. It tells the story of 15-year-old Chicklet, a cute, perky girl who desperately wants to be a surfer.

Staged in the 1960s in the heart of machismo culture, she convinces the king of surfers to teach her the ways of the water. Only problem: young Chicklet has multiple personality disorder and her personalities keep popping up, each with its own agenda.

Rick James plays Chicklet's "Mommie Dearest," Mrs. Forest. The actor has been seen on stages across the Bay Area, including locally at Club Dakota, but under the drag pseudonym Helen Back. This is James's first real acting gig. Turns out, he's loving it. Not a bad job for a guy who likes dressing up as a woman, especially since that's exactly what he gets to do in "Psycho Beach Party." His Mrs. Forest is so Joan Crawford and the villain of the show.

"She's not dealing well with a budding, young, teenage daughter who wants to be a surfer," James says. "She is fighting it tooth and nail and is a little heavy handed on the punishment."

The evil mom role seems like a stretch for the charismatic, fun-loving James. No bother, he's glad to bite into the part. It provides him with a little escape from his day job as a florist, in fact, as one of the top four florists on the West Coast. Sunset magazine noted him in the top ranks of the flower industry. Clearly, he's at the top of his game, both with flowers and femininity.

Sidling up to James's girlish side, on stage at the Broadway Playhouse, is pretty boy turned pretty girl, Sugarman, who stars in the role of Marvel Ann, the sort of nemesis to Chicklet. Simply put, Marvel Ann is a bitch, through and through. For Sugarman, unlike James, this is the first time since college that he's tromped around in women's shoes in a play. The footwear might be uncomfortable, but embodying the XY chromosome, not so much.

Fifteen years ago an acting instructor cautioned him (when he was playing another role as a woman) not to be a caricature, but the real thing. "I took that with me into everything I've ever done," Sugarman says, about the advice.

It's wisdom that has served him well. Sugarman has proved to be a strong stage actor, shining in many local productions. Besides the fact that he cleans up nicely (as a woman), "the show is absolutely wild," Sugarman says. "It's a visual delight. People will see some of the most dynamic performances ever seen in Santa Cruz."

"Psycho Beach Party" runs Oct. 1-23 at the Broadway Playhouse, 526 Broadway, Santa Cruz. It plays at 8 p.m. on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and 3 p.m. on Sundays Oct. 10 and 17. Tickets are \$12. To reserve tickets, call 429-2328. For more info, visit www.piscesmoon.org.

Slasher with a difference invades Pisces Moon's 'Psycho Beach Party'

Oct 8 2004 12:00AM By

By JOYCE D. MANN

FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

True to form, Pisces Moon Productions opens the season with Charles Busch's camp comedy "Psycho Beach Party" at the Broadway Playhouse in Santa Cruz.

Set in 1962 Malibu, the play parodies the beach movies of that time, with shades of Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello. Like today, the '60s were a time of fear and anxiety, where people took refuge from real or imagined threats in escapist movies. Add a topping of slasher movie to the beach melange, and you have a strange sundae called "Psycho Beach Party."

Atmosphere is an important element of this play, and stepping into the theater is like stepping into a life-size comic book. Huge comic strips, designed by the multi-talented Susan Myer (who also directs) and implemented by Myer and Bernie Visel, decorate the walls.



In keeping with the comic book theme, scenery (design by Roger McCune) and props are large, colorful and two-dimensional. The decor tells the audience from the start that they are entering into an unreal world, and that the superficial content of the play is not to be taken too seriously.

The plot, if it can be called that, revolves around Florence "Chicklet" Forrest played by Flynn Witmeyer. She is a gauche, underdeveloped teenager who desperately wants to get in with the beach bum set and learn to surf. She especially has her eye on Star Cat (Zachary Krone), a bronzed blonde surfing star who has just dropped out of his psychology class.

The other big "k-nocker" of the beach scene is Kanaka (Jay Mosely). Rounding out the male entourage are soon-to-be gay partners, Yo Yo (Adrian Balbontin) and Provoloney (Jeff Dinnell).

But what would a beach scene be without a group of admiring girls? "Psycho Beach Party" has its share. Outstanding among them are the gorgeous Marvel Ann (Christopher Sugarman) and the studious and homely Berdine (Becky Armor). Armor has some wonderfully funny vignettes throughout the play. Patsy Reese turns in a good performance as a Marilyn Monroe-lookalike starlet who is hiding out with the beach group.

Now, Chicklet is not quite what she seems. On a certain verbal cue, another Chicklet emerges. She is a bold, vicious woman who gives new meaning to the term "slasher movie." As the evening progresses, a whole troupe of Chicklets emerges. Witmeyer does a great job flipping between characters that have different personas and accents. This is the only role that really tests acting ability.

Star Cat tries to analyze Chicklet's problems and, of course, comes back to the mother and early childhood experiences. Frederick James gives a great performance as Chicklet's mother, Mrs. Forrest. His larger-than-life, over-the-top portrayal would have made Joan Crawford proud.

Costumers Sugarman and Linda Turner recreate the flashy 1960s beach fashions. The "big hair," which plays a significant role in the plot, completes the visual impact.

The play is full of ambiguity and sexual innuendo. Myer adds an additional layer of ambiguity by using amusing pseudonyms, such as Austin Tayshus and Diana Shame, for cast and crew. Myer's directorial hand is clearly seen both in the style of the production and in the snappy, fast-paced performances of the actors.

Most parodies are hard to sustain, and "Psycho Beach Party" is no exception. Theatergoers will either love or hate this play. There's no in between.



Dangerous Liaisons *by Christopher Hampton*

Plays April 22nd through May 21st, 2005
at Actors' Theatre in Santa Cruz

[Tickets](#)



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