

# *Psychopathia Sexualis*

By Debbi K. Swanson



John Patrick Shanley loves quirky people. Look at his films *Moonstruck* and *Five Corners*, and you'll certainly see them. *Psychopathia Sexualis*, a comedy which first played in L.A. at the Mark Taper Forum, is also full of them.

Part of the Shanley Festival at the matchbox theater, The Zoo in Hollywood, it's as good in its performances as those of the Taper's. Production quality is definitely lacking as this is bare bones theater, but the intimacy tradeoff makes it successful.

The plot's rather simple. Arthur, (Allen Barton,) a young introverted man who has just become engaged to Lucille,

confesses to his best friend Howard that he can't achieve sexual fulfillment without having a particular pair of his father's argyle socks handy at the crucial moment.

The complications set in because his therapist of six years has stolen the socks, with Arthur's marriage less than two weeks away. He now enlists the aid of Howard to recover his sexual aids. Albert Owens is a riot as Howard, a pompous, self-centered former executive who pretends that his world is perfect. This as his wife Ellie, played by Marie Marshall, writes a poem that tells how she really feels -- and it ain't good. Because he's touched by Arthur's problem, Howard finally confesses to Arthur his own weaknesses and agrees to see the psychiatrist to retrieve the lost goods.

Dan Barton plays Dr. Block with his stand-up comedian skills in a memorable performance of a lunatic in action. It turns out he's crazy in a good way, however, which isn't apparent early on.

The second act focuses on the women - Lucille and Ellie. Barbara Niven blasts onto that stage and never lets go of it. Having played Marilyn Monroe in HBO's *The Rat Pack*, she's dynamite in her lowcut wedding dress and cowboy boots, as well as in the skimpier Victoria's Secret wardrobe she spends much time in. Lucille is a tough Texas blonde babe with high ideals and a low budget, with her character an even stronger asset than her looks. When Niven is on stage, all eyes are upon her, though Marshall holds her own as the older, jaded Ellie whose motives aren't so friendly. Or are they very clear, which is a Shanley writing weakness. Does she just want everyone to be as unhappy as she?

Lisa Pescia directs with a keen sensitivity for timing. There was a prop problem this night, but with doing three different shows in one day, it's no wonder. Chris Barella gets credit for the multi-level set design and Mike Brink for lighting. You'll have a ball with this little romp, though the single ticket price is way out of line for this kind of theater

space and production values.

*Psychopathia Sexualis* plays at the Zoo Theater, 1611 N. Cahuenga Blvd., Hollywood (323)460-4233. There is one more performance of *Psychopathia* at 8 p.m. Sun., Nov. 21, and is in repertory with 12 other Shanley works. The festival has been extended through Dec. 18. Call for complete schedule. Tickets are \$20 with discount festival passes available. Also check their schedule on their website at [www.subtlebliss.com](http://www.subtlebliss.com).