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S A N F R A N C I S C O

Loveland is Brilliantly Funny

By Linda Ayres-Frederick

It's a no-brainer. Ann Randolph is a comic genius... and not just any sort of hide-your-light-behind-a-bush kind of genius, but a hard-working, dare-to-put-it-out-there kind of genius. If you missed her first show *Squeeze Box* that played last year at The Marsh (and deservedly won Best Solo Show from *LA Weekly* and *LA Times'* Ovation Award for Best Solo Performance) don't worry. Randolph returns to The Marsh (currently running), and she has gotten even better — a tribute to what is humanly possible — in *Loveland*, directed by Matt Roth.

In seventy short minutes, this is the irreverent, hilarious and deeply human journey of Franny Potts on her way home to Ohio from LA as she faces up to the greatest loss of her life: her mother. Surrounded by strangers, Franny stumbles her way from awkward confusion through the mystery, tragedy and the "true beauty formed from loss" that unites us all. This is by no means a sentimental journey, but you'll still need a hanky or two.

Franny Potts, her mother, and the fellow travelers Franny encounters on her way as well as those involved in the care and demise of her mother form the cast of characters, all of which Ann Randolph portrays. Without missing a beat, Randolph moves from one fully-defined character to another with a single unique gesture, physical or vocal change, embodying each new person seamlessly. Among them are the businessman sitting next to Franny, the "Isn't that nice" woman on the aisle along with the stewardess — oops! as Franny corrects herself —



PHOTO BY LELAND AUSLANDER

Ann Randolph in *Loveland*

"flight attendant," and the pilot whose voice we hear over the loudspeaker. The pilot becomes the object of acted-out fantasy in one of the most sultry episodes of the piece.

Franny Potts has exceptionally fabulous fantasies. Previous to the pilot fantasy, we see Franny "moving around the cabin" (more like gyrating) before the seat belt sign has been turned off. From her window seat (booked far in advance on the side of the plane chosen for perfect viewing), she shares her excitement about the many American landmarks to behold that the pilot announces as they pass over each one from above. She also refuses to pull down the shade on America.

Included in the sights is Loveland, Colorado, that shares the name of her hometown Loveland, Ohio, where she is headed. Take a hint from that name.

Franny also recounts her initial interview and subsequent (hilarious) performance of "facial gestures that accompany sounds" show at the nursing home where her mother doesn't "pass away" like some people pass gas. Mom eventually dies, but not until she's had several adventures that we are able to see and hear.

The real journey Potts/Randolph takes is not only the physical one from one side of the country to the other, but the huge step she takes from fear to courage in sharing her private feelings about her loss with a public that she is convinced has no interest in hearing. This emotional journey has the audience laughing hysterically at one moment and in shockingly honest tears the next — tears that rip away the façade of propriety that so many in the "caring" industries put on to survive.

If anyone can make you laugh about a subject as serious as dying, it's Ann Randolph sharing both vulnerability and audacious humor that are the basis of her immense talent. It's no surprise that both Mel Brooks and his late wife Ann Bancroft considered Ms. Randolph as stunning and generous a performer as the late Gilda Radner. *Loveland* (for adults 16 and above) is a highly recommended MUST SEE!

Loveland written and performed by Ann Randolph, continues Thursdays at 8pm and Saturdays at 5pm at the Marsh Studio Theatre Upstairs, 1074 Valencia St. SF. No shows on Oct 22, 24 and 31. Tickets are \$20-\$35 (sliding scale general seating); \$50 reserved seating, call Brown Paper Tickets (800) 838-3006 or at themarsh.org. For further info call (415) 826-5750.▼