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Loving Loveland

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Fourth show of 2010: *Loveland*, the Marsh, January 17.



Ann Randolph in *Loveland*. Photo by Leland Auslen

It took a long time for me to catch up with *Loveland*, Ann Randolph's latest solo show at the Marsh. It opened back in October as a follow-up to her previous hit *Squeeze Box*, both the *Los Angeles Times* and *LA Weekly*'s pick for best solo show of 2002, which enjoyed a much-extended eight-month run at the Marsh last year. And I have to admit, I missed that one entirely. I also missed the initial run of *Loveland* but had a second chance when it returned this month for another extension.

And boy, am I glad I did. In a bare-bones staging directed by Matt Roth, Randolph has created a sublime character in Frannie Potts, a loudly geeky nature enthusiast on a California to Ohio flight to attend to her mother's remains. With a sunken chin, a toothy lisp and eyebrows hoisted high, Frannie exudes enthusiastic, dweeby charm while blurting out the most inappropriate things.

Frannie's chosen her seat on the plane carefully so she can stare out and rhapsodize about the natural parks passing outside her window. "Yes, it sure *is* pretty," she says emphatically to a

neighbor's tepid praise. "Pretty *spectacular!*" The unseen pilot's description of sights coming up outside, mellifluously voiced by Wayne Wilderson, make her squirm in hilariously unseemly lust.

Frannie sings a little, but as far as she's concerned her true art is "facial gesturing to sound," which turns out to be exactly what it sounds like: making outlandish faces in interpretation of various sounds, whether they're car alarms or airplane toilets.

The flight she's on serves as a launching pad for connecting flights of memory that we board and disembark so smoothly that we hardly know we've been away. All of these are ultimately about her mother, such as reluctantly summiting Mount San Jacinto on the tram rather than on foot because her wheelchair-bound mother insists; the two of them giving the perky staff at the nursing home a hard time while touring the facility; and appalling her meditation teacher with a rant about how grief makes her horny.

Randolph deftly lets the other characters in Frannie's story shine clearly through the distinct Potts persona as she details pricelessly uncomfortable encounters with a grief counselor, a mortician and a masseuse at Whole Foods, each more outrageous than the last. In particular Frannie's portrayal of her mother is a wonder, her voice brassy and boozy and two fingers always raised as if waving a cigarette around. While she seems like a handful and a half, the great thing about Frannie's mom is that if she gives her daughter a hard time she also backs her up with a sardonic, conspiratorial good humor. You can definitely feel the love.

A mere 70 minutes with no intermission, *Loveland* is an awfully funny monologue, but it's also a keenly incisive exploration of grief, building up to a climax so devastating and beautiful that it brought tears to my eyes. It's the kind of play that burrows its way into your heart, breaks it and puts it back together again.