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Leland Auslander

**Ann Randolph has a second long-running hit in "Loveland."**

## THEATER REVIEW

# Hilarious solo show back at Marsh

**By Robert Hurwitt**

CHRONICLE THEATER CRITIC

The death of a parent, sex and a lot of inappropriate behavior generate waves of hilarity in Ann Randolph's surprisingly moving "Loveland." You'll laugh. You'll cry. Sometimes it's hard to tell if the tears come from comedy, compassion or both.

Randolph's second long-running hit at the Marsh (her "Squeeze Box" ran for eight months in '08), "Loveland" reopened for its third extension Saturday. With any luck, the tale of a compulsively outspoken oddball coping with the death of her mother will play at least as long as its predecessor.

True, the hyperactive

Marsh has plenty of other shows vying for space on its two stages, including Don Reed's also long-running "East 14th" and Dan Hoyle's eagerly anticipated "The Real Americans." But the Marsh is about to double its size. In her curtain speech Saturday, founder Stephanie Weisman revealed she'd just signed the lease to reopen the Marsh Berkeley, this time with two stages. The downtown Berkeley space will reopen with Reed's show Jan. 22.

That could give audiences more time to fly with Randolph, if the increasingly in-demand comic doesn't have other plans (her extensive tour of "Squeeze Box" included a six-month off-Broadway



**Loveland:** Solo show. Written and performed by Ann Randolph. Directed by Matt Roth. Through Feb. 21. The Marsh, 1062 Valencia St., San Francisco. 75 minutes. \$15-\$50. (800) 838-3006, [www.themarsh.org](http://www.themarsh.org).

run produced by Mel Brooks and the late Anne Bancroft). "Fly" is the operative word. "Loveland" takes place on a plane from Los Angeles to Loveland, Ohio — the hometown of Randolph and of her character Frannie Potts.

Frannie — a geeky experimental performance artist ("I do facial gesturing to sound") — is flying home after the

death of her mother. She's one of the last people you'd want to sit next to on a long flight. Opinionated and impulsively candid, she's prone to barking judgmental comments, dissing the would-be helpful; writing mash notes to the pilot, enacting masturbatory fantasies and jumping up from her window seat to dance in the aisle.

What makes this all the funnier, besides the mercurial skill with which Randolph shifts characters in Matt Roth's seamlessly swift staging, is that we share most of Frannie's prejudices. The objects of her attacks include despoilers of nature, people who go to parks for the gift shop and films about nature,

smarmy funeral directors or meditation teachers and on-hold music (the nursing home's use of Mozart's Requiem Mass is inspired).

A veteran of sketch comedy (she co-starred with Will Ferrell and Cheri Oteri in L.A.'s Groundlings), Randolph mines new depths of hilarity from even such tired topics as car alarms. But what distinguishes "Loveland" is its underlying compassionate universality. Frannie's outrageousness is grounded in the death of her mother. "Loveland" is a bracing tonic for anyone who has or will face that situation.

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