

MIA FARROW LIVES THE ME TO WE PRINCIPLE. B3

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Heart of a clown

The Homemaker
puts her own life
under the microscope

JEFF DEDEKKER
LEADER/POST

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LEADER-POST

Don't get the wrong idea when Laura Anne Harris, the star of the one-woman show *The Homemaker*, refers to herself as a clown.

Harris isn't donning funny makeup, a wild costume and huge shoes for her role, rather she's incorporated the heart of a clown into her portrayal of homemaker Janette Pettipas.

Actors use the Red Nose and Buffon clown techniques as rehearsal tools to bring a playful energy to the stage. Each of the styles use classroom exercises that develop the performance techniques through elements like farce, satire, gallows humour and burlesque.

These techniques enable Harris to bring Pettipas, a 1960s French-Canadian homemaker living in Albertville, Sask., to life. Pettipas, who Harris loosely based on her great aunt, attempts to deal with a problematic marriage and a reliance on alcohol by sharing her life story as a cabaret show delivered from her kitchen.

"Red nose is considered the smallest mask in the world — that's all you need," Harris said during a recent telephone interview from her home in Toronto. "Back in the time of circus and early television, people decided to put the circus clown, who needed to be big, bold and colourful for the people in the 50th row, on TV. They transferred that clown to television. That's why we have that stereotype — they didn't play to the room ... In France and in Europe, the nose is it. That's all you need."

Harris, who graduated from the University of Victoria in 2007, originally wrote *The Homemaker* as a four-person play during her second year at the school.

See *HOMEMAKER*, B2

THE HOMEMAKER

When: 8 p.m., May 7-10
Where: House of Dance

The immediate issue, being heard at the ICC, is just the grand total of two convictions to its credit. The magazine is a massage therapist.

Homemaker

CONTINUED FROM B1

"I remember my director at the time saying, 'This should be a solo show.' I didn't know how I could do that but as time went on and I thought about the show, I considered making it a two-person show with myself and a husband character," said Harris.

"But as time went on and the more clown training I did, I realized you can create your own playground with just one person. There shouldn't be any limitations to that.

"You can become different characters, you can represent different characters and you don't have to have four people on stage. You can tell the story with one person."

Telling the story with one person is a bit of a double-edged sword. On one hand, the artist has the freedom to

shape and fashion the piece however they like because they control every facet of the production. But on the other hand, the risk of making the piece successful falls solely upon them.

Harris has experience with one-person plays — she wrote and starred in *Pitch Blond* in 2007 with the production winning the critic's choice award as best fringe production at the Victoria Fringe Festival.

She understands both sides of the equation and feels that the reward definitely outweighs the risk.

"I love being creatively in control of my own piece, in terms of how I decide to design the set, the costumes and my performance as well as the storytelling," said Harris. "On the other hand, I have to be responsible for the costumes, the props, tell-

ing the story. It's very challenging, I won't lie about that ... But for me, the reward is the connection with the audience. As a solo performer, you have that unique opportunity to connect with the audience like no other play. You're not connecting with another actor on stage, you're only connecting with the audience.

"For me, that's the reward and the payoff even though it can be stressful having all that on your shoulders. In the end, once you're on stage and you can play, it's fantastic."

The *Homemaker* begins its four-night run at The House of Dance (2207 Harvey St.) on Wednesday. Morgan Norwich is the director and Darcy Stoop is the assistant director. Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$15 for students and are available online (www.hectick.ca).

ing a well-paced comedy underlining everyday foibles, which the cast plays just right. **JB**

ROB FORD AND THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THE FLYING ANARCHIST by Danilo Fo, adapted by Matt Jones. Jul 14 at noon, Jul 15 at 8 pm, Jul 16 at 1:45 pm. Rating: **NN**
See review at nowtoronto.com/fringe

TARRAGON EXTRA SPACE

30 Bridgman

ABRA-CADAVER! by Jenna Turk. Jul 15 at noon, Jul 16 at 8:45 pm. Rating: **NNN**
Century-old author, critic and satirist Dorothy Parker can't commit suicide, try as she might, so she enlists the audience to help her in this sometimes witty play set in a graveyard.

Dubbed "the defier of death," Parker toys with hemlock, electrocution, hanging, sleeping pills and other means but remains steadfastly suicidally challenged. **NS**

some laughs here, too, though often of the sitcom variety, but the shift in tone between humour and seriousness doesn't always succeed.

Matt Murray, who wrote the script with his mother Carol Anne Murray, gets good performances from his actors, especially Alanis Peart as an over-eager neighbour. **JK**

WHEN HARRY MET HARRY by Allan Gird. Jul 14 at 5:15 pm, Jul 15 at 9:15 pm, Jul 16 at noon. Rating: **NNN**

Inching along with his inner acid jazz soundtrack, uptight office worker Harry finds his life unravelling when he's made to take a workshop with an overbearing motivational speaker named Rodney.

Looking like a rangy Spalding Gray, solo performer Allan Gird radiates likeability as the anxious paper pusher forced to re-evaluate his life. His Rodney is slightly less appealing, with his puerile interpersonal activities, but that makes Harry's eventual redemption all the more satisfying.

While the plot is as thin as the paper Harry supplies, Gird's elastic physicality and heartfelt presence make him utterly watchable right to the optimistic end. **NS**

the dialogue actually sound witty. As Laurel, the central character, **Bummi Adeeye** glows with warmth, humour and sympathy. The cast later delivers three short songs with such panache you wish someone had taken the play and completely reworked it for them as a musical. **CH**

PITCH BLOND by Laura Anne Harris. Jul 14 at 9:45 pm, Jul 16 at 9:45 pm, Jul 17 at 3:30 pm. Rating: **NNNN**

Writer/actor Laura Anne Harris, a warm and engaging performer, looks at the life and career of Broadway and Hollywood star Judy Holliday in this marvellous blend of comedy and poignancy.

Harris has Holliday's voice down pat, and, under the direction of Judith McDowell, the show's highlights are the scenes in which the super-bright Holliday uses her ditzy blond persona from *Born Yesterday* to ward off charges of Communism.

There are lots of other memorable moments, including Holliday auditioning for the Mercury Theatre with a piece from Aristophanes's *The Frogs* and her association with musical theatre legends Betty Comden and Adolph Green. A winning Fringe production. **JK**

so little about her, him or what they see in each other that we don't care about the various roadblocks to marital bliss. Directed by Sandra Battaglini, Pascuzzi uses puppets (with varying degrees of success) to tell the story, and she's an appealing, modest performer, at her most entertaining when evoking her critical, old-school Italian parents. **GS**

THE SODS by Jason Thompson. Jul 14 at 4:30 pm, Jul 15 at 10:30 pm, Jul 16 at 8 pm, Jul 17 at 12:30 pm. Rating: **NN**
See review at nowtoronto.com/fringe

VISA CALLED THIS MORNING by Jen Gallant. Jul 14 at 9:45 pm, Jul 17 at 4 pm. Rating: **NNN**

Credit card stress induces a state of serious paranoia in Jen Gallant's solo show about the interest you don't want. Gallant charms as the feckless debtee, juxtaposing childhood flashbacks with various silly-voiced characters in the present. Too many musical interludes and a lack of development in the otherwise likeable main character means this Visa doesn't always pay off. **NS**



= Critics' Pick

NNNN = Standing ovation

NNNN = Sustained applause

NNN = Recommended, memorable scenes

NN = Seriously flawed

N = Get out the hook



War Of The Clowns emerged victorious at the Fringe.



Laura Anne Harris displayed perfect Pitch Blond.

FRINGE WRAP-UP

The 2011 Fringe, which closed Sunday (July 17), proved the hottest on record, and not just because the temperature got up into the 30s.

This is the first festival we can remember without any rain; audiences waiting on line didn't have to worry about finding shelter in theatre lobbies, and none of the outdoor site-specific shows lost a performance.

The heat extended to the crowds and the box office, with ticket sales over 57,000, up 7 per cent from last year. That meant a return to companies, who get all the box office, of just under \$410,000.

Some tickets were hard to get from the begin-

ning of the festival. Ins Choi's *Kim's Convenience*, winner of this year's New Play Contest and featured on NOW's July 7 cover, was a sellout from its first performance; it ran in the festival's largest venue, the Bathurst Street Theatre. Tickets for its added Patron's Pick performance on the Fringe's last day sold out in 25 minutes – a festival record.

Here's NOW's list of this year's Fringe highlights.

Outstanding new plays

Kim's Convenience; *Swoon!*; *War Of The Clowns*

Outstanding productions

The Giant's Garden; *Mary's Wedding*; *The Godot Cycle*; *Horse*; *Kim's Convenience*; *La Duchesse De Langeais*; *Mickey & Judy*; *Peter 'N Chris Save The World*; *Pitch Blond*; *Romeo & Juliet... A Puppet Epic*; *Sex, Religion & Other Hang-Ups*; *Swoon!*; *Tiki Bikini Beach Paradise Party A-Go-Go*; *The Travelling Salesman And His Magical Suitcase Of Desires*; *War Of The Clowns*

Outstanding performances

Christel Bartelse (*Chaotica*); James Gangl (*Sex, Religion & Other Hang-Ups*); Lynne Griffin (*Brother Andre's Heart*); Laura Anne Harris (*Pitch Blond*);



James Gangl explored *Sex, Religion & Other Hang-Ups*.

Ryan Kelly, Dale Miller and Christian Bellsmith (*Living With Henry*); Michael Hughes (*Mickey & Judy*); Adam Lazarus (*Tyumen, Then*); Michael MacLennan, Laura Caswell and Paula Wolfson (*The Giant's Garden*)

Outstanding ensembles

Awake; *Bloom*; *Breaking News*; *Horse*; *Kim's Convenience*; *La Duchesse De Langeais*; *Mister Baxter*; *MonaRita*; *She Said What Happened*; *Swoon!*; *Tiki Bikini Beach Paradise Party A-Go-Go*; *The Travelling Salesman And His Magical Suitcase Of Desires*; *War Of The Clowns*

Outstanding direction

Leora Morris (*Horse*); Natalie Fehereghazi (*La Duchesse De Langeais*); Sue Miner (*War Of The Clowns*)

JON KAPLAN/GLENN SUMI



PRAISE FROM THE HOMEMAKER AT THE TORONTO FRINGE FESTIVAL:

“There is some very funny clowning going on here. Our heroine becomes increasingly drunk as she happens upon bottles of booze stashed in every nook and cranny. This drunkenness coincides perfectly with the narrative.

Laura Anne Harris’ *The Homemaker* is challenging theatre. She gives us a very cute and shiny trinket to play with, but then she asks us to open it up and see what’s inside. Well, guess what...there is a lot of pain inside.

What Laura Anne Harris has achieved here is quite exceptional. Easing us in gently, she’s shown us a little piece of life that is sad and harsh. She knows it’s devastating, that’s why she’s wrapped it up in a wonderfully entertaining package.

The Homemaker is funny, poignant and heartbreaking—a truly great piece of theatre.” – Istvan Dugalin - Mooney on Theatre, Toronto ON

‘Harris’s subtle clown and Morgan Norwich’s direction made for a magnetic performance. I fell almost instantly in love with Janet Cardinal: her shame about using her native French, her reflexive Catholicism, and her self-effacing presence in her own performance made me want to join her on her journey and also take care of her.

The quiet despair at the middle of Cardinal’s life slowly emerges over the course of the show, resulting in a piece that is light and funny in parts but that I ultimately found very moving.’ – Colette Shaw, *The Charlebois Post*, Toronto ON

Top 10 Artists to Watch at the 2013 Toronto Fringe by Now Magazine.

- ‘Harris is expert at getting to the heart of a character through text and physicality’ – Jon Kaplan, *Now Magazine*

- **Four Stars:** “Harris creates an immediate rapport with the audience and, with the help of director Morgan Norwich, pulls us easily into Janette’s world...What begins with laughs become sober and tragic by the final blackout, and Harris does a fine job taking us on a seamless journey from one emotional world to the other.” – Jon Kaplan, *Now Magazine*

PRAISE FROM MS HARRIS’ PREVIOUS PRODUCTION, *PITCH BLOND*:

Five Stars -“*Pitch Blond* is a palimpsest scraping away the grease paint giving us a done-wrong dame. I hope Senator Joe is roasting in hell. This is the first play that uses YouTube's massive archive to re-create the Golden Age of radio and cinema. Using authentic sound and recorded enactments blended with live performance, the show takes you back and aback. Mothers, bring your daughters. Men, polish your funny bones. See this show. I'm an atheist. I don't think Judy Holliday, who died so young, so sadly, is alive anywhere other than on tape and screen. But, if I might be presumptuous and sentimental at the same time, I dearly wish to thank the oh so dear Laura Anne Harris with all my heart for bringing J.H. - all of her - back to life and sharing this great labour of love with us. Thank you, darling.” – Winnipeg CBC

Five Stars -“Harris sparkles at Holliday,” *Victoria’s Times Colonist*.

CRITIC'S CHOICE – Four Stars – “A winning fringe production,” Jon Kaplan, *Now Magazine*
Outstanding Production and Outstanding Performance – *Now Magazine*

Four Stars – *Torontolist.com*

Four Stars - Victoria's, *Monday Magazine*

Winnipeg Fringe Festival 2010: Best of Fest

Victoria Critics Choice Award 2007: Best Fringe Production

Victoria Fringe Festival Nomination 2007: Best Actress

Monday Magazine M Award Nominations 2007: Best Actress, Best New Play