

## ARTS REVIEW

# Wilderness comedy cracks up audience

BY BILL EDWARDS

Daily News correspondent

Patrick McManus' staged stories in "A Fine and Pleasant Misery" brought jolts of laughter to the Discovery Theatre's sold-out performance Friday night. Outdoor columnist, author of 14 books and creator of five works for the stage, McManus has garnered the reputation as one of America's funniest writers.

Culled from the experiences of growing up in rural America, "Misery" unfolds through the remembrances of an aging guy who has been forced by his wife to clean out the garage. In this Everyman situation every item pulled from the heap is attached to a story, a childhood memory that is then retold.

Actor Tim Behrens worked nothing short of magic into the realm of these tales set amongst a sparse collection of junk, a rocking chair and a porch railing. With a simple change of voice and posture, Behrens gave life to a dozen oddball characters with names like Crazy Eddie, Rancid Crabtree, Mr. Muldoon and the other inhabitants of aptly titled Blight, Idaho.

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### ■ A FINE AND PLEASANT

MISERY will be presented at 7 tonight at the Valdez Civic Center in Valdez, at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Gerald C. Wilson Auditorium in Kodiak, at 8 p.m. Friday at the Ketchikan High School Auditorium in Ketchikan, at 7:30 p.m. May 26 or 27 (date to be determined) at the Otter-Torium in Seldovia and at 7:30 p.m. June 2 in Seward (venue to be announced).

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Behrens' overly exaggerated gestures in acting out scenarios became the vehicle through which McManus' words played upon the imagination, and the predominantly middle-aged audience tumbled into his world bent over with laughter.

McManus compiled the stories from a variety of his written work. The fluidity with which one seemed to flow into the next was remarkable. Cyclical details — like the way each misadventure results in another character developing a nervous head twitch — neatly blended the pieces into a well-rounded whole.

Described as "a cross between Mark Twain and Bill Cosby," McManus encapsulates the humor of both great satirists. His tales come from the wide-eyed naivete of youth and play on the American coming-of-age experience. He falls short, however, of developing the social commentary that catapulted both predecessors, particularly Twain, into the national consciousness.

What "Misery" lacked in revelation it made up for in hilarity. Behrens, together with director Jack Delehanty, cooked up a perfect delivery. The man seated next to me had such a hard time breathing from laughing so violently that it resulted in odd-sounding snorts and gasps, which at times, were so loud that it made it difficult to hear the dialogue.

For entertainment value alone, "Misery" was a bargain, and I'm quite sure no one left feeling cheated.

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