

# A One-Man Cast Of Many Voices

**Newsday**  
FRIDAY, MAY 21, 1993

**PERFECTLY NORMILL PEOPLE.** A multi-character monologue written and performed by John Monteleone. Directed by Denise Welborn, who also designed the set. Sound effects by Andrew Bleiberg. At the Performing Arts Center, Dowling College, Oakdale, through May 30. Seen opening night last Thursday.

By Steve Parks

STAFF WRITER

**M**OST OF the "Perfectly Normill People" John Monteleone has created are deeply disturbed. But what's really frightening is that they all seem like people you might actually encounter in Manhattan's Washington Square Park.

That's the venue for his collection of 11 monologues. Director Denise Welborn's spare set — a park bench, a garbage can, a shopping cart brimming with returnable bottles and, in the second act, the chalked outline of a body on the pavement — is amplified by Andrew Bleiberg's recordings. Each new scene is established by its own distinguishing urban sound effects — from police sirens to pigeon cooing.

This startling day and night in the park begins at lunchtime. A bill collector is brown-bagging it and he's brought along his cellular phone. This is a working lunch, but it's no picnic. The first call is to a Mr. Smith. A late payment is the least of Mr. Smith's troubles. His wife's in a coma; his daughter's committed suicide. Ah, but no matter. The "account representative" of Things 'n' Things suggests that paying this particular bill is just what Mr. Smith needs to turn his life around.

Salesmanship is a favorite target of

Monteleone in "Perfectly Normill People." In "Special Offer," true believers are offered coupons — good for a day off from purgatory or worse — with each purchase of a Buddy Burger. And in "Homer's Oddysey," a weapons peddler in a cowboy hat briefs his colleague on how to sell nuclear missiles to Third World countries. "Threaten to sell 'em to the other guy," advises Homer as he feeds the pigeons. "Look at that little fella. He took it right out of the other-un's mouth," Homer says admiringly.

Then there's the "ex-feminist" of "It's a Man's World." Joan, a divorcee going through menopause, gives advice to a young mother in the park with her kids. Joan regrets spending so much of her energy confusing equality with similarity. "The question I forgot to ask myself is: 'Equal to what?'" In her quest to be equal to men, she had turned herself into one.



John Monteleone

Some characters are more abstract. In "Hell on Wheels," for instance, there is little coherence to the monologue as a Vietnam veteran speeds around the park in his wheelchair, emitting his own "vroom-vroom" sound effects.

"Stargazer" shamelessly attempts to make us ashamed of our prejudices. "I forgive your fear, I forgive your indifference, I forgive your hate," says the homeless man in a black garbage bag. "I forgive you so I can have some peace." And in "Suffer the Little Children," a lollipop-sucking juvenile crawls around, going "pow-pow" with a toy gun. "I don't have a real gun — yet," he says a little too pointedly.

Monteleone demonstrates a convincing range in evoking 11 distinct characters with the help of costume changes and props. His weakest performance is his portrayal of the lone woman in the cast. The ex-feminist is too shrill here. Better to play Joan as a man, since that is what she has become.

While this provocative gallery of solo characters might benefit from a bit of editing and the elimination of at least one monologue, "Perfectly Normill People" is a bravura dual performance. Both as a writer and as an actor, Monteleone's best work here reminds me of a gentler, though not kinder, Eric Bogosian. ■



John Monteleone in 'Stargazer'