

Perfectly Wonderful

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by Kevin Molloy

The bearded hustler peers out through blue colored sunglasses, a bandana wrapped around his head, as he smooth talks the 14-year-old runaway girl just newly arrived in Manhattan's Washington Square.

"Hey, Songbird," he says, using the nickname he gave her moments before. "You gotta be careful. You have no idea what kind of people you come across in the park."

No idea, indeed. Drunks, homeless men, street kids and even arms merchants can all be found in the park on a Spring day. And John Monteleone is only too glad to introduce you to all of them, from the comforts of a folding chair at Dowling College.

In all, you'll come across 11 different characters in the one man show *Perfectly Normill People* in which he performs and wrote with assistance from Denise Welborn. And while most will seem familiar to anyone who has traversed the Greenwich Village park, though only from a distance, Monteleone brings them to his audience with a depth and clarity that will leave you feeling like you've spent an hour conversing with them.

There's the fast talking businessman trying to repossess appliances and furniture from a near-suicidal man; the southern "preacher" who appears to be espousing redemption and salvation, until he hands out the flyers proclaiming "McBuddy burgers are the key to salvation!" And assorted homeless men and drunks, who alternate between leaving you in hysterics and breaking your heart with their insightful perspectives on life and the people around them.

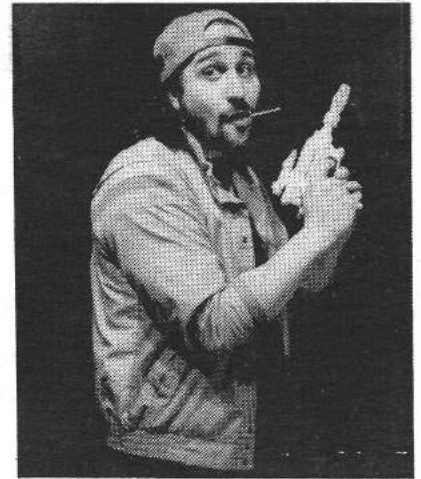
Monteleone is spellbinding in his portrayal of the 11 different roles, slipping with ease from the street hustler to kid growing up in the inner city to a high-powered arms merchant, and even a retired Jewish woman. Gender and age have no boundaries on this performance. Within seconds, he *is* a homeless man, or a child, or some guy handing out advertisements on the street with an original and hysterical line to draw you in.



The many faces of John Monteleone in his 'Perfectly Normill People,' now playing at Dowling College.



And as each character touches you, the social commentary about life, gun control, homelessness, the women's movement, and simply the way people living in the fringe element of society are treated seeps into you almost unnoticed, until you have time to think about it during a costume change. You realize that, as odd as these characters are, they're all just perfectly normal people, just like you and me, only maybe a little different. But not by much.



Monteleone is brilliant in *Perfectly Normill People*, a perfect follow-up to his critically acclaimed *The Diary of a Madman* which he performed at the college last year. As Dowling's artist in residence, Monteleone has

said he wants to push beyond the barriers and constraints of traditional Long Island theater, providing high calibre drama with important social themes. In this production, which is expertly directed by Denise Welborn, who shares writing credits, he succeeds in this goal, perhaps better than he may have expected.

Although *Perfectly Normill People* is not your standard community theater fare, dealing with some adult material, the honest, funny, and sometimes tragic themes the play deals with have broad-based appeal.

Perfectly Normill People will run at the Dowling College Performing Arts Center through May 30. Admission is free, but reservations are necessary. Call 244-3155 or 244-3399 for reservation and information.