

## Dream Sequence

*'Woman in Mind' Wisner Theater*

Judging from Monday night's dress rehearsal, by mid-run *Woman in Mind* will be

one of the finest productions ever to hit Chico.

It's an incredibly complex, multi-level show that director Mercedes Gilbert and an excellent Court Theatre cast manage to keep comprehensible and fascinating throughout. There's a lot to catch, and the rewards are worth paying attention for.

*Woman in Mind* opens immediately following a gardening accident in which housewife Susan (Jessica Neemann) hits herself on the head with a rake. The entire play, largely an exploration of her self-questioning psyche, is seen from her subjective perspective.

Presumably because of her injury, Susan hallucinates an entire alter-ego family, an elegantly clad dream trio of husband, daughter and brother, which contrasts sharply—and eventually clashes—with her real-life dull-normal husband, son and sister-in-law.

The best of Alan Ayckbourn's recent "serious comedies," *Woman in Mind* is really more of a comic tragedy, and this production has it both ways—it's hilarious throughout without sacrificing a shred of compassion or sadness, and the conclusion is positively chilling.

Onstage the whole play, the wide-eyed, expressive Neemann deserves much of the credit for the show's success; she's absolutely brilliant in the lead role, constantly making things happen without unnecessarily upstaging anyone, moving with ease from caustic sarcasm to wailing frustration.

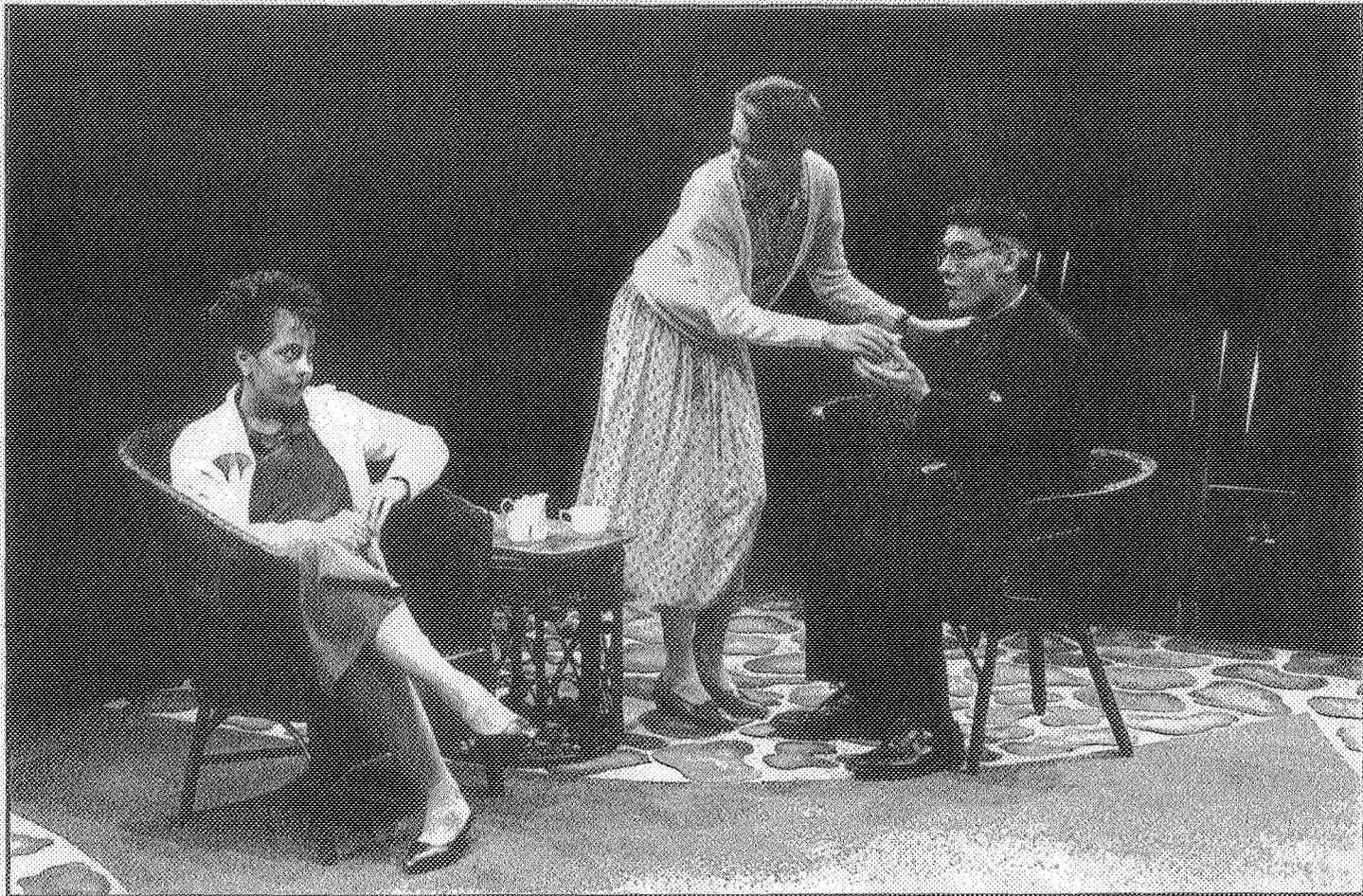
Neemann also managed to cover smoothly for the cast's expected dress-rehearsal dropped lines.

Despite several inconsistent accents (sorry to keep harping on this, but if the company insists on producing English plays...), acting is outstanding. A stoic Tony Bridgers and evil-looking Donovan Schinkel lead the pack, but the rest—Jamie Gandola, Paul Stout, Johnny Lancaster, Patrick McBride and Jenna Leikas—are good as well.

Jerome Salyers' striking lighting design enhances the contrast between Susan's two worlds, flooding the beautiful brick-paved garden set with orange and stark white and creating several stunning effects.

The third production of the Court Theatre season, *Woman in Mind* opened Tuesday and continues Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:15.

—MATTHEW BUDMAN



**SUBJECTIVE PERSPECTIVE** A contemptuous Susan (Jessica Neemann, left) watches her dull-normal sister-in-law (Jenna Leikas) serve an appalling cup of coffee to Susan's husband (Patrick McBride) in a scene from Court Theatre's startling *Woman in Mind*.