

# Finally — Fo/Rame done with style

By ROBERT WILLDEN  
Arts Critic

**H**OW'S AN INTELLIGENT, sophisticated, fashionable career woman going to kill herself these days? Where do you find the time with so many obligations and distractions? There are tantalizing phone calls to answer and a rigorous diet (the Jean Harris "New Scarsdale Diet") to maintain. And there is that troubling problem of getting the suicide video just right — doing take after take. After all, ex-hubby must see her at her very best, her most attractive and controlled.

Joan Mankin's Julia rises to the challenge with a poise that borders on hysteria in "A Day Like Any Other" by Dario Fo and Franca Rame. This production, directed by Julie Hebert "in collaboration with Richard Seyd," runs at the Eureka Theatre through Feb. 7.

Finally we get to see a Fo/Rame piece performed with style by a fine S.F. actress, perhaps partially a result of Mankin's taking a workshop from Rame when she was in town last year. But Mankin's high-energy mediatrix — Julia in advertising — owes more to the voluble Joan Rivers than the sexy Franca Rame.

Julia is caught on the horns of an existential dilemma: She can't live with people and she

can't live alone. Suicide seems the only solution.

Nervous grounds for a comedy, you might think. Just when things get a little too intense, Julia defies theatrical convention and chats with the audience talk-show style, scattering a few ad libs.

The Italian playwrights throw all sorts of delightful situations our way. Julia eavesdrops, electronic stethoscope affixed to the wall, on the s/m lovebirds next door at bedtime. She does a number of quick changes trying to get her farewell look just right for the ex. She rejects one outfit saying, "If he sees me all glitzy like this, he'll think I'm Joan Collins."

When her phone number is mixed up with a Japanese psychiatrist's, she answers wrong numbers, finally pretending to be the doctor they're dialing. One of her "patients" is a hooker who has bitten off more than she can chew. Another is a suicide in progress, ironically a doctor who has a problem that mirrors Julia's.

During all these misadventures, Julia drives herself sane, only to have the world decide she's crazy. There is one unfortunate lapse in the show, a poorly directed segment in which two thieves force their way into Julia's apartment, evidently thinking it is the set for the Three Stooges. Their style is



Joan Mankin in a scene from "A Day Like Any Other," at the Eureka Theatre through Feb. 7.

wrong for the play and so disruptive that even Mankin loses it for a bit and lapses into eye-rolling and inappropriate mugging. This is a slight blemish on an otherwise splendid performance.

Reinforcing the idea that life is lived in 20-minute soap opera segments, "the existen-

tial problem," the high-tech set of "A Day Like Any other" is filled with TV monitors and a big video screen. They bombard us with snippets of televised torment that make us feel right at home. For once this slickness does not camouflage a weak performance.