

Eureka's 'Day': A winner from Italy

By Jane Ayres
Times Tribune staff

SAN FRANCISCO — The always-interesting Eureka Theatre has come up with another winner from the Italian Left.

"A Day Like Any Other," a fast, funny and biting farce by Dario Fo and Franca Rame, husband-and-wife play-writing team, opens tonight at the Potrero District theater.

This certainly is not a play like any other. The live cast is only three people: Joan Mankin as Julia, a high-powered advertising executive, and Robert Ernst and Chris Brophy as two thieves. The rest of the cast is made up of people on video, voices on answering machines and even disembodied voices from the walls.

Julia is a high-powered advertising executive who lives alone surrounded by video monitors, camera, recording equipment, answering machine — everything needed for an alienated, efficient life. Her elegant modern apartment is equipped with "video warnings," devices attached to the liquor bottles, cigarettes, ashtray, kitchen cabinets. Whenever she starts to drink, smoke or overeat, the devices activate moralizing, intimidating videotapes of damage done

to lungs by tobacco, livers exploded by alcohol abuse, etc.

On this day, Julia sets out to celebrate the one-year anniversary of her divorce by committing suicide, but first she decides to make a videotape for her ex-husband, explaining why she is killing herself. In fact, the distraught ad exec actually plans to do the deed on camera (her method of choice is a syringe full of sodium pentothal.)

Unknown to Julia, her telephone number has been mistakenly printed in a magazine article about a psychiatrist who has a miracle method for obtaining perfect pitch, so Julia's telephone keeps ringing with complaints from tuneless sopranos about the method's failure to turn them into opera stars.

How Julia copes with her anxiety and the further problems brought on by all her electronic equipment is the heart of the play. Joan Mankin, a divine comedienne, gives a free-wheeling, funny performance in the style of Beatrice Lillie. Mankin mugs, takes pratfalls, mimes and for most of the evening is the only person on stage. She seems to be in so many places at once that she appears to be dozens of people.

Mankin says her next job will be with the Pickle Family Circus, and the Pickles couldn't ask for a bet-

ter gherkin.

Technically, this is one of the Eureka's most ambitious projects. The stage is littered with electronic equipment, and it all functions well. Director Julie Herbert, in collaboration with Richard Seyd, has produced easy, effortless transitions between stage action and video effects.

Nothing that happens in "A Day Like Any Other" is like anything usually seen in the legitimate theater. The fast pace and comic acting is worthy of Ringling Brothers, but the subjects lambasted are dead serious.

If you're going ...

Show: "A Day Like Any Other"

Who: Eureka Theatre Company

Where: Eureka Theatre, 2730 16th St., San Francisco

When: Wednesday through Saturday, Jan. 13 through Feb. 7

(415) 558-9898