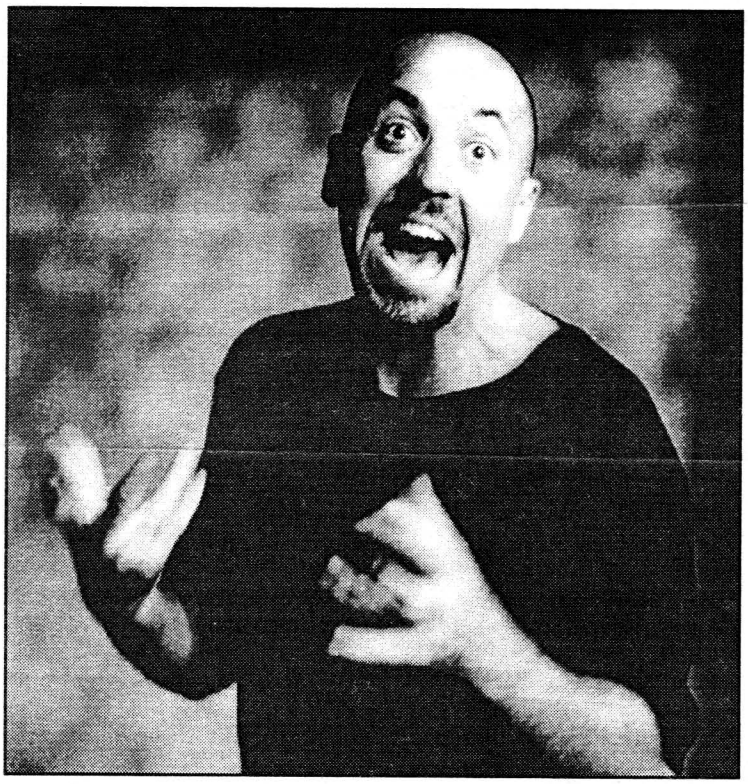
Out on the Town

Do Yourself a Favor and Visit 'Shiva Arms'



DOUG MOTEL portrays 11 different characters in "Shiva Arms," currently playing at the Gold Coast Playhouse.

By Kitty Dill
Acorn Staff Writer

Doug Motel is quite a character. Eleven of them, in fact.

The 37-year-old stars in *Shiva Arms*, a one-man play that bears the name of the dilapidated Hollywood apartment house around which the action centers. Tenants in the building range from Mr. Chandra, owner of both the apartment house and a shiny Mercedes; to Ian the handyman who disdains "women with big hair"; angry punk rocker Jamie; and Mrs. Burns, 86, retired negative cutter who is custodian for her stroke-ridden husband. Other characters include Bambi, the B-movie actress who is proud that her film "'Cannibal GoGo Girls' really put me on the map"; and cancer-stricken Tatianna, who is certain the apartment is a "cirque de soleil of bacteria."

Motel, 37, wrote this touching one-man odyssey. Dressed in black, he performs sans make-up, sophisticated props and backdrops — none of which is missed because of Motel's exceptional acting ability. He introduces you to the characters one-by-one and, in the finale, mixes them about in a round-robin story underscoring how they interact with each other and react to life's poignant and funny moments. Motel's introductory persona, Mr. Chandra, explains that Shiva is the name of a God who creates and destroys — in this case he "destroys old apartment buildings to make way for new apartment buildings."

Without an intermission, the performance offers a sustained glimpse into life's moments, tawdry and otherwise. Motel's moving tableau uses humor and objective observation to portray personalities caught up in dreams, regrets and day-to-day enduring. At first blush the characters might be totally dismissed as misfits, but in reality each represents a bit of all of humanity compressed into a 90-minute show. What is remarkable about this thornless satire is its compassion, gentleness and spirituality.

While a different actor could perform each role, the fact that the shaved-head Motel portrays every one of them actually accentuates each separate personality and the contrasting mannerisms. His experience as a stand-up comedian, actor and creator of previous solo plays, "The Doug Motel Show" and "Mind Salad," coalesce into a truly original performance. Motel has an uncanny ear for dialects, dialogues and delivery, and fluidly shifts characters with split-second timing.

Director is Michael Michetti, a many-time winner of Drama Logue and Ovation awards.

Shiva Arms is the inaugural production for Gold Coast Plays' New Works Series, performing at the Gold Coast Center for the Arts, 1408 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Thousand Oaks. Its new, commodious Janss/Nichols Gallery is transformed into an intimate theater for the show. Gold Coast's Stephanie Angelini, artistic director, says that Motel's solo play "fits perfectly within our mission to encourage new works." *Shiva Arms* is based on a true story and was fine-tuned in workshops over a three-year period in Ventura County.

Shiva Arms runs at 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, through April 10. General admission is $20, and students/groups, $15. For information and tickets, call (805) 497-4066.