

APRIL 2006

theatre

BAY AREA

EDITORS' PICKS

Chrysalis

BY JOHN O'KEEFE
& CLARK SUPRYNOWICZ
DIRECTED BY MARK STRESHINSKY

Playwright and libretticist John O'Keefe has been pushing the boundaries of theatre since at least the 1970s. Today, he's joining the "new opera movement," which he declares is "less conservative and more adventurous" than most theatre currently on the boards. Perhaps channeling his own shifting artistic identity, O'Keefe has penned a libretto for Berkeley Opera, teaming up with local superstar composer Clark Suprynowicz, who's collaborat-

ed in the past with the likes of John Zorn and Tom Waits. O'Keefe and Suprynowicz's new opera, *Chrysalis*, centers on Ellen Ermaine, an advertising guru who unleashes a line of genetic cosmetics that can change a person's entire body. The products are, of course, a smashing success, and Ellen soon finds herself (or loses herself) in a twilight zone of a changing identity where she meets her "doppelganger," who naturally begins to plot against her. It sounds like science fiction, but given the proliferation of horrifying extreme makeover shows that render the subjects nearly unrecognizable by their families, *Chrysalis* is unnervingly prescient in its exploration of identity's definition. Is there a collective idea of who you should be? Do we look at people not as people but as functions? Is there subjectivity in identity? After seeing this opera, you may never look in the mirror the same way again.—KAREN MCKEVITT



Buffy Baggott with Marnie Breckinridge (in the mirror).

BERKELEY OPERA, JULIA MORGAN CENTER FOR THE ARTS, 2640 COLLEGE AVE., BERKELEY. APRIL 22-30. TICKETS ARE \$15-40. CALL (925) 798-1300, OR VISIT