

PULSE

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Rock candy craving
Weezer re-emerges to give anxious fans
the sounds they crave **PAGE 8**

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'ANGELS' DESCEND ON THE ROBINSON

Tony Kushner's 'Angels in America' opens May 25; one performance will benefit the HIV Alliance of Eugene

By Peter Maurer
for the Emerald

During the Reagan era, issues surrounding homosexuality and the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic bombarded American culture, demanding to be addressed. These issues are examined in this month's University production of "Angels in America," the season closer at the Robinson Theatre.

Subtitled "A Gay Fantasia on National Themes" by its writer, Tony Kushner, "Part I: Millennium Approaches" will open May 25 and run May 26 and May 31, June 1-3 and June 8-9 in Villard Hall.

Director John Schmor, an assistant professor of theater arts at the University, observes that while the 1990s brought us shows such as "Will & Grace" to broaden the public's perspective and acceptance of homosexuality, "Angels in America" is the answer to a need for a more frank look at the issues of AIDS and homosexuality in society.

However, Schmor does caution that "Millennium Approaches" contains imagery and subject matter that may offend those who dislike sexuality or politics as topics of public discourse.

"Eugene tends to be generally tolerant of controversial issues," he said. "This is a play for people who

both think and feel, who are not afraid of language and its rich capacities for paradox or poetry."

Schmor went on to say the play has "so many different things: AIDS, the Reagan years, homosexuality, Mormon religion, and it really has an incredibly wide scope in the social issues it covers."

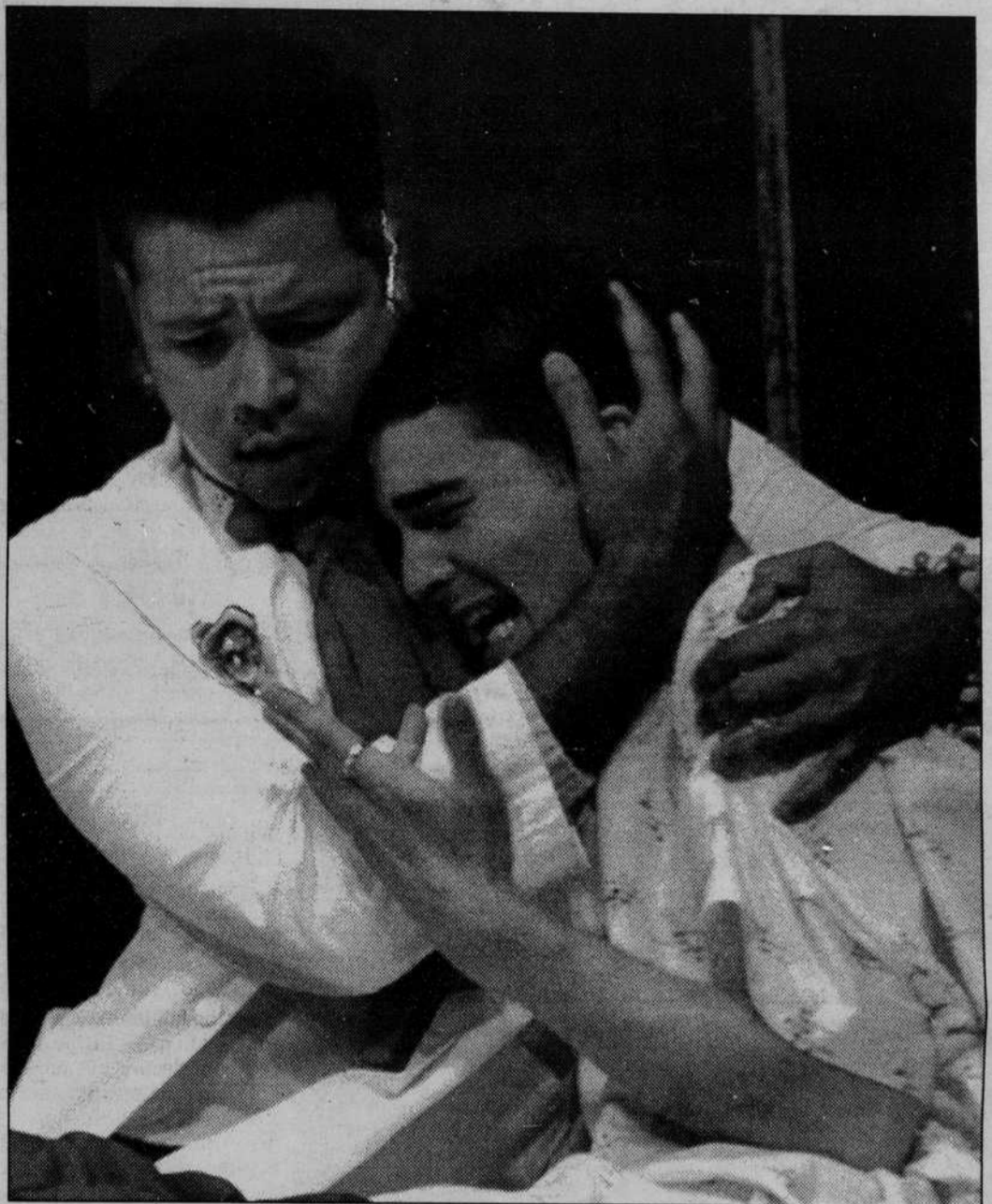
Patrons should come prepared to get an "in-depth look at something that hasn't had a lot of in-depth looks," actress Katie Breene said.

The essence of "Millennium Approaches" concerns two couples trying to cope with the disintegration of their relationships and the difficult self-examination that comes with it. The play paints a painfully candid picture of AIDS and its impact on the homosexual community. It also makes the point that people aren't the only ones falling apart: So is the planet in general.

The acting ensemble includes juniors Kimberly Bates, Matthew Woodburn and Nathan Bloch and senior Breene.

If there is any doubt as to whether this is a thoroughly witty and engaging play, consider that at its inception in 1993, "Angels" impressed critics and was awarded recognition for achievement and playwriting. As if this was not enough praise, the

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Tom Patterson Emerald

Alberto Albuquerque's character, Belize, comforts the bedridden Prior, played by Matthew Woodburn.

Sitcoms exhibit the same-old same-sex clichés



Sean Graf Emerald



MR. RIGHT

DAVE DEPPER

What a difference four years makes. When Ellen DeGeneres announced in May 1997 that she was a lesbian, it sent shock waves through the entertainment industry. Here was an established star of a hit TV show — effectively torpedoing her career at its zenith! Or was she?

In fact, the episode of "Ellen" in which her sexual preference was announced was one of the great media events of the television era. It won DeGeneres an Emmy, created a cultural firestorm and turned her into a television icon.

Unfortunately for DeGeneres, poor writing, sponsorship fallout and declining ratings sounded the death knell for "Ellen," and the show was canceled soon after. For a time, it looked as though television was through with taking chances on "alternative lifestyles."

That trend didn't seem to last long. Have you been watching the tube lately? "Will and Grace," featuring two gay main characters, is a huge hit for NBC. "Queer as Folk" is a hit drama on Showtime, and even the juggernaut "Friends" featured a girl-on-girl smooch between Jennifer Aniston and Winona Ryder (and later, Lisa Kudrow). John Goodman even tried it on the now-defunct "Normal, Ohio."

Looking at the evidence, you'd think that there was a massive revolution in gay presence on television. In fact, I set out to write this article with the philosophy that we were experiencing a golden age of homosexuality on television. However, I made the mistake of making assumptions.

Debra Merskin teaches the journalism course "Women, Minorities and the Media." I asked her how she thinks that television's portrayal of homosexuals has changed in the past few years. She quickly pointed out that by asking that question, I was assuming that things have changed at all.

"I would say that certainly there are more prime-time television programs that feature a gay character. 'Ellen' broke the ground for that. However, two programs is a pretty small number," she said, referring to my mention of "Will and Grace" and "Normal, Ohio."

Merskin informed me that soon after DeGeneres' exodus from the closet, Kentucky Fried Chicken, JC Penney and Chrysler all pulled their advertising from "Ellen." Television programs are competing for millions of dollars in advertising revenue, and their producers are making sure that the least amount of people are offended by the content.

Because of this, "you're not expecting to see a gay character in a lead role. If you do, it's usually a comedy," she said.

Why comedies?

"I believe that there's a presumption on the part of the creators of TV that the audience isn't prepared to watch or consider gays and lesbians

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