

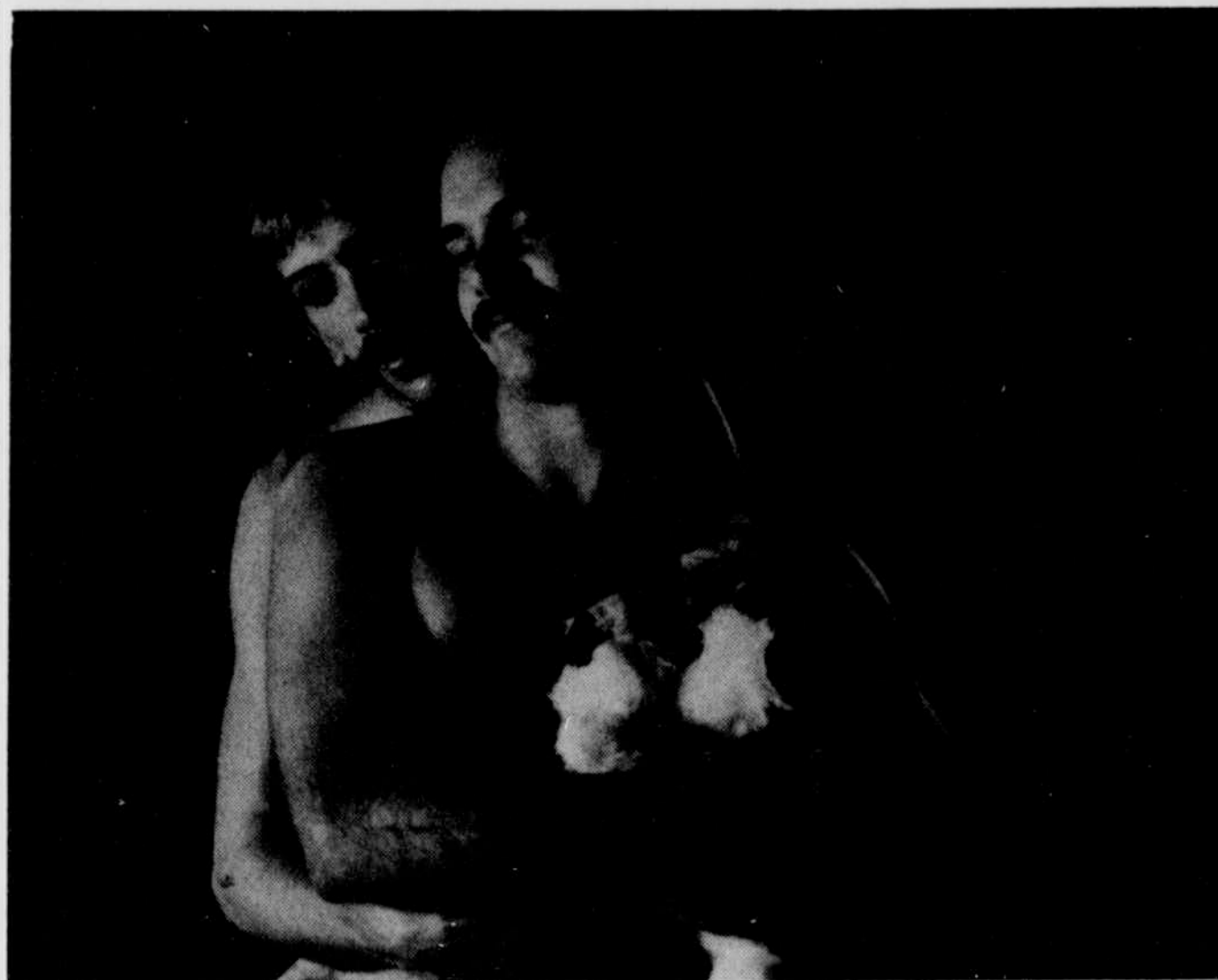
## A Boy and his dog

by Abbot Winstead

It's one of the oldest clichés around — the love between a boy and his dog. How often have we seen the story about a faithful pup that pulls his master from the burning building? We know, of course, that a dog is man's best friend, and that often the most loving, lasting relationship people ever experience is with their pet. So, can we be surprised when Robert Chesley's *Stray Dog Story*, now playing at JR's West, focuses on the love between a lonely gay man, Jon, and his devoted dog, Buddy? Well, yes, because once we are introduced to Jon and his furry friend, we see the dog's wish to become a man granted by his Fairy Dog Mother.

Delighted by Buddy's new human status, Jon quickly accepts him as a fantasy lover turned real and they continue their somewhat unusual relationship. From that point on, however, their affair becomes a lesson in survival. As Buddy struggles to survive in an urban, gay environment, his post-canine fortunes turn from good to bad to worse. And as an audience we are drawn deeper and deeper into this fantasy turned nightmare.

*Stray Dog Story* is a dramatically touching play that is occasionally tragic and often very funny. It is a fairy tale, of sorts, that takes a comic and critical look at urban gay male culture, and asks some hard questions about our ability to accept those who are different. Although the script, written by San Fran-



cisco's Robert Chesley is at times awkward and unwieldy, this production has been tightly paced and finely polished under the direction of Brown McDonald.

Portraying Buddy, the "dog," Kevin Koesel is amazingly believable as an innocent whose humanity is only a few days old. He expertly captures that comic/tragic element of bewilderment and/or awakening into a new world.

Daniel Dallabrida delivers a sensitive performance as Jon, a man whose dreams have come true. From his melancholy musing to his excitement and delight after the transformation, Dallabrida helps us accept this remarkable event.

Given one of the play's most complex roles, Karen Boetcher-Tate, as the Fairy Dog Mother is fascinating to watch. With great depth and attention to detail, her running

commentary on the play's fast-paced action ties it together and expresses our sympathies for Buddy's struggle.

As the leather man who befriends Buddy, Gregg Sylvater is excellent at poking fun at his role as Master. Dallas Crosby brings strong, and, at times, menacing authority to his multiple role as cop, bouncer and superintendent. The same creative dexterity in changing character is also shown by Kevin Van Slyke, Jon Squire, and Richard Beanes, who play a variety of punks, Upper East Side faggots, demonstrators and political activists. Especially noticeable is Squire as Tom, the up-and-coming gay politico.

The production quality is as tight as the acting. The lighting by Cain Warren and Paul Starr and sound by Michael Wilson complement the action perfectly.

*Stray Dog Story*, produced by Jim Gambrell, is the fourth in a series of plays that have been presented by the Open Door Theatre, Portland's only gay theatre company. This association of actors, directors and writers is committed to presenting quality, professional theatre by, for and about gay men. As with *Richmond Jim* and *West Street Gang*, *Stray Dog Story* makes good on that commitment. It is an excellent production, that delights, as well as brings its audience to tears.

*Stray Dog Story* will run through July 15 on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings at 8:00 at JR's West (the upstairs bar), NW 10th and Everett.

## Hollandia '45

by Eve Sicular

*Hollandia '45*, recently staged by the Portland Women's Theatre Company, drew attention both for its production quality and its audience policy. The play's run is now completed, but controversy over women-only nights continues among certain people who feel that such specially designated performances constitute discrimination against men; or, as an Oregonian reviewer wrote, a "step backward in the struggle for equality between the sexes." While my reaction to such statements is to recall my own experience of women's culture needing a nurturing environment, and the historical bases of oppression of minority culture, I thought it best to go to the source: in this case, the Portland Women's Theatre Company.

After attending one of the three performances especially for women (out of the play's twelve-show run), I spoke with members of the company about this tradition. Director Judy Clover and actors Faith McDevitt, Sara Packer and Carmella Ettinger (cast as WACs Kit, Marian and Hazen in *Hollandia '45*), talked of the group's practical, political and personal reasons for maintaining their policy, and stated that contrary to what the disgrunt-



led Oregonian writer printed, the point is not to exclude men, but rather to provide women, who are the company's most loyal audience, with the choice of attending either all-women or mixed female-male audience nights, depending on their viewing preference. The

nearly full house at the performance I saw amply demonstrated the popularity of the former choice. Because these performances tend to be their most profitable, the company members stressed that their survival as a theatre group depended on them as much as any repertory arts group might need the special benefit nights staged for members only.

Another important consideration for the company and its audiences is that the climate in which the material they perform, including many overt lesbian scenes, be a safe atmosphere. Overall, they hope their theater will continue to educate all audiences so that a mixed female-male audience can provide such a non-threatening, supportive and understanding presence as one that is all female, but, in the perceptions of many women who perform and attend these plays, that time has not yet arrived.

So men are welcome at most of the company's performances, but the women who produce them will continue to uphold their policy of setting certain performances aside for women. This is the response to the spirit of the plays, the demands of the core audience, and the real conditions of present-day women's experience. The company seems willing to discuss this further, but hopes that criticism comes from those seriously committed to changing oppressive conditions experienced by women.

Although *Hollandia '45* will have closed by the time this issue comes off the press, I would like to cite some of my favorite points here. These include the performances of Patty Flynn, Faith McDevitt and Sara Packer,

the set, and the ironic '40s mood music against which the play was acted out.

## Faerie gathering

Celebrate summer at Montana's 2nd Faerie Gathering *New Moon in Montana*, July 26-31, 1984. This is a gathering of spiritual, new age gay men in the pristine wilderness of Western Montana.

Join each other to celebrate the magic of life in each other and to encourage the poets, artists and visionaries within each of us. This year, emphasis will be on purification for the new moon, July 28th. Also planned are day hikes and mountain climbing, a sweat lodge, workshops on self-awareness, and just plain nature worship. Preceding the gathering will be a *Faeries & Fags Full Moon* on July 13-15 at North Crow Vacation Ranch. Plans include a Tea Dance and a Queen's Costume Contest.

Contact: Star, Box 693, Great Falls, MT 59403.