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Harrison Pierce sings farewell aria to Portland

Harrison Pierce, well known theater person and producer of gay plays, left Portland last month to take a job with the San Francisco Opera. Pierce joined the San Francisco

Opera February 20 as an assistant to the costume director.

Pierce, a native of Tampa, FL, first appeared in Portland in a 1979 production of *Isadora Duncan Sleeps with the Russian Navy* (directed by Richard Hurst and featuring Laurie Holland) at Portland Civic Theatre. He went on to act with The Production Company (led by Peter Fornara) at Centenary Wilbur Church and finally became their business manager. He last appeared on the Portland stage as Rudy in a 1982 production of *Bent* at the Willamette Center.

Pierce is probably best known to Portland theatergoers as the writer of blurbs for Willamette Week's theater calendar (a job he held for almost three years) and as a producer of plays by, for, and about lesbian and gay people. His productions of Doric Wilson's *Street Theater* (1983) and Terry Baum's *Dos Lesbos* (1984) celebrated Lesbian and Gay

Pride, and his 1982 production of Doric Wilson's *A Perfect Relationship* played to capacity audiences at the YWCA, was written up as "the funniest show in town" by Holly Johnson of the Oregonian, and won a Willie nomination for director Paul Douroumis. To complement these productions, Pierce brought playwrights Doric Wilson and Terry Baum to Portland to share firsthand their experiences as writers of lesbian and gay material.

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March 20, 1985

Dear friend,

I know that in recent weeks you followed the news concerning Multnomah County's ordinance forbidding employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The turn of events, which resulted in the repeal of the ordinance and the subsequent passage of a resolution with similar content, was complicated. I thought you might want to receive our perspective on the matter.

Soon after the passage of the ordinance, Drew Davis and his followers, who have long been hostile to the gay community, launched a petition drive to force the issue onto the ballot where they believed it would be defeated.

Many people in the gay community, and our friends, were concerned about the prospect of such a campaign.

It would have been certain to divert our efforts to achieve civil rights protection under legislation we are seeking from the Oregon Legislature. That legislation would extend protection to all gay people. The Multnomah County ordinance only applied to those seeking employment with the County.

Davis and his followers are particularly strong in east Multnomah County. Our chances of defeating him on his territory would not have been good.

Because it only applied to a few gays, the ordinance had a divisive potential. Because Multnomah County has long practiced nondiscrimination, its practical effect would have been minimal.

Recent experience in other communities around such referendums has not been good. They have been marked by bigotry, lies and attacks on gays that are a setback to our movement.

Most important, we have never believed that our most basic human rights should be a matter of a popular vote. No minority can tolerate such an arrangement. It goes to the heart of why we have laws to protect minorities against the possible tyranny of the majority.

Under the circumstances we urged our supporters on the Board of Commissioners to repeal the ordinance and substitute a resolution. The resolution has the same policy mandate as the ordinance, but it cannot be forced to a popular vote. It is binding on the County's employment practices.

Although we were successful in preserving the County's protection for gays, and deflecting the organized efforts of bigots to wage their campaign of hate and fear against us, there is much to be done.

We have learned that we must be better prepared to deal with such events in the future. None of us was comfortable with the necessity for rapid, *ad hoc* decision making. We simply are not equipped as an organization to meet the demands placed upon us by the virulence of our enemies. An example was the phony "news clips" circulated by Davis' organization.

Soon, I will be back in contact with you to ask for your financial and volunteer help in order to give us the resources we need. I hope you will be generous in your support, and that you will ask your friends to help too.

None of us can afford to be complacent. All of us need to help each other, now more than ever.

Sincerely,

Keeston Lowery

Keeston Lowery
Chair, Right to Privacy P.A.C.

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