

just entertainment

Very funny!

"What are affirmations? Affirmations are when you lie to yourself until it's true."

— Linda Moakes

BY HOWIE BAGGADONUTZ

Steve Martin once said, "Comedy isn't pretty." But he's a straight white guy, so what does he know? Comedy is ruled by straight white guys. What about a gay or lesbian comic I have been known to be one — gay, not lesbian — on occasion, and believe me, it isn't always pretty; in fact, it can be downright ugly! That's why I have the utmost respect for other funny homos who take to the stage. It's tough making a roomful of people laugh — unless, of course, you're Tammy Faye Bakker. It seems to me that gay and lesbian comics are all too few in number, but among the ranks are two of California's best — Linda Moakes and Danny Williams, who will appear in Portland this month.

Linda Moakes, like most queer comics, it seems, started out as a teacher, seeing her students as "hormones with legs." She lasted five years with the "puberts" before making a career change to landscape architecture, which, in turn, got her to San Francisco, which, in turn, got her into West Coast spirituality, which, in turn, got her into comedy — particularly comedy about spirituality and the New Age. She's one of a kind. How many other comics joke about affirmations? What are affirmations?

"That's when you lie to yourself until it's true," explains Moakes. Her work can be visionary ("The future isn't what it used to be"), scholarly ("The Bible had no editors — if it had, that book would be a pamphlet"), even fearful ("I'm going across the Bay bridge and somewhere I'm thinking, 'Gosh darn, this is all built by the lowest bidder'"), but always human.

Like many of today's top lesbian and gay comics, Moakes got her start at the Valencia Rose nightclub in San Francisco in 1982. Critics have praised her work as zany, spirited and inspiring, and have described her as one of San Francisco's finest comedians. She's honest, vulnerable, chic — her words, not mine — and very funny. And she believes in the power of laughter. "Just to laugh at anything is important," she says. "You sort of work your body out in a kind of aerobic way when you laugh."

Danny Williams is no slouch either when it comes to making people laugh. An award-winning comic, Williams has come a long way since taking to the stage at — where else? — the Valencia Rose in 1982. At the time he was going through a fag crisis of sorts — turning 30,



Danny Williams, San Francisco's Gay Comedian of the Year for three years running, brings his unique brand of comedy to Portland on October 21, 22 and 23 to help Just Out celebrate our fifth anniversary.

working in a hospital and being "real unhappy." All that changed a minute after he stepped on stage. A month later he had his first paying job as a comic. Six years later, he's playing Portland. Success, it seems, has arrived.

One of Williams's favorite targets is fundamentalist Christians and their bigotry. This bothers some people who feel that Christians are sincere and that he shouldn't make fun of them. "But Mussolini and Hitler were sincere, and a lot of people are sincere," explains Williams. "What am I supposed to do? Invite them over for toast?" As for parents, Williams poses this interesting thought: "What do you do with parents who, if they weren't your parents, you wouldn't ever even remotely know them?" Lest he be considered one-sided, Williams also targets gays. Consider this: "What's a gay couple's anniversary: the first time they met, the first time they made love or the day they moved in together?" Williams's answer: "Yes."

Like Moakes, Williams gets more out of doing comedy than just laughs. "Comedy," he says, "is a way of healing. It's easing pain. I want to make people feel better. I feel incredibly lucky because I'm doing that." Is Portland ready to be healed by Williams and Moakes? I think so. See them.

Linda Moakes and Danny Williams will help to celebrate Just Out's fifth anniversary. The dynamic duo will appear in Portland on October 21, 22 and 23, at 8 pm, at the Columbia Theater, 2021 SE Hawthorne Blvd. Tickets are \$8 in advance at A Woman's Place Bookstore, Music Millennium and Just Out, and \$9 at the door. ●

"Steel Kiss" opens Seattle's Alice B. Theatre season

"This play is balls-to-the-wall theater. Steel Kiss is hard-hitting, heavy metal, all those great adjectives."

BY IVAN MARTINSON

"He was a faggot. He was there. That was enough." Robin Fulford's *Steel Kiss*, based on a murder that took place in a park in Toronto in 1985, opens Alice B. Theatre's sixth season on October 13.

Alice B. Theatre, "a gay and lesbian theatre for all people," is not just Seattle's principal storehouse of gay-themed theater, it is one of the Queen City's proudest gay outreaches to benighted straights.

And if all this is political, the chief aim is still to entertain. The message is insidious. Straight people are lulled into swallowing the pill of gay rights. And we all know how good for them that will turn out to be.

Steel Kiss is the work of Robin Fulford, a Canadian playwright whose avowed *bêtes noires* are the vicious little prejudices society declines to take seriously. Director Nikki Appino chose it from several scripts offered her by the directors of Alice B.

"This play is balls-to-the-wall theater," said Appino, a Seattle newcomer of national experience who will direct Eric Bogosian's outrageous *Drinking in America* at Empty Space later this fall. "*Steel Kiss* is hard-hitting, heavy metal, all those great adjectives. The writing's real good — crude and nasty, which will bring up reactions by itself. I have some problems with the structure of the play, but it gives a director lots to do.

"There's sex in it, too. There's a cruising

scene in the middle, nonverbal, much like a dance." Come to think of it, that's just what cruising in parks at night is like: a pavane, very stately, with definite rules and nervous undercurrents, like some complex rhythm.

"What [Fulford] does really effectively," said Appino, "is set up three sort of separate worlds: the world of teenage boys in the park; the world of gay men who cruise the park; and then society.

"We're having discussions with the audience after every performance, which is real important. I have a feeling it's going to bring up lots of stuff." This was certainly the case recently when such discussions followed every performance at A Contemporary Theater of Steven Dietz's play about outlaw white-supremacist groups, *God's Country*.

Fulford, a straight man whose first play was produced in 1982 by Buddies in Bad Times, a gay Toronto company that also first presented *Steel Kiss*, said, "I try to challenge people to be more aware of what's going on around them. I think my plays are geared towards disturbing people and making them think more."

The four actors of *Steel Kiss* play characters at all different levels of society, from the bigoted

kids to their victims to the uncaring parents and role models. This calls for a great deal of intricate work from fairly young actors, and can backfire in front of the wrong audience.

Officials at the school that the thugs of the real-life incident had attended proposed bringing in classes of other teenagers to view the play. With a gulp, Fulford and Buddies in Bad Times agreed — and the kids saw the murderers as figures to admire and emulate! (The murderers are now all on parole and in halfway houses.)

"It opened my eyes," said Fulford of the experience. "I come from a very nonviolent, 'nice,' WASP background, and I wonder what my fascination with violence is.

"I go through a process of sensitization myself when I write a play, doing the research, living the experiences. One of the things I love about being a writer is that I get to put myself in so many other people's places. My life isn't all that interesting."

So the plays, of course, are that much more exciting. *Steel Kiss*, full of sex, violence and the hypocrisy of society, plays through November 6 at the Little Theatre Off Broadway on Capitol Hill. Call 206-32-ALICE (322-5423) for details. ●

