

What price humor?

While this play has many good one-liners and some clever plot twists, it also contains a very humiliatingly racist story line

by Meg Grace, Ariel Waterwoman and Renée LaChance

Gays of Our Lives is the production under way at the Portland Women's Theater Company. The play was conceived by Claudia Allen and LeeRay Rogers. The play is promoted as a "lively soap opera spoof" and it is the first production to include men.

The play is poorly directed by Stephanie Torres and Candace Ohannesian. The technical workings of the play involve a fast string of 'black-out' skits that sometimes don't last as long as the scene changes do. This makes for a tedious two hours. There is some really fine acting that brought some enjoyment to this otherwise embarrassing production. Mikael Eriksson was believable and entertaining as the crusty Cajun sailor who had seen it all. Nan Gatchel was excellent as the rough and rude inmate. Her comic timing had the audience rolling with laughter. James Peppers juggled his character's multiple personalities with ease. [After we first saw the play, some actor changes happened and Peppers was switched to play the role of Peter and the Geisha.] Amanda Colorado butches it up for her role as a sailor with a femme in every port.

While this play has many good one-liners and some clever plot twists, it also contains a very humiliatingly racist story line. Tip, a mother on her way "out", travels aboard a ship that takes her to Hong Kong, where she meets an Asian woman

named Ming and indirectly meets a male Geisha. Both Ming and the Geisha are played by European-Americans. All 'jokes' in the Hong Kong scenes are at the expense of Asian culture. The story is not forwarded at all by being in Hong Kong. Any story line that *does* develop could have taken place just as easily in London or Norway, where white people could then mock their own heritage. As it is written, the play is offensive and racist.

These concerns were brought to the attention of the directors and the board of PWTC who all said they had had the same concerns when they first read the script. Dialogue took place about the issue and the company decided to simply modify the script somewhat instead of completely rewriting the racist content. In addition they chose to print a disclaimer. The disclaimer states in part: "It is PWTC's intention to be as responsible with, as well as true to, the satirical content of the work as possible. If the balance we strive for seems inadequate, we ask your pardon. One aim may be irreverence, but not insensitivity."

We saw nothing comedic about stereotyping Asian people and Asian culture; adults having sex when infants where in the bed; the majority of the sex scenes being precipitated by fights and verbal assaults. This production brings up many questions about the PWTC. What, if any, criteria and screening do they have for material? Is there a new audience that they are trying to reach? Is the production of this play a failing of the leaders in our community to work to create a better forum for people to come together safely and unlearn oppression?

available and appealing to a diverse audience contributed to the remarkable success enjoyed by OSF Portland.

As the shock has begun to wear off, Bigelow was happy to talk to *Just Out*. "I'm in the middle of directing two great shows; *Romeo and Juliet*, in San Francisco, and *The Heidi Chronicles* in Sacramento, Calif. I'm doing great!" says Bigelow. "You know, I haven't had a vacation since 1975. This break has been pretty fun! I'm doing some free-lance directing, which is exciting." He just finished casting for the production in San Francisco and is off to London for most of June.

"My home, for now, is Portland. I just love it here. It's a city that has everything for me. I'm turning 40 this summer, so I'm still young enough to explore all of my career opportunities," said Bigelow.

However life plays itself out for Dennis Bigelow, Portland will miss his inspired direction and creativity sorely. There's certainly no envy for whoever tries to fill his shoes.

Ariel Waterwoman

THEATER

Bigelow gets the ax

With very little fan-fare, or warning, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) eliminated its Portland Producer position, which was held by Dennis Bigelow. OSF Artistic Director Henry Woronicz announced the restructuring of the company in conjunction with the announcement of the 1992-93 season. Citing "greater integration between the Portland and Ashland operations," one of the most talented and inspirational theater people has been set adrift.

Bigelow has been the creative genius behind the OSF Portland company establishing itself. He turned around the entire theater scene in Portland. At a time when nationwide theater attendance is declining, Bigelow was able to attract a 27 percent increase in theater-going in Portland. This increase is partly due to Bigelow's production of pieces like *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Fences*, *Burn This* and *M. Butterfly*—the list goes on. Bigelow's philosophy of making theater

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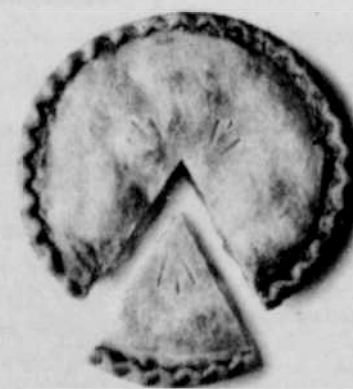
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