

THEATER

Queer conscience of comedy

Comic Bill Bradley's ongoing one-man show raises social awareness with a smile

BY FLORA SUSSELY

If we have been looking for an original voice, a profound thinker and a perceptive intelligence in a playwright, we have found it.

Bill Bradley has created *Fixed and Confused: Social Work in Animal Shelters, or Dairy Farming in a Lactose Intolerant World*, a hilarious, moving and important play. In this one-man show, Bradley takes us from the ridiculous to the sublime, as they say. He says things we either think ourselves, or are afraid to think.

Bradley begins his story as a career counselor, which is strange because he doesn't think that someone who works for \$7.50 per hour is an appropriate career coach. In fact, as far as he's concerned, there are all kinds of careers open to you, if you don't mind not getting a paycheck.

As Bradley takes us from stand-up comedy to a communal farm, where he thinks there should be a Commune Workers Union, we visit the "existential terror" of a committed have-not. Even when this queer character falls in love and marries, it is a woman he chooses. And that too, puts him outside the circle of mainstream anything. Finally he screams out: "And what do they mean by 'differently-abled'?! Does that mean I can fly?!"

In another poignantly ridiculous diatribe he speaks of the illegality of carrying a blanket with the intent to sleep. "If you are homeless, it is illegal to sleep!" He tells us of talking with starving homeless people and watching a fast-food employee dumping food into a padlocked dumpster. "What kind of greed is that?" he wonders aloud.

Bradley is a genius. And this new work is much like Wallace Shawn's *The Fever*, in which a U.S. citizen travels to Latin America and comes back changed. Shawn and Bradley have much in common, except that Shawn sits in a chair and talks to us as though he is in our living room. He does not move from there.

Bradley, on the other hand, paces, sits, interacts with the audience, uses props and commands the entire theater with his constantly brilliant words and natural stage presence. Bradley throws things out like "aquatic Marxist" in reference to trickle-down economics. He relentlessly makes us look at what we accept socially.

Although this show has a great deal of adult

language, my 10-year-old son understood everything. In one evening Bradley gave us all much to think about. And, though it is definitely a comedy, we walk away with the same disturbing feelings about how much we have and how much we complain and how little we help the situation.

The interesting thing about *Fixed and Confused* is that it doesn't make us feel hopeless.

Contrary to the effect of *The Fever*—out of which we walk feeling totally, inexorably corrupt, guilty, blood soaked—we walk out of Bradley's play seeing how funny it all is, how many of us think the same way, how wonderful it is that someone is saying these things and how much we want everyone to see this play.

Near the end, Bradley takes us to his class reunion, where he is afraid of being seen as a failure. But an interesting twist occurs: The golden boy of his class sends a note explaining that he is fighting in the trenches with the Sandinistas.

And the note further reads: "Vale la pena," which means "It is worth the grief."

In the end we understand that there are battles to be fought everywhere.

And our weapons can be laughter, words, plays, the children we teach, the jobs we take, the stories we tell, the books we read

and the things we do not buy.

I think Bradley will be recognized as one of our best comic political writers. I would love to see his play shot on video and made available to students in high schools, before they are forced to make decisions about "what they will be."

There are no reasons not to see this wonderful new work.

■ **FIXED AND CONFUSED: SOCIAL WORK IN ANIMAL SHELTERS, OR DAIRY FARMING IN A LACTOSE INTOLERANT WORLD** opens at the Backdoor Theatre, 4321 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., on Jan. 23 and runs through Feb. 10. Show times are 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Tickets are offered on a \$6-\$15 sliding scale. For more information, call 236-6948.

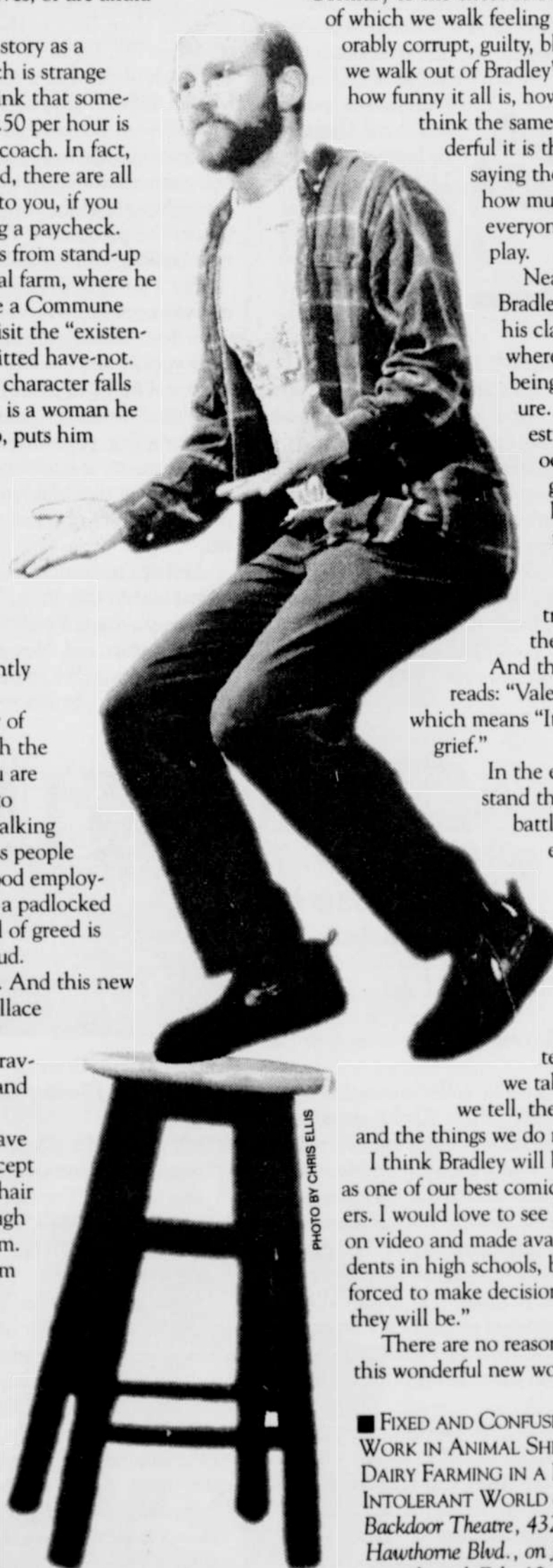
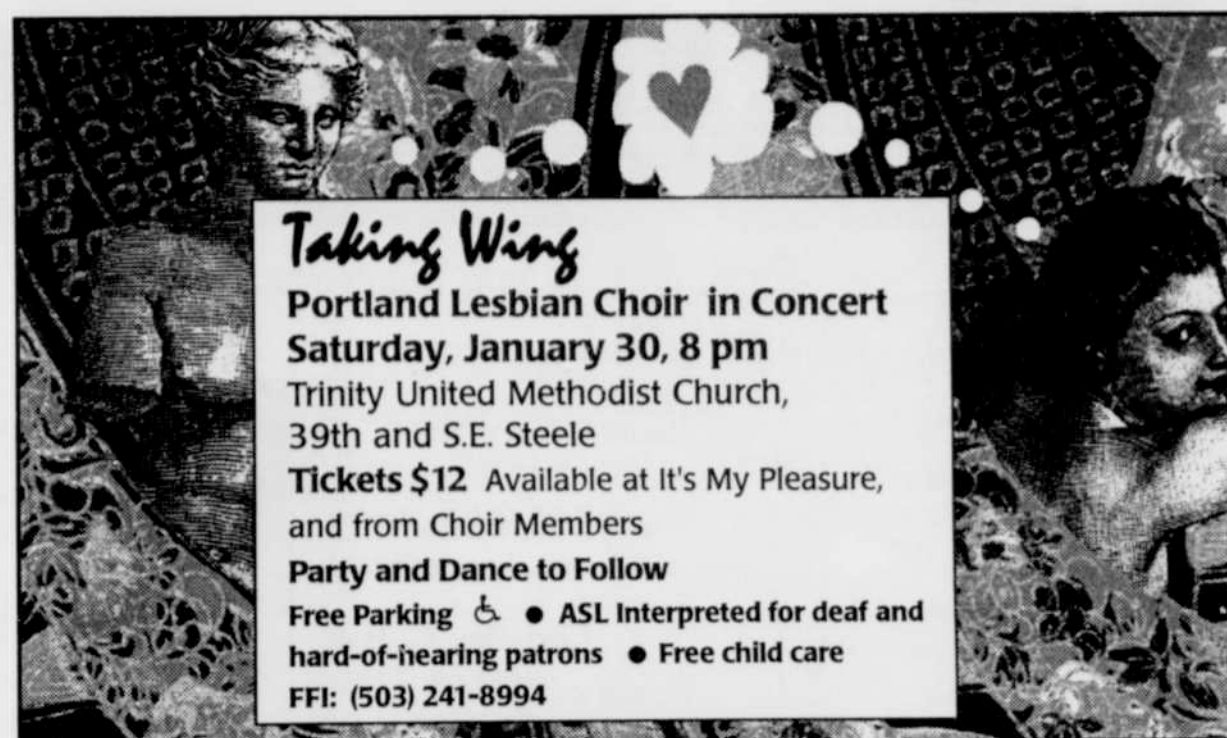


PHOTO BY CHRIS ELLIS

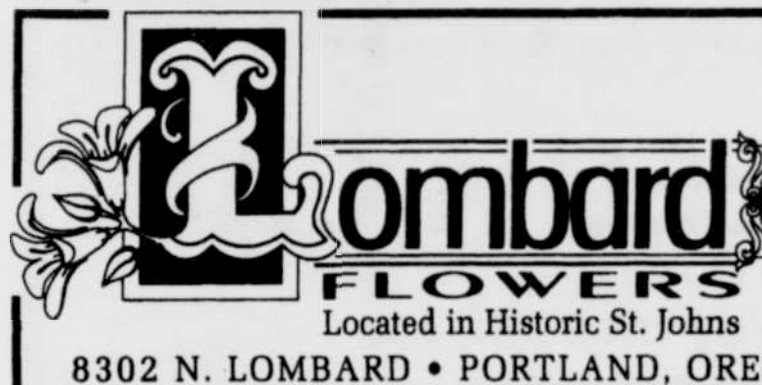


Taking Wing
Portland Lesbian Choir in Concert
Saturday, January 30, 8 pm
 Trinity United Methodist Church,
 39th and S.E. Steele
Tickets \$12 Available at It's My Pleasure,
 and from Choir Members
Party and Dance to Follow
Free Parking • **ASL Interpreted for deaf and**
hard-of-hearing patrons • **Free child care**
FFI: (503) 241-8994

just out welcomes Letters to the Editor.

Letters should be 500 words or less, typed and double-spaced. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Please include your phone number for verification. just out reserves the right to edit for liability concerns, style and length.

PO Box 14400, Portland, OR 97293 • justout@justout.com
 Fax: (503) 236-1257



Lombard
FLOWERS
 Located in Historic St. Johns
8302 N. LOMBARD • PORTLAND, OREGON 97203

Proudly Serving
 The Greater
 Portland Metro Area
 503/ 286-1330



How the Other Half Loves

Two dinner parties collide with some ferociously funny results. Experience the frenetic hilarity of it all as both evenings come together in a collision of rumor and farce. Directed by Cliff Baker, who staged PCS's hit *A Tuna Christmas*.



PORTLAND
Center
Stage

GALA NIGHT: 1/19/99

Gay & Lesbian Audiences Series
 Box Office: 274-6588

Sponsored by:

just out

