

MUSIC

Raised by musicians Loudon Wainwright III and Kate McGarrigle, Rufus Wainwright was playing the piano at age 6. When he was 14, he was nominated for a Juno (Most Promising Young Artist) and his song "I'm A-Runnin'" was nominated for a Genie for Best Song in a Film. (Junos and Genies are the Canadian equivalents of Grammys and Oscars, respectively.)

Now, at 25, the queer Wainwright has graced the cover of *Out* magazine as one of the "People Who Rocked 1998"; was named *Rolling Stone* magazine's Best New Artist of the same year; and repeatedly asked viewers what they were doing New Year's Eve in a holiday-themed television commercial for The Gap. It would seem the world is on fire for the young Wainwright.

His music, with influences ranging from Tin Pan Alley to Edith Piaf to *Tosca*, is pleasantly pop, though heavy-handed enough to keep listeners from feeling pandered to as they tap their toes. And his gay love songs are a breath of fresh air. From his song "Danny Boy," for example:

*You broke my heart Danny Boy
Not your fault Danny Boy*

*I was hanged at the doorstep,
played like a two to a fourset
Had like poor Job in the Bible by God*

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Just Out was able to catch Wainwright—currently touring the United States and soon to arrive in Portland—via telephone in New Orleans.

Hi. How is New Orleans?

Well, it's pretty muggy and there're a lot of, you know, rickety buildings...and it's great!

Which leads me to ask, how do you find Portland?

I've only been there once and I played at this one club [LaLuna] that was sort of on the outskirts of Portland, so I don't know what it's like at all.

Then next time should be nice and fresh. You've had a fair measure of fame since you were 14—is that fair to say?

Nothing compared to what I'm going to have. [Laughs.] Or what I have now. I had a little bit of it, but no overdose of fame or anything.

You're still fairly young, so given that, would you say that fame has spoiled you in

any way? Are you primed to become the next Dana Plato?

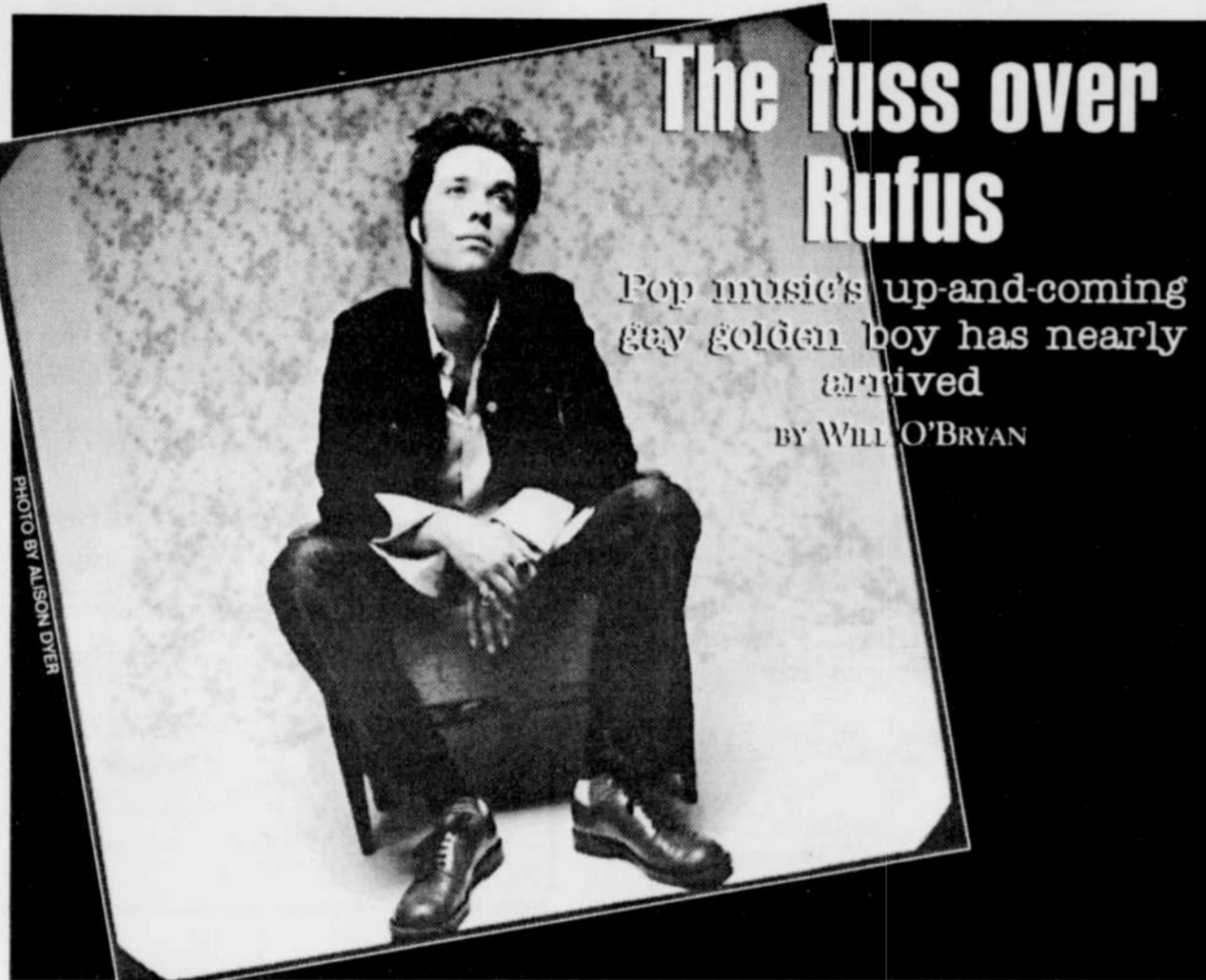
Well, I'm not that young. I'm 25 and I've been doing this for about 10 years, so it's not overwhelming me or anything... I mean fame is great and I guess one has to work with that when you're trying to make money or something, but I'm really more into just trying to make really good records.

Despite the *Rolling Stone* accolades, your music seems a bit esoteric. I don't know if

have to speak their language—like Verdi and Maria Callas. I definitely have a large dead contingent.

There's nearly a consensus that you're the new "it" boy, so to speak. Is it talent, effort or luck?

The talent is about 10 percent. It's mostly work, I tell ya. I've been on the road since May and I've played tiny stages, and then I've played for 20,000 people opening up for the Barenaked Ladies, and I've done Japan and



you would agree, but with that in mind, would you still hope to someday sell out Madison Square Garden?

Yeah, I'd like to sell out Madison Square Garden, but I'd probably be happy with selling out Carnegie Hall. I think it's esoteric, the music and everything, but I think once you get the orchestra out there... Maybe Radio City Music Hall. I'd settle for that.

Your music also seems a little haunted—like you stole it from the playlist of some steerage-class minstrel on the Titanic.

Oh, yeah, that's kind of a cool vision.

What haunts you? What motivates you in that way?

Let's just say that all my favorite influences are dead, most of them. A lot of the time when I play, I'm trying to impress those people, so I

Europe. It's mostly just perseverance and work—and practice. It's very boring when you think about it. [Laughs.] But it's worth it in the end.

It's not exhausted you? You're still motivated?

No, it exhausts me and I'm certainly near the end of my tether, but a little exhaustion never killed anyone.

What do you do to recharge? Where do you go on vacation?

I'm going to go to Greece—unless this Kosovo thing blows up.

Mykonos?

No, I have friends who live on Hydra, which is further south. There are no cars on it, it's much smaller. But I'll probably drop by

Mykonos for sure...and visit the Oracle of Delphi.

Is this going to be hedonistic?

Oh, yeah. I'm pretty much hedonistic wherever I go—Mykonos or Albany, N.Y.

Granted, you weren't a "superstar" when you were 14, but what influence did your fame have on your coming out process? You had some notoriety when you came out, I'm guessing.

No, not really. I wasn't known at all. I did one thing when I was 14, which was sort of known in Canada, but then I didn't do anything for years. When I came out it was pretty much a family and friends affair. It wasn't broadcast in Times Square or anything. [Laughs.]

Now, as it turns out, you are famous and you are gay. You're this kind of gay role model. Do you appreciate that?

Well, yeah. I've been doing a lot of tours recently in some pretty strange places. Like the other night I played [yells out, "No offense!"] apparently to someone nearby] Birmingham, Ala., and Louisville, Ky., before that. A lot of those people really appreciate me coming there. I meet a lot of young kids who really, really need the support. I never expected to be a role model in that way. I didn't really go for that, but I'm certainly happy to be of service and to be an inspiration. Why not? [Laughs.] Why not?!

The world's your oyster. Where do you go from here?

I want to make a lot of money and get a place in Paris. And also I want to write an opera. And I want to date some prince who lives in a castle. I'm like a 14-year-old girl, basically.

Is there anything special in store for your Portland show?

One thing that's going to be really cool is that my sister will be there.

Singing backup?

Singing backup, and also she's opening for me as well. My sister will get up and sing a few songs and she's pretty amazing.

■ RUFUS WAINWRIGHT performs a free all-ages show at 6 p.m. Wednesday, April 21, at Music Millennium Northwest, 801 N.W. 23rd Ave. He performs with Ben Lee Thursday, April 22, at Berbat's Pan, 231 S.W. Ankeny St., at 10 p.m. Tickets are \$12 in advance, available through TicketMaster.

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