

THEATER

Starry night

Portland talent assembles en masse to raise funds and honor Rob Buckmaster at *Night of 100 Stars*

BY STEPHEN BLAIR

Since landing on the cultural map in 1996, *Night of 100 Stars* has been an annual highlight of Portland's entertainment calendar.

On Wednesday, May 12, the tradition continues as director John Oules and producer Fred Ross gather an epic cast of local entertainers for a wild and eclectic night of musical theater.

The volunteer-driven gala benefits the Rob Buckmaster Fund of Equity Foundation. Buckmaster was a popular and critically acclaimed Portland actor who died of an AIDS-related illness at age 31.

One of Oules' main objectives is to showcase new material that has not yet surfaced on Broadway. The show freely intertwines unfamiliar tunes with a collection of musical theater mainstays. Whether the material is newborn or vintage, rest assured that Oules and his dynamic company will steadfastly avoid DOA renditions of Rodgers and Hammerstein sonic dinosaurs. "This will not be *Oklahoma*," Oules assures.

The evening will be, however, a sort of living memorial. Buckmaster enriched Portland theater in the 1980s and early '90s with his candid and versatile performances in *Falsettos*, *Three Guys Naked from the Waist Down* and *Into the Woods*. The highlight of his career was perhaps his title role in Triangle Productions' popular run of *Jeffrey*. Buckmaster's witty and engaging performance as Jeffrey earned him a Drammy nomination as best actor. This benchmark in his career unfortunately coincided with the decline of his health. When Buckmaster died in 1995, his family, friends and colleagues honored his passion for the theater by creating a memorial fund in his name that fosters growth in Portland's theater community.

The fund's mission statement reads: "The Rob Buckmaster Fund is dedicated to developing, sustaining and enriching theater artists and audiences in the greater Portland area through innovative and visionary projects." Proceeds from *Night of 100 Stars* enable select theater groups in the Portland area to experiment more freely and to realize high artistic standards.

Funds generated by the event help finance theater groups that provide alternatives to conventional plays and musicals. Since its conception, the Rob Buckmaster Fund has granted financial support to the Larry Kramer Project at Artists Repertory Theatre. The theater applied the grant toward productions of two Kramer plays, *The Normal Heart* and *The Destiny of Me*. However, the fund does not support lesbian, gay or AIDS-related theater projects exclusively. Aside from ART and Triangle Productions, for example, grant recipients include the Portland Area Theatre Alliance, Cygnet Productions and Lakewood Theatre Company.

Night of 100 Stars is itself a colorful cabaret of musical theater that covers a wide range of styles and themes. Oules and his cast guide the audience on an explosive, sometimes irreverent tour of contemporary musical theater. This year's lineup includes songs from *Cabaret*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Rent*, *La Cage aux Folles* and *Dreamgirls*. Beyond music, this year's program will include dance by acclaimed tapper Terry Brock.

Oules savors the possibilities unleashed

Adair Chappell performs "I'm a Woman" during last year's *Night of 100 Stars*



by removing a show tune from its original context. "Out of context, you can give it free reign," he says.

Highlights of previous installments of the fund-raising night include a scorching rendition of "Big Spender" from *Sweet Charity*; campy songs from *Little Shop of Horrors*; and a hilarious, operatic version of "Sodomy" from *Hair* that drives the initially demure vocalist into a state of sexual frenzy.

The fourth annual *Night of 100 Stars* promises to be a variety show par excellence, a parade of entertainment in which Buckmaster still takes center stage.

■ The fourth annual NIGHT OF 100 STARS will take place Wednesday, May 12, at 7:30 p.m., at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts' Newmark Theatre, 1111 S.W. Broadway. Ticket prices are \$15-\$29, available at the PCPA box office and Fastixx.

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