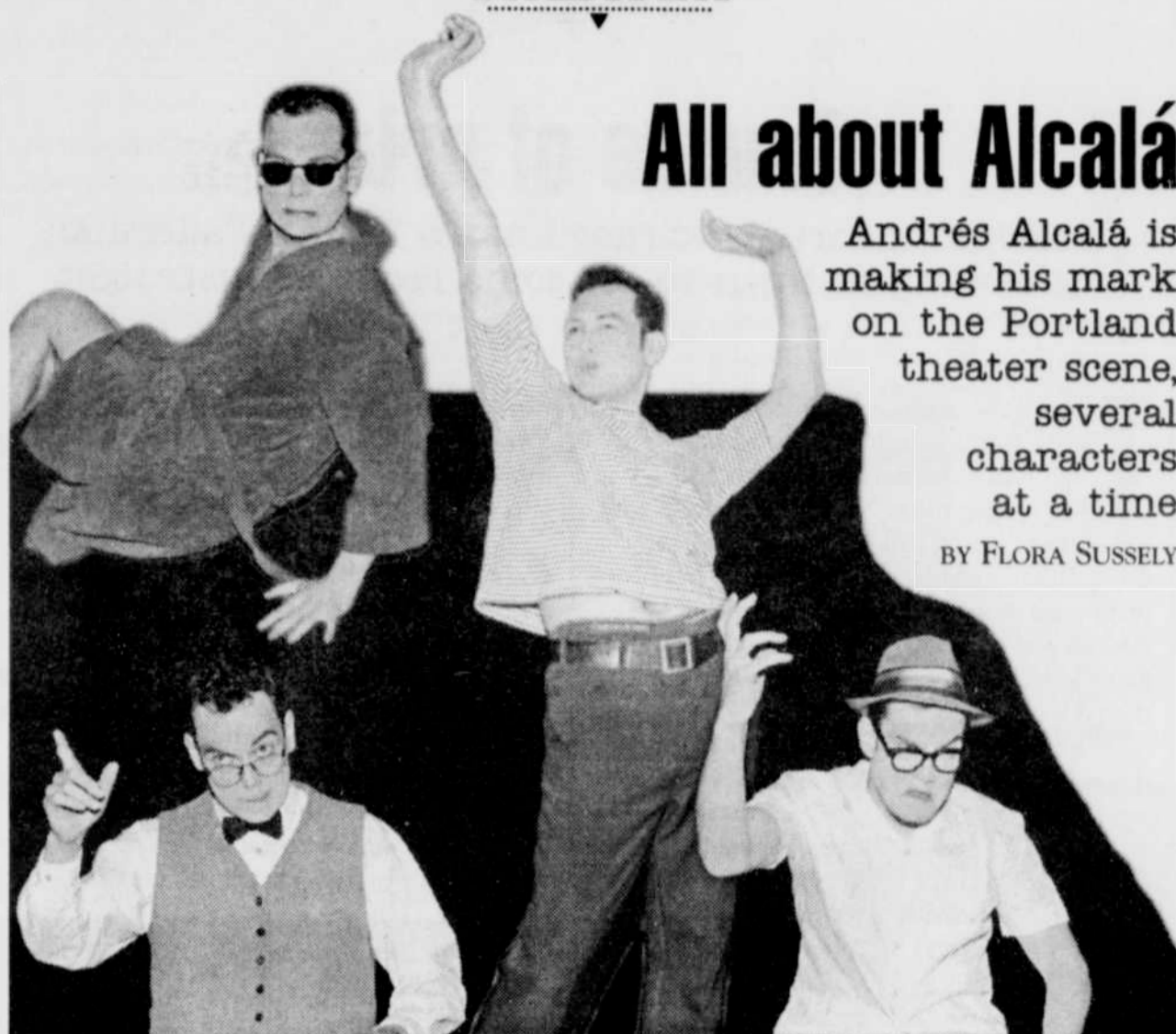


## THEATER

## All about Alcalá

Andrés Alcalá is making his mark on the Portland theater scene, several characters at a time  
BY FLORA SUSSELY



Andrés Alcalá is a small-town boy turned Shakespearean actor. So, what's he doing in Portland? Quite a lot, actually.

When I caught up with him, he was rehearsing an assortment characters for *Men on the Verge of a His-panic Breakdown*. He and playwright Guillermo Reyes were locked in a long day of blocking out the eight gay Hispanic characters that Alcalá will bring to life at the Miracle Theatre.

To those of you who attend Portland theater regularly, Andrés Alcalá is the savagely handsome Ramon in Artists Repertory Theatre's production of Terrence McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!*; he is the cruel, villainous Duke Fedrik and the sweet empathetic Signor of Tygres Heart's production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. He is also the alluring and mysterious Latina diva of Reyes' *Deporting the Divas* at Miracle Theatre; and the fragile, angry AIDS patient in ART's production of David Rabe's *A Question of Mercy*. In short, he is one of Portland's most sought after and versatile actors. So, what's his story?

Always the clown, the family ham, he loved to make his parents laugh. Later, teaching special-education and Down syndrome kids, he used his acting talent to role-play. "I'd show them what they were doing by doing exactly what they were doing. Then they'd say, 'That's not what I'm like,' and they would change their behavior. It was a way of communicating with them."

What happened next was the catalyst for wonderful things, but at the time it was very painful: "In my senior year in high school, I came out. My parents were not supportive and I got my GED, became an emancipated minor and left Crescent City. I left behind the lead in *Grease*, the kids I'd been teaching, everything."

Somewhere along the line, Alcalá realized that running was not what he wanted and, in a very courageous move, he returned to the town and the family that had scorned him. What he found was surprising. Everyone had been praying that he would return. His father installed a little trailer in the backyard, complete with everything—including cable—and a sign that read: "Your Home a Bit Away from Home."

As Alcalá conquered his demons, new ones replaced the old ones. An adult lover was arrested because Alcalá was still a minor, and a platonic friendship with an exchange student was investigated as a sexual transgression. "By the time I got to college, I had already suffered

a lot of the indignities of homophobia," Alcalá says evenly.

And indeed, he had managed to assert his personhood before an entire community that had alternately banned him, investigated him and recognized his gifts.

In college, thoughts of teaching special-education kids gave way to love of theater. After getting his degree, Alcalá went on to two seasons at the Ashland Shakespeare Festival. So, what happened then?

He fell in love. After a year of letters and visits, Alcalá says, he followed his heart. Now, settled in Portland, steadily burning through the local theater scene, he sits back to reflect on my questions, which he proclaims "difficult."

Alcalá is disarmingly shy. All at once he will smile a sideways smile, shrug and say, "Well, you know, I'm from a small town." He was raised speaking only Spanish at home and his vowels have a Latin ring. He is very pale with very black wavy hair and lips like Disney's Snow White. In short, he is Dracula and Zorro, drama personified.

The interesting juxtaposition is that he is not at all dramatic or commanding in personal presence. He slouches, whispers, and, as we hunched over proof sheets of his photos he complains: "I don't like that picture—I look fat." He is not.

As rehearsals continue, he becomes an old gay Cuban restaurateur, a wickedly sarcastic English professor, a young gay Mexican boy in love, and others. Generations, regions and situations swirl in the empty house. Slowly, Reyes directs Alcalá this way and that. It is not often an actor has the opportunity to work with the playwright, and Alcalá is obviously in awe. They have been here for hours.

I am struck with how hard they are working to bring us these Hispanic men. In Reyes' play we learn the history of otherwise invisible members of our community—from the Cuban "gay concentration camps" of Castro, to someone suffering alone with AIDS. The human voice. And, in the capable hands of Alcalá, it is sure to speak to us all.

■ MEN ON THE VERGE OF A HIS-PANIC BREAKDOWN shows at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, June 4-26, at the Miracle Theatre, 525 S.E. Stark St. in Portland. Ticket prices range from \$12-\$15. For reservations, call (503) 236-7253.

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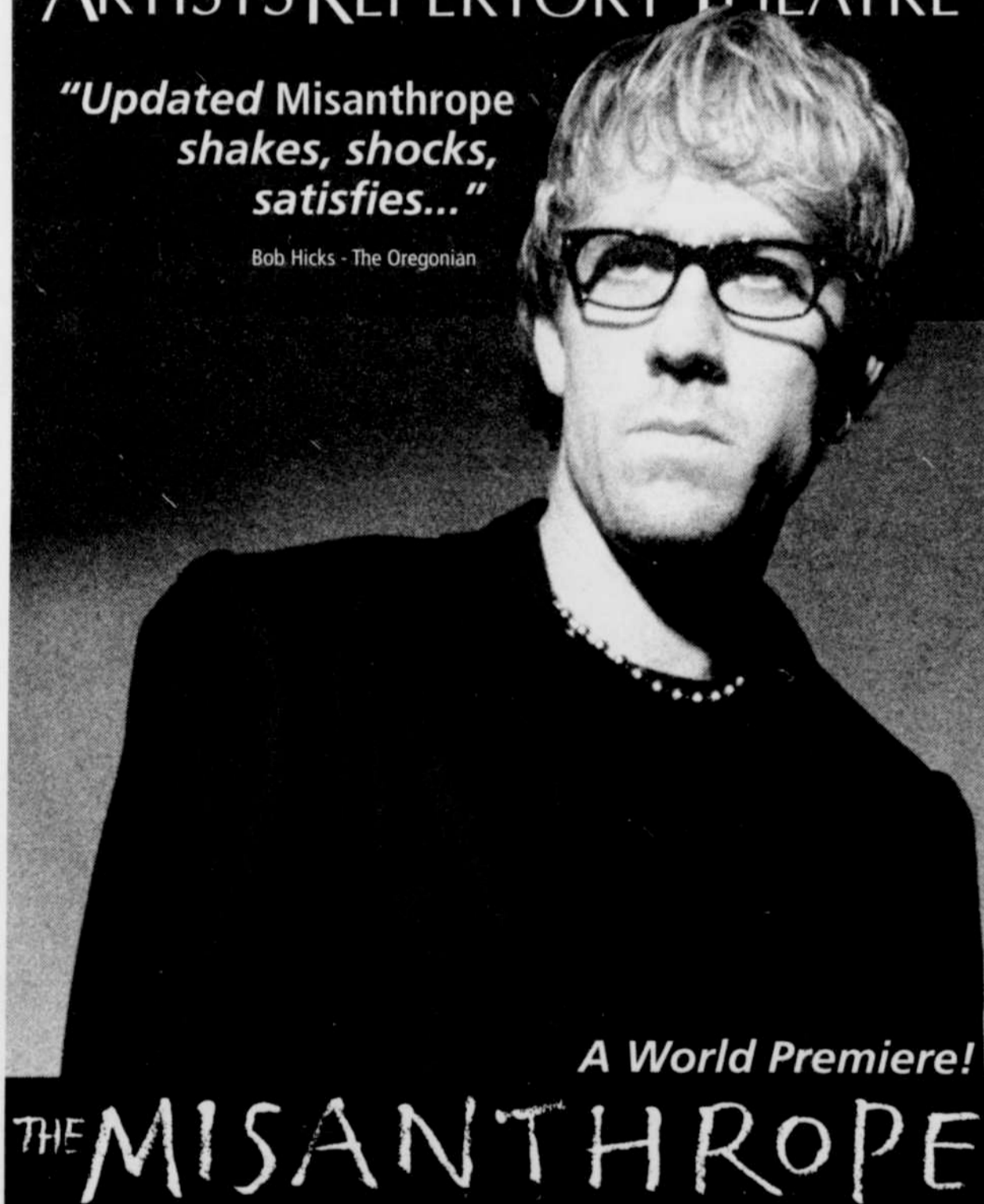
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