

THEATER

Tim Miller is pissed off. From the cold war to AIDS, from "general, garden-variety gay civil rights" to freedom of expression, Miller has covered it all in his acclaimed solo performance art pieces of the past 20 years. One of the infamous NEA 4—four artists who had their National Endowment for the Arts grants revoked by the government for "indecentcy" in 1990—Miller has found a new issue to agitate him to action and inspire him to performance.

"It's just so ugly," he says. "I don't think I've ever felt as activated or as wanting to change this injustice. It's much worse than having your grants taken away and having to take a case to the Supreme Court; it's much more stressful, too. Worse than having your grants taken away is having your partner taken away."

Miller fell in love with Alistair McCartney, an Australian, in 1994 and began his journey through the hazy, maddening world of U.S. immigration. Because their relationship is not recognized in this country, Miller and McCartney, along with thousands of other binational queer couples, have no legal rights of partnership for immigration purposes.

Miller's latest show, *Glory Box*, which comes to Portland's Echo Theatre on April 29, is an exploration of his experiences as a gay boy, then a gay man in America, and his subsequent struggles with the second-class citizenship reinforced through the immigration machine. The piece, titled with an Australian term for hope chest, is in part a testament to the heart's inability to create or conform to the borders and restrictions placed on the gay community by a heterosexist culture.

As a teen-ager in Los Angeles, Miller was inspired by autobiographical feminist performance art, which "is certainly why I do the work I do today, seeing the narratives of our lives as being important and bringing those into performance," he says. Since the mid-'80s, Miller's solo work has been largely autobiographical studies of gay America.

"I feel like there's more than enough for several lifetimes of any artist in exploring our identities as lesbians and gay men," he says. "It's a big ol' terrain."

To be sure, Miller is now tackling a gay rights subject that has barely been on the map in the queer community but has built up momentum and media attention of late with the introduction of House Resolution 3650, the Permanent Partners Immigration Act of 2000. The bill—introduced by U.S. Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., in February and co-written by the Lesbian and Gay Immigration

A world of hope

Tim Miller's new show, *Glory Box*, proves you can't put borders on the human heart

BY LISA BRADSHAW

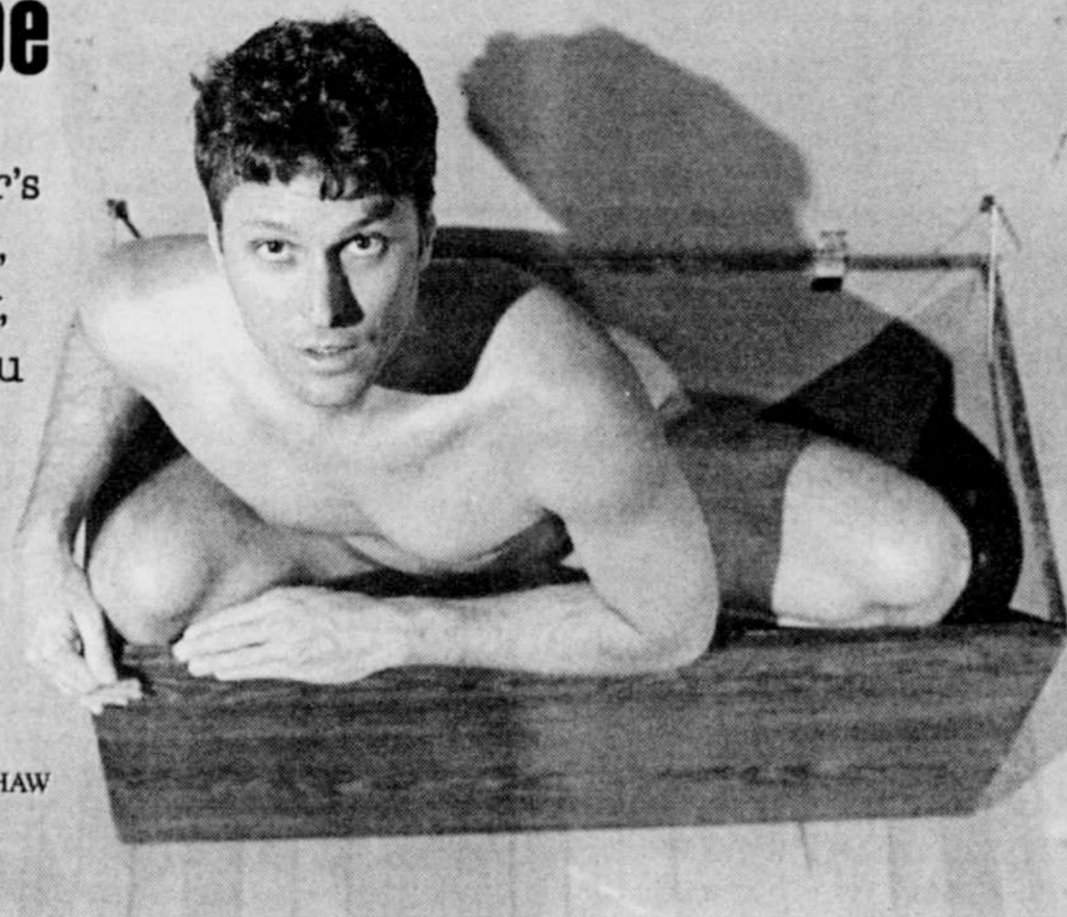


PHOTO BY DARRELL TAYLOR

Rights Task Force—would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to allow queer American citizens to sponsor their foreign partners for entry into the United States. Currently, no such allowance exists for same-sex couples, so their only option is to obtain short-term educational or employment-based visas, which can be extremely restrictive and costly.

Miller's partner is currently here on an education visa that expires next year.

"I just go ballistic," Miller says, "when people start to talk to me about the marriage penalty—that they, depending on their tax return, might have to pay a few hundred dollars more a year. The government is costing Alistair and I \$2,000 or \$3,000 a month with his inability to work, our legal fees, out of state tuition. We're having to spend a minimum of \$20,000 to \$30,000 extra a year on maintaining our relationship, because the United States wants to destroy our relationship. That's a penalty."

Because marriage and immigration issues are inextricably linked, Miller tries to give them equal time in *Glory Box*. It's been interesting, he says, to see a larger number of straight people attending this show than his past performances, and he attributes it to their being alternately fascinated and freaked out by gay marriage.

Much of the audience so far has been mar-

ried binationals. Although he acknowledges that it's not "their fault" they're able to get married and stay together without the constant fear of being separated, he pulls no punches on the institution of marriage itself. His value system insists on all or nothing.

"Nothing's going to happen unless our hip-pish straight friends start realizing the right wing speaks for them," Miller contends. "They are going to have to say, 'I won't participate in marriage if gay people can't.' I say this in the show, and it always gets a little rush. For straight people to get married now is shameful.... Even if I really care about them, I could never go to a straight friend's wedding, and I'm ashamed of them that they would get married. They know my situation—that I don't have the special rights they have, that I may well have to leave the country—and they still expect me to, like, bring them a present? Get real."

Leaving the United States for what Miller calls "more civilized" countries is a choice all binational couples eventually face. Thirteen nations currently recognize gay relationships for immigration purposes. Australia is one of them, and so is England, another country in which Miller's partner maintains citizenship. When asked which they would choose, Australia or England, Miller is quick to answer.

"We choose changing the laws of Ameri-

ca.... The fact is, if we're having to leave, what we need to talk about is why is America so fucked up?"

Asking this question is a major intention of *Glory Box*, which Miller calls his best piece to date.

"Unless America grows up and starts treating gay people like human beings," he insists, "I don't want to stay and pay taxes in a country with the human rights violations that exist here.... The only ethical choice, really, is to no longer give the illusion that there are civil liberties in the U.S. for gay people."

Miller routinely uses his work to inspire community action, and *Glory Box* is no different.

"There's a certain visibility I have as a performer. I get in the media a lot," he explains. "I'm taught in universities for my performances and writing; it potentially sends a strong signal, that I'm not welcome as an American artist, that I'm not welcome in my own country. That's about just creating a strong stance of protest and refusal to participate in a system that's so unbelievably unfair."

So Tim Miller is pissed off. But, he admits, he's also been truly inspired by the people he's met on this tour.

"I'm just so moved as I meet all these hundreds of binational couples—the strength of people's commitment and their real belief in love and connection amid the complete hostility of the U.S. government," he says.

The feeling is mutual. *Glory Box* is the first performance art project about an issue that is dominant in binational couples' lives. Part of the proceeds from the shows, including the performance in Portland, are going to local chapters of LGIRTF.

"Even if Alistair and I end up being forced into exile," concludes Miller, "it's really been energizing to me, the depth of queer people's love and commitment to each other. That's something I feel very lucky to be witnessing."

■ Witness TIM MILLER in *Glory Box* at 8 p.m. April 29 at Echo Theatre, 1515 S.E. 37th Ave. Tickets are available from Gai-Pied bookstore and Fastixx. Tickets cost \$15, or \$20 with post-show reception benefiting the Portland chapter of LGIRTF; tickets purchased at the door cost \$3 more. For additional information, call (503) 203-3305.

LESBIAN AND GAY IMMIGRATION RIGHTS TASK FORCE Portland chapter can be reached at (503) 471-1568 or lgirtfpx@hotmail.com.

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