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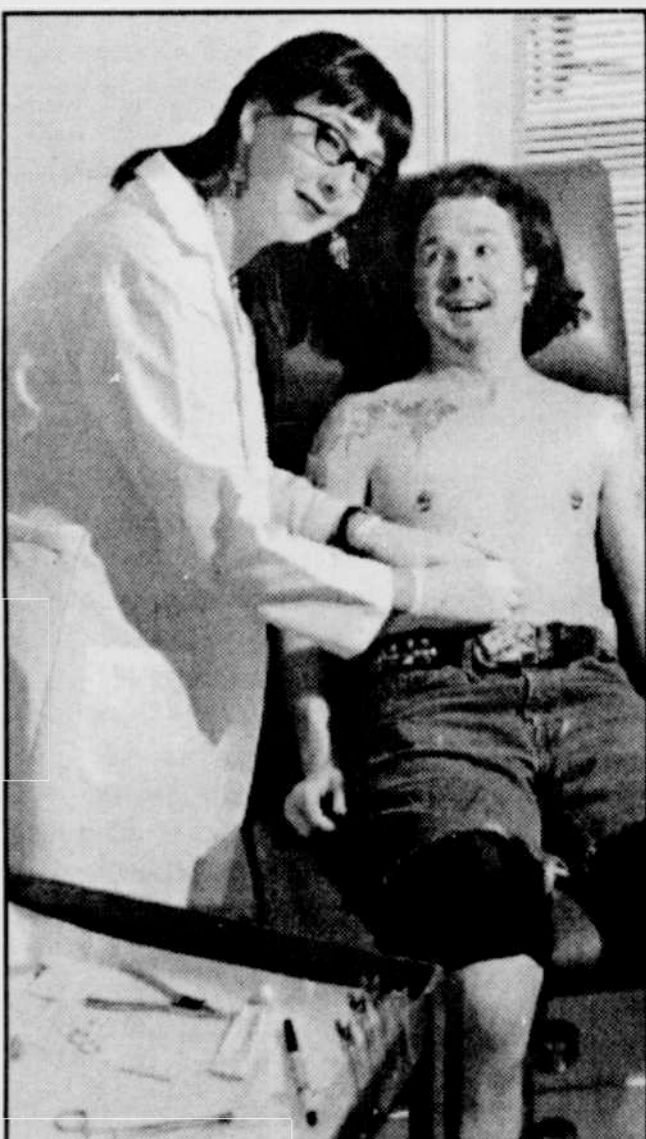
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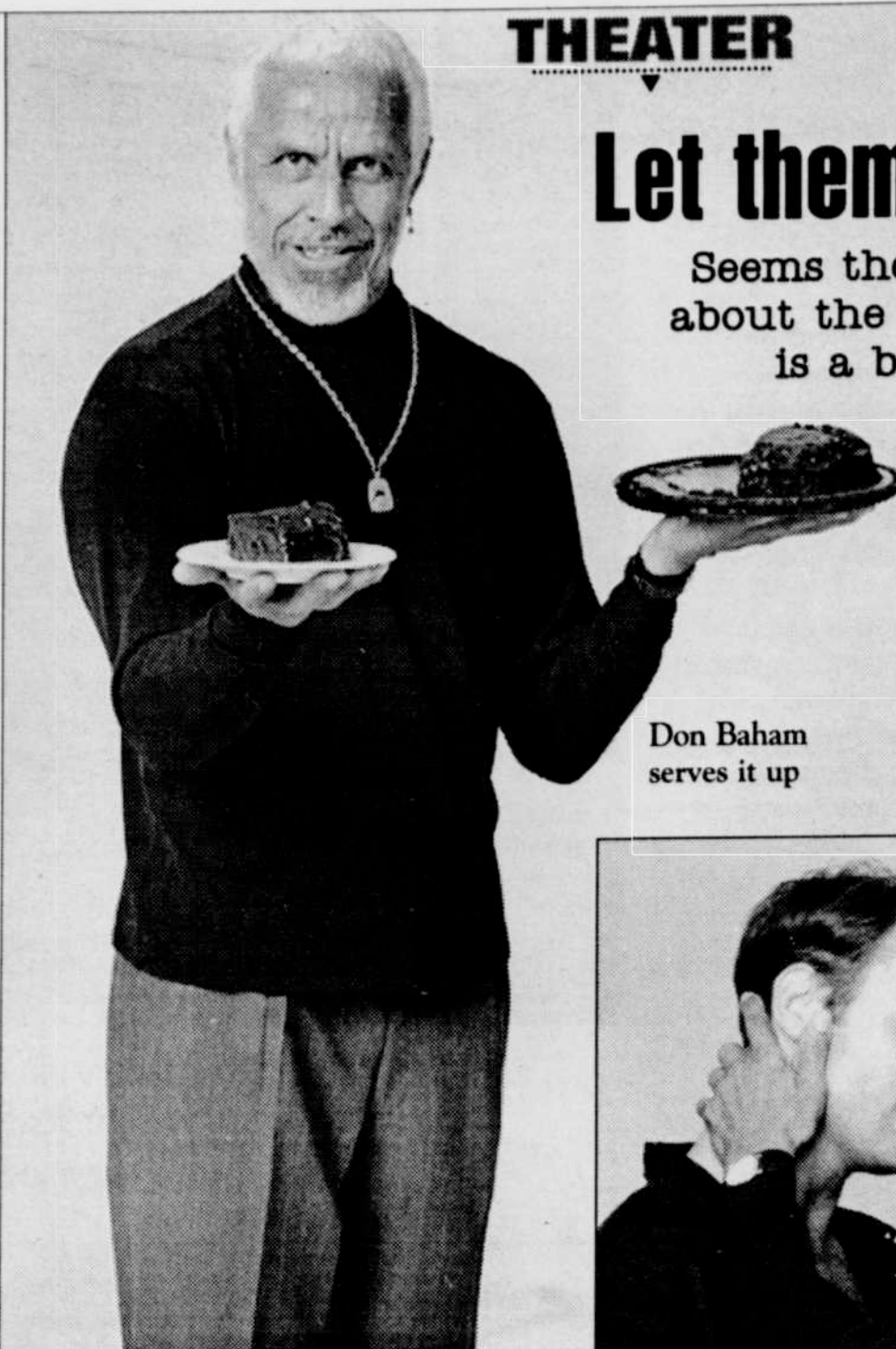
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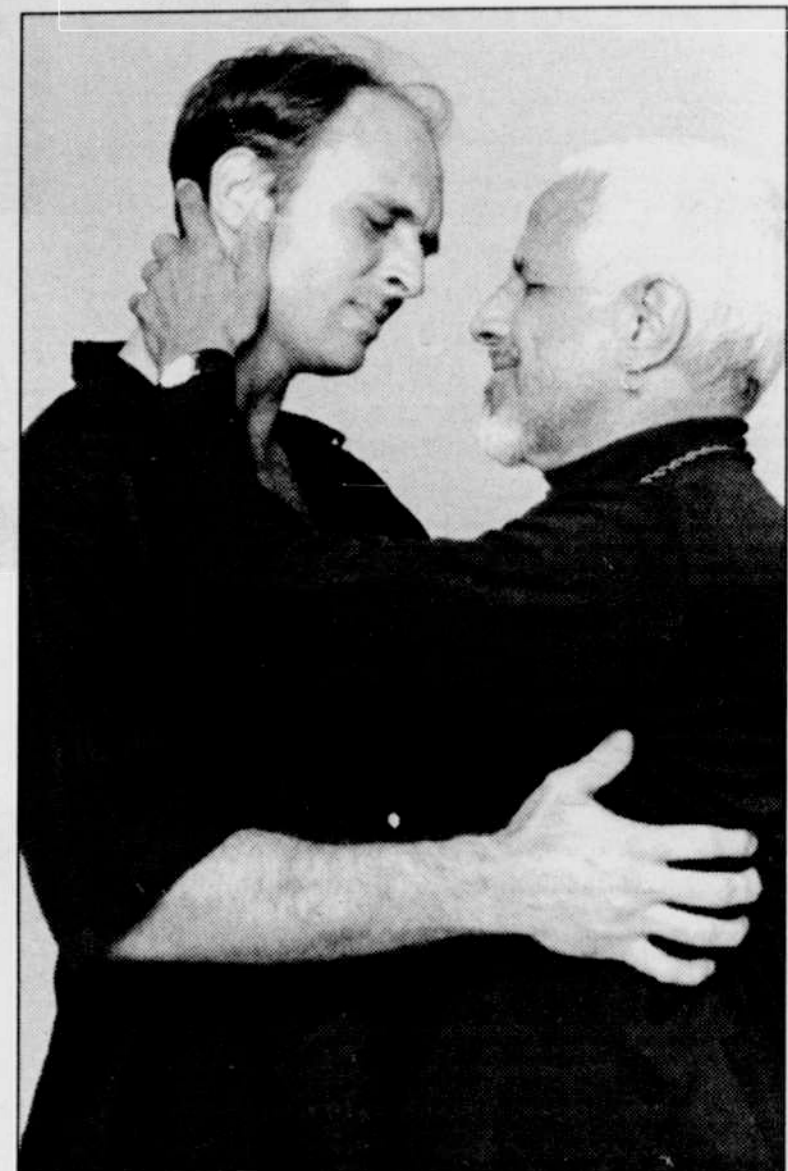
Let them eat *Cake*

Seems the only good thing about the end of the world is a bounty of pastries

BY ANDY MANGELS



Don Baham serves it up



Don Baham delivers the sweets to Thomas Beckett

Civilization is in ruins and the people of the future cower in their homes. The sound of bombs dropping constantly reverberates through the air, and the only solace for two isolated couples is the promise of further fellowship and the infrequent delivery of cake and pastries by representatives of the Powers That Be.

Welcome to the world of *A Piece of Cake*, an experimental one-act play presented by Portland's Stark Raving Theatre. This piece is director Jim Wilhite's second production of a drama written by Raymond J. Barry, a respected stage, film and television actor.

The first couple the audience meets are Albert (Thomas Beckett) and Marvin (Daniel Flint). Albert is manic and pushy and is determined to leave the safety of their home to search out their neighbors. Marvin agrees with everything Albert says, and seems almost child-like. They eventually meet Ruth (Megan Harris) and Buford (Jared Royslance), a young married couple who have ceased having sex for fear of spreading disease. Ruth is at first nervous to meet her neighbors, then loosens up when she gets drunk. Buford wants to share his body with his wife but feels conflicted for reasons he doesn't understand.

When Herman (Don Baham) arrives bearing cake and cookies, relationships start to unravel and new alliances are formed. Are Albert and Marvin gay lovers, spies for the government, or something else? Will Ruth's revelation bring about the death of her husband, or her own? And what role does the cake man have in it all?

A Piece of Cake is not always an easy play to like. Some of the language is didactic and—at least on opening night—the energy and delivery of the actors was almost too strong. But, for gay audience members, it poses a complex conundrum: While Barry's script seems gay-friendly and places the blame for AIDS and its death toll squarely on the government's shoulders, the anti-gay language spouted by almost every character is squirm-inducing.

I didn't know whether to be offended or not, but in a play that relies so heavily on allegory, such uncertainty is to be expected. Still,

even allegory can have too-negative implications, and the fact that homosexuality is generally treated in this play as an element of betrayal—or something to be vehemently denied—left me feeling more discomfited than I believe the playwright and crew intended.

The cast members are credible in their roles, though Daniel Flint's simpler character allowed him much more ability to win over the audience. Jared Royslance gets the meatiest emotional scenes to act and acquits himself well, and Megan Harris plays her closing scenes very strongly. Staging, props and lighting are extremely minimalist, but functional.

Hard to classify completely, *A Piece of Cake* would best be labeled an allegorical dark comedy. Unfortunately, gay audiences may find that the allegories are not pleasant ones. If you like theater that challenges and unsettles you, give this show a try; if you want more lighthearted entertainment, it's best to look elsewhere.

Note: This play contains male and female nudity and adult language. It may not be suitable for younger audiences.

■ *A PIECE OF CAKE* plays Fridays and Saturdays through Aug. 12 at Theater Theatre, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. For tickets call the box office at (503) 232-7072.

ANDY MANGELS is a longtime Portland entertainment writer with three books and hundreds of comic books and magazine articles to his credit. You can write him at AMangelsSW@aol.com.