

THEATER

Bad boys

triangle productions! presents
a Summer Pride Series of plays

BY RICHARD BRAY

Theatergoers are getting a bonus this summer: four edgy plays from triangle productions!

Don Horn projects passion and excitement as he discusses the upcoming shows and the state of gay theater in general. The Summer Pride Series features works he says his gay patrons "really want to see."

Horn always is striving for balance in his productions—two of the shows in the series are male-oriented, and two are for the gals. *The (Bad) Boy Next Door* and *Naked Boys Singing!* come first; *Butch/Femme Chronicles* and *The Dyke and the Porn Star* play later in the summer.

Reflecting on the state of gay theater in the United States, Horn wonders if it's become too homogenized now that gay culture has become so ubiquitous in today's society. Noting the popularity of *Ellen* and *Will & Grace*, he says gay theater is just not unique anymore.

"Nudity's become blasé, gay has become blasé," Horn says. "Every play you read has a gay character."

Horn suggests one direction that will help gay theater keep its edge: Bring it into the realm of "let's talk about it—let's do the social problems that we have again."

To illustrate his point, *The (Bad) Boy Next Door* pushes some of the gay community's

Yes,
they really are
*Naked Boys
Singing!*

hottest buttons. Barebacking, prostitution and porn—issues often swept under the carpet—are subjects writer and performer Tony Valenzuela boldly examines.

Horn has strong feelings about the responsibility of theater to provoke and ask these questions and equally strong opinions about his role in this process. "I have to be responsible for what I put on stage; that's one of the reasons we're doing it."

In this case, despite his personal beliefs, Horn wants to present opinions that provoke thought and discussion. And he says this kind of theater can make a difference: If even one person leaves the theater learning about safe sex, something real has been accomplished.

Because of the subject matter, a discussion will immediately follow the play, and Cascade AIDS Project will have an information table set up in the lobby each night. Horn thinks this is particularly important considering the subject matter of *The (Bad) Boy Next Door*.

Drawn from a talk he gave at an AIDS conference, Valenzuela says that his play is trying to "demonstrate a new narrative on AIDS for people who grew up with the disease" and that he is trying to "focus on my generational experience." Most of the attention around *The (Bad) Boy Next Door* inevitably has focused on the barebacking issue.

Valenzuela does not advocate barebacking but says, "There are individual circumstances when it's defensible, and that's a very important distinction." He does advocate HIV disclosure but says, "People ultimately need to make their own decisions and be responsible for their own health."

Tony Valenzuela offers his provocative, bare truths

Obviously proud of his play and the discussion it provokes, Valenzuela says, "I'd like to encourage people to come out and see it and make their own decisions."

Second in the Summer Pride Series is *Naked Boys Singing!* Different in tone from *The (Bad) Boy Next Door*, this is a 16-song musical covering a wide range of emotions and projecting much more depth

than seven naked guys singing on stage might imply.

Dan Johnson and Mark Brown are two of the cast members; both are particularly excited about this production and unusually relaxed considering their lack of attire in an intimate theater setting during most of the show.

Johnson, an investment banker, acted in college and appeared locally in *Hello, Dolly!* He says he geared up for this sort of performance by doing a little modeling for the Art Institute of Portland. Already a triathlete, he did little extra training for this role.

Johnson says his friends, family and partner have been hugely supportive of this endeavor. His parents will be in the audience opening night, although he acknowledges his "mom has some reservations."

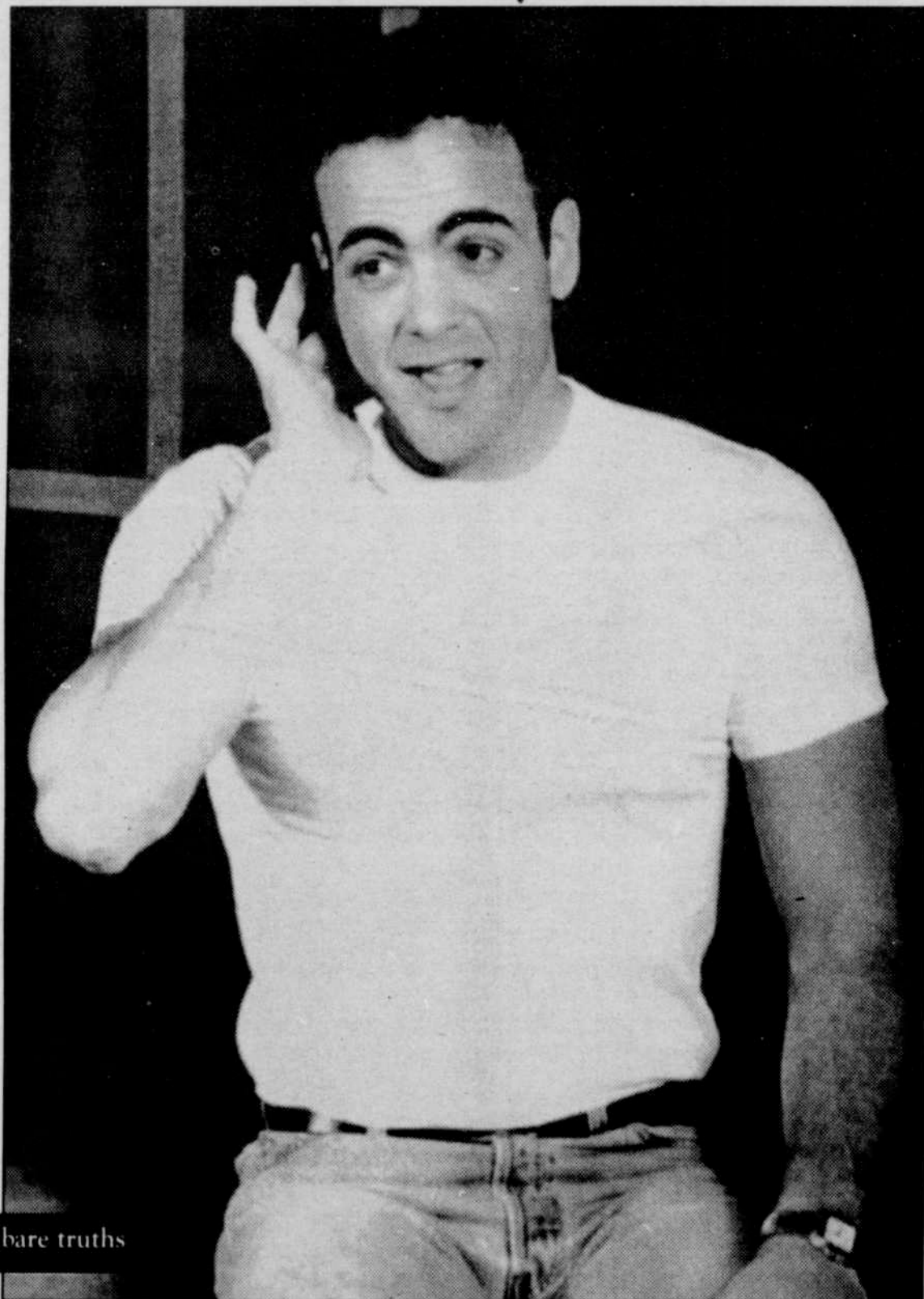
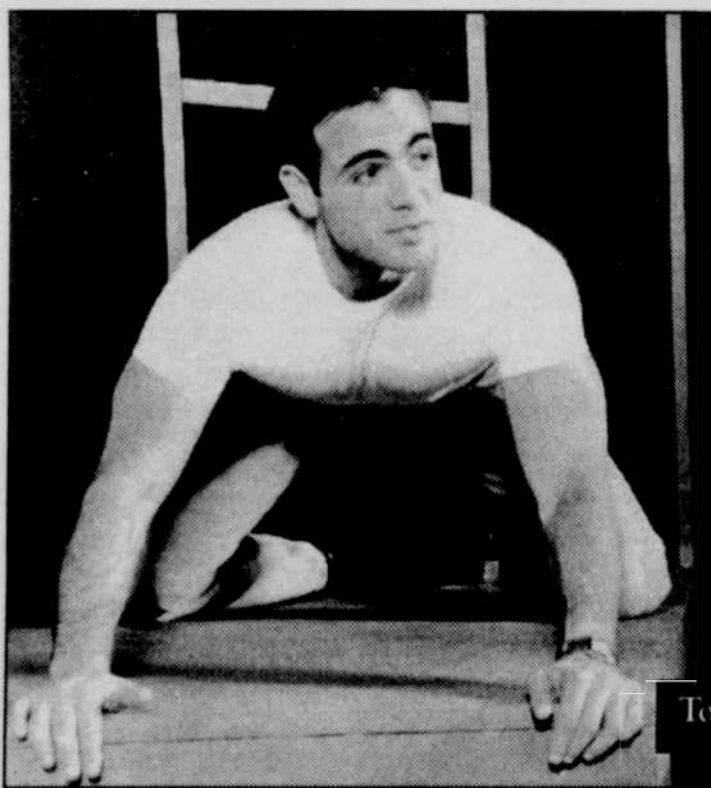
Johnson thinks the audience will be somewhat surprised and challenged by *Naked Boys Singing!* "They think they're going to see one thing, but the show is so much more."

Brown is equally excited about this musical, preparing for the past three months at the gym and losing 25 pounds. At 38, he is also the oldest cast member and doesn't really "consider himself a 'boy.'"

Brown has 20 years of theater background, and this isn't his first nude role—he appeared in a production of *Hair* six years ago, although he laughs and says the stage was "much darker."

Echoing Johnson's surprise at the depth of the play, Brown says: "It's not about the nudity so much. It takes you places you're not expecting to go," adding that *Naked Boys Singing!* "has a huge heart." **JN**

THE (BAD) BOY NEXT DOOR plays June 7 to 9 at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. Tickets are \$17-\$19 from 503-239-5919 or Fastixx. NAKED BOYS SINGING! plays June 14 to July 21. Tickets are \$23-\$25.



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