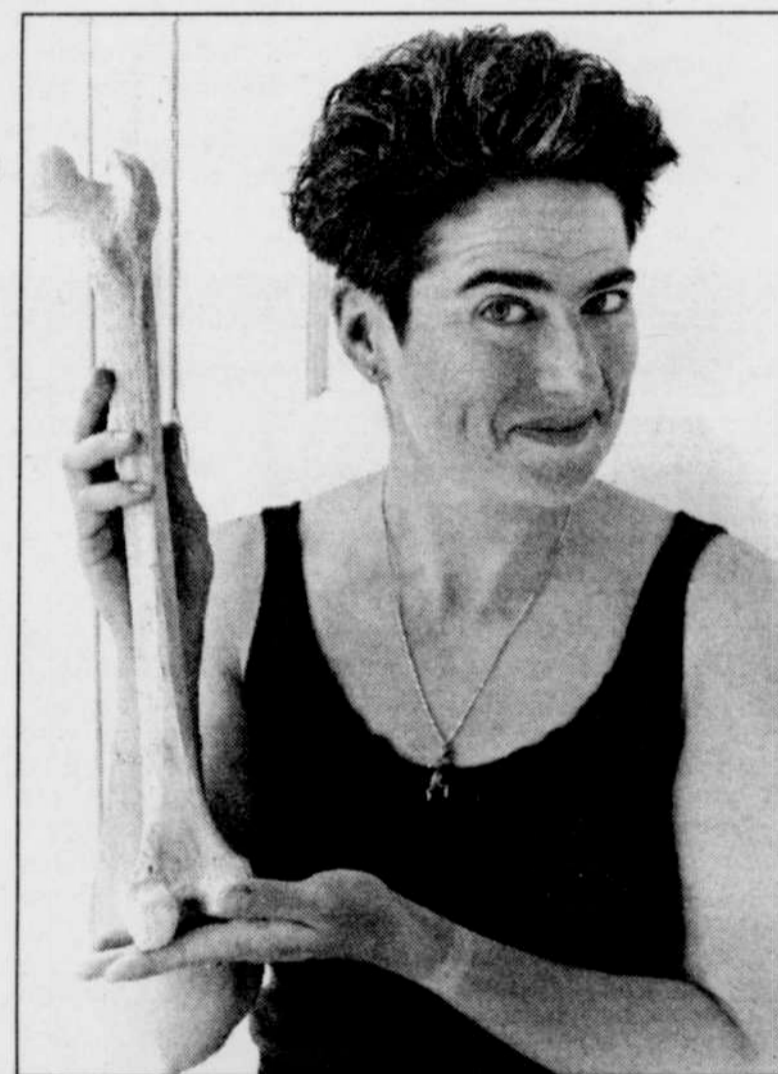


# Hey Dorothy, where's Toto?

Onstage and off, this comical dyke has multiple personalities

by Sarah Leimert



Dorothy Hirsch has a bone to pick with Oz's Dorothy—and her little dog, too

**A** conversation with Dorothy Hirsch is like talking to a cartoon.

An endless source of one-liners, accents and characters, she always has a story to tell. Ask her how she got her start in performance art, and she'll tell you: "I was born in the Wilcox Memorial Wing of Good Samaritan Hospital. It was March 19, and it was a rainy midday. Shortly thereafter, I was chosen as the demonstrator baby for teaching new mothers how to wash their infants. And I believe that's how I got my start."

A born performer, the Portland native's one-woman show *Where's Toto?* is a combination of her vast writing and improvisational talent. It is running concurrently with Stark Raving Theatre's production of *After the Zipper* because they both have gay themes.

"There is lesbian content," Hirsch notes, "because I am a lesbian, and it speaks to my life experience." However, the similarities between the two shows end there.

*Toto* is a 75-minute adventure of comedy with numerous characters created by Hirsch based on her own life experiences. "Most of the stories are true," she says, "but I've certainly taken poetic license."

The audience will meet a charismatic feminist faith healer, a spirit medium and a referee, among others. The act is light-hearted and funny, with moments of ad-libbing and opportunities for audience interaction. Thematically, the show will stand in stark contrast to *Zipper*, bringing audiences who see both performances full circle by the end of the night.

Although *Toto* contains moments of improvisation, Hirsch will perform from a script. "While I have a great deal of fun going off on tangents for two hours at a time, that can turn out to be absolute brilliance—or incredibly boring," she says.

The title of Hirsch's show might seem somewhat mysterious, but the explanation is simple. As a member of *The Wizard of Oz* generation and with a name like Dorothy, she constantly was approached as a child by people joking, "Hey Dorothy, where's Toto?"

This experience became tedious quickly, and she turned it into a subject for comedy. Now, *Toto the Dog* is a character in her performance piece.

**L**ike many successful folks in the business of acting, Hirsch's career began with a college major that had nothing to do with theater: Russian. After graduating from University of Denver, she moved to Washington, D.C., and worked in the Library of Congress stacks, which, she says, was "quite a hoot."

As a woman whose goal in life is to avoid regrets, Hirsch decided to take some theater classes in D.C. Since then, she has done a great deal of stage, comedy and improvisational work on both coasts.

Hirsch, who lives back in Portland now, says the most important thing she learned during her time in the nation's capital was the difference between acting and standup comedy. "I think that's what created this hybrid of what my performing tends to be—a combination of monologues and character pieces," she explains. Her résumé boasts a nearly equal amount of stage and comedy work, along with some directing, producing and much script writing.

"One of the longest-running and most useful gigs I did was as Lucretia G. Swiftly, the



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

As if his partners don't provide enough, Dan conjures his own torturous mind games

is to create a dialogue within the community, and he hopes to attract both queer and straight audience members. "I want the audience to leave at the end of the show with their hair standing up and leaving the theater talking about this."

Zrebski says producing this "work in progress" with the input of a director and three actors has been fulfilling. "Working closely with another passionate director is challenging, thought-provoking and wonderful all at the same time, which is exactly what good art is. You come together, you debate, you

butt heads and you meld...and that's exactly what this process has been. It has yielded a much stronger text."

He understands *Zipper* is a big risk but is

excited about sharing his work with Portland. "This is a piece of theater that clearly is not going to be accepted by all people. And even though that's the type of art I want to do, on the flip side, I'm still a human being, and we all want our work to be liked." ☐

AFTER THE ZIPPER runs 8 p.m. Thursday to Saturday and 7 p.m. Sunday through March 2 at Stark Raving Theatre, 2257 N.W. Raleigh St. Tickets are \$10-\$20 from 503-232-7072 or [www.starkravingtheatre.org](http://www.starkravingtheatre.org).

## After After the Zipper

Stark Raving Theatre invites you to talk back

**A**udience members will have an opportunity to voice reactions to Stark Raving Theatre's production of *After the Zipper* during two *Just Out* nights Feb. 9 and 16.

"What excites us the most about this," exclaims playwright Matthew Zrebski, "is the opportunity to spark lively discussion and debate over the material, opening up a dialogue with the queer community."

Included will be a showing of *After the Zipper* as well as an interactive discussion with the writer, director and actors followed by a wine-and-cheese reception and Dorothy Hirsch's comedic one-woman show *Where's Toto?* Tickets are \$20 for the entire evening.

Zrebski adds, "We feel both these shows complement each other beautifully to provide a well-rounded evening of theater."

Writer Matthew Zrebski (left) and director Robert Tollefson call their play "unapologetically adult"

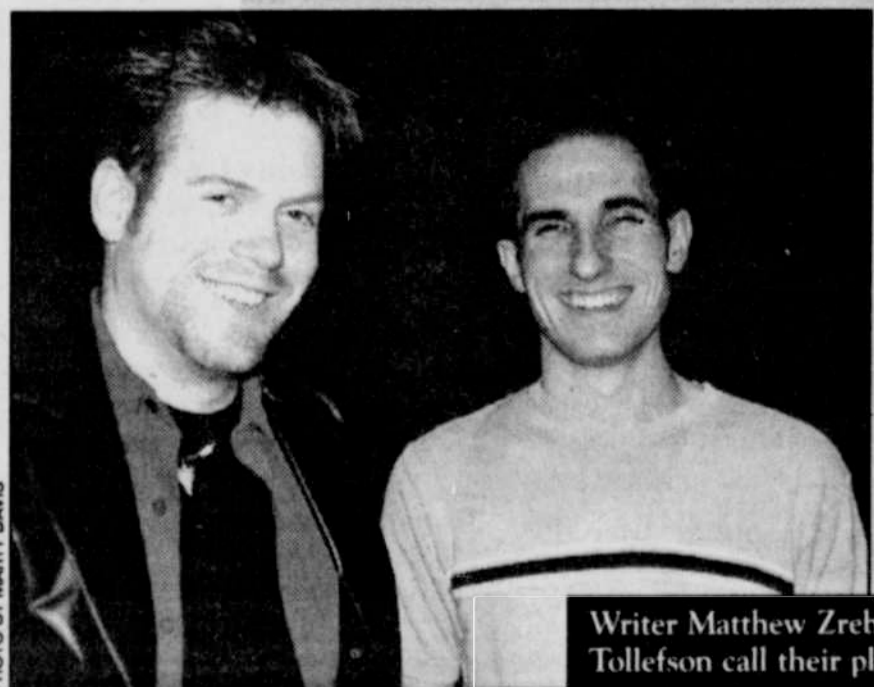


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Feudal Express Messenger at the Maryland Renaissance Festival," the actress shares. She spent 10 years in various capacities at the festival. "It really gave me a good, all-around theater education," she says. When she isn't performing, Hirsch is a highly ranked women's lacrosse referee and a librarian.

She is excited to be back onstage in Portland and to be working with Stark Raving Theatre. "I very much enjoy performing," she exclaims, "and so I tend to think audiences enjoy coming to my shows. They have, in the past, laughed! Support the arts, come to live theater. It's different than the movies." ☐

WHERE'S TOTO? runs 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday through March 2 at Stark Raving Theatre, 2257 N.W. Raleigh St. Tickets are \$12 from 503-232-7072 or [www.starkravingtheatre.org](http://www.starkravingtheatre.org).