

THEATER

Got hot flashes? It's a band, it's a musical, it's a state of mind

BY NATALIE SHAPIRO



The Hot Flashes (clockwise from left): Kate Finn, Sharon Knorr, Marvella McPartland and Lynn Thomas

Ah, hot flashes—the quintessence of menopause. Women shudder in anticipation of the dreaded “change” and the emotional and physical manifestations that accompany it.

But wait! There's hope! Thanks to a Portland musical group with the very same name, women can finally get support for menopause, including a healthy dose of laughter.

Hot Flashes, playing May 3 to 12 at Firehouse Theatre, follows the career of a five-woman band over three decades—from their 40s to their 70s. The production discovers and embraces the changes menopause brings. Although the show obviously is entertaining, the members of Hot Flashes want it to serve as education and outreach to women.

Kate Finn and her husband, Rick Weiss, wrote the musical comedy, gleaned inspiration from Finn's massage practice, which she started when her theater group, *Fallen Angels*, ended in 1996. She became intrigued by stories her female clients told about their life changes.

Finn notes not too long ago women were in the dark about how to approach menopause; fortunately, that is changing. “We are riding a wave of a huge menopausal network,” she states. “So many women are facing menopause.” She decided to produce programs that entertain, support and educate women.

With these goals in mind, she contacted Lois Smith of All Women's Health Services, a naturopathic and medical association that works with low-income women. Smith agreed to sponsor the show, and her organization will have an educational table at performances. The

Northwest Health Foundation also sponsored the program. Finn plans a post-show discussion “about our experiences in aging and health.”

The production itself, she says, looks “at aging with a sense of humor,” beginning at a dinner theater and ending in an assisted living home. It's directed by Portland gay musical theater virtuoso Rick Lewis.

The show's music is half parody and half original, explains Hot Flashes member Sharon Knorr. “We do a parody on ‘I Will Survive’

called ‘I Will Not Age.’ It's about plastic surgery.”

Band members include Finn, who plays accordion, guitar and flute; lead singer Knorr; bassist Marvella McPartland; and Lynn Thomas, a singer who also plays keyboards and clarinet. Pam Krieg came on board a bit later as drummer. “We play everything,” Knorr says, “rock, rap, Glenn Miller.”

All five women have a rich history of involvement in music and the arts. Thomas did the women's music circuit in the 1990s, singing at festivals and concerts. She wrote the

anthem for the 1993 March on Washington (“Together, Proud and Strong”).

In the production Thomas plays an out lesbian (a role she knows well). “As a lesbian in a band...I always have to change the lyrics. I'm constantly changing pronouns.” One of the pieces emphasizes the amusement of pronoun dilemmas.

Knorr performed in *Angry Housewives*, a popular musical in Portland and Seattle in 1984, but then she experienced the discrimination facing older women. “When you turn 40, the phone stops ringing.” She decided to become a producer, focusing on issue-oriented subjects.

McPartland also has a long history of musical involvement. “I wrote, directed and choreographed my first musical when I was 12 years old,” she exclaims. She has been a working musician since 1965, opening for such famous performers as Lily Tomlin, the Smothers Brothers and Randy Newman.

Krieg is a lesbian but (rats!) doesn't get to play one in the show. She started playing music in the early '80s and has been involved with many bands since. She and her partner of 21 years, Kate Sullivan, played together in *Loose Women*, a band that recently ended 20 years of performance.

Finn envisions running *Hot Flashes* again in the fall and wants to do productions at women's and health conferences. **J**

HOT FLASHES plays May 3 and 4 and May 10 to 12 at Firehouse Theatre, 1436 S.W. Montgomery St. Tickets are \$20 at the door or \$15-\$17.50 in advance from www.hotflashesmusical.com or Fastixx.

NATALIE SHAPIRO is a Portland free-lance writer.

REVIEW

Call it crazy

What the Butler Saw is fast, funny and sexy

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE

Mistaken identities. Cross-dressing. An insane number of near-miss entrances and exits of six characters fit for an asylum.

This is the lunacy behind *What the Butler Saw*, a comedy by gay playwright Joe Orton onstage at Theater! Theatre! With typical British sex farce formula (think *Noises Off*), he sought to send up institutions of society with his stinging wit and shocking scenarios. Some 30 years later, the situations seem more clever than shocking but remain hilarious.

Set in a private psychiatric clinic, *Butler*



Various states of dress and undress in *What the Butler Saw*

opens with Dr. Prentice (Darrin Murrell) attempting to seduce Geraldine (Deirdre Atkinson), a naive secretarial applicant. No sooner has he convinced her to undress than enters

Producer/director Don Horn of triangle productions! keeps the pace fast and furious, presenting *Butler* sensibly without intermission. Each performer has his or her own moment,

Mrs. Prentice (Michelle Maida) with her own young, previously-loving-but-now-blackmailing hotel page (Jefferson L. Davis) in tow.

Throw in a random government inspector (Robert Wade) and a police sergeant (Gary Norman), and innocent misbehaving quickly leads to a chaos in which nearly all lose their wits and their clothes. But no matter how wild the situation gets, these mad characters maintain their verbal volleys until all is resolved with an amusing twist.

though they could have considerably more than just one with a little fine-tuning of the play's precise comic timing.

The cast is glued together by the deliriously obsessive performance of Murrell, playing a cross between Drs. Frasier Crane and Frank N. Furter. Maida is equally viscous as the psychiatrist's delicious nymphomaniac wife. Atkinson is the girl-awhirl, Davis a pliable scamp, Norman the foolish bumble and Wade a voice of ill reason.

Most elements behind the production are typical triangle-adequate-but-uninspired. Costumes by Elizabeth Wright, however, coyly hint at the sexy '60s.

As non-epiphanic as the script might be today, *What the Butler Saw* nevertheless shows how fun straitjackets can be. **J**

WHAT THE BUTLER SAW continues through May 25 at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. Tickets are \$15-\$19 from 503-239-5919.

TIMOTHY KRAUSE is a Portland free-lance writer.

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