

A wonderful little package

Steven Nash invites you to get to know him...intimately

BY FLOYD SKLAVER

Steven Nash is over the top, and he wants to prove it.

In his latest act, *Over the Top*, which opens May 20 at Wilf's, the 45-year-old cabaret singer reflects on "all the things that are over the top in my life."

A performer since age 12, Nash has spent his life in musical theater. He started as a dancer and moved on to successively larger roles until graduating to leads in *Company*, *Sweeney Todd* and *A Chorus Line*. He is rehearsing with the Oregon Symphony Pops for its upcoming concert, *Boulé on Broadway*, starring Oregonian columnist and popular music theater performer Margie Boulé.

But it is cabaret that tugs at his heart, and the proudly out singer has been active in the fluctuating scene since arriving in Portland 20 years ago.

"When I moved here," he says, "there were several cabaret clubs [like] Wild Oscar's. Then cabaret just died out, pretty much nationwide. By the '90s there wasn't anything here."

But, like many other cities, we've recently seen a resurgence of cabaret. "Portland has a huge theater community," says Nash, "and Portland theater has been dying over the last few years, so we have all these wonderful performers with no places to perform their craft."

At the forefront of this movement has been Wilf's Restaurant & Piano Bar at Union Station. Its cabaret series started a year and a half ago and has proven so popular that performers are already booked every Tuesday through the end of September. "Wilf's is a really wonderful space that really feels good," says Nash.

For successful cabaret, according to Nash, the audience should end up knowing about the performer intimately. For him, cabaret is different from theater because "you have to be yourself. You have to be very honest, very vulnerable. In theater, when people don't like you, it's the character they don't like. But in cabaret, you are putting yourself in a position to be judged, and if they don't like you, it's personal."

And know him we certainly will. Nash performs a variety of comic songs that reflect his "twisted" humor and "over the top" attitude. In choosing his material, if he hears a song and thinks to himself, "I could have written this song," then he begins to explore it. These are songs that "just ring in my gut."

His latest show, however, "is more about stuff that makes me laugh. I hear something that made me laugh and I think, 'Where can I put that in?'" For instance, Nash has "bastardized a couple of songs and changed the lyrics to reflect my life" on such ditties as Noel Coward's "Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage, Mrs. Worthington," now titled "Your Son Is Not Going Through a Stage, Mrs. Worthington."

He also performs a song called "Shattered

Illusions" by Dillie Keene, "about when you meet a person and...then you get to know them and realize you're dating a freak." (He confesses, "I've had a pretty wild dating career, and so there's a whole section on screwy dates.")

Depending on the crowd at Wilf's—"the rowdier, the better," Nash says—he also hopes to sing a number about

masturbation ("Making Love Alone") that Bernadette Peters sang at Carnegie Hall. "A lot of my humor," he notes, "depends on how far in the 'off' position my editing button is."

Accompanying him is collaborator and fellow gay artist Richard Bower, who Nash calls "a genius on the piano." The two have been working together for about a year and find that their musical aesthetics mesh perfectly.

"I will be hitting my head trying to think of a number appropriate for a moment," says Nash, and Bower "will come up with the perfect one. He is absolutely brilliant at arranging and weaving songs together...to make these wonderful little packages."

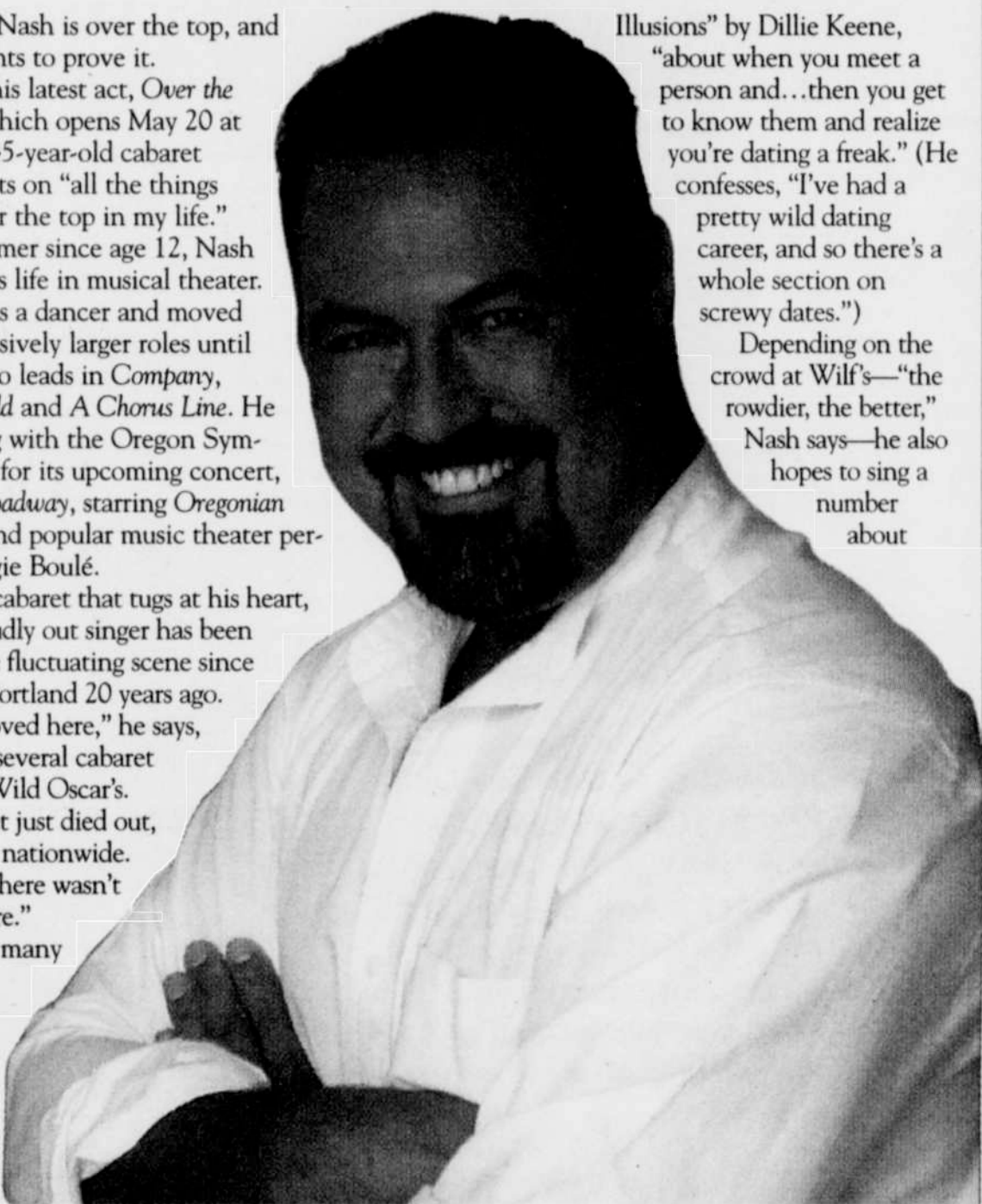
Nash cites Bernadette Peters as one of his favorite performers because she is "a powerhouse. Her comedic timing is flawless, and then she can turn around and be very introspective."

Another performer he admires is Bette Midler. "This sounds like such a faggy thing to say, [but] I love her," he gushes. "She can get up there, and her voice can crack on the high notes or go flat, but it's honest and passionate. You don't care that she went flat. She fills her heart and her gut, and you are just with her."

And, like Midler, Nash knows that when he goes over the top, gay audiences will go right with him. 

STEVEN NASH performs *Over the Top* with Richard Bower 7:30 p.m. May 20 and 27 at Wilf's Restaurant & Piano Bar, 800 N.W. Sixth Ave. Admission is \$10. Make reservations at 503-223-0070.

FLOYD SKLAVER is a Portland free-lance writer and theater queen.



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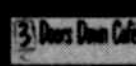
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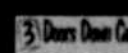
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