

Out-and-out gay: Eric Millegan

Eric Millegan is out and there's no stopping him. The baby-faced actor from Springfield refuses to be closeted and is riding the wave of openness toward gays in the entertainment industry.

He is co-starring in *On Line*, an independent film that explores the growing community of people who conduct most of their social and sexual lives at their computers. The film, which features two songs by Portland band Pink Martini, opens Sept. 26 at Hollywood Theatre.

Eric Allen Millegan was born in Hackensack, N.J., about 60 miles west of New York City. When he was 5 the family moved to Springfield, where his father attended the Eric Allen School of Journalism at nearby University of Oregon. "When I was growing up, it was a big joke that I was named after a journalism school," Millegan quips, "and my sister was named after Elvis' daughter, Lisa Marie."

Millegan describes an idyllic childhood in which the worst thing that happened was "when the ball went over the fence, there used to be a mean lady [next door] who wouldn't give it back." He started performing in local shows at around 7 and hasn't stopped since. "I was pretty ambitious once I started in theater," he says.

Urged on by his parents, Millegan and all five of his siblings studied piano from an early age. He auditioned for the Oregon Children's Choir when it was first forming and sang with the group for five or six years. "Everything I learned [there] was really important to me getting musical jobs now," he says.

As a child, he appeared in productions of *Amahl & the Night Visitors* and *Oliver!* and worked with the Mainstage Theater (now called the Downtown Cabaret Theater) in Eugene. "Even then it was always about putting more shows on my résumé."

Today, Millegan remains close to his family ("I love my family," he says, "and Christmas is about coming home and being with them") and they remain supportive of his career, flying to New York to watch him perform in *Jesus Christ Superstar* and spend-

ing time with Millegan's partner of five years, Charles, a coach and casting director for voice-overs.

Millegan says he came out to his family seven years ago and recounts the time he called home, finally determined to tell his parents he was gay. When one of his younger brothers answered and informed him that Mom and Dad weren't around, "I told him so I could tell somebody because I was fired up for it. He was very accepting, and we became closer."

Good thing because in *On Line*, his debut movie role, he plays a sexually confused college student who hooks up via the Internet with an older man. Millegan says their scenes together are especially moving because "it's about a young boy with an older man, which is never depicted in movies. It's not two Chelsea boys. These relationships are out there and yet we never see them."

When I ask if anyone else associated with *On Line* is gay, he tells me about John Fleck, who plays the older man. "[John's] gay in the movie and he's gay in real life," Millegan says, but catches himself. "There's an answer you should never give in an interview." Then he asks, "He is openly gay, isn't he?" (Note: Fleck is openly gay and gained national prominence as a performance artist in 1990 when he was one

of four artists, now collectively known as the NEA Four, whose grants were rescinded by the National Endowment for the Arts on the grounds that their work was obscene.)

For Millegan, being gay is unashamedly a part of who he is, although his attitude reflects the complexities of what it means to be out as a public figure. "I never have and never will make an announcement that I'm gay because I just am," he says. "Everybody knows."

When I first hear this, I am slightly concerned, especially since Millegan has already told me that among his role models and heroes is Nathan Lane, who finally came out publicly in 1999 after years of being coy about his sexuality. ("I would make a joke," Lane told *The Advocate* in his coming-out article, "not out of being closeted, but out of finding it difficult to discuss my personal life with total strangers.")

"I never have and never will make an announcement that I'm gay because I just am.... It's never going to be more of an issue than my height."

—Eric Millegan

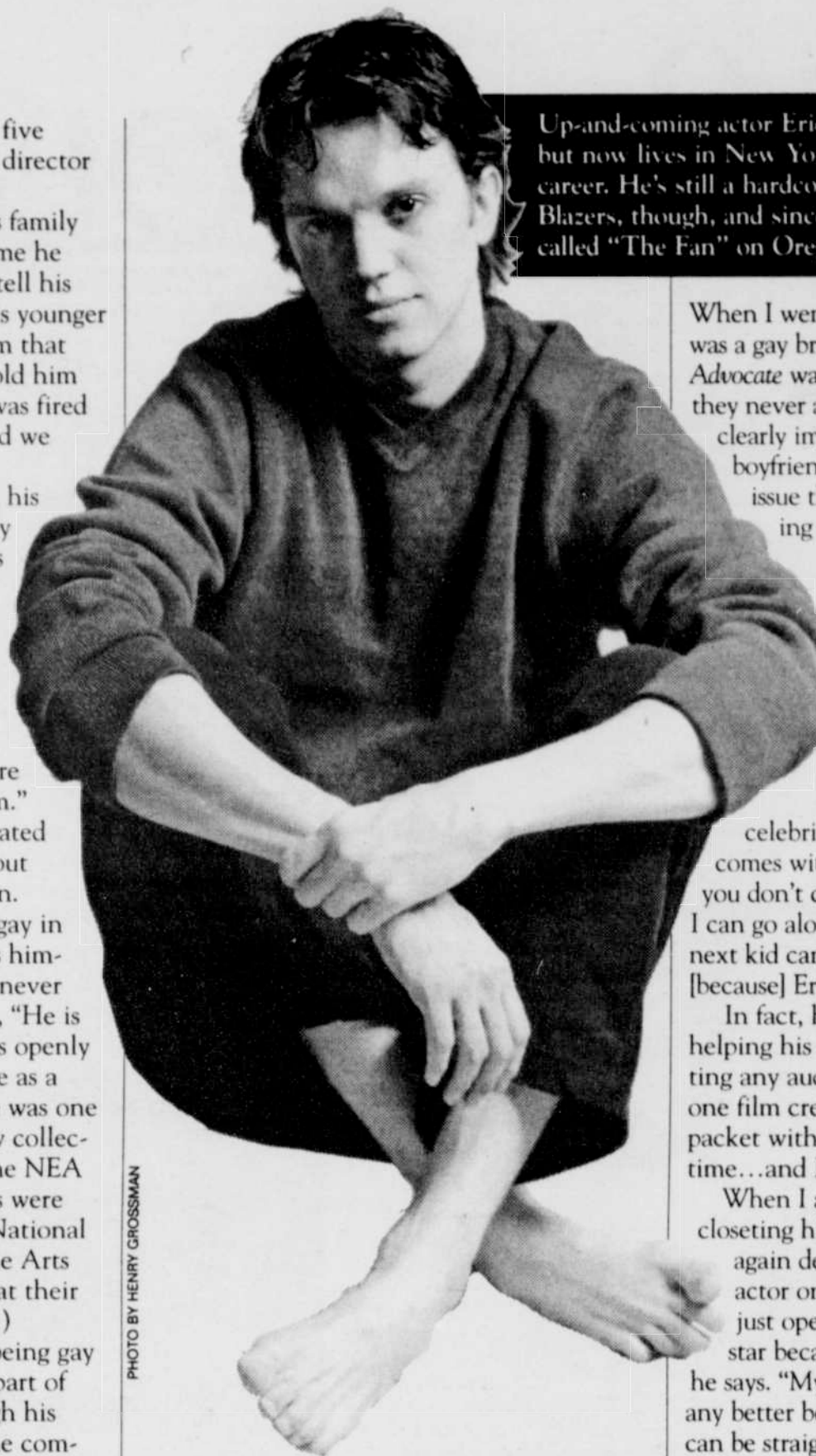


PHOTO BY HENRY GROSSMAN

Up-and-coming actor Eric Millegan grew up in Springfield but now lives in New York City as he pursues an acting career. He's still a hardcore supporter of the Portland Trail Blazers, though, and since 1999 has authored a column called "The Fan" on OregonLive.com.

When I went to Sundance [Film Festival] there was a gay brunch and I went to that. When *The Advocate* wanted to write the article [about me] they never asked the question...but the article clearly implied it by saying that I have a boyfriend. It's never going to be more of an issue than my height because there's nothing to announce. It's just what is."

Millegan continues: "I don't hold it against either Nathan or Rosie [O'Donnell] because they both got started at a time when things were completely different. They didn't grow up with everybody around, with Rosie and Nathan coming out before them." But clearly Millegan relishes his celebrity and the pioneering status that comes with it. "You do a disservice to gays if you don't come out," he says. "Hopefully, now I can go along and have a good career and the next kid can see it and say, 'I can come out [because] Eric Millegan did.'"

In fact, he says that being open is actually helping his career. "The only reason I'm getting any auditions," he says, "is because of this one film credit. My agent sends in a press packet with the *Advocate* article in it every time...and I'm getting auditions, even more."

When I ask whether he had ever considered closeting himself, Millegan's answers once again demonstrate the challenges facing an actor on this issue. "Opportunities don't just open up and you become a big movie star because you lie about your sexuality," he says. "My friends in the closet are not doing any better because they're in the closet. You can be straight and not get jobs."

Still, he is honest enough to admit: "If I were a huge superstar, people would care more.... It's pretty easy for me now, but let's see me get tested.... I don't know what I would do if I were offered \$2 million but told I couldn't mention Charles."

On the other hand, Millegan says: "I don't mind being pigeonholed into getting a paycheck. There are plenty of straight actors who only play straight roles. Are they pigeonholed? If I only played gay people for the rest of my career, would that be terrible? There are plenty of different kinds of gay characters. I could work for years." ■

FLOYD SKLAVER is a Portland free-lance writer. He can be reached at floydsklaver@comcast.net.

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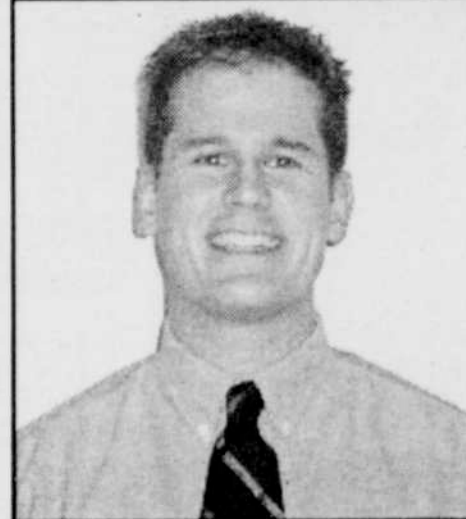
6700 SW 105th Ave., Suite 200 Beaverton, OR 97005
Toll Free (877) 826-9900 Fax (503) 297-0824
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