

DIVERSIONS

Out With It!

by Lisa Bradshaw

The music man

Remember how in *The Music Man*, flimflam artist Harold Hill blows into town and creates a miraculous marching band out of nothing, contrary to his original nefarious intentions? Well, Steven Couch already has one up on Harold. Couch's intentions are all good already, so imagine what could happen.

Couch has been hired as the new director of music at Metropolitan Church of Portland, and he makes his debut singing with the choir on Christmas Eve.

"MCC in Portland is on the verge of a lot of growth," says Couch from his soon-to-be-former Dallas home. "I'm very close to Glenna [MCC's the Rev. Glenna Shepherd]...her and I together can really make a difference in that church's growth. I would say that within a year it will be much larger—larger congregation, more outreach, doing more things in the community."

Shepherd worked with Couch two years ago when she was on staff at Dallas' Cathedral of Hope, the largest gay and lesbian church in the world (which disassociated with MCC last summer). Couch has been with Cathedral for nine years, working with the worship planning team and serving as principal organist, conductor of two vocal ensembles and orchestral arranger.

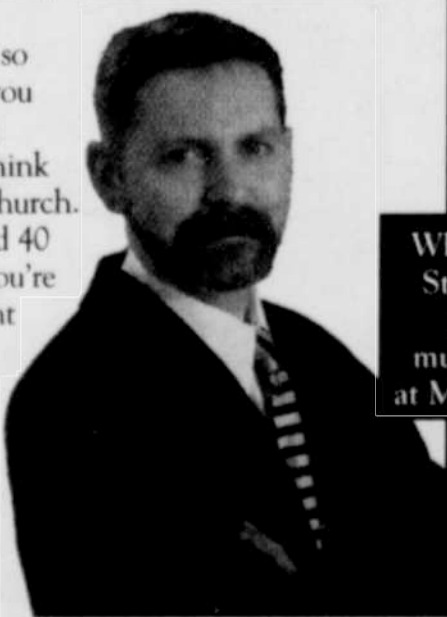
Shepherd saw Couch in Dallas last fall and told him she was about to hire a man from Florida for MCC Portland's music position. "Within a couple of weeks, the person in Florida decided that he wasn't ready to move," shares Shepherd. She called Couch. "When he answered, he said, 'I was expecting your call.' I think that Spirit was working in both places to bring this about!"

Couch spent a significant amount of time in Portland as a teen-ager because his favorite aunt, who is also a musician, lived here for about 15 years. In fact, it was in Portland that Couch had his first contact with the queer community. Seems his aunt has several gay and lesbian friends. "I wasn't clear that I was gay," he says, "but she was pretty clear with me that 'these people you just met are gay, and they're a couple.' I didn't know what to say at that point," he laughs.

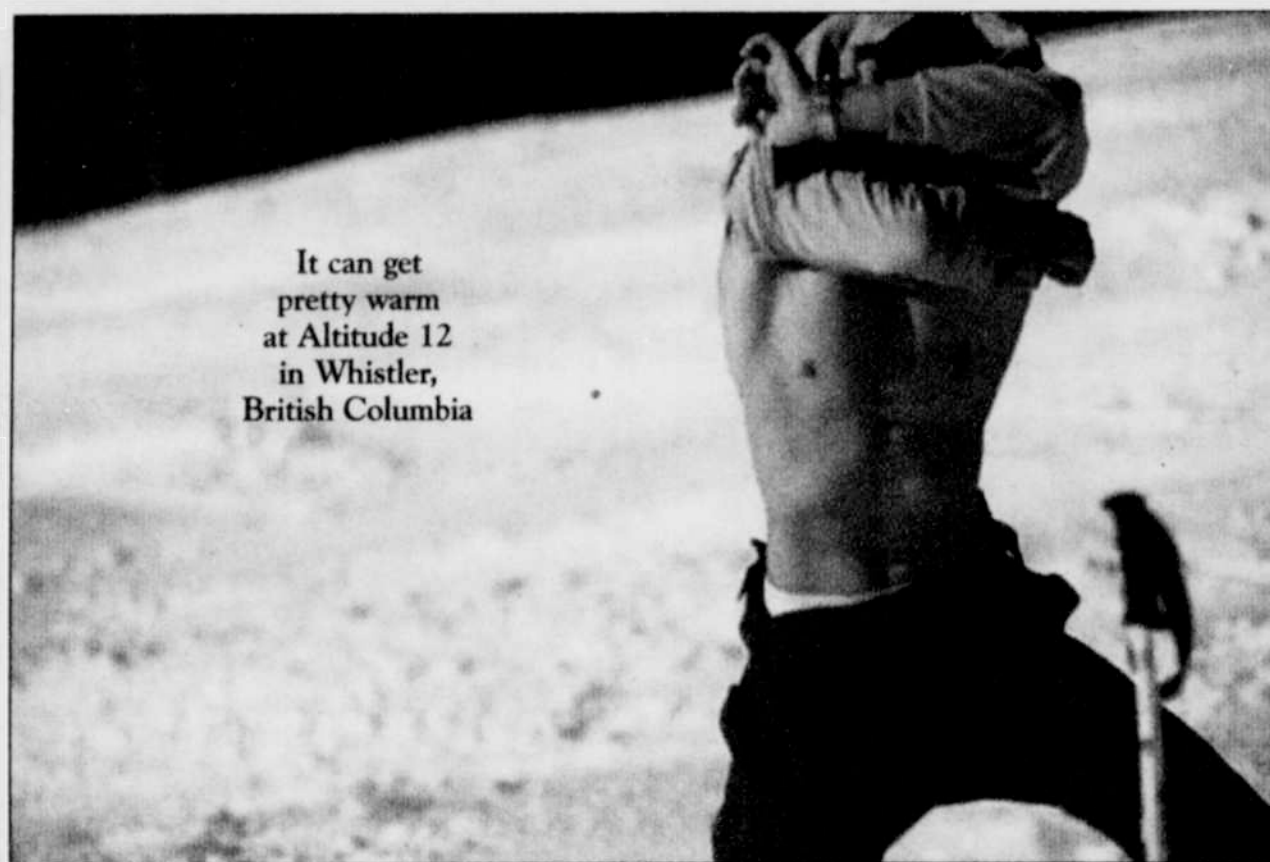
Now he says everything he needs to through music. "The role of music [in the church] is to create the mood or the setting for people to be in a mode to hear the word," he remarks. "It creates the drama for people to be able to hear whatever the message is."

Remember how at the end of *The Music Man*, Harold Hill winds up with Madame Marion the Librarian? Well, Couch is single, so maybe some of you library-type guys might want to think about going to church.

Couch turned 40 just this year. "You're not going to print that, are you!?" he screeches over speaker-phone. "OK, I'll let you. As long as my picture looks good, I'll let you." ☐



What a picture! Steven Couch takes over music direction at MCC Portland.



It can get pretty warm at Altitude 12 in Whistler, British Columbia

Because everybody needs a safe haven

Safe Haven, a benefit CD for the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center, is scheduled to hit the streets next spring.

The compilation will feature some of Portland's finest musical talent including Tamara J. Brown, Nicole Campbell, Anne Weiss and Lara Michell, to name a few.

Safe Haven is the brainchild of Dale Schiff, queer owner of Haven, a coffee shop on Southeast Division Street. When she heard that SMYRC was having financial troubles and might close, she says she "felt compelled to do something."

As former program director for Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Services in Los Angeles, Schiff believes sexual minority youth are a greatly underserved population. "I felt that if SMYRC were to go away, it would leave a great void in the community."

Schiff funded the CD and was involved in all aspects of the project. She contacted the musicians, scheduled the recordings (with donated studio time from Jackpot Studios), worked with the sound engineer and oversaw the artwork. All proceeds will benefit SMYRC. Schiff won't recoup any costs. "It's a donation," she says.

SMYRC development director and singer/songwriter Ashleigh Flynn has also been actively involved in the project. Besides donating a track, she's been attempting to round up national talent for inclusion on the CD. So far she's hearing positive responses from the likes of Tegan and Sara, Catie Curtis and the Indigo Girls.

"SMYRC has struggled to become financially solvent over the past five years, and community support like that offered by Dale...makes a huge difference!" exclaims Flynn. "All queer youth deserve a safe haven where they can learn new skills and develop a sense of self-confidence.... We are lucky to have this resource here. It makes for a better community for all."

Skiers go down fast

Grab your pole and go to Out on the Slopes' Altitude 12, one of the largest gay and lesbian ski/snowboard weeks in North America, drawing more than 3,000 queers Feb. 1 to 9 to Whistler, British Columbia, site of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

The week is snow-packed with more than 30 events, parties and activities, including a movie-and-martini night, a mountaintop fondue dinner, a women's wine-and-spa day, races, scavenger hunts, snowshoeing, dog sledding, eco-tours, a poolside beach party and even a fashion show.

Capping the event, however, is the DJ

dance party Snow Ball, to be held at the Telus Whistler Conference Centre in the heart of Whistler Village.

And since this is British Columbia, snow bunnies who are also snuggle bunnies can tie the knot and consider this their ultimate gay honeymoon.

For details on Altitude 12, visit www.outontheslopes.com. Another helpful site is www.whistlergayweddings.com, you know, just in case you're interested.

Finger-lickin' good

"Because in the depths of the winter, the best we can do to keep warm is come together and shake our collective booty." Words to live by, really—spoken by Sue Burns, manager of *In Other Words*, in reference to the nonprofit bookstore's upcoming Dec. 26 benefit concert at McMenamins White Eagle, 836 N. Russell St.

Portland queer musicians Tamara J. Brown, who spearheaded the event, and Ashleigh Flynn will perform. Brown, who sounds uncannily like Ani DiFranco (sounds like a cliché, but wait until you hear her), promises an "outta control, aggressive and politically finger-lickin' good" time.

"It's a great chance to hear powerful music," says Brown, "help out our sistas at *In Other Words* and hang out with all the cool kids, 'cause they'll all be there."

The show starts at 9:30 p.m. and costs \$8 at the door.

PCS fights AIDS

During its run of gay authors David Sedaris' *The Santaland Diaries* and Truman Capote's *A Christmas Memory*, Portland Center Stage is collecting donations for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS,

the nation's largest nonprofit AIDS fund-raising and grant-making organization, based in New York.

At its Nov. 30 dress rehearsal, PCS reports more than 200 people raised \$307. Heck, we can do better than that. At \$2 each, you could shoot that up to

Portland Center Stage collects money to fight AIDS during *The Santaland Diaries*

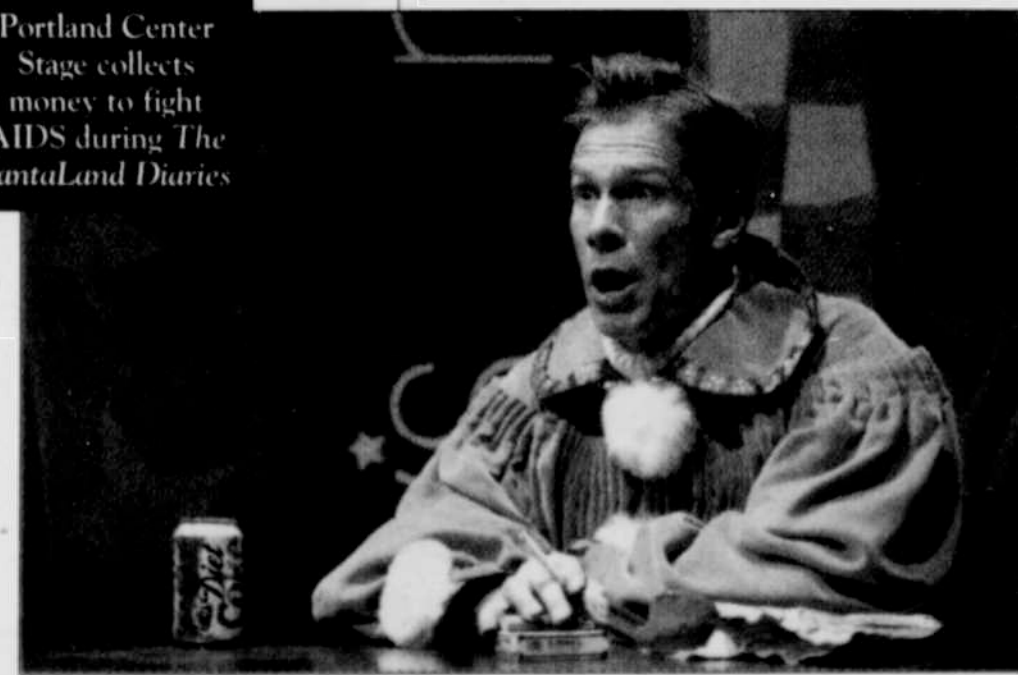


PHOTO BY OWEN CAREY

\$400 a night, so take some dollar bills along.

PCS revived the onstage double bill this year after its success in 2002. Gay California actor Steve Wilkerson stars in both of the one-man shows.

Series of queers

Two big queer stories on cable TV: the premiere of HBO's heralded adaptation of the Pulitzer- and Tony-winning two-part play *Angels in America* and Showtime's premiere of the lesbian drama *The L Word*.

Directed by Mike Nichols (*The Graduate*, *The Birdcage*) from Tony Kushner's own adapted script, *Angels in America* has taken the media by storm, eliciting ravishing reviews from both queer and mainstream press across the country. The production boasts a venerable cast including Meryl Streep, Al Pacino, Emma Thompson and Mary-Louise Parker.

Kushner wrote the epic, which is actually two full-length plays, in the early '90s. Centered around two very different men with AIDS, it's considered by many critics to be the best stage work of the past decade.

HBO showed part one, "Millennium Approaches," Dec. 7 and part two, "Perestroika," Dec. 14 but will repeat them in six "chapters" beginning Dec. 22. In addition, the network will air both parts back-to-back Jan. 3.



HBO's adaptation of *Angels in America* airs to raves

Down the dial at Showtime, *The L Word*, TV's first lesbian-themed drama, will premiere Jan. 18. Like *Queer as Folk*, *The L Word* stars mostly straight but certainly all gorgeous actresses (save for the authentically queer Leisha Hailey, formerly of the band The Murmurs, now with the band Gush).

Jennifer Beals (*Flashdance*) stars in the pioneering series as a woman in an LTR with Laurel Holloman, the cute blonde from *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*. ☐

Compiled by LISA BRADSHAW, TIMOTHY KRAUSE and JAMIE BOLDYARD