

Mark Setlock can dish it out with the best of 'em. The gay New York City actor is in town through the end of May to star in *Fully Committed*, a one-man show about an upscale Manhattan restaurant that's been selling out Winningstad Theatre like mad. (The title refers to a haughty term some restaurants use when they're fully booked.)

Setlock first tackled the multifaceted role when the show opened five years ago in New York, and he went on to win the Outer Critics Circle Award for best solo performance in 2000. He portrays more than two dozen characters, including a conceited chef, disgruntled customers and a few bitchy queens. In addition to acting, he's directing Portland Center Stage's run of the production.

With his shaved head and well-manicured goatee, Setlock has the look of a poet on open mike night. For a powerhouse performer who ends shows by shaking his booty to Prince songs, he is surprisingly soft-spoken and shy in person.

Fully Committed is a slight but highly engaging comedy, and its success stems from Setlock's uncanny ability to mimic the good, the bad and the ugly faces of human nature.

As a mimic, the Ohio native says he walks a fine line between imitation and mockery. "I've crossed the line of cruelty many times," he confesses. His targets have ranged from everyday folks like teachers and Gap employees to cultural icons like Dr. Ruth Westheimer and Jimmy Stewart.

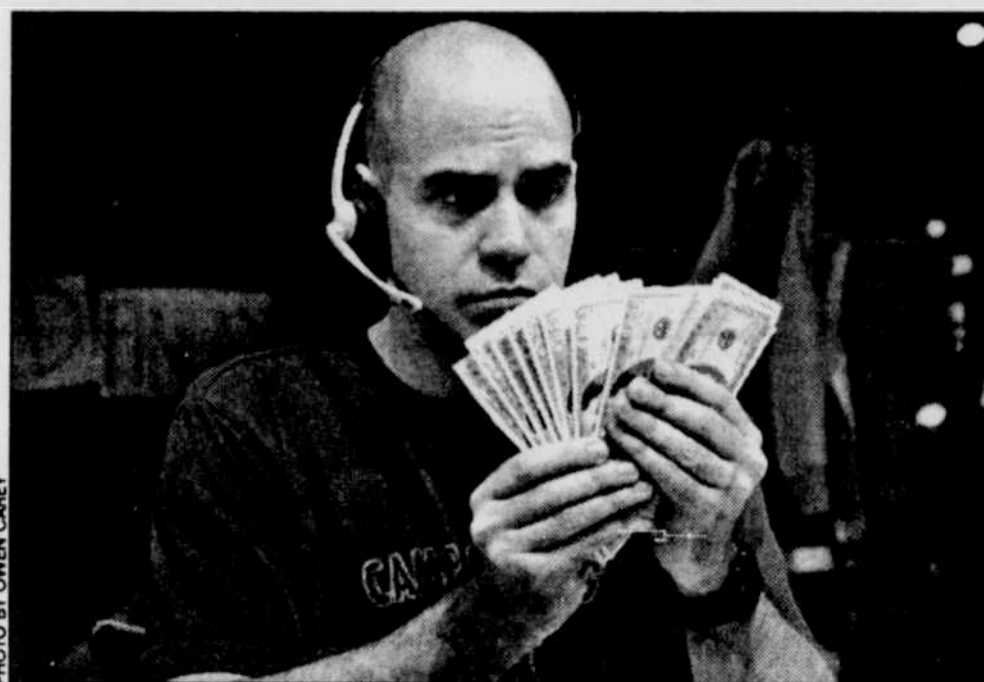
Setlock, 35, helped playwright Becky Mode develop the cast of characters for *Fully Committed*. He drew on his experiences at Bouley, a chic Manhattan restaurant where he worked in the early '90s.

Filled with personality switches, the play at

A commitment worth making

Mark Setlock's two dozen characters make hundreds of happy Portlanders

BY STEPHEN BLAIR



Gay New York actor Mark Setlock exhibits multiple personality disorder during Portland Center Stage's *Fully Committed*

times resembles a day in the life of Sybil. It clocks in at a mere 70 minutes, but viewers feel like they're working overtime to keep up with Setlock.

Portland Center Stage artistic director Chris Coleman notes Setlock's performance is seamless. "You never see how he makes the transition between the characters. They seem to sort of pop out of him of their own accord."

And all are very distinct. Sam, a 20-some-

thing who books reservations in the dingy restaurant basement, is the main character. All he wants to do is figure out a way to make it home for Christmas in the Midwest, but armies of caustic customers and impatient supervisors drown him in complaints and demands.

Characters change as fast as machine-gun fire. "Sometimes I wonder how he keeps the right person coming at the right moment—and when he finds time to take a breath," Coleman adds.

Setlock's New York theater credits include *Rent*, in which he was the understudy for Angel, the drag queen. "I'm not a pretty woman," he smiles. Earlier this year, he appeared in the play *Roulette* with former *Saturday Night Live* cast member Ana Gasteyer.

Setlock says his success onstage hinges on the response. "It's easy when the audience is enthusiastic." He prefers Portland crowds to the fidgety theatergoers he has experienced on the East Coast.

From the audiences to the natural scenery, Setlock is enjoying his first visit to the Pacific Northwest. Between rehearsals and performances he has found time to hike in the Columbia Gorge and to take a field trip to Cannon Beach.

But Portland's gay night life, he says, leaves a lot to be desired. "I'm staying near Vaseline Alley—I know all the lingo. But all the bars seem like a slice of *Queer as Folk*. I prefer low-key bars, like the ones in the East Village in New York."

Setlock takes a minute to muse on his likes and dislikes of other queer actors. "I have a lot of respect for anyone who's fearless about their sexuality," he says. "I have a lot of respect for Rupert Everett. Rosie's obnoxious, but I'm glad that she finally came out. And I love Ellen."

Conversely, he calls Kevin Spacey the "anti-role model" for the queer community. "It's well-known in theater circles that he's gay, and yet he denies it."

After the Portland run, Setlock plans to spend the summer doing Shakespeare in Williamstown, Mass. He is also developing a project about fetishes based on Dan Savage's "Savage Love" column.

"I've never been a very driven or ambitious person," he says simply. "I just like to act and do things that are good." ■

Tickets are going fast for Portland Center Stage's *FULLY COMMITTED* through May 30 at Winningstad Theatre, 1111 S.W. Broadway. Get them now for \$16-\$51 from 503-274-6588.

STEPHEN BLAIR is a Portland free-lance writer.



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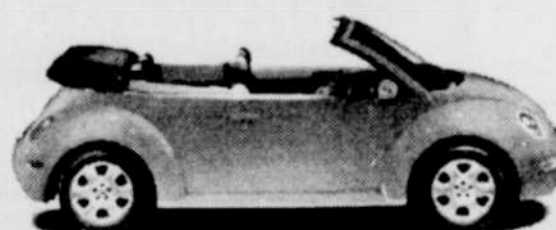
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