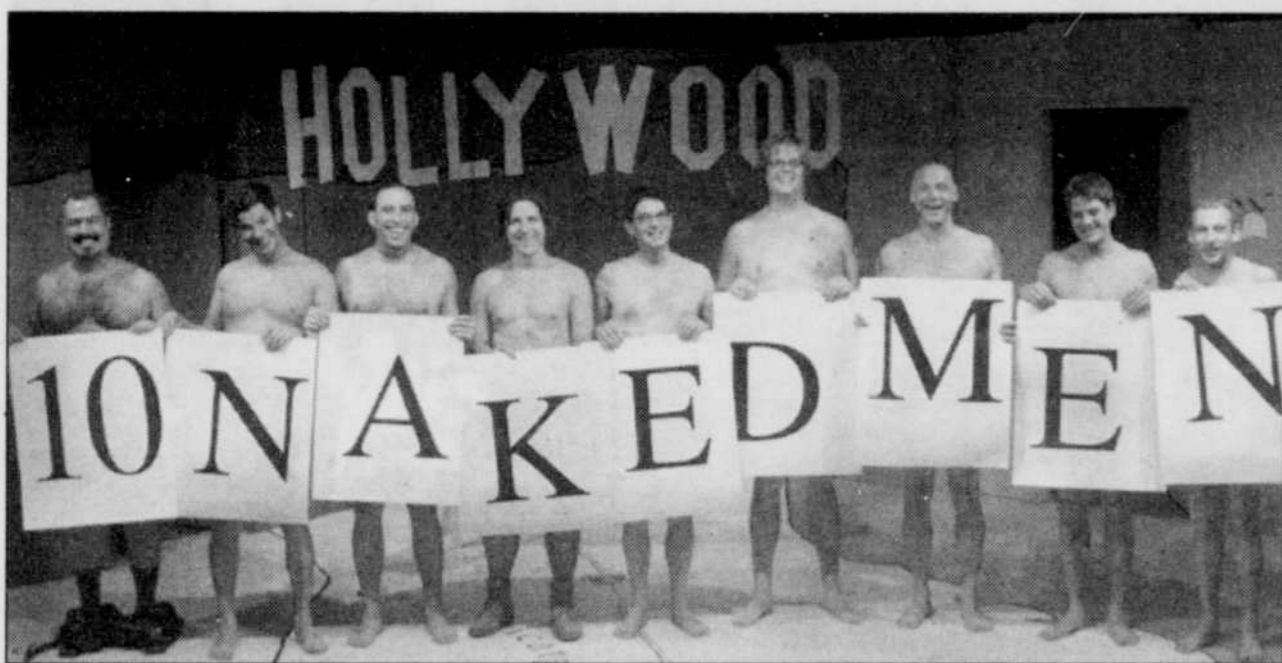


THEATER

Disrobing and disarming

triangle exposes the hearts and minds of *10 Naked Men*

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE



A cast of Portland's finest tail, er, talent graces the stage through June 26 at Theater! Theatre!

Men typically have two things on their minds: money and sex. So it's not surprising that the two hook up in the midst of *10 Naked Men*, a funny and raunchy off-Broadway comedy about hustling in Hollywood that kicks off the Summer Pride Series from triangle productions!

Sex, skin and self-scrutiny mingle to make *10 Naked Men* the summer's must-gawk for gay boys and fag hags—a rousing riot that is provocative in more ways than one.

Written by Ronnie Larsen (*Making Porn, Peep Show*) and directed by triangle founder Donald I. Horn, *10 Naked Men* retells the familiar story of hometown hopeful facing big-city temptations while learning a few truths about life along the way. Only in this case, the truth echoes my best bud's long-held credo that "it all boils down to the wiener."

Fresh from college, aspiring actor Robert gradually sheds his Portland naiveté when he moves to West Hollywood with best friend Kenny to begin a career in the entertainment industry. Alternating between beating the pavement and beating off, Robert eventually closets his thespian dreams and joins man's daily hunt for sex and work.

Our earnest hero—repeatedly labeled as "too stagy" and "too fat"—ends up with a two-timing agent who trades him off to lick a one-line ice cream spot. Then, in probably the play's most comical scene, Robert fingers the back pages of *Frontiers* to browse escort ads that trumpet "Gymnast," "Air Borne Ranger" and "Sicilian Meat" before he sheepishly calls an ex-con rapist for hire.

Although the lives of the play's 10 characters are threaded around Robert's search for a buck and a fuck, *10 Naked Men* is really a comedy of manners about prostitution in all senses of the word. In L.A., Robert quickly learns that no one feels like they belong and that we're all for sale. Any job is prostitution. What (and who) we'll do in exchange for money is limited only by the depth of our desire—above all, to feel wanted, even though some, like Kenny, firmly believe some business deals cross moral lines.

To our voyeuristic pleasure, the evening lives up to its promise of bare booties and full frontals, but the title is equally a metaphor for revealing the humanity beneath our horniness. As much as we fondle the men's foibles, we know they reveal larger themes of love and lust, monogamy and infidelity, judgment and acceptance, while more than once seeking the value

of desire: Do you love me? Would you fuck me if I didn't pay you? How much does monogamy cost? And what's the difference between working for a bank and working over the banker?

Still, *10 Naked Men* never takes itself so seriously that it can't milk a guy for laughs.

Though a little off-the-rack, Horn has redressed his latest venture smartly in layers, tailoring the familiar riffs on L.A. life while lifting the hems of local institutions, such as the cloaked University of Portland, tatty Club XES and others. The story's cleverly fashioned staging and brisk pace deliver constant laughs, entangled encounters, a smidge of sentiment and a dose of reality.

The dynamic ensemble is equally well-balanced. Todd Pozycycki (*Chicken Soup for the Hole*), who plays Robert with a reassuring genuineness, proves wholeheartedly that the still waters of nice guys often run deep and murky—and that real characters can be stereotypically comic while charismatically complex.

Equally engaging is Michael Teufel (*Shopping and Fucking*) as Kenny, who eventually exposes a hurting heart hidden beneath his ever-optimistic, gay Everyboi. And the Vivian Vance award for perfect sidekick must go to Michael DeMaio for his portrayal of a director's pissy assistant, giving fresh meaning to sucking up.

Kelsey Tyler's (*Judy's Scary Little Christmas*) charming and stripped-down portrayal of Steve, an escort who hides the fact from suitor Kenny, and Drew Barrios' tenderly brutal ex-con both illustrate real lives behind command performances as men on call.

Similarly, Todd Chatalas' (*Hedwig and the Angry Inch*) goofy Richard sympathetically explores the mutual vulnerabilities of performing for the camera and for a john. Frequent cabaret crooner Steven Nash keeps things humming along as a domineering-by-day, submissive-by-night commercial director, while Joe Healy and Brian Wilson, as opposing entertainment industry agents, fuel the fire of manipulation when they treat everyone as a commodity to trade.

Sex sells, it's true, and *10 Naked Men* can really hustle. **✪**

10 NAKED MEN plays 8 p.m. Thursday to Saturday through June 26 at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. Tickets are \$25-\$30 from 503-239-5919 or www.tripro.org.

TIMOTHY KRAUSE believes sex, like education and health care, ought to be free and universal. Contact him at timkra@millenicom.com.

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