

THEATER

Acting out

Anthony Rapp brings refreshing candor to stage and screen

BY FLOYD SKLAVER

Gay actors come out about as often as President Bush admits mistakes. So the openness of actor Anthony Rapp, who stars in *Little Shop of Horrors* at Keller Auditorium, is not only refreshing but downright heroic. The 33-year-old veteran of four Broadway shows and 18 films (including *Six Degrees of Separation* and *A Beautiful Mind*) is openly gay and refuses to be any other way.

"The younger generation just doesn't seem to care," says the compact strawberry blond, who rocketed to fame as Roger in the original Broadway cast of *Rent*. "If an actor is straight and married, that doesn't stop them from having fans just because they're inaccessible. God knows there are lots of straight men that gay men are fans of."

That kind of candor is refreshing from an actor, especially one who has worked as much as Rapp. (He landed his first movie role at 17.) Perhaps it's because he's a character actor and not a leading man. "In my case, because I have a pretty diverse career and an established résumé, [being gay] probably doesn't affect me as much as a young actor who wants to be on the WB network," he laughs.

Even as a youth, Rapp was open about his sexuality. "I've always been 30 percent bisexual, so I didn't get in my head or freaked out about it until my late teens," he says.

At that time, he was outed to his parents after being caught with an older boy. "I was very strong with my mom about it," he admits. "It wasn't about identity. I just wanted to do it, and I didn't have any problems with it."

In 1991, while performing in a play by Larry Kramer, Rapp found himself so moved by the AIDS activist's convictions "that I just wanted to stand up and say something." So he made a point of naming and thanking his male partner in his bio.

"It didn't get any attention," he continues, "but then I did another play and one of the



Anthony Rapp makes a Faustian pact with a plant to win the heart of the girl he loves in *Little Shop of Horrors*

editors from *Out* magazine saw my bio and asked me to do an interview."

Since then, Rapp has been out, vocal and proud. "Visibility can be the biggest deterrent of bad treatment," he says.

Determined to be a role model for young kids and to show other actors that you can be open and not ruin your career, Rapp spent time with a queer youth group while filming *Dazed and Confused* 12 years ago in Austin, Texas. Yet he found himself inspired by the bravery of these out teens and by a poster they had on the wall. It read: "There's only one you for all times. Fearlessly be yourself." [E]

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS plays Oct. 19 to 24 at Keller Auditorium, 222 S.W. Clay St. Tickets are \$23-\$64 from 503-241-1802 or Ticketmaster.

Love and Marriage

David Mamet meets Oscar Wilde in CoHo's latest play

BY FLOYD SKLAVER

Boston marriage, n. A 19th century term used to describe a long-term, intimate, sometimes discreetly sexual relationship between two women. Perhaps after the devoted women pairs depicted in Henry James' 1886 novel *The Bostonians*.

With gay weddings actually taking place in Massachusetts, the term "Boston marriage" has taken on a whole new meaning. Those in such relationships were unrelated but lived together with no male support. While some were platonic, many were thought to be intimate. Now, CoHo Productions brings Pulitzer Prize winner David Mamet's *Boston Marriage* to Portland audiences.

Mamet, who has been credited with reinventing American theatrical language, generally uses terse, cryptic and often profane dialogue (widely known as "Mametspeak") that's marked by a staccato, highly stylized rhythm. His best-known plays revolve around macho male characters in grungy settings.

In *Boston Marriage*, however, he has taken a page from Oscar Wilde and replaced grunge

with elegance and gritty verbal exchanges with highbrow parlor talk. Yet, despite the mannered and clever repartee, protagonists Anna and Claire, two scheming ladies of fashion, are as much con artists as the hustlers in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

Anna, the elder of the two, funds their lavish lifestyle by becoming the mistress of a wealthy man who showers her with cash as well as an enormous emerald. Meanwhile, her lover Claire is infatuated with a younger woman whose arrival sets off a crisis that puts the valuable emerald and the women's future at risk.

The purpose of drama, Mamet wrote in a 1988 essay, is to remind us that "we live in an extraordinarily debauched, interesting, savage world." In *Boston Marriage*, estrogen and ego make an explosive mix. [E]

BOSTON MARRIAGE plays Oct. 29 to Dec. 4 at CoHo Theater, 2257 N.W. Raleigh St. Just Out night is Nov. 12. Tickets are \$19-\$21 from 503-220-COHO.

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