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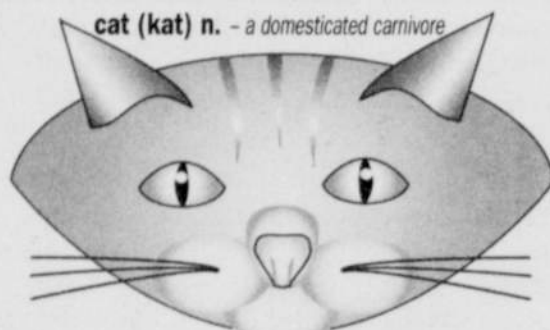
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Arabic elegance

Have a night of drinks and conversation in Northeast Portland's newest bar, **Zaytoon**. The establishment is named after the Arabic word for "olive," reflecting the owner's heritage.

Aysha Ghazoul, 32, has been living in Portland for 11 years, but she is originally from Iraq and grew up in a small village in England. Despite intolerance in some Middle Eastern countries toward queers, Ghazoul says she grew up in a progressive country with liberal and supportive parents.

"Iraq was very forward-thinking in the '70s. In Iraq, gays and lesbians are accepted but not discussed," she says.

Multiculturalism in her own family was the subject of the documentary *My American Grandmother*, a film Ghazoul made while she attended the Northwest Film Center. The film is about her grandmother, who was a showgirl in Texas. The movie aired on Oxygen for two years.

Despite a lack of business experience, Ghazoul says she is prepared to risk it all for Zaytoon.

"Of course it's nerve-racking because you want to be a success, but when you have parents like mine who are so incredibly supportive, I was raised that it's good to take risks. If it's not a success, I've still got me, and my family and my friends are all I need in my life," she says.

Her parents have flown in from England to support Ghazoul's opening. Her father and a family friend are investors in the bar.

Although Ghazoul is a lesbian, she says she is not trying to create a women's establishment. The feel of the spacious bar is elegant in cool wood and steel.

"Conversation is the most important thing for me," says Ghazoul. She plans to project student films on the wall, has built shelves to display Last Thursday art pieces and would like to host small folk and jazz bands, but she wants to keep the noise level mild to promote chatting.

The menu reflects Ghazoul's Middle Eastern heritage, with Lebanese food and desserts.

"They will never try a better baklava in their life," says Ghazoul of dessert chef **Jennifer Stevenson's** creations.

Although the muddled specialty drink menu carries pricey elixirs, Ghazoul says her beers (four on tap) and mixed drinks are cheaper than downtown establishments.

Zaytoon, billed as "a new kind of bar," opens Aug. 21 at 2236 N.E. Alberta St. Its daily hours are 5 p.m. to 1 a.m.

—Jaymee R. Cuti

Parking with Shakespeare

Gay actor **Dan Ruiz** has never played a gay character before.

"Of the few gay playwrights in the modern canon, like Tony Kushner and Terrence McNally, I don't fit their parts."

Ruiz, who is the marketing director for Miracle Theatre, attributes this misfortune to his bodily bulk.

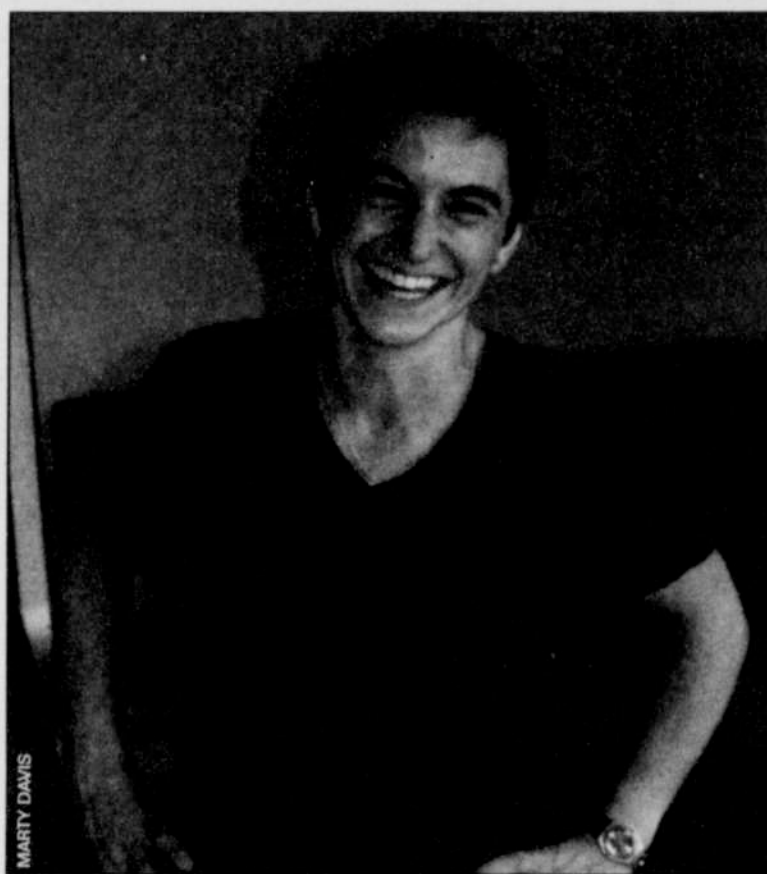
"It's a shame," he says. "I'm still waiting for a theater to do Nicky Silver's *The Food Chain* [a dark comedy about an overweight gay man] and let an actor play the character without a fat suit." This character even strips at the end, and Ruiz is willing to go the distance.

Until that day rolls around, Ruiz has his hands full with no less than two roles in

DIVERSIONS

Portland Actors Ensemble's production of *As You Like It*, which will be performed gratis in various outdoor locations through Labor Day as part of this year's Shakespeare in the Park series.

Willamette Week said the show "sucks eggs" but singled out Ruiz for giving two hilarious performances as the dandyish LeBeau and a lovesick shepherd named Silvius.



Aysha Ghazoul promises affordable drinks and the best baklava at her new bar, **Zaytoon**, opening Aug. 21.

In defense of the play, Ruiz says: "Our mission is to provide free theater to people who wouldn't otherwise go. This is the first taste of theater for many families and kids. This experience is traditional and accessible, with a clean, direct representation of the text."

As *You Like It* is a playful tale of cross-dressing and mistaken identities, set in the Eden-like Forest of Arden. Ruiz explains that one of his characters, LeBeau, is never explicitly identified as gay. But this production "queers" him in the sense that he wears lacy clothing and swooningly speaks about a male wrestler.

Ruiz, a New Orleans native, moved to Portland in 2002 to pursue a master's degree in fine arts and directing at University of Portland. Though his all-time favorite Shakespeare plays are *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Tempest*, his thesis is on the ultimate battle of the sexes, *The Taming of the Shrew*.

He's a big fan of *As You Like It*, too. "It sends the message that life is as you want it to be," he says. "There's lots of ambiguity and androgyny."

As You Like It plays 3 p.m. Aug. 20 and 21 at Gabriel Park, Southwest 45th Avenue and Nevada Court; Aug. 27 and 28 at Fernhill Park, Northeast 41st Avenue and Holman

Street; and Sept. 3 to 5 at Reed College, Southeast Woodstock Boulevard and Reed College Place. Visit www.portlandactors.com for more info.

—Stephen Blair

Sweet hearts

Sweet Thunder is a three-woman jazz band that recently released its first full-length CD of original music, *Kinship*.

Pianist **Kiera O'Hara**, bassist **Mary Steele** and drummer **Wendy McGinnis** have been playing together since 1999. O'Hara and Steele met at a session for another Portland musician's CD. When O'Hara decided she wanted to develop some of her own material, she asked Steele to join her. Then they added McGinnis, whom Steele knew through Rose City Swing. They played around with some music, decided it sounded pretty good and went on from there to create their own group and produce a CD.

While performing live, Sweet Thunder plays a mix of original and standard jazz material. "When we play the standards, we play pretty much like a straight-ahead jazz trio," says McGinnis. "But the originals are a little bit harder to categorize. They're definitely based in jazz with some Latin thrown in. They are their own kind of thing."

O'Hara creates the original tunes, with the final product being a collaborative effort. "They're mostly in her head," explains McGinnis. "She brings in a tune and plays it for us. Then Mary adds her bass, and they go back and forth. Then I add the drum part."

Sweet Thunder has played at a variety of events including concerts, private parties, banquets, art gallery openings, commitment ceremonies, Portland Pride and a few weddings when Multnomah County issued marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

During live performances, Steele is happiest when the band is "really communicating musically and we have an audience that is sharing in that experience."

For McGinnis, there is nothing quite like jazz. "Because of the nature of jazz, there is a set form, but within that form, there's improving, so every time is different," she explains. "And so sometimes when we are communicating musically with each other, this synergy happens that is kind of indescribable. It's just...an incredible joy—the fact that we are creating something together and every time a kind of different thing develops."

Sweet Thunder will perform 2 p.m. Aug. 21 at Tryon Creek State Park, 11321 S.W. Terwilliger Blvd.

—Pat Young

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Dan Ruiz steals scenes in *As You Like It*, part of this year's Shakespeare in the Park series.