

theater

Two Boards and a Passion

New theater company has simplicity at its core

by Jaymee R. Cuti

In the midst of a fall theater slump, with most independent theaters unable to fill houses, a new company has emerged with values that could draw like-minded progressives out of the bars and back to the playhouse.

With painful awareness that the cost of a night at the theater might turn off Portland's youth, Jamie Lynne Powell-Herbold of 2Boards Productions has set ticket prices low to compete with cinema and live music.

This fourth-generation Oregonian, who has been involved with theater in some form since the age of 6, launched his own company based on a few guiding principles.

"The idea of simple theater, that theater is two boards and a passion, has always interested me," says Powell-Herbold, who is bisexual.

Powell-Herbold graduated from Whitman College with a degree in theater. He has worked both on stage and behind the scenes in various capacities including as set designer, carpenter, sound designer, stage manager, master electrician, production manager, director and producer and has stage combat training from Dueling Arts International.

His company, which started in the summer with William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, vows to produce plays that are simply designed and richly performed. Its next show, *Dog Opera* by Constance Congdon, opens Thanksgiving weekend.

This second-generation AIDS play, where AIDS is a factor but not the focus, can be described as *Will & Grace* with depth.

"It's a lovely story about people. On a very human level, people can connect to it regardless of who they are," says Ginnie Sutfin, a 2Boards board member who directed the company's maiden production. "I leave the play appreciating that we as people can go through these emotions and feel these feelings—be they extreme pain, extreme joy, loss and the blessing of friendship."

Sutfin holds a master of fine art degree in performance and leads the drama department at Valley Catholic High School.

"I moved to Portland with the idea that I wanted to



Jamie Lynne Powell-Herbold (inset) is keeping *Dog Opera* ticket prices low to draw younger audiences.

be involved with an independent theater company," she says. "Jamie and I think along the same lines artistically and aesthetically. When Jamie approached me to direct a Shakespeare play and to join a company, I was immediately on board."

Some of the values Sutfin and Powell-Herbold share include paying actors and championing the works of local playwrights, actors and directors.

"As a director, it can be hard to break in," Powell-Herbold says from experience. He has worked as a technician for some of the largest groups in town, including Portland Center Stage, Artists Repertory Theatre, BodyVox, Oregon Ballet Theatre, Miracle Theatre and Northwest Children's Theater, to name a few, and was the production manager of Profile

Theatre's 2002-2003 season. Yet when he directed his own pet project, *Trickster Tells This Story*, Powell-Herbold had to sign on as co-producer to make the show a reality.

"We are kind of a vehicle," Sutfin says. "We accept submissions from anybody, or if someone wants to focus on performing in a show, ideally we'll help find a director or designers and bring it to fruition."

The nonprofit theater company hopes to secure financing through grants, which will fund future projects as well as actors' stipends, another fundamental value of the company. "I want actors to know, your time is valuable to me and you are valuable to me," says Powell-Herbold.

Both he and Sutfin have set realistic goals for

2Boards: longevity and visibility. Powell-Herbold's ultimate aim, however, is much higher: "for the Portland theater scene to be as thriving as the Portland music scene." 10

DOG OPERA runs 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays from Nov. 25 to Dec. 18 at Theater Theatre, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. Tickets are \$10. Matinees are two-for-one, and Dec. 4 is "feed the actors" night, with all money coming through the door divided among the cast. For more information visit www.2boards.net.

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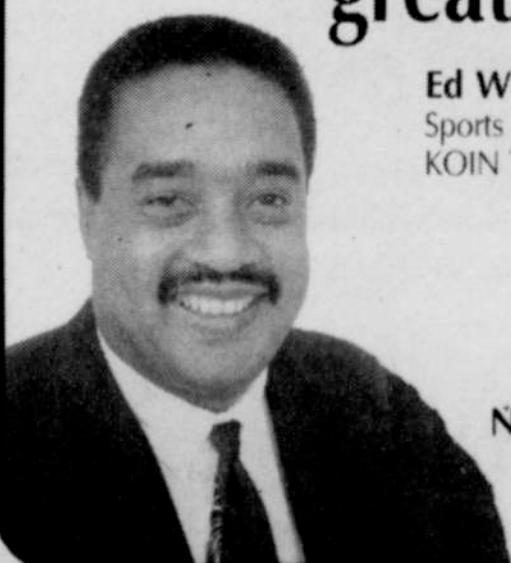
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