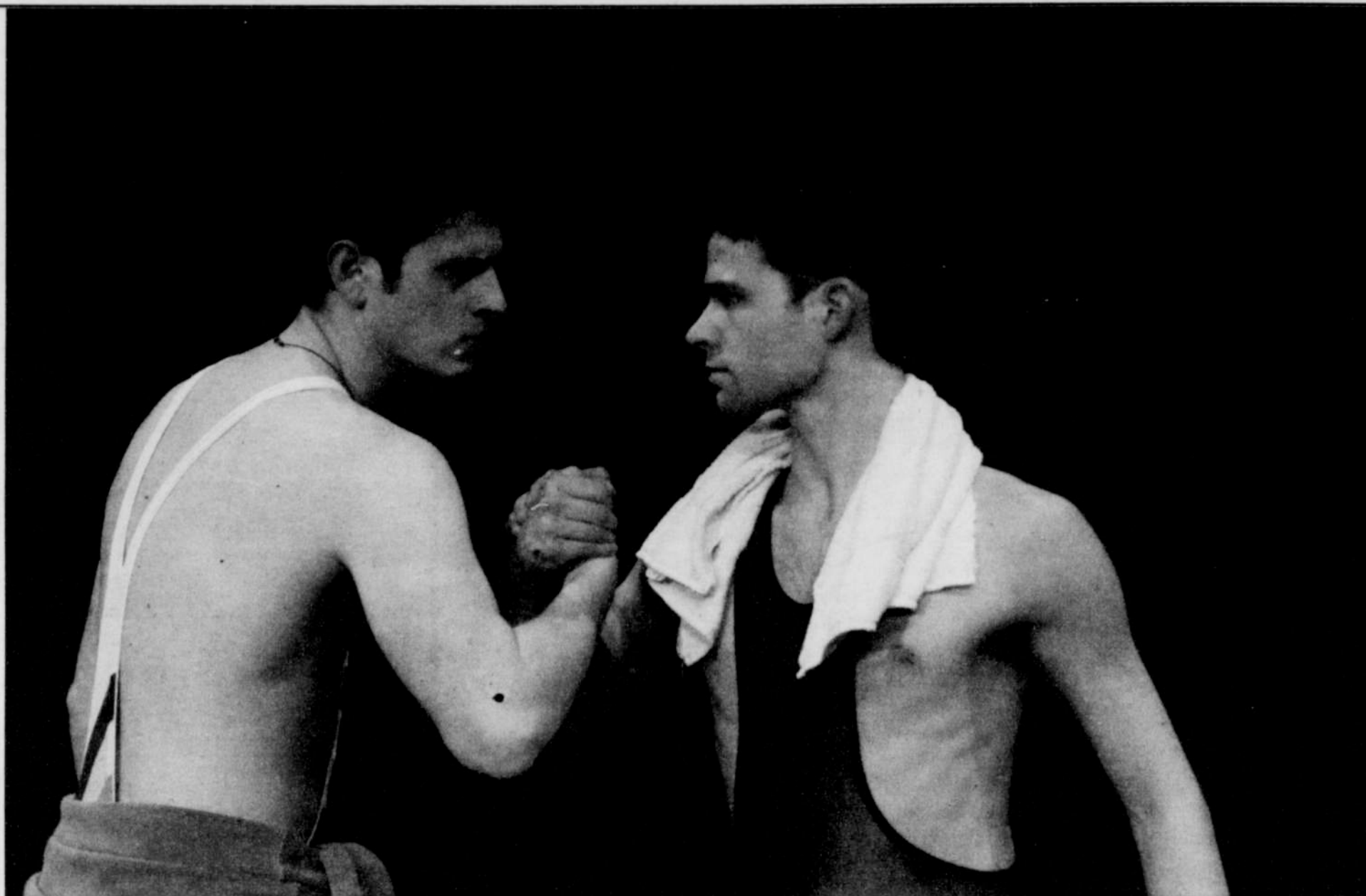


Tag Teen Wrestling



Luke (Jacob Stichman, left) and Matt (Ken Potts) find strength in friendship as their world crumbles under the weight of lies and gossip.

Northwest Children's Theater production pits teens' search for self-identity against the destructive power of rumors

by Timothy Krause • Photos by Annaliese Moyer

It's far from the warm-and-fuzzy world of *Frog & Toad*. Or even the flight of fantasy that was *Peter Pan*. And it's nowhere near the cream-pie-flinging mini-mobsters of *Bugsy Malone*.

No, Northwest Children's Theater is taking on something a little edgier when it kicks off *The Wrestling Season*, a drama that blows the whistle on eight teen-agers' search for identity and the peer pressure that accompanies it.

In Laurie Brooks' award-winning play, Matt (Ken Potts, 21) is pushing himself to excel on his high school wrestling team to the point of risking his own health by trying to qualify for a lower weight class. Threatened by the new competition, rival teammate Willy (Matt Miller, 16) spreads a rumor that Matt and best friend Luke (Jacob Stichman, 17) are gay, leading Matt to question his priorities and Luke to honestly consider his sexuality.

Meanwhile, Luke's friend and class goth-girl Kori (Allison Hergert, 17) wants to be accepted for who she is, not the way she looks, and Melanie (Kelsey Glasser, 17) is finding it hard to deal with a reputation for being "easy." High school chatter even chips away at the confident relationship of the senior power couple, Jolt (Alex Sorenson, 17) and Heather

(Danielle Poland, 17), when word gets around that Jolt might have been less than steady. Nicole (Hillary Marler, 16), on the other hand, has so little self-esteem that she agrees with everyone—and repeats whatever she hears.

Issues of not only homophobia but also date rape, anorexia and teen-age pregnancy play out among what are, arguably, adolescent archetypes familiar to anyone who went to high school. And yet, that's to the point: In *The Wrestling Season*, no one escapes the pain of simplistic labels and automatic assumptions.

"Teens are the most exploited and the least nurtured group in our society. Everything is geared toward them, but nothing gives them what they need or what they really want," remarks director John Monteverde (*Peter Pan*), whose search for stories in which teens could play themselves yielded largely didactic and condescending admonitions about drugs and sex. In *The Wrestling Season*, he was happy to find a script that reaches out to kids on their own terms. "Teens love sporting events. They go to rock concerts. So theater for teens really needs to be a little more like a sporting event and a rock concert, and I'm hoping this will be a little bit of both."

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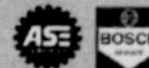
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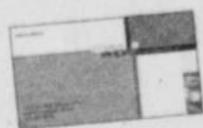
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