

eatingout eatingout eatingout eatingout

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

GOLDRUSH COFFEE BAR

wifi
i-macs
sandwiches
sweets
&
illy
espresso

open 'till
8pm mon-
fri & 6pm
sat-sun
2001 ne
MLK

Because the internet
should be free!

se
6th ash

J & M
cafe

breakfast
&
lunch

503
230 0463

ristorante

fratelli

an
italian
kitchen

regional italian dinners
Open 7 nights

Sunday-Thursday 5:00-9:00pm 1230 nw hoyt | portland
Friday-Saturday 5:00-10:00pm 503-241-8800

www.fratellicucina.com

Russell Street
BAR-B-QUE

Watch the Stars come out
on Russell Street

WE ARE NOW OPEN
'til 10pm Friday and Saturday Nights

325 NE Russell Street (at MLK Jr. Blvd.)
russellstreetbbq.com • 503.528.8224

La Calaca Comelona
Restaurante Mexicano

5:30 pm Monday to Saturday
2304 SE Belmont • (503) 239-9675
Patio open soon!

Halo Thai

We have the BEST Peanut Sauce in Portland!

1625 NE ALBERTA ST. PORTLAND 503.546.7063

Mon-Thurs - 11:00am - 9:30pm
Friday ----- 11:00am - 10:00pm
Saturday ---- 5:00pm - 10:00pm
Sunday ----- closed

NOW SERVING LUNCH

WE KNOW GOOD

NOBLE-ROT

Lunch Mon-Fri 11:30-2 • Dinner Mon-Sat 5-12 • Kitchen open til 11
Private dining room available • 503.233.1999 • www.noblerotpx.com

theater

Target Practice

Wade McCollum sets his sights
on Stephen Sondheim's *Assassins*
by Stephen Blair

What do John Wilkes Booth, Leon Czolgosz and Charles J. Guiteau have in common?

Each assassinated a U.S. president and—to the delight of show tune lovers everywhere—each figures prominently in Stephen Sondheim's Tony-winning musical *Assassins*. The show opened off-Broadway in 1991 but was deemed too bleak for public consumption after 9/11, so its Broadway debut got bumped from 2001 to 2004.

Gay director Jon Kretzu is bringing this provocative slice of Americana to Artists Repertory Theatre for a six-week run. Acclaimed gay actor Wade McCollum stars as The Balladeer, a singing narrator who tells the stories of successful assassins like Booth and failed White House wreckers like Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme. From 19th century folk tunes to 1970s ballads, the music is distinctly American.

When he's not acting in Los Angeles, recording a CD or fine-tuning his epic musical *One*, the obscenely talented McCollum has wooed Portland audiences with Drammy-winning performances in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *Bat Boy: The Musical*.

Before our recent interview started, he sat at an outdoor cafe table reading a book about Lee Harvey Oswald.

Stephen Blair: How did you come on board this production?

Wade McCollum: Jon Kretzu called me and asked me to come in for callbacks. When you get a chance to do a Sondheim show that's so insanely brilliant, you kind of have to do it. Especially since I'm in rewrite mode with *One* and examining structure and thematics and really getting into the structural elements of writing a show. To step into one of Sondheim's brilliantly structured pieces is severely illuminating.

I've done a few of his shows. He has an ability to create these humanistic, incredibly dramatic, viable, accessible, amazing stories.

SB: Is *The Balladeer* involved in every song?

WM: No. Just three ballads. He tells the story of each of their big moments of assassination and who they were and what they were like and why they did what they did.

SB: Does the play evoke sympathy for the assassins?

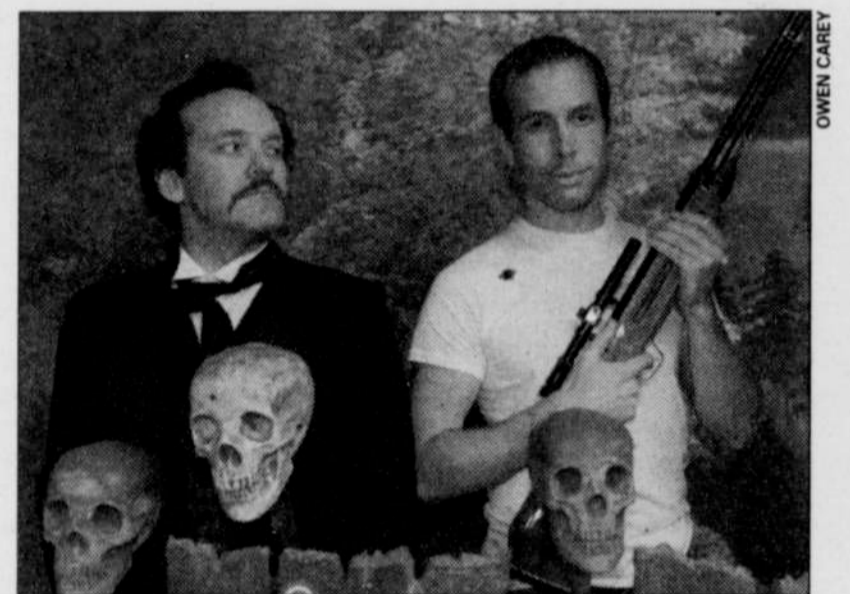
WM: I don't know if sympathy is the right word. I might say empathy. Like any well-written piece of theater, you can access their point of view. We can see that the person is either absolutely insane or they're suffering so greatly, this was the only way they could conceive of to connect. When that amount of desperation comes to a breaking point, people do desperate acts.

The show doesn't give clear answers. It doesn't

villainize anyone. It humanizes them. It doesn't make it easy for the audience to say they're just crazy. Anyone is capable of extreme action.

SB: Do you think that assassinations or assassination attempts can have positive effects?

WM: In this show, absolutely not. These people were criminalized and the president was usually immortalized as being great and being a



John Wilkes Booth (Kirk Mouser, left) offers guidance to Lee Harvey Oswald (Wade McCollum) in the Tony-winning musical *Assassins*.

victim of somebody's madness. But my suspicion is that it does raise awareness when you kill the president. People listen. But then they don't and things go back to what they were. That's kind of the argument of *The Balladeer* at the end when he's in conversation with all the assassins. He tells them they stirred it up for a moment, but it didn't really change things the way they hoped. Maybe there's another way of channeling the intention.

SB: What does *Assassins* have to say to audiences in 2006?

WM: It's a poignant examination of what right action is in times of political despair. It's certainly not pro-assassination. It really looks at the fact that a corrupt government is not the product of one man, the president. It's the product of an entire society. An assassination isn't going to fix a problem that is integral to the society and the way we function.

SB: What's next for *One*?

WM: The producers are going to New York in April for a conference. We submitted the show to the National Alliance for Musical Theatre. They have a showcase in October. There's a fair chance we might be able to do that showcase.

I've narrowed the cast down so it's more producible. I really like the idea of taking it down to a 100-minute roller coaster ride. 10

Artists Repertory Theatre presents ASSASSINS
April 25 to June 4 at 1516 S.W. Alder St. Tickets are \$15-\$40 from 503-241-1278.

Portland free-lance writer STEPHEN BLAIR recently jumped on the blogwagon. You can visit him at www.stephen-blogday.blogspot.com.