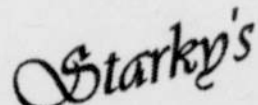


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theater

The Envelope, Please...

Will this year's Drammy Awards find anything outstanding among Portland theater's queer contenders?
by Timothy Krause

From the Will-and-Grace *Dog Opera* at 2Boards Productions to the Goldschmidt-sparked story of a girl whose affairs turn lesbian in Stark Raving's *The Mark*, from Hand2Mouth's literal drag Queen Isabella in *City of Gold* to gender-bending royalty in the power-play *Silence* from Jakers Productions, Portland theater companies offered a mixed bag of sexual diversity onstage this season—and with mixed results.

So, will anything queer get the nod when the Drammy Awards celebrate all that was outstanding in local theater this past season? To be sure, an absence of blockbuster productions makes it certain that this year's ceremony will hold some surprises.

While audiences were treated to a few high-profile queer voices—namely Gertrude Stein (Defunkt Theatre's *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*), Susan Sontag (Integrity Productions' *Alice in Bed*) and Stephen Sondheim (Artists Repertory

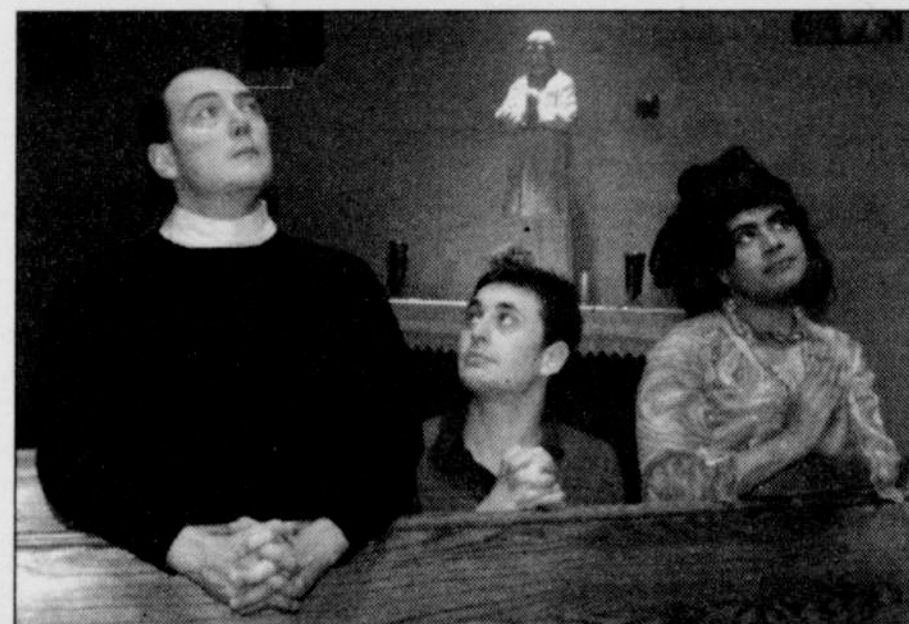
Theatre's *Assassins*)—none actually had anything to say about being, well, gay. Enter Lanford Wilson, whose straightforward style graced the stage of Profile Theatre Project all season long. Although he doesn't write in such rainbow hues as last year's Terrence McNally, Wilson's script for *Burn This* dared to break down the barrier that many men-who-love-men straddle when coming out in the big city while staying closeted back home. And in Profile's production, all eyes were on the composed, even-keeled performance by Stumptown stalwart Michael Mendelson, the usually fiery gay actor admired by critics for anchoring the story in a tempered reality.

At the other end of the spectrum is another out Portland actor—Andrés Alcalá—whose string of wide-ranging performances demonstrated talent elastic enough to snap out the most extreme characters. With near schizophrenia, Alcalá netted a multitude of outrageously funny but heartfelt mariposas in *Men on the Verge 2: The Self-Esteem Files* by Guillermo Reyes, which was in sharp contrast to the solemn, gay priest pursued by an underage altar boy (played with outstanding veracity by fresh-faced Kurt Conroyd) in Edwin Sanchez's ballsy *Clean*—both from Miracle Theatre Group, a company that produces some of Portland's most diverse work. Alcalá's father figures continued first as a sensitive dad in *One*, the much-hyped musical from Wade McCollum, then as a more sinister parent in *The Giver*, a smart sci-fi from Oregon Children's Theatre, where earlier in the year Alcalá found acceptance as a flower-loving bilingual bovine in the title role of *Ferdinand the Bull*.

The animal kingdom also yielded a pair of amiable amphibians. Like Bert and Ernie, these kiddie characters might not be explicitly gay, but

one would be hard pressed to straighten out the mutual admiration of Northwest Children's Theatre's *Frog and Toad*, in which a couple of awfully friendly guys in a very committed relationship sing show tunes and bake cookies. But NWCT really scored this year with its fearless production of *The Wrestling Season*, an edgy high school drama in which vicious rumors of jocks being gay bring to the surface questions of self-identity and realities of peer pressure—rocked by hardcore wrestling that proved this company can play with the big kids.

Though most queers were corralled in the chorus, a few musicals featured same-sex sidekicks: a lesbo kiss-kiss in Radiant Theatre's *Tommy*; same-sex mamas and free-lovin' cast in *One*; and a pair of blue collar joes in Pixie Dust Productions' *The Full Monty*. Gay or not, the real question for Broadway babies is this: Will all this song and dance revive a long-absent Drammy Award for Outstanding Musical Production?



A gay priest (Andrés Alcalá) is pursued by an underage altar boy (Kurt Conroyd) in Miracle Theatre Group's ballsy *Clean*.

Speaking of the full monty, technicalities of the Drammy calendar mean last season's ball-bustin' *Take Me Out* from Artists Rep is eligible for consideration at this year's awards, while the final show of that company's current season—the heartily gay *Theater District*—won't be considered until 2007. Missing completely will be last summer's wildly popular *The Rocky Horror Show* from Triangle Productions starring McCollum as the sweet transvestite from transsexual Transylvania—a combination so expensive to produce that seats couldn't be spared for Drammy reviewers. (Groupies rejoice: McCollum returns this summer in his multiple Drammy-winning star vehicle, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*). 10

The 27th annual DRAMMY AWARDS will be held 7 p.m. June 12 at Crystal Ballroom, 1332 W. Burnside St., preceded by a social hour and followed by an after-party. For details visit www.drammy.info.

By day, TIMOTHY KRAUSE is communications coordinator for City Club of Portland; by night, he serves on the Drammy committee, for which he has enjoyed more than 100 performances of live, local theater during the past 12 months.