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Wedding bells herald the opening of Portland's new gay theater company

by Timothy Krause

Opening hearts and minds through theater. That's the mission of Portland's new gay theater company, Key Productions, which debuts Jan. 5 at World Trade Center Theater with *Can't Say I Do*, an original musical penned by Oregon City gay boys Peter Alexander and Kevin Yell.

Director Troy Lakey, who is also gay, says the insightful and funny production pops the question: Why is marriage of such fundamental importance? The right to marriage is an issue that entangles whole families, as happens in *Can't Say I Do* when two siblings see the institution from different perspectives: A pregnant Carol has to rethink her lifelong resistance to marriage, while the inability of her brother, Chris, to marry his South African partner, Alex, threatens to split the gay couple up forever when Alex's visa is revoked.

"This musical questions the 'freedom' that we have in this country," explains Lakey. "This play also shows the struggles that happen within a family around gay marriage, especially when one member is more 'traditional conservative.' This show is really about relationships—parent/child, brother/sister, in-laws, boyfriend/girlfriend, gay/straight, partner/partner."

One of the most powerful relationships in the play is between Margaret, the conservative mother, and Chris, her gay son.

"They each struggle with loving someone that believes something very different than what they do. How can Margaret balance her desire for her son to be happy with her belief that homosexuality is wrong? Over the course of the play, she begins to understand the struggles he has to face and the inequalities he encounters," relates Lakey. "One of my favorite lines from a song in this play is 'Why red states and blue states—what's wrong with multi-hued states?' This is a play for many of those conservatives to see, to realize what they are fighting against. This is a show I wish my very conservative parents would come and see."

It's also a show that Lakey hopes will galvanize support among Portland's queer community for a new theater company that will focus on gay themes, issues, characters and artists.

"I have several ideas for shows I would like to do, but I also want to bring in other members of the gay theater community to help to develop Key Productions," he says. "I have a few shows that are on my 'to do' list at some point—*Angels in America*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* possibly with a man playing Blanche and *Dracula* with stronger homoerotic undertones, possibly doing my own adaptation."

Raised Mormon, formerly married and now bringing up two kids, Lakey came out about two years ago. After studying theater at Brigham Young University, he taught high school drama in Denver for a couple of years before a job in corporate training brought him

back to his native Oregon. More recently, the 35-year-old directed *It's a Wonderful Life* and performed in *California Suite* at New Century Players, a community theater in Milwaukie.

For Key Productions, Lakey is also considering up-ending shows written for straight couples by casting two women or two men instead. "One of my goals," he proposes, "is to show that the queer community has the same exact problems that the straight community when it comes to relationships! I want to 'normalize,' if you will, gay characters—so it happens to be one of the characteristics, but the play isn't always about that issue."

Unlike *Can't Say I Do*, which is a production Lakey hopes audiences will remember the next time they vote. "I want them to talk to their friends who aren't sure which side of the gay marriage debate they stand on, and convince them that all people should have the fundamental right to marry the person they love. All people deserve the same rights and benefits. It isn't special rights, it is equal rights." **10**

KEY PRODUCTIONS presents *Can't Say I Do* through Jan. 20 at World Trade Center Theater, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Tickets are \$20 from www.keyproductionspx.com.

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Troy Lakey



The right to marriage entangles a whole family in the original musical *Can't Say I Do*.

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