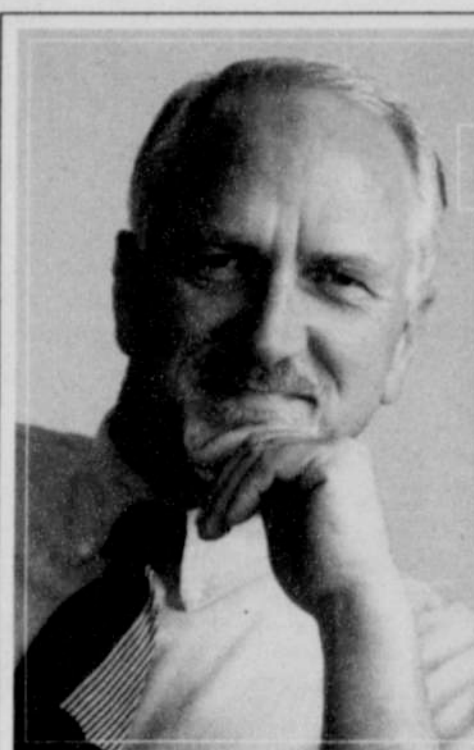




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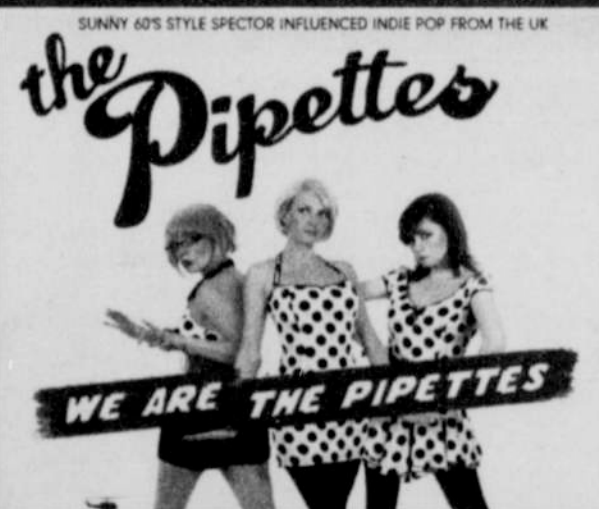
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culture

March Madness

Gay-friendly band keeps Portland weird

by Julie Sabatier

March Fourth is about the closest thing Portland has to a traveling circus. The 34-member marching band—complete with drums, horns and vocals—incorporates a troupe of stilt walkers, acrobats

and fire dancers. The band will return from its seven-week fall tour to play two shows benefiting Voices for Silent Disasters, a grassroots effort to support Mercy Corps' humanitarian work in Uganda.

March Fourth counts jazz, rock, Vaudeville and burlesque among its influences, and many identify it with Portland's reputation as a "weird" city.

"They're all freaks, so they can completely empathize with the queer community," says March Fourth stilt walker and acrobat Sid "Simpatico" Phillips. "It shocks a lot of people that I'm one of the only gay-identified people in the band.... A lot of people are surprised because we're a very flamboyant crew."

Phillips, 31, joined the marching band for its second show at a large anti-war protest March 15, 2003, on the eve of the Iraq war. Although he has a musical background—he played French horn and hand bells as a kid—his true calling is movement-based performance.

"As a kid, I was not allowed to dance, so I feel like I'm making up for that now," he says. "March Fourth has been a really incredible experience in exploring dance and experiencing music in a new way."

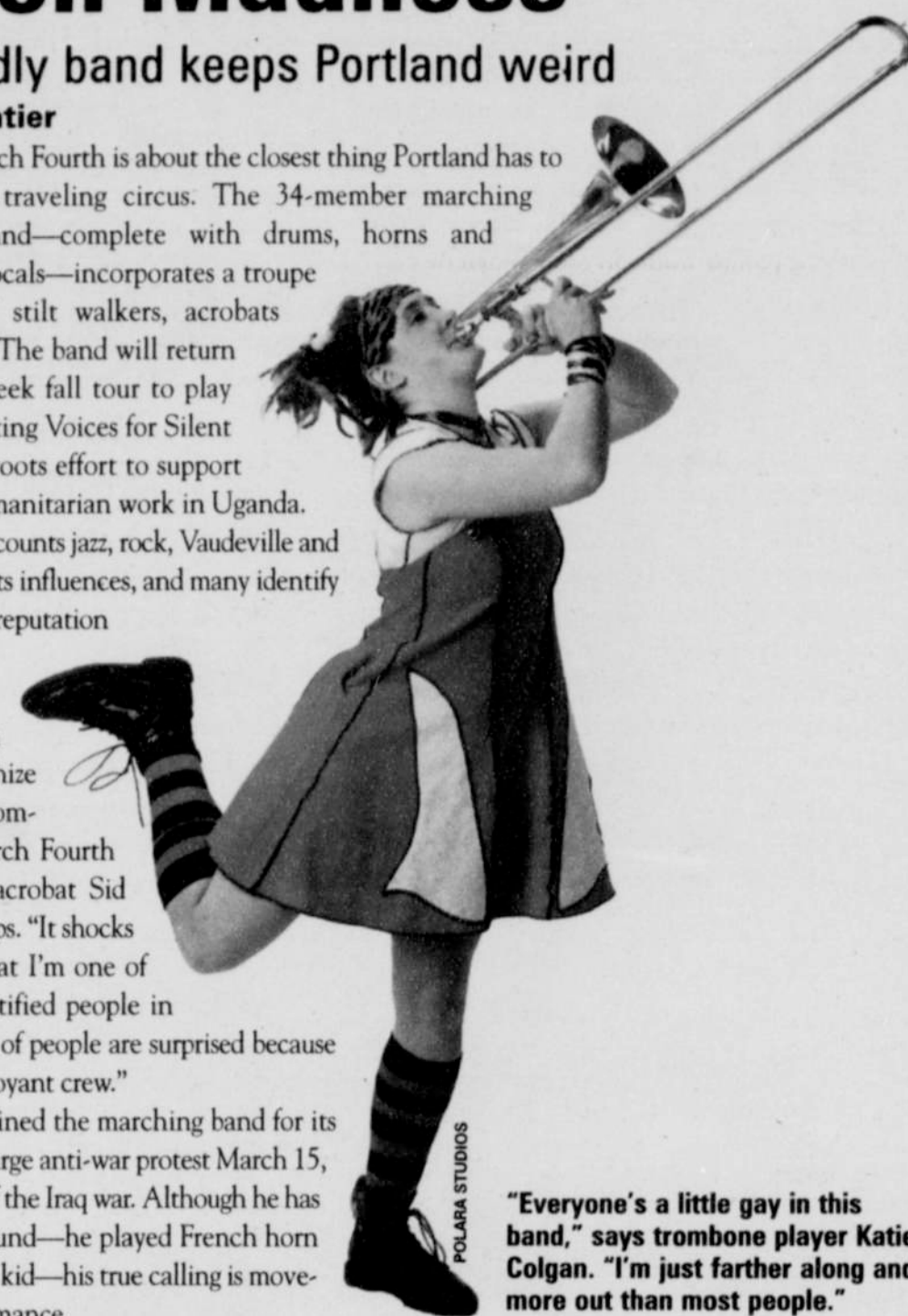
Phillips, who is a native Oregonian, says he also values the opportunity to travel with the band. "I grew up as a missionary brat overseas from [ages] 7 to 13, so I traveled a lot at an early age and kind of got the wanderlust," he explains.

Phillips' parents were medical missionaries in several different places including Malawi and Guam. They raised him in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but he says they were accepting when he came out to them after leaving home.

"They were a little bit shocked I guess, but we've always had the kind of relationship where it's OK to talk through things," he says. "My mom and dad actually became gay rights activists in their community.... My dad came out of the closet five years after I did."

Phillips hopes March Fourth will play more queer events in the future. "I would love to have March Fourth represent Portland at Gay Mardi Gras in Sydney, Australia. I've been to that event, and there are a lot of supportive crews that go that are not necessarily all gay," he says, noting that traveling that far would require more community sponsors.

According to Phillips, March Fourth plays an average of 150 shows a year, and roughly one-third of those are outside Portland. Last year the band even went to Germany to play at the



POLARA STUDIOS

"Everyone's a little gay in this band," says trombone player Katie Colgan. "I'm just farther along and more out than most people."

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