

ghettoized, but that it is just part of everyone's theater season. If anything, that is the positive thing that has come of recent years.

Over at Portland Center Stage, Chris Coleman (who recently directed *The Beard of Avon*) is at the helm for *The Little Dog Laughed*, a contemporary comedy about an up-and-coming movie actor with a secret: He wants to come out of the closet with the "rent boy" he's fallen in love with. Wearing his heart on his sleeve, however, could very well be the fashion faux pas that costs him his budding career. A Broadway hit in 2006, this social satire will be the Armory's first studio production presented in-the-round if not in-the-buff.

Timothy Krause: Why *The Little Dog Laughed*? Why now?

Chris Coleman: For my first seven years in Portland, I was basically single. I definitely dated a lot of different guys, and the distinction between sex and intimacy really became vivid for me. Sex in the gay community is easy to come by, but you realize after a while how hungry you become for

The heartbreaking thing about it is who chooses to go with their heart, and who is unable to choose to go with their heart because of their ambition. That conflict is real and something that a lot of us struggle with in different ways: What compromises are we willing to make to get where we want to get? It's so very American: If I can get what I want, somehow the ends justify the means and the compromises are worth it, even if I lop off a part of myself. I make it sound very serious—and there are serious parts—but it's also hilarious.

TK: Do you think this play in some ways asks if one can be homosexual without being gay?

CC: That reflects the moment probably. I definitely know guys in their 20s who you ask: "Are you gay? Are you straight?" And they're like: "You know what? I've been with men; I've been with women; I'm sexual." Their identity with the larger gay community is softer. They're much less hung up on sticking a label on themselves because there's less need to ghettoize ourselves against the persecution from the outside. It's much easier to be integrated into the rest of the world than it was 20 years ago.

TK: What else has come up in rehearsal?

CC: I'm fascinated by the notion that the hooker is actually the one who lives most in his heart, and whose heart I think we become most engaged with. I'm fascinated by somebody like him who makes an allusion about his first sexual experiences with his stepfather. How did that kind of dynamic morph into having sex for money? What is the conflict between the power that gives you over other men—the power that their desire gives you—and the crappy way it's gotta make you feel about yourself? The assumption that the only reason people want to engage with you is because of your body.

TK: How do you think this play reflects the state of gay theater today?

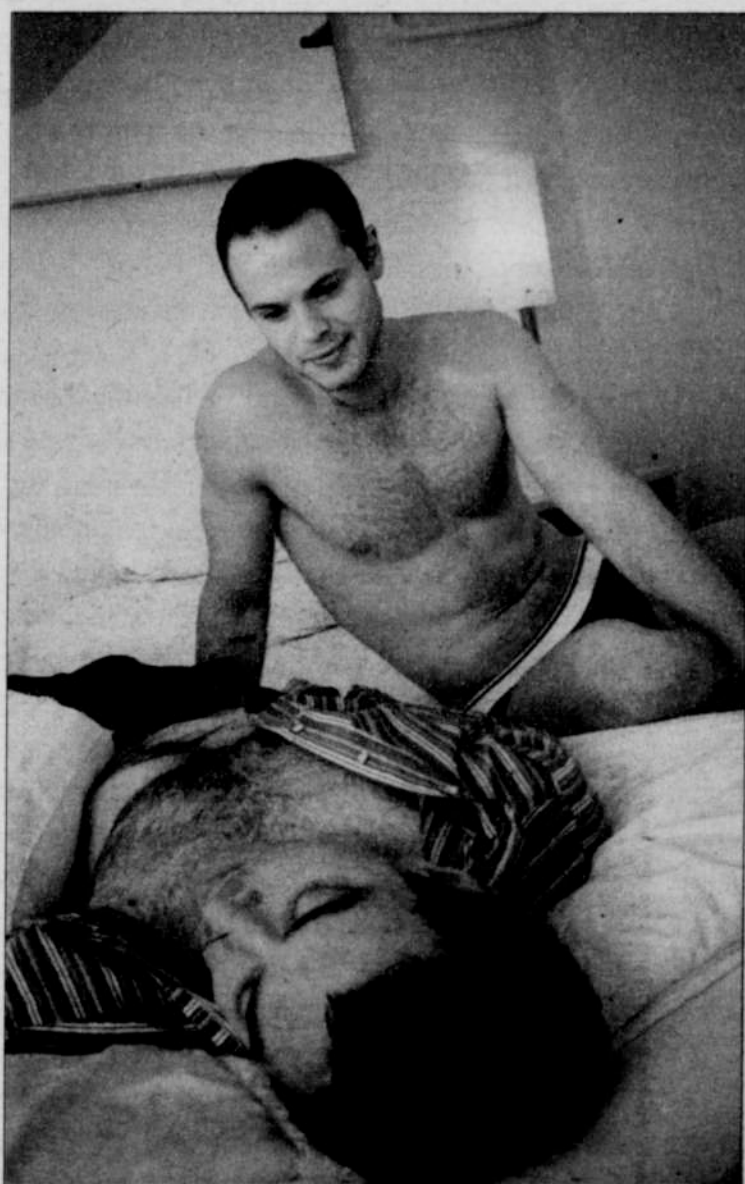
CC: It seems like we're at a different moment. It seems like we're telling stories about people. Sometimes they're gay people, sometimes they're black people, and sometimes they're Asian people or whatever. I feel like I'm reading fewer "gay ghetto" plays than I was a decade ago...I think it is probably positive, though I wish somebody would make a gay movie where the gay man didn't either die in the end or have his heart broken. I don't want to hear another story about a tortured gay guy. I want a different story, a different moment. 10

PORTLAND CENTER STAGE presents *The Little Dog Laughed* April 29 to June 15 in Gerding Theater at the Armory, 128 N.W. 11th Ave.

For performance times and ticket information, call 503-445-3700 or visit www.pcs.org.

ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE presents *The History Boys* April 29 to June 8 at 1515 S.W. Morrison St. For performance times and ticket information, call 503-241-1278 or visit www.artistsrep.org.

TIMOTHY KRAUSE is marketing director for Miracle Theatre Group.



A rent boy named Alex (Dennis Flanagan, right) watches over Mitchell (Brik Berkes), little knowing that his new crush is a closeted (but charming) rising movie star, in *The Little Dog Laughed*.

intimacy—emotional intimacy. It sounds so silly, but when you haven't spent the night in the bed with somebody in a while, the privilege of being that intimate with someone—not sexual, but intimate—is really powerful. There's something really aching and delicate about the dance these two guys are doing that I feel is so familiar in our community. It's easy to just say, oh, *The Little Dog Laughed* is about a movie star who's in crisis over his sexual identity and falls in love with a rent boy. But it's really about two men—both of those men are struggling to figure out what their identity is and figure out if they have the courage to own it. It's the conflict between desire and fear.

TK: Yet the appeal is more universal than sexual identity....

CC: The play is about the price of ambition.

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