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THEATER

Bare Necessities

Musical tackles taboo issues

by Kristin Steele

Teenagers in a Catholic boarding school. Homosexuality. Sex. Drugs. Pregnancy. Intolerance. Priests. Parents. Guilt. And 37 musical numbers running the gamut of the sonic spectrum.

Welcome to *Bare*, a dark and edgy musical that deviates from the traditional old song-and-dance. Think of it as a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* with gay boys named Peter and Jason.

And we all know how *Romeo and Juliet* ended. Since its successful off-Broadway run, *Bare* has played across the country. Tin Pan Alley Theatre Company, in collaboration with Blue Monkey Theater Company, brings the musical to life for its Portland premiere.

"[We] offer up the beauty of the music, the purity of Peter and Jason's love, and the thought-provoking plot line of how to synthesize your religion or spirituality, sexuality and your own uniqueness while coping with outside forces," said Clara Hillier, choreographer/producer of *Bare*.

Local gay talent Matt Insley is the vocal/musical director of the piece. "Rehearsal has been fast-paced, and every member of the cast has given 2,000 percent," he said.

Set in a Catholic school, *Bare* follows the relationship of Peter and Jason as they deal with being

gay in environments that work against them. In an effort to stay safe, Jason takes up with popular Ivy. The musical delves into dreams as well as the bitter realities of drugs and bullying that accompany being someone different. When Jason decides to come clean about his homosexuality, he faces isolation from his family and church.

Within the demanding piece, there is a wide range of characters portrayed by actors working to get to the heart of what it is to be young, confused and trying to be who you are. The cast includes talented gay actor JP Latchaw.

"Most of the cast has been a little more than slightly obsessed with the show for years," said Insley.

Bare deals with hard issues in a frank fashion for a reason. Strong language, sexual content and drug usage are used throughout the piece without flinching.

"We do have a lot of sex and drug talk throughout the show, and I think it's only realistic to have that in a story about high school kids. To ignore such issues would be to deny vast realities," said Insley.

The intersection of faith and homosexuality in the musical gets murky, especially when Jason's sexual orientation is condemned by the very priest he confided in for redemption.

"The relationship between Peter and Jason pushes the issue of what is more important to an individual: love of a god or love of a soulmate," said Insley.

The char-



Ivy (Kylie Johnson) attempts to have a relationship with Jason (Jonathan Swartout), oblivious to his relationship with Peter (JP Latchaw), in *Bare*.