

acters in *Bare* explore what it means to be an outsider in environments that are hostile to that notion, and they examine the toll that can take when an individual believes the intolerance around him and starts to perpetrate it on himself.

"As someone who grew up in a small southern town, I understand why some people feel the need to hide what others feel isn't acceptable," said Insley. "The musical deals a lot with internal homophobia... [It] still runs rampant in our community, and many gay men and women deny themselves the pleasure of living a truthful life because of fear of self-recognition."

Taking its cues from opera, *Bare* is a very musical piece. Music plays throughout, with each principal character having a melodic motif. The styles of the numbers veer from ballads to rap.

"Lyrically, the show is bold and doesn't steer away from thrusting the actors into situations that they otherwise wouldn't have a chance to sing about," said Insley. "[I] felt that, being a gay man, I have the ability to grasp the content of the music in a way that perhaps another music director wouldn't have the ability to do."

Bare leaves the audience to grapple with what happens when the happy ending doesn't come true, and the strength that can be found in therein. Insley hopes people will take advantage of "the chance to see a show that tackles issues most theater is too afraid to address."

While the action of the piece is relegated to the insular environment of one school, the implications of its messages are widespread. Hillier explains, "We wish to unite people after their experience with *Bare* and perhaps open hearts and minds, formerly tightly closed off, to accepting the beautiful differences in people and how they choose to be themselves." JO

TIN PAN ALLEY THEATRE COMPANY presents *Bare* through March 28 at Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, 5340 N. Interstate Ave. Tickets are \$18-\$20 from 503-593-2466.

KRISTIN STEELE is a Portland writer and educator whose work has appeared online, onstage and in newspapers, magazines and anthologies.

Public Playhouse Stages Lesser-Known Kushner Play

Public Playhouse's production of *The Illusion*, Tony Kushner's free adaptation of French playwright Pierre Corneille's 17th century comedy *L'Illusion Comique*, is affording Portlanders a relatively rare chance to see a Kushner work that predates his enormously popular and successful *Angels in America*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize and became probably the highest-acclaimed and most renowned of contemporary gay scribes.

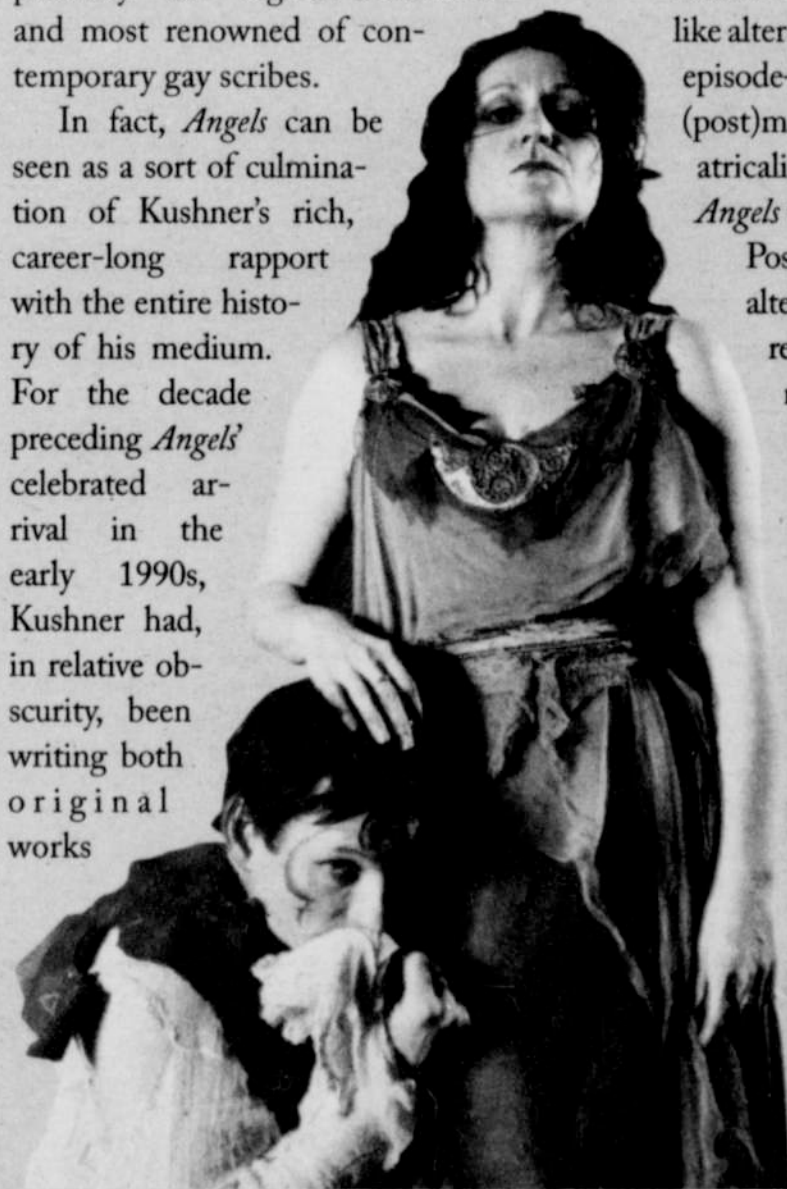
In fact, *Angels* can be seen as a sort of culmination of Kushner's rich, career-long rapport with the entire history of his medium. For the decade preceding *Angels*' celebrated arrival in the early 1990s, Kushner had, in relative obscurity, been writing both original works

and adaptations of classic plays. It was during this earlier period, in 1988, that he adapted Corneille's tragicomedy, in which a melancholy father enlists the aid of a magician to find out what happened to his wayward son. Corneille's embrace of artifice in *L'Illusion Comique*—each "scene" the magician shows the king from his son's life amounts to a "play within the play" à la *Hamlet*, with *Rashomon*-like alterations in the significant details of each episode—dovetails nicely with Kushner's (post)modern embrace of self-conscious theatricality and taste for self-reflexivity, which *Angels* took even further a few years later.

Post-*Angels*, Kushner has continued to alternate between original works and reinterpretations of classics, although none of his later plays have received the degree of attention and acclaim that *Angels* brought him nearly 20 years ago. He has also continued to be an outspoken and often controversial cultural voice, offering his impassioned, erudite and informed perspective on American life and international politics—particularly on queer and Jewish issues—in his plays, in interviews and in frequent essays. That a lesser-known utterance of such a voice has the potential to be a worthwhile revelation is reason enough to check out *The Illusion*.

The production runs through March 28 at CoHo Theater, 2257 N.W. Raleigh St. Tickets are \$17-\$20 from 503-922-0532.

—Christopher McQuain JO



A melancholy father enlists the aid of a magician to find out what happened to his wayward son in *The Illusion*.

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