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THEATER



Thirty years after its debut, Tom Enyart's comedy *The Circuit* is in production again at the new 100-seat Embers Backroom Lounge Theatre

Revival of the Fittest

Legendary Portland Production *The Circuit* Returns

By RYAN J. PRADO

It was 30 years ago that the showplace of Dahl and Penne, a now-defunct gay hot spot saloon and former soft drink parlor during Prohibition, premiered the original two-act comedy, *The Circuit*. Tom Enyart's creation transcended boundaries and became an instant local hit.

Three years after its 1979 debut, in 1982, *The Circuit* was staged in its second production, again at Dahl and Penne, and sold out every performance before a third production at Sumus Theater (at the time located at The Pub Theatre) secured a nomination from the *Willamette Week* for a Willie Award for "Best New Play."

And early this month, a sold-out audience at the new 100-seat Embers Backroom Lounge Theatre witnessed a revival production of *The Circuit*. Among the audience members were many who had been in attendance for the first production decades ago. Enyart—a successful playwright, director, choreographer and member of the Screen Actors Guild—felt that both the location and the timing were right to revive his Portland theater gem.

"I wanted to do this revival production, frankly, because I wanted to revisit the experience while I and Nolan Mack, the other original cast member of 30 years ago, still can," explains Enyart. "When I saw the setup for two draw curtains at The Embers, I knew this was the place to begin. I'm very excited that live theater will be happening [here] on an ongoing basis."

Enyart's desire also has a lot to do with Portland's thriving drag community, and a notion that the newer diva scene might view a little more of itself in the production.

"There is much more drag being done these days," offers Enyart. "Performers are in drag several days a week. Back then, getting into drag was more of an occasional thing, and those who were entertainers only did it on weekends. There are many more drags, now, than before, who relate to the backstage antics depicted in *The Circuit*."

The antics in question revolve around the relationships of six characters who tour in a professional lip-sync drag show. The piece is set backstage during opening night in a new city, with a local brought into the makeup and dressing area by one of the entertainers. The play has an automatic draw for the gay community because of its subject matter, says Enyart, and when word spread through Portland's avid theater-going audiences, the play became a cult hit.

Enyart asserts that it's the human qualities of the narrative that continue to translate so well with both gay and straight audiences.

"The human stories of the characters, as well as the hilarious banter among them, have a universal appeal," he says. "All good comedies have their poignant moments, and whether gay, straight, bi or otherwise, people relate to those human frailties that are revealed in this play and embrace these endearing characters."

The Circuit is now being staged as a pre-AIDS period piece. Enyart explains that the evolution of gay and drag culture prevented any newer themes from being added to the story.

"I believe that it is more effective in its appeal to today's audiences as a piece of history," he adds.

Enyart recently returned to Portland from Los Angeles, as his career opportunities in acting, directing and theater production are greater here.

"Now that I am back and among so many wonderful friends, I have a burning desire to do what I did before," he says.

"I want to, once again, be an entrepreneur of sorts, as a producer of projects and plays that are gay-themed, but with universal appeal that will inspire other creative individuals to participate in our community activities, to express their own unique voices, as well as to promote the concept that—gay, straight, bi, or otherwise—we're all human, loving creatures with an appreciation for diversity in others." ☐

Tickets for *The Circuit* are \$10, The Embers, 110 NW Broadway, 503-222-3082. The production runs Sundays at 7 p.m. Aug. 9, 16, 23 and 30, and Sept. 6, 13 and 20. For more information, visit www.emberspdx.net.

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