



Jones recently landed his dream role playing Angel in *Rent*. Sanchez saw him in the production and invited him to audition for *BOOMCRACKLEFLY*. The play marks his first time originating a role.

"Angel was terrifying. I think playing a part like that is scary because if you do something wrong you'll have a riot. People will be pissed," says Jones, explaining that audiences have come to expect a certain performance from Angel. "So this is the first. I get to do whatever I want and call it good, which is fun. I get to explore all the time, which is what I really like."

Jones will have considerable freedom with the role since Smith didn't provide much of a backstory for Fulana. Smith says she imagines the character living life as a woman, but doesn't elaborate on what that means in terms of an identity.

"I'm leaving it to Tyler's hands. I envisioned it as maybe he went back and forth between identities, but primarily living out life as a woman in terms of gender," Smith says. The way she sees it, "everybody is their own gender actually and people are different gradations of straight and gay and everybody is probably at some point on the spectrum. These divisions we want to impose on people are more for our own comfort."

Jones has had his own run-ins with identity-based divisions. Still, he doesn't seem worried about being typecast in gay roles. Nor does he buy the argument that gays can't play straight and vice-versa.

"I think it's bullshit. I know that when it's just Tyler, I'm feminine, and I'm okay with that. It comes out when I'm playing Fulana, it comes out when I'm playing Angel. But I've played Prince Charming. I think if you're an actor and you say that [gays can't play straight roles], you're not giving yourself enough credit and if you're watching and seeing someone you don't believe, then you're not buying into the scene."

If anything, Jones says he sees his race as a bigger roadblock than his sexuality, especially in less diverse areas. In high school, he recalls, his drama teacher wouldn't cast him as Curly in *Oklahoma!* because, she told him, "You don't look like a cowboy and you never really will look like a cowboy."

In Portland, there simply aren't enough roles open to African-American men, and Jones says he finds himself competing with a small group of actors for the same roles, despite age and other differences among them.

Jones says he is excited to be a part of a play that leaves more open to interpretation. *BOOMCRACKLEFLY* is like nothing he's ever seen or read.

"It's completely original and thought provoking," Jones says. "It's beautiful. Once you get right down to it, the words are gorgeous." JO

BOOMCRACKLEFLY, March 25-April 16, Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m.; Milagro Theatre, 525 SE Stark St.; \$14-\$25; 503-236-7253 or milagro.com.

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