

BY AMANDA SCHURR

before moving to Portland expressly for that reason. The combination of Brian and Nikki's theater background and Michael's business expertise cultivated an ideal business model, based as much on passion as dollars and cents.

"Michael could make money selling bottled air," says Brian of his brother's business savvy. "I tricked [him]! I told him it was possible to make a living in the arts if you run the business well."

The ruse didn't deter Michael, and all three Weavers made a point to prove Brian wrong, first by acquiring the church, then by networking with Portland actors and other theater companies. Nikki helped foster community bonds by acting with other companies while things ironed out. It didn't happen overnight.

"[When] we did our first show, four people came," says Michael. The second night, two people came.

Four years later, PPH routinely sells out its 100-seat space, and has moved productions into bigger venues like the World Trade Center.

Part of the plan for success was enticing nontraditional theatergoers out to shows.

"There is a 'theater audience' who come to everything, and they are punished relentlessly with mediocre theater," explains Brian. "It's our challenge to create thrilling work that people want and need to attend."

Despite some neighborhood noise and parking complaints, PPH has been a boon to the indie theater scene. What they grow into appears to be more a matter of when than if.

"We've tripled in size every year four years in a row," notes Brian. "We love our cozy little church."

"We want to continue to have shows there for years to come," adds Michael, "but one day, we'd like to build a large new theater in Portland. We want to grow and expand."

For more information on Portland Playhouse, visit [portlandplayhouse.org](http://portlandplayhouse.org), or call 503-488-5822. Portland Playhouse is located at 602 NE Prescott Ave.

*Angels in America* capped a year of stunning performing arts, which educated as they entertained, provoked and benefited the community in more ways than one. From *Daily Show* alumna Lauren Weedman in Portland Center Stage's *Bust* to Portland Opera's *The Marriage of Figaro* and Oregon Ballet Theatre's innovative *Petrouchka/Carmen* doubleheader, there was something for every theatergoer in 2011.

Portland theater company JANE presented *Looking for Normal*, playwright Jane Anderson's domestic comedy-drama with a (trans)gender twist. Respected middle American patriarch Roy approaches wife Irma with a confession: He's a woman trapped inside a man's body and wants to undergo gender reassignment. As the couple, their adolescent tomboy daughter and grown son struggle with their own life changes—Irma's in menopause, to boot—the family and community at large grapple with the definitions and dynamics of love, and how it ultimately transcends gender.

In March, Portland native Christopher Kenney and husband Jamie Morris brought their outrageously twisted takes on gamut-running film classics *Mommie Dearest* and *Silence of the Lambs* to Portland Actors Conservatory in a one-two punch of drag. That same month dancer multi-hyphenate Meshi Chavez explored relationships with *We Two Boys*, a translation into movement of a Walt Whitman poem of which Chavez explained, "As men we've had these relationships with other men that are so deep, [yet] there's something that doesn't get spoken about, it's never revealed."

White Bird presented *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater* for the first time in five years, while Teatro Milagro artistic director Danel Malan brought the world-premiere of his *Duende de Lorca*, the story



Mommie Queerest

of Spanish surrealist and poet Federico Garcia Lorca (played by Rory Stitt), to the stage. Milagro also explored hope through transformation with *BOOMCRACKLE-FLY*, the intersecting stories of a lonely drag queen, a circus acrobat and a Cuban man constructing wings. The *Fertile Ground Festival* returned for a third year of fully produced theatrical productions by long-running professional companies ranging from Oslund+Co/Dance and BodyVox to NW Fusion and Legacy Dance.

Eve Ensler's groundbreaking *Vagina Monologues* got a makeover thanks to a Q Center production, which augmented the work to include the experiences of trans women and queer-identified persons. Elsewhere, defunkt theatre queered the David Mamet classic *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and Bag&Baggage Theatre delved into *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, complete with the stipulation that the actors must be of the same sex, in order to ensure cross-dressing.

*Broadway Across America* brought everything from *Billy Elliot The Musical* to

*Mamma Mia!* to *West Side Story* to Stumptown, while the Broadway Rose revisited seminal Aqua Net stage smash *Hairspray*. Chris Coleman and *Portland Center Stage* triumphed with creative portrait *Opus*, and the world premiere of *One Night with Janis Joplin*, as did *Portland Actors Conservatory* with Sarah Ruhl's *Passion Play*.

*Vertigo Theatre* crafted a gender-bending mix of sex and satire with *Cloud 9*, and *Profile Theatre* opened its 15th season with Terrence McNally's AIDS-era drama *Lips Together, Teeth Apart*, following the conclusion of its well-received Lee Blessing repertoire.

Collaborative efforts like the *Galaxy Dance Festival* and Oregon Ballet Theatre's *Stravinsky Project* delighted audiences, along with *Water in the Desert's First*

*Annual 1 Festival*, the brainchild of local choreographer Mizu Desierto and performer Sean Bowie. "Princess of Pastiche" Taylor Mac and choreographer Kyle Abraham marked *Time-Based Art's* ninth installment, the Alberta Rose Theatre-presented a star-studded evening of the "Songs of Sondheim," and over at *Triangle Productions!*, the PDX Pride Reading Series got its gay on with entries like *Steel DRAGnolias* and *Zanna, Don't!*—the latter in which gay is more than okay, it's the norm.

In early November, *Standing on Ceremony—The Gay Marriage Plays* threaded together nine 10-minute plays, written by a who's who of scribes (including Tony Award nominees Moisés Kaufman and Neil LaBute) in a national effort presented locally by Portland's Artists Repertory Theatre to benefit Basic Rights Oregon. ART plans to follow up the one-night-only event with a full run with revolving actors come spring 2012.

How's that for a curtain call to the year at the theater? ☐

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