

With Script in Hand

Second Stage Readers' Theatre is a theatre group in Asheville which has a lot to offer the area's gay/lesbian community. Second Stage produces plays which appeal to diverse communities, including lesbians and gay men. Housed within Asheville Community Theatre, Second Stage receives the full support and backing of the board and staff of A.C.T. In April, Second Stage will produce *Dos Lesbos* and *André's Mother*, the third and fourth gay/lesbian oriented plays this year. The first two were *Safe Sex* and *Tidy Endings*.

Dos Lesbos, written in the late 70's by Perry Baum, is a two-woman show which has been performed internationally. Janet Oliver, Coordinator for Second Stage, describes *Dos Lesbos* as a slapstick comedy which "deals with coming out to parents and living in a homophobic world...." The characters "are trying to live with some dignity. The play conveys [the message] that lesbians/gays are real people, living just like everyone else," Oliver said.

André's Mother, written by Terrence McNally, is only three pages long and takes about ten minutes to read. It will be performed in three different scenarios. Scenario 1 involves a man who has died of AIDS, his male lover, and his mother; scenario 2 involves a man who has died of AIDS, his female lover, and his mother; and scenario 3 involves a man who has died of AIDS, his male lover, and his father. This three-part production was contrived to demonstrate that AIDS cuts across all lines--everybody is affected by AIDS. Both *Dos Lesbos* and *André's Mother* will be directed by Jerry Crouch.

The purpose of Second Stage is to make available to the public plays not covered by the main stage of A.C.T. The main stage avoids material which is considered to be offensive to their patrons; consequently their repertory is limited to musicals, comedies, mysteries, and home-town dramas.

Janet Oliver is in her third year of coordinating Second Stage Readers' Theatre. She has acted with A.C.T. and served on its Board, and has acted and directed with Second Stage. Oliver has both a B.A. and M.A. in speech and theatre. While pursuing her undergraduate degree, Oliver became intrigued by the medium of readers' theatre and has been involved in it since. The theatre is in Oliver's blood: "I love the make believe of it...I love the smell of the theatre...I love when the lights go down...."



The innovative scripts employed by Second Stage may shock, challenge, educate and broaden minds. Second Stage is "a place for experimental theatre--new types of theatre....We try to present challenging scripts to an actor/actress that other theatre groups don't do, can't do or won't do," said Oliver.

In its effort to reach out to a variety of communities, Second Stage was one of the first theatre groups to do black drama/black theatre, and produced *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, a compilation of Lorraine Hansberry's plays. Second Stage's production of *Safe Sex*, by Harvey Fierstein, toured universities and colleges, and was presented at CLOSER in February.

Oliver encourages people to consider Second Stage as a way to get involved in theatre. While main stage productions can take a six to eight-week commitment, Second Stage productions can be put together in as few as 12 rehearsals. You don't have to worry about memory loss, for you have the script in your hand; hence the term "readers' theatre." And best of all you can be part of productions that are on the cutting edge of the theatre world.

One noteworthy aspect of readers' theatre is lack of type-casting. Readers' theatre does not discriminate based on race, sex, age, height, weight, etc. It doesn't matter what you look like.

Second Stage's production of *Getting Out* (February 23, 1991) is a good example of this: Oliver (a woman of color) plays a woman who is getting out of prison, her mother is played by a caucasian blond, and her alter-ego is a white woman, as well. Instead of looking for specific body types, Second Stage looks for specific types of vocal inflections and people who can read well. The performers should be passionate about the material, and enjoy digging into the characterizations.

Second Stage was started eight years ago by a member of A.C.T. as an alternative to the more traditional approach of the main stage.

In the last year, Second Stage's audience size has grown 40%, and it soared beyond that when it produced *Bent*, by Martin Sherman, last fall. This increase in audience size has let A.C.T. know there are folks out there who are interested in supporting and backing alternative theatre.

Second Stage has accomplished much in eight years, and hopes to remain the mechanism for alternative scripts and different types of shows. Second Stage Readers' Theatre is very grateful to Asheville Community Theatre, for without them, Second Stage would not exist!

Second Stage will hold auditions for *Dos Lesbos* and *André's Mother* March 24 and 25, from 7 to 9 PM, at Asheville Community Theatre, 35 E. Walnut Street.

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