



THEATRE BEST/BEFORE

PRESENTS

JEFFREY

By Paul Rudnick

519 Community Centre (519 Church Street)

June 26th & 28th @ 7pm

Tickets: \$10.00 Box Office: 416-892-4593

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PRIDEPREVIEW

Pride's triple play

A trio of young theatre artists look at queer history past and present By JON KAPLAN

EXIT EAGLE EYE by Spy Dénoimmé-Welch, directed by Moynan King. Presented as part of Free Jane at Buddies in Bad Times (12 Alexander). Friday (June 22) at 7 pm. Free. 416-975-8555.

JEFFREY by Paul Rudnick, directed by Andrew Lamb. Presented by Theatre Best/Before at 519 Community Centre (519 Church). Tuesday (June 26) and June 28 at 7 pm. \$10. 416-892-4593.

THE PARIS LETTER by Jon Robin Baitz, directed by Victor Correia. Presented by Little Guy at Tarragon Extra Space (30 Bridgeman). Opens tonight (Thursday, June 21) and runs through June 30, Tuesday-Saturday 8 pm, matinee Sunday 2:30 pm. \$15-\$18. 416-531-1827.

"UNSTOPPABLE" IS THIS YEAR'S PRIDE theme, and that word describes a trio of young, queer theatre artists whose current productions look at gay life from a historic and contemporary perspective.

In his new play Exit Eagle Eye, Spy Dénoimmé-Welch tackles the relationship between two native brothers, one gay and one straight, who fight over

their personal past and the importance of traditional values.

Director Andrew Lamb helms a reading of Paul Rudnick's 90s hit Jeffrey, featuring a man unsure about sex in the age of AIDS, while Victor Correia directs another American play, Jon Robin Baitz's The Paris Letter, that follows a closeted man over a 40-year period.

It's not by chance that all three queer works are being produced during Pride festivities.

"Emotionally and spiritually, it's timely to have a reading of Exit Eagle Eye during Pride," says Dénoimmé-Welch, whose thoughtfulness is expressed in his quiet voice. "There needs to be an artistic way to explore the issues of identity in the native and queer communities.

"And I think people are ready to listen. I've been working as an artist since my early teens, and I believe these topics can blossom in the arts. You see it in the work of Kent Monkman and Waawaate Fobister, as well as people who paved the way, like Spiderwoman's Muriel Miguel, Alec Butler and the poet Chrystos."

Exit Eagle Eye is part of the Free Jane evening at Buddies, and Jane's alter ego, Sky Gilbert – who taught Dénoimmé-Welch at Guelph – chose the piece to be on the bill.

The script began as a play about Métis leader Louis Riel, but now, following development at Buddies and Native Earth, that historic element has become a subtheme in the contemporary story of the queer Ivan, who left the reserve and turned his back on his heritage. His politicized brother Robert and their mother, a traditional healer, follow him to the city.

"This story is part of Pride, too," offers Dénoimmé-Welch, whose heritage is Algonquin.

"Sure, people can step out and have fun during the festivities, and I do that, too. But the event also gives us a time to process and contemplate what others have done to make this society more tolerant.

"Society's more compassionate about queer issues, but there's much to be done, especially around transsexual."

There's a lighter touch in Rudnick's Jeffrey, best known from the film adaptation featuring a zinger-flinging Patrick Stewart.

"It's a play that lets us see how much has changed and how much has stayed the same," notes Lamb, who directs a reading for Theatre Best/Before with Cole J. Alvis in the title part.

"Are the play's often funny stereotypes valid now? Yes, I think so, even though we've taken some huge steps forward with issues like gay marriage. But other things haven't been addressed.

"People still understand Jeffrey's dilemma, that he's fearful to have sex or even date because of AIDS," adds Lamb, director of the upcoming Fringe show Just So Stories and the Tarragon's director of education and outreach. "The lesson in the play, and one that's still relevant, is that you can be safe rather than paranoid and still have a good time."

The Paris Letter reaches even further back in time. Its central character, Sandy, grew up in the 50s and 60s and carries his conservative, closeted values into this century, denying himself and his own nature.

Sandy's denials bring down his life and his family.

"The play says, 'Live your truth and be who you want to be,'" explains director Correia, who next guides the Fringe show Geek-Gasm. "Baitz, creator of the TV show Brothers And Sisters, contrasts Sandy and his lover, Anton, at two times in their lives. Anton always accepts himself, while Sandy continually fights his nature.

"I think Baitz echoes the Pride theme, telling people to live their truth.

"It sounds simple, but a lot of people have trouble doing it." ©

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