

One-Man Wonders

August 1, 2000 By Angelo Ragaza

The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me

FILMNEXT/John Tilly, opens in New York July 14

(Check www.kissedme.com for listings in other cities.)

Fabulous Ride into the Unknown

HERE, New York City,

June 1 and 2

At the start of the film version of David Drake's smash off-Broadway show, *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, a 6-year-old Drake is at his first live musical, beside himself with glee. But when the footlights go up, he's shocked to learn there are "stories between the songs, the stories not heard on the album."

Single-performer shows have indeed become the vehicle for the "stories between the songs" of commercial behemoths like *Cats* and *Miss Saigon*. Solo fliers as diverse as Harvey Fierstein, Anna Deavere Smith, John Leguizamo and Margaret Cho have become household names for their ability to play entire subcultures—whether gay, Korean or Latino—with the sheer force of their personalities, training the spotlight on race, gender and sexuality in the process.

Given that such shows make quick-and-easy films, it comes as no surprise that *Kissed Me*—the longest running one-man show in New York City's theater history (originally produced by *POZ* founder Sean Strub)—should finally have its moment on the silver screen. "It had been an idea to film the play for years," recalls Drake, who ran into the usual frustrations trying to do just that. "It went through a variety of stages until I finally just put it on the shelf. It was 1995, and I was like, 'Ugh, skip it.'" Besides, after an Obie Award and some 100 productions in 10 countries, Drake felt that *Kissed Me* had seen its day. But when director Tim Kirkman (*Dear Jesse*) approached him, "the producers came along, people came along, money came along," he says. "Everything unfolded."

In adapting *Kissed Me's* 1992 script—an autobiographical tale about living, loving and loss in 1980s New York City—for the new millennium, Drake admits to a few changes. But for the most part, Drake, a *POZ* contributing editor at work on a new play about his Romanian roots (its working title is *Son of Dracula*), chose not to mess with success. "You wouldn't update the civil rights movement to now," he says. "That doesn't make it a less valuable story."

Fabulous Ride Into the Unknown's author-star Bruce Ward agrees. "I didn't want the '80s to go by

without giving proper notice to all the people who fought for the cause and died,” he says. Ward should know: He spent those years in the trenches as director of the National AIDS Hotline. In *Fabulous Ride*, a series of monologues, Ward plays 10 different men, one for each year of the decade—among them a hairdresser from Alabama who discovers New York City’s notorious Anvil club and a 19-year-old HIV positive gay basher. After picking up critical raves from around the country for *Fabulous Ride*, Ward hopes that producers in New York will take it on a commercial run—but he refuses to provide a Y2K version. “It’s almost a period piece,” he says. Indeed, some audience members don’t get the references to junk-bond trading and HTLV3. “For people who lived through it, it’s a validation,” Ward says. “For younger people, it’s an education.”

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