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## a+e STAGE

## Doin' Time in Bennington

BY JUDY MURPHY

eterson Toscano began life as a bornagain Christian and later spent 17 years in the ex-gay movement before fully accepting himself as a gay man in 1999. He is now a Quaker Christian and has turned his incredible journey into theatrical performances that use storytelling and humor to both entertain and educate

Audiences in the United States, Canada. England and Africa have been regaled by his performances of "Doin' Time in the Homo No Mo Halfway House; How I Survived the Ex-Gay Movement," which is Toscano's humorous rendition of a 12-step Christian program that attempts to change men's sexual orienta-Peterson spent years in reparative therapy through counseling, ex-gay

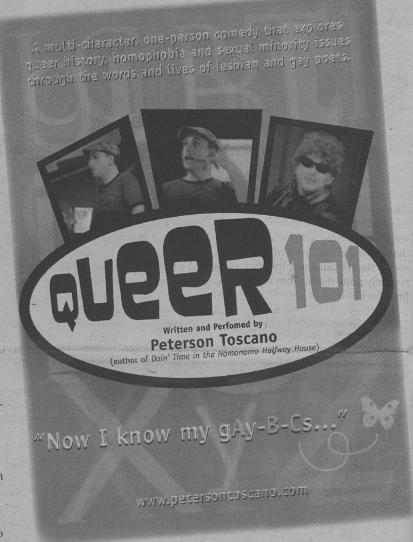
support groups, an ex-gay residential program and even three exorcisms. In "Doin' Time..." he plays five characters in a unique performance that critics have compared to those of Lily Tomlin and Whoopi Goldberg.

"Queer 101" follows the character Chad after his graduation from the Homo No Mo Halfway House and he has to cover a Queer 101 class. He introduces the class to individuals who shaped queer history and his own.

"It is incredibly important that I be funny," he said in a recent telephone interview. "It isn't successful unless they laugh their asses off."

"I never attack," Toscano said. "I use comedy as a tool, not a weapon. Even in my expose' of the ex-gay movement I do not attack its leaders," he said. In fact, he often meets with conservative Christian leaders for coffee, lunch or a chat, and recently spent three hours with a representative from Focus on

"It is important to continue the dialogue, to disperse assumptions and de-escalate violence," he says. "As a Quaker



high school and college students in Bennington. The event is free for

On Saturday, April 8, Toscano will perform "Doin' Time in the Homo No Mo Halfway House" at 8 pm. Tickets may be purchased for \$8 in advance from the Bennington Bookshop, the Hawkins House and South Street Cafe in Bennington, or \$10 at the door, and \$5 for

students with student ID. Both performances will be at the Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse in Bennington.

The performances are sponsored by Bennington Pride Coalition and made possible by a grant from the Vermont Unity Project. For more information, check the web at www.petersontoscano.com and www.homonomo.com. Contact the Bennington Pride Coalition at Bennpride@gmail.com or www.benningtonpride.org

Christian I don't see anyone as my enemy. They may be an opponent on a specific issue, but there is much more to them and me than that one issue."

In addition to performing and writing, Toscano also speaks before college audiences. When interviewed, he was packing to attend a conference on linguistics in Washington, D.C. and was excited about performing

"Queer 101" at McGill University in Montreal.

Toscano lives in Hartford, Connecticut.

