

Theater Company

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citizen because I am gay, I miss being sure that everyone around me knows that too.

So Deja Vu, and the group of people that made it what it was, are gone. Are there other places in the Queen City's "straight" world where GLB people can feel comfortable being themselves without fear of reprisals? Of course Pauline's on Shelburne Rd., formerly Deja Vu's sister restaurant, is still owned by Robert Fuller and is a lovely place with wonderful food. But what about downtown Burlington? A friend tells me there are some out lesbians working at The Daily Planet and a same-sex couple can feel comfortable holding hands there. And Alfredo's Restaurant has just become a business member of Vermont Gay Social Alternatives, so that certainly seems welcoming. Any of us can hold hands over dinner anywhere, but we cannot always be sure that if another patron has a problem with our affections, the complainer will be encouraged to leave.

Perhaps what we all need to do is see what happens when we push the envelope a bit by displaying our affections publicly. (While, at the same time, being careful not to get ourselves killed.) The average non-gay person is much more used to seeing GLB people enjoying each other's company than they were just a few years ago. Quentin Crisp once said that true equality only comes when people are completely bored by your issues. When straight couples look right past GLB couples holding hands in restaurants, not even noticing them, then we will all experience that certain sense of Deja Vu. ▼

"Vermont CARES is happy to be a beneficiary," said director of administration Sylvia Racca. "It's certainly something that we couldn't have done ourselves," she said. "It highlighted the seriousness of the AIDS issue, but in a way that entertained...and it added both levity and a tear to the issue."

"This show may have been impossible to put on had it not been a benefit for Vermont CARES," Pratt stated. "BCPI was concerned that the subject matter could have been considered relevant only to a small segment of the Burlington community and would have therefore played to limited audiences; but because the whole community was outraged by the arson and felt a need to help this local organization, we were able to present this powerful show," he continued. When asked who comprised the majority of the audience, however, Pratt admitted that the gay community was definitely the predominant presence as "the audience laughed uproariously at jokes and lines that only gays would understand." Vermont CARES was also instrumental in helping to bring *Jeffrey* to the stage. "They were able to secure a sizable grant from Broadway CARES that enabled us (BCPI) to bring this powerful show to Vermont," said Pratt.

Surprisingly, although the play is about a gay man who swears off sex because of his fear of AIDS and then meets Mr. Right, the cast was not comprised of only gay men. "We had a great cast that was quite open-minded," said Pratt. "There was no reluctance or hesitation on any cast members' part to carry out their

scenes, whether it was a gay kissing scene or a bedroom scene." The show was a success and members of the cast worked well together because the play was "not only about AIDS," said director Michael Jordan Evans. An underlying universal theme pervades the entire show, "essentially, the whole play is saying, 'Go for it,'" he said.

Jeffrey "use(s) humor to teach a valuable and useful lesson," Pratt continued. "Humor is a much more powerful teaching tool than preachiness. The messages of the play were presented in a subtle manner, but subconsciously they hit home in some fashion and hopefully everyone left the show having learned something. So many people with HIV/AIDS have expressed how empowered they felt after seeing the show."

As a gay man playing the lead role, Craig Cabot said the play has special significance for him. "I've been to more funerals than my grandmother," said Cabot. "It feels too soon for that to be happening yet." However, Evans pointed out that the play is about a man choosing to live despite the constant presence of death. "That's what Vermont CARES is all about--that until you die, you live."

Vermont CARES continues to provide services to those suffering from HIV/AIDS thanks in part to the financial success of *Jeffrey*. Big City Players, Inc., will continue to raise funds for AIDS-related causes through the production of other staged works including *March of the Falsettos* or *Falsettoland* in the near future.

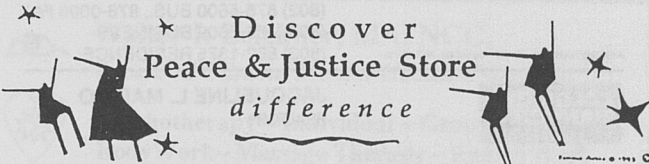
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