

Politics are used as little markers, as historical footnotes in the play, because you've got to have context. But within those historical footnotes, you have gay men changing and growing, and you have the idea of gay men learning how to love themselves, how to communicate with themselves, how to be strong, and how to become empowered. This whole play is about empowerment. And it's not just shaking your fist in the street. Empowerment is about self-discovery. It's not just working out on a Soloflex; it's knowledge."

This becomes clear as Cabot talks about working with the predominantly straight ensemble for *Jeffrey*. "There were moments when their embarrassment was embarrassing for me," he admits. "For example, when I had to be kissed, or we had some intimate physical contact ... this could not have happened without Mike's incredible talent for creating space that is safe and nurturing for people. That explains two thirds of the success of *Jeffrey*."

Evans responds quickly, admitting that at first he was nervous about the straight actors coming to terms with the kissing scenes in the play, but that he didn't think twice about the gay actors dealing with the intimacy. When Craig revealed that he was nervous about kissing someone he didn't know, the issue of sexual orientation got set aside. "It became not just a man kissing a man, but two people who didn't know each other kissing each other," Evans says, noting that the problems were the same in each case. This common ground allowed the group as whole to grow closer, and to more fully develop their craft on stage. "When you break down that sexual barrier, you find a whole new world of ways to

relate to people," Cabot says. "You just have to recognize and use the feelings you have at the moment ... and use that on stage. When we found ourselves in that moment on stage, when we were connecting and it was real for us, our sexualities were probably the least important thing. But it did take work to get there."

Cabot likens *the work* to therapy, but Evans, who is quick to avoid any pat definitions, disagrees. "It's not therapy, but it is applying a psychology." He likens it to the creation of ritual masks in both a physical and psychic sense: "We create our personalities, our personas, our masks to guard ourselves from the outside, and also from our inner shadows and ghosts and monsters. An actor uses that mask to create another character ... creating another mask in front of the mask they have, so they're two steps away from themselves. (As actors), we put the mask aside during rehearsal, and we create another persona, but this one is built to show. In ancient or primitive cultures, when they put on a mask, they were able to become something greater than themselves. That's essentially what creating the character is. (As Jeffrey or Jason Troy), Craig is able to be in the world in a way that he isn't allowed to be in our culture because we're such a repressed culture. That vulnerability - showing the very essence of the self - is where the power comes from."

"This is the kind of theater that has made me excited for life," Cabot says by way of encapsulating up his ongoing experience with *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, "and in order for me as a gay man to get the most out of life, I have to act on my

gayness. I have to show people what it's like to be me, and what it is to be gay."

"Is that because you haven't been reflected?" Evans asks. "Heterosexuals are reflected in society, whereas gays aren't reflected."

"Yes," Cabot replies, adding with the commitment of one who knows, "and you have to constantly work on that."

He becomes even more impassioned as he continues. "As gay people, we have to recognize the power of being a community. In order for that community to exist, it has to be healthy. In order to be healthy, we have to be functioning. In order to be functioning, we've got to understand ourselves. We've got to delve inside ourselves. This is what the play is doing for me."

And so *the work* continues. Judging from our our conversation, it may never end. This would appear to suit Evans and Cabot just fine as both continue to chart the depths of their respective souls in the context of theater.

At press time, performance dates and times for *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* had not been set. For more information, call Michael Evans at (802) 660-9706. ▼

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