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The New Group's 'Steve' Looks at Gay Relationships

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
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Director Cynthia Nixon has teamed up with writer Mark Gerrard and an all-star cast to present "Steve," a new gay relationship comedy playing through January 3 at the New Group at the Pershing Square Signature Center Romulus Linney Courtyard Theatre in New York City.

Steven (Matt McGrath) is a failed Broadway chorus boy who's a stay-at-home dad for the child he has with Stephen (Malcolm Gets), his partner of 14 years. Although Steven's lesbian bestie Carrie (Ashlie Atkinson) is dying of cancer, all Steve can think about is getting even with Stephen, who's been sexting Brian

(Jerry Dixon), whose longtime partner Matt (Mario Cantone) has just invited their hot young trainer to move in and become a 'throuple.' And every time sad Steven turns around, hunky waiter Esteban (Francisco Pryor Garat) is there to tantalize and seduce him.

The play looks at the idea of friendship and aging in the LGBT community, about fidelity and what that means, and about loyalty between partners, families and friends.



The cast and crew of 'Steve' (Source:Erik Carter)

"This situation of them bringing in a third person isn't going to put their relationship in danger because the way Mark (Gerrard) wrote it, you get the sense that this third person is on the way out, and the couple loves each other deeply," said Mario Cantone, who co-stars with his real-life partner Jerry Dixon. "I think they are highly sexual, but I don't think it puts their relationship in jeopardy. But for us in real life, we aren't bringing in a trainer to live in our house -- that's not going to happen."

The two admitted that working together countered their separation anxiety, and made the rehearsal process fun, with Cantone noting that "getting up and going to work with [Jerry]

every day was the best."



Working with director Cynthia Nixon (Source:Erik Carter)

Malcolm Gets echoed this sentiment, saying, "Working with this group of actors (as well as Cynthia, the crew, and everybody) has been wonderful. I met Jerry Dixon in Florida back in 1985. I've known Mario since at least 1995. I've known Matt socially for almost as long. I think absolutely it makes for a great translation to the stage. Having histories, experiences and friendships in common is an amazing thing. In a play that's all about history and relationships, it definitely translates to the stage."

Gerrard said that although the play was about a group of close friends like this, it wasn't inspired by any specific friends of his. He admits that he knew a couple who shacked up with their

personal trainer, and does have gay friends with kids. But he expected viewers to come to their own judgment.

"I tried not to come down on one side or other; I have my own feelings about this sort of stuff and what works in my relationship, but as I've gotten older, I've gotten a lot more tolerant of the many ways people get through their lives and stay happy," said Gerrard. "I have a puritanical streak, but still really appreciate other choices that people make. More power to this secondary couple in the play; I like their relationship, it works for them."



(Source:Monique Carboni)

"For a lot of couples, it might put the relationship in jeopardy, but it depends on the strength of the bond and the psychological make-up of the individuals," added Cantone. "No judgments. Every relationship has its own rules, and those rules are not anybody's business."

Gerrard said that being 47 -- the same age as the character Steven -- had made him more aware that getting older means losing people.

"It's really true that we're not going to live forever. As you get older and lose people your age, you are forced to grow up," said Gerrard. "I'm too young to have seen the AIDS crisis, so part of this play to me is about Steven figuring out how to grow up. One of the ways I have grown up is by coming to terms with the loss of people dear to me."



Francisco Pryor Garat, Matt McGrath and Ashlie Atkinson (Source:Monique Carboni)

The lesbian character is the embodiment of this ideal; she is based on a male friend that Gerrard lost. The fact that the character is based on a true person make it easy to understand how fleshed-out she is.

While some critics have questioned whether a gay couple sexting -- or even inviting a younger man into their bed -- would have disrupted a long-term relationship, others wonder if the advent of marriage equality has normalized LGBT relationships. Are our issues same as straight couples now?

"Yes and no," said Gerrard. "I think there is something about being gay that always be at least for me, something outsider-y. We are a minority group, and we always will be; that's the way

genetics or whatever pans out. There's something interesting about being the 'other,' in terms of coolness. Being chosen for being gay makes me more interesting than regular people, and also harder because we're a minority, traditionally a minority that gets anywhere from ignored to discriminated against."



Malcolm Gets (Source:Monique Carboni)

As gay couples begin to get divorced, like straight couples, there will still be something that makes our relationships different, said Gerrard.

"Gay guys I know have wandered in their relationships, but not to any greater degree than straight couples, but is that just the urban gay male hookup culture?" asked Gerrard. "The intersection between that is fascinating and different."

Gets said that there's no right or wrong way to do relationships; we're all just making it up as we go along, whether that's choosing to emulate a "traditional" relationship (whatever that is), or not.

"I have been in a (very happy) relationship for over 16 years now. I certainly see elements of my own relationship, as well as my friends, in Mark's wonderful play," said Gets. "I also am extremely happy to see that the play is resonating with the heterosexual audiences as well. I think that's why it's so strong. It's about relationships, marriage, commitment, parenting, fidelity... things that most people can relate to, regardless of their sexual orientation."

Although Gerrard is currently working on his MFA at NYU's Dramatic Writing program, he is thrilled that his first play "Steve" has seen so much success. While it may be hard to break into movies, he knows that his next play or television script will at least get some eyes.

"The great thing about work with Cynthia Nixon and The New Group is that whatever I write next, someone will read," said Gerrard.

"Steve" runs through January 3, 2016 at the New Group at the Pershing Square Signature Center Romulus Linney Courtyard Theatre, 480 W. 42nd St., New York, NY 10036.



Gets, Dixon, Cantone and McGrath (Source:Monique Carboni)

For information or tickets, visit <http://thenewgroup.org/steve>



Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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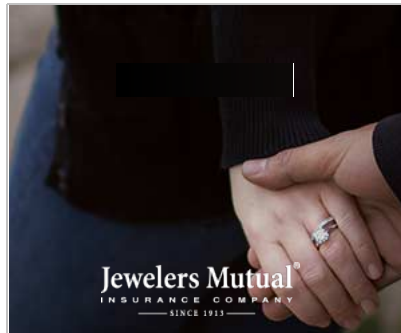
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