

Performance: Angels in America

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Seattle audiences have a rare opportunity this summer: to see both parts of Tony Kushner's "Angels in America" back to back.

This summer, Repertory Actors Theatre pairs up with Absurd Reality Theatre to present both Part I, "Millennium Approaches," and Part II, "Perestroika," during July and August. Audiences can see both parts of what has been billed as a "gay fantasia," in which religion and sexuality intersect, in the same weekend.

ReAct Artistic Director David Hsieh gives the credit for the initial idea to Brandon Ryan, Artistic Director of Absurd Reality Theatre. "He approached me with the idea of presenting 'Perestroika' to coincide with their anticipated production of 'Millennium Approaches,'" Hsieh said. "I thought it would be a wonderful collaborative opportunity, particularly for our 15th Anniversary season."

Ryan thought it was a natural collaboration. "The idea for our show and our overall company approach was to ensconce ourselves more adamantly in the community as a whole," he said. "I had seen and respected some of David's work, and he is the first person that I approached about this. Then bam, nine months later our baby is about to be born."

Difficulties securing a venue for "Millennium Approaches" have allowed each company to produce the two parts of "Angels in America" more independently. "Due to the loss of their venue, ART pushed back their production and moved their show to the Poncho Forum, at roughly the same time as ours was already scheduled," Hsieh said. "The productions are two separate productions...different casts, different designs...same wonderful playwright."

Ryan agreed. "Both of our productions have been difficult to align in terms of collaboration," he said. "I would have liked to have a more intertwined game plan for both of our productions, but alas it was not to be."

But that has not stopped the impulse for collaborative work. "Right now we have a few sponsored nights with the Babeland folks," Ryan said, as well as "a panel discussion with local religious community and activists leaders discussing the place of our gay community and the idea of living with AIDS in contemporary America."

Hsieh also continues to look for partnership opportunities in the Puget Sound area. "Here at ReAct, one of our main objectives of course is to help promote and raise support for other arts organizations, including other theatres," he said. "Cross promotions and joint productions are a wonderful way of sharing resources and getting the word out to theatre-going audiences."

"Angels in America: Perestroika" runs through August 10, 2008, at the Ethnic Cultural Theatre, 3940 Brooklyn Ave NE, Seattle.