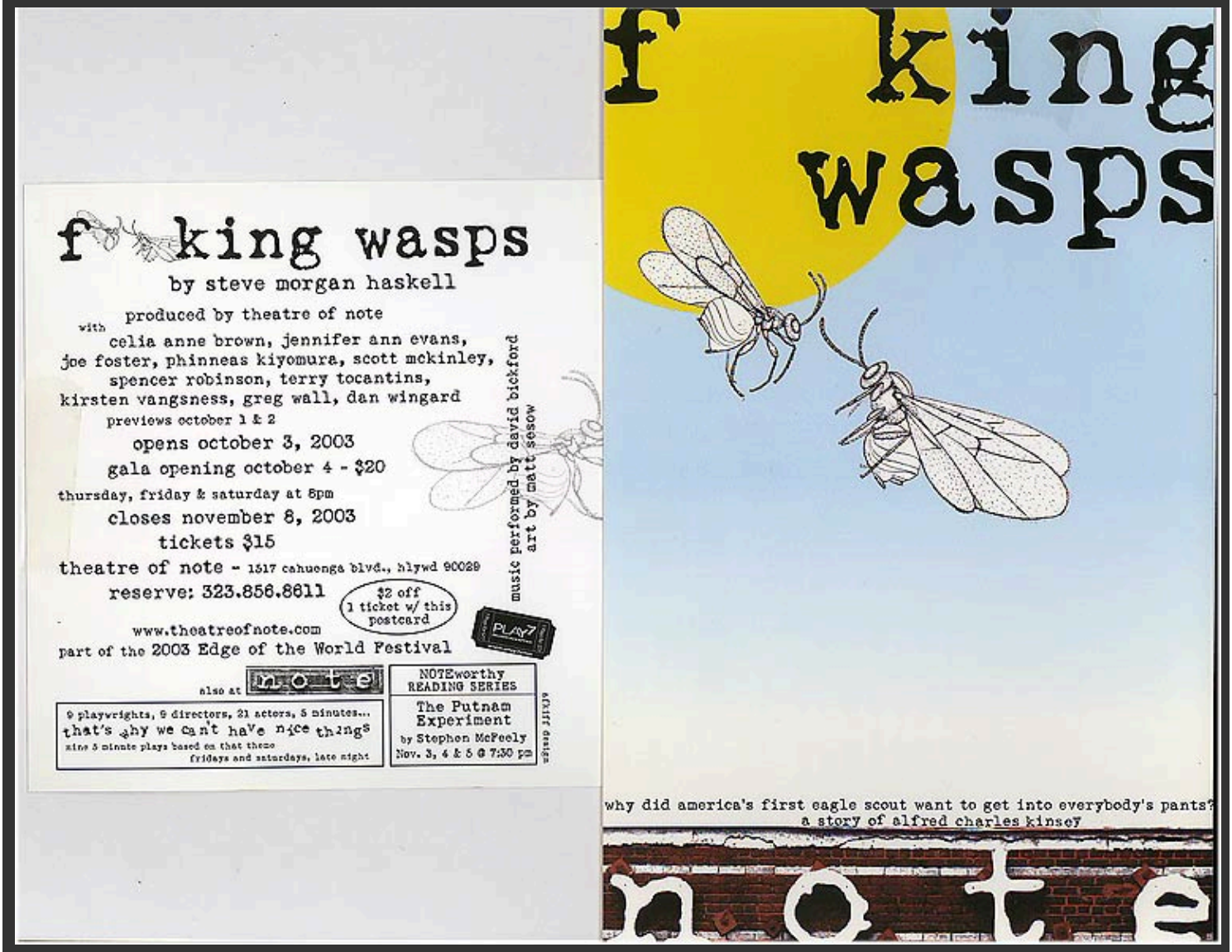
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this page:

Sesow creates backdrop paintings for play in Hollywood

("F**king Wasps")
2003



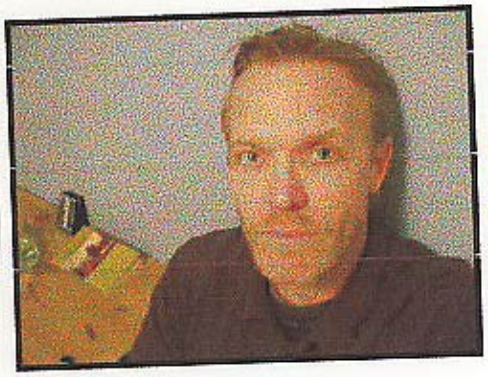


Terry Tocantins (as Alfred Kinsey) and Jennifer Evans in "f**king wasps"



Terry Tocantins and Celia Brown in "f**king wasps"





Playwright Steve Morgan Haskell

BACKSTAGE WEST- Critic's Choice (OCTOBER 8, 2003)
F**KING WASPS

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THE COMPLETE ONLINE PERFORMING ARTS RESOURCE

Steve Morgan Haskell's zany yet tributary dramatization of the life of groundbreaking sex researcher Alfred Charles Kinsey plays out like an X-rated valentine. Amid the current climate of sexual boundaries being pushed in proposed legal reforms, this juicy story cries out for dramatic treatment, and Haskell brings it to the stage after several years of extensive research. Kinsey's life was rife with fascinatingly edgy aspects, and the surprising thing about Haskell's crisply entertaining work is that, compared to the typically iconoclastic Theatre of NOTE fare, it is a fairly conventional comedy. Haskell tempers the tragic and explosively controversial aspects of this story with sharp laugh-out-loud humor and his obvious affection for the beleaguered protagonist, who died a famous but broken man.
(CONTINUES.)
Haskell directs his new work with great energy and style. David Bickford performs with zest at an onstage piano, highlighting the script's paradoxical mix of the seedy and the beautiful, and accompanying a few snappy cabaret-like interludes. Kathryn Stockwood's costumes offer another masterstroke; most characters, including Kinsey (Terry Tocantins) wear Boy Scout uniforms throughout the play, hilariously commenting on the blind shortsightedness of the self-appointed morality police. **Along the same lines, the minimalist set (adorned with amazing expressionistic paintings by world-renowned artist Matt Sesow)** includes such devices a trap door and a ladder so the characters can enter and exit scout-camp style.
‹ Les Spindle

LA WEEKLY REVIEW- (OCTOBER 9, 2003) LA WEEKLY (LAWEEKLY.COM)
***Recommended**
Even as he probed the secrets of others, granddaddy of American sexology Alfred Kinsey kept many of his own. Born in 1894, he grew up oppressed by a domineering father, developing closeted attractions for other boys early on. In writer-director Steve Morgan Haskell's abstruse stylistic play, Kinsey (Terry Tocantins) emerges as an ambitious weakling, a former Eagle Scout who, following 18 years of dry entomological research on wasps, achieved national acclaim by counting America's orgasms. At his Institute for Sex Research, the married Kinsey reportedly engaged (according to a recent biography) in numerous homosexual affairs and ménages à trois with his wife and employees. His career stalled after sanctimonious right-wing elements leveled charges of communism against him; he died two years later, a depressed man. With its crucifixion dream sequences and composite characters, the play is less one individual's story than a metaphoric social critique. Here, a vigorous ensemble brashly explicates the ironies of a sexually dysfunctional individual at the forefront of the libidinal revolution, emphasizing the material's garish humor while minimizing its pathos. **Designer Matt Sesow's posters of bug-eyed, tormented Eagle Scouts aptly reflect the piece's tone,** while David Bickford's live piano accompaniment ‹ an instrument Kinsey played and loved ‹ furnishes a welcome strain of underlying poignancy. Theater of NOTE, 1517 Cahuenga Blvd., Hlywd.; Thurs.-Sat. 8 p.m.; thru Nov. 15. (323) 856-8611. Written 10/9/2003 (Deborah Klugman)

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from the Santa Monica Mirror (October 2003):

On The Stage

From Boy Scout to Sex Scholar: A new play explores the life of Alfred Charles Kinsey

Anne Kelly-Saxenmeyer
Mirror drama critic

Early on in Steven Morgan Haskell's play about pioneering sex researcher Alfred Charles Kinsey, the Kinsey character thinks aloud about the insufficiency of art without science and science without art.

As happens in Haskell's Fucking Wasps, the Kinsey-novice wonders whether these words come directly from the subject (from the speeches, letters, and quotations that are woven into the play) or if they are an inference from the conceiver. Either way, Haskell has taken their substance to heart, creating by that balance that Kinsey refers to — between hard fact and the ambiguous magic that gives it character — a portrait that feels both trustworthy and inspired.

Excellently acted and fast-paced, Haskell's is the kind of show that seems to overflow with its material. Zigzagging forward through Kinsey's life, from his adolescence (when he became one of America's first Eagle Scouts) through his years at Bowdoin College, the play zips past Kinsey's Harvard years and lands at Indiana University where he did extensive studies of the gall wasp and later amassed the research that would become Sexual Behavior in the Human Male and Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (or "The Kinsey Reports"), the latter of which was so negatively received that it led to the loss of his Rockefeller funding and, Haskell contends, his death three years later.

Much more than a laundry list of Kinsey's accomplishments, the play offers a compelling portrait of a fallible genius caught between a host of opposing forces. To this challenging role, Terry Tocantins brings humor, complexity, and physical grace, conjuring the magnetism and torment of a great man.

At the start of a lifelong struggle with the religious establishment, Kinsey breaks with his Methodist upbringing and his father (an imposing Greg Wall). In the academic world he's driven by both pure-science idealism, embodied by his exuberant, high school biology classmate Alice Field (a delightfully odd Celia Anne Brown), and bare ambition, which he shares with star chemistry scholar and wife Clara Bracken McMillen Kinsey (the formidable Jennifer Ann Evans).

Kinsey and the research team of Paul Gebhard, Wardell Pomeroy, and Vincent Nowlis (a well-teamed Spencer Robinson, Joe Foster, and Dan Wingard) thrive and fall under the pressure of their sexuality research, becoming immersed in their data and in their own tangled relationships, and torn by public opinion, which alternately praises and condemns their work.

If Haskell uses Kinsey's texts to capture the man's mind, he locates his emotional life in music (Kinsey loved to play the piano), and on-stage pianist David Bickford adds an essential layer to the piece.

The focal points of a relatively bare set are paintings by Washington, D.C.-artist Matt Sesow. With their mix of frank images (which willfully reduce the human to his base realities) and brash artistry (which attests to something more), they are the ideal backdrop for Kinsey's story.

Fucking Wasps presented by and at Theatre of NOTE, 1517 Cahuenga Blvd., Hollywood. Thursday-Saturday 8 p.m. October 3-November 15. $15. (323) 856-8611.



"Add it Up (with the birds,the bees and bunny)"
6 feet x 4 feet
acrylic/oil stick, lumber crayon on unstretched canvas
*SOLD
PAINTING DETAIL
used for "f**king wasps" play in hollywood, california at 'theatre of note'



"Kinsey"
12 feet x 6 feet
acrylic/oil stick, lumber crayon on unstretched canvas
*SOLD
PAINTING DETAIL
used for "f**king wasps" play in hollywood, california at 'theatre of note'



"Twisted Spine (with gall wasp)"
6 feet x 4 feet
acrylic/oil stick, lumber crayon on unstretched canvas
*SOLD
PAINTING DETAIL
used for "f**king wasps" play in hollywood, california at 'theatre of note'



"Kinsey Crucifixion (with testicular stigmata)"
6 feet x 4 feet
acrylic/oil stick, lumber crayon on unstretched canvas
$2000
used for "f**king wasps" play in hollywood, california at 'theatre of note'

Coagula Magazine (Los Angeles)



Review of Sesow's work with Theater of Note
F**king Wasps
November 2003



"Gal Wasps (f**king wasps)"
12 feet x 6 feet
acrylic/oil stick, lumber crayon on unstretched canvas
*SOLD
PAINTING DETAIL
used for "f**king wasps" play in hollywood, california at 'theatre of note'


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