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THE AMERICAN GAY EXPERIENCE

Arts & Style

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The Boston Reader

SECTION B



Robert and Donald Kinney are living in Iowa City where they are spending time working on new projects.

SPECIAL TO THE BOSTON READER / JEFF PALLARD

The Kinney Brothers

Expressing their pride by nurturing a growing gay video genre

MUSIC / By Thom Cox



John Corigliano's music will not be pigeonholed

The following interview is reprinted for *Pride* from the last edition.

NEW YORK CITY
THE PERFORMANCE that took place at Symphony Hall last March will have to go down in my mental scrapbook as one of the most moving, passionate, and flawless performances I've ever heard from the Boston Symphony Orchestra or any orchestra for that matter. The program began with *Prelude for Siring Orchestra* from an unfortunately seldom heard composer, Gerold Finzi. Composed in the 1920's and remaining unpublished until after his death in 1956, *Prelude* is a work

of at once restive tenderness and at others sweeping emotion. The BSO, under guest conductor Leonard Slatkin, performed this music with absolute affection and tasteful restraint.

I wonder if anyone in the audience was completely prepared for what was to follow intermission. One of the first performances by the BSO of what quite possibly may come to be seen as one of the seminal works of the late twentieth century—*Symphony No. 1* by John Corigliano. It is brimming with a dramatic intensity perhaps unheard since Mahler, these

See CORIGLIANO, page B10

By DAVID HIRSCH
I FEEL LIKE Sally Jessy Raphael when introducing videomakers Robert and Donald Kinney as identical twin gay brothers. Should I then describe some of their work, this titillating uneasiness remains for in a series of videos produced between 1989 and 1991, the Kinneys unblinkingly examined taboos surrounding the psychological and sexual complexities of twinning.
Two of these videos, *The Maids* and *Stephen*, along with their most recent production *Agora*, will be screened at this year's Boston City & Lesbian Film/Video Festival, where the Kinneys will be making personal appearances (see below).
To view these videos is to realize quickly that, far from exhibiting a bizarre sideshow, the Kinneys are looking through their twinning at dilemmas common to many gays and lesbians living in a culture that both stamps us with freakish stereotypes and renders us invisible. By reconstructing and reclaiming those images circulating in the general marketplace, the Kinneys dish up startlingly original slices of American life in all its melodramatic glory.

We had a three-way on the phone recently, a bit different in tone from our usual banter:

ROBERT KINNEY: Maybe you should preface it: usually we talk on the phone about things like showing Barbie dolls up our asses...

DONALD KINNEY: And I put Ken on the table and make him waltz.

RK: And sometimes I play Ken.
DAVID HIRSCH: Some *Barbies* and *Kens* living in Iowa City haven't appreciated your game-playing: *Agora* caused a controversy there recently when it appeared on public access TV. Did they air the uncensored, well, the uncensored version of *Agora*?

DK: None of our tapes they've shown is censored. And *Agora* had

been running very late at night. I think people were upset about seeing two men in bed.

DH: I can think of only one vaguely pornographic, and very brief, shot...

RK: And that's actually just a rubber dildo.

DK: Sorry to disappoint you. Although the purpose of public access television is to allow the community to create and air their own programs, and then respond, unfortunately they usually don't complain about anything but gay-consent sort of work.

DH: In *Agora* itself, the lesbian and gay characters spend a fair amount of time watching TV, trying to locate themselves in relation to the "general audience" that network TV targets. It's fascinating to see how disturbed this "general audience"

can be when the tables are turned...

RK: Rather than us looking at them, they're looking at us....and looking at themselves as we see them. It's a beautiful conceptual loop that's happening. If people can't handle that coming onto their televisions, into their homes, can they imagine growing up and never seeing a representation of themselves, and then suddenly seeing it.

DK: We're trying to locate, as well as create, a gay subjectivity. We're going through those dominant media to try to reflect them back, and to come out on the other side with something individually or collectively ours as gay men.

RK: Central in our work is the act of thievery that occurs. The characters in *Agora* and *The Maids* are in a position where they're never going to

be given anything, and the only way for them to possess something is to steal it, because they want and need it to survive. And, in some ways, this happened conceptually with *Stephen*: we took back that narrative from a closeted context, and made it our own. A bit of thievery.

Consuming Passions

DH: In *The Maids* you suggest that consumer culture can consume queer individuals: I'm thinking of the tension between the dark-haired, working-class sisters and the image of a glamorous bleached blonde that appears on a TV commercial. And in *Agora*, TV and the marketplace in general become important in the making and breaking of your outlaw characters.

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THEATER REVIEW / By William Castronuovo

'Oh, my chocolate cream soldier'



ARMS AND THE MAN: Jeff McCarthy, Frances Cuka, Katy Selverstone, and Humbert Allen Astrodo at the Huntington Theatre, Boston.

BOSTON
THE HUNTINGTON THEATRE Company, (Huntington Theatre, 264 Huntington Ave., Boston) has been on a roll this year, and its final production crosses a consistently wonderful season.

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (through June 20) is performed with ease, savvy, and life. The play, a delightfully irreverent exposé of society's grandiose myths about love and war, was first performed in 1894 (Oscar Wilde was present on opening night; he loved it). Almost a century later, its comic sarcasm still holds true.

On opening night, the laughter grew with each passing moment. Frances Cuka, who plays the heavily bustled matriarch, Catherine Petkoff, comes close to stealing the show, but the tightly knit cast holds its own:

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ARTS & STYLE



AGORA: Kerry Snyder and Tammy Hopkins star.

Kinneys: Playing with stereotypes

KINNEYS, from page B1

RK: The inclusion of commercials and popular culture in our work is not simply the situation of the early '60s pop artists, who were somewhat condescending toward popular culture, placing kitsch in the gallery as a kick at modernity. Our attitude is not looking down from a lofty height, it's really about being immersed in that culture and negotiating those types of representations and objects that surround and to some extent produce us.

DK: A bottle of Resolve, or a box of Tide is actually much closer to you than a distanced criticism on such products. And we actually come from a family that produces those sorts of items.

RK: At the breakfast table we didn't read *The New York Times*. It was the back of the Post Toasties box.

DK: There's a trail-park aesthetic to our work that recognizes the kitschy quality of it all but at the same time embraces it because it's so much a part of your experience growing up.

We're taking on those representations in the popular media as reflections of who we view ourselves both to be and not to be. The TV screen is an unreachably ideal for the maids, who are working-class, who don't have—aren't allowed to have—a full-blown femininity like that blond bombshell of an actress.

DK: What do you make of advertising's recent purchase on homoerotic desire—Calvin Klein and Marky Mark?

DK: It's problematic for me. We're falling into the same traps of representation that have been explored and torn apart through straight advertising's representation of women. And with Marky Mark: once he opened up his mouth, he revealed himself to be a homophobic opportunist.

RK: I don't like my life being served back to me as a hamburger, and I equally don't like my sexuality being handed back to me as a pair of underwear.

DK: So I take it you don't wear Calvin.

RK: Well, in fact I do. (laughter) And I don't like them. They look great the first time you put them on, but then they shrink, and you hope nobody ever catches you with them. That's kind of a gift way of putting it. But while we're drooling over these pretty boys we should realize that we're not necessarily being represented; rather, our desires are being jerked around to get us to purchase something. And a lot of it is excluding difference just as mainstream advertising has always done.

DK: They're doing the same thing in the lush slick gay magazines: they push multicultural images of all these very handsome gay men, but basically they're all coming out of the same mold...

RK: Out of the same gym.

DK: But so many of "our" sexual fantasies are based on these stereotypes taken from advertising. In *Agora*, there's a dream sequence where Crab fantasies about being raped by Joe Camel. Do you mean that as a critique of how we can desire our own domination through the media? It doesn't seem that simple.

DK: It's not that simple, for as much as we've been criticizing this, it can become an extremely gay—I mean, gray—area. We designed that image to be brutal, yet once it was produced and put in the context of a surreal dream, it became something sexually charged. That's a good example of how sometimes initially you bring up something really problematic, and it turns out to be this kind of desiring image.

RK: I remember reading statistics saying that more children know who Joe Camel is than Mickey Mouse. So, at least for this brief market period, he is a highly visible icon of dominant masculinity. And that's very different from who Crab is, who Swallow is, who Katch and Joy are—they're people basically stuck behind a door in a motel room. One level of that image is about the marketplace raping this individual. Taking your desire and serving it back up to you as a Camel cigarette.

DK: And then there's that very dangerous zone of criticizing rape.

DK: That's one thing I found powerful about *Agora*, though, the way you've counterbalanced this male erotic dream of rape with the actual physical threat women experience in our culture. I'm curious to hear your thoughts on the linkage between misogyny and homophobia.

DK: I think they're actually brother and sister, if you will—or sister and sister. In a patriarchal society, if you locate misogyny you're going to locate homophobia.

RK: In my own growing-up experiences, I don't think I was being attacked for my homosexuality per se, but for my presentation of myself as a less-than-masculine man. With those kind of complicated gymnastics, it's obvious that many of the concerns discussed in feminism should be important to us.

DK: And just because we're a marginalized community doesn't mean that we don't internalize stereotypes: queers have a good deal of homophobia, misogyny, even misandry. I think *Agora* tries to indicate how profound the split is even within our "community."

Through the Mirror of the Other

DK: You once said, Bobby, that since your early visual information was primarily television rather than film, the first time you saw a Marilyn Monroe film your reaction was, "My god! She's ripping off Ginger Grant from *Gilligan's Island*."

RK: I didn't even know who Marilyn Monroe was, but I knew Ginger Grant.

DK: When you're exposed to the model of Ginger Grant or Skipper and Gilligan for many years, and only afterwards encounter Laurel and Hardy or Marilyn Monroe, the original suddenly becomes a gross mockery...

RK: You take the original for the copy. We grew up in the simulacrum. We've been very influenced by soap operas and melodrama: you can deal with arch situations and tragicomic dramatic responses—it's kind of pornographic.

Mildred Pierce's daughter was this wretched child, and you just wanted to throttle her; but then you follow her into seedy nightclubs and see her dancing, and she was quite beautiful in her badness: what you wouldn't give to put on those boas and be a tramp like that.

DK: When we take on taboo characters and situations, it's not at an explosive distance, but instead a locating of ourselves within those characters and saying, yes, this is a very strong possibility.

DK: You often play with mirrors in your videos, which is almost a marker of the melodramatic style of *Six*, or even *Fastbinder*. But certainly you can't show a mirror, or shoot through a mirror, in anything with a lesbian or gay theme without commenting on cliché equations of narcissism and homosexuality.

DK: And as soon as you bring on twins in front of the screen, there's the very stereotypical idea that one is just the reflection of the other, or that

it's some personality split: dark-light, good-bad.

RK: It's a way of suggesting how our characters are forced to see themselves through others' images of who they are. They're not necessarily looking at themselves, but they look at themselves through the mirror of the other person. The mirror at least raises the possibility of that kind of dialog, or dialectic, being created visually in our work.

DK: It also raises the question of whose desires are being projected onto the screen. Have you sensed that viewers get some illusory *Freuding Tom* thrill, as if there's no difference between the roles you play on screen and the roles you play in life?

DK: It seems a very popular fantasy to find twinning erotic. It's an intrigue even for me to encounter twins. We encountered twins up here in Cedar Rapids, and my eyes were just bouncing back and forth and I had all sorts of dirty thoughts. I think both Bobby and I are perfectly willing to give that to an audience.

RK: But it has to be on our own terms. Although we enjoy playing with clichés, it can become tiresome over and over again to get the question pointed at us. "Are you sleeping together? Well I realize that people are making this mistake, which ultimately we have to give to them; you have to choose your battles."

The films...

Featured works by Robert and Donald Kinney at the Boston Gay & Lesbian Film Video Festival:

■ *The Maids* (1990), based on the play by Jean Cocteau. While Madame is away, her servants (two sisters) play out the fantasy and horror of their own lives, the "game" becoming a dangerously real enactment of their anger toward each other, their employer, and their socio-economic marginality. Shows June 13, 2:00 pm, at the Harvard Film Archive. The Kinneys will be present for this screening.

■ *Stephen* (1991), based in part on *The Bridges of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder. Stephen focuses on twin brothers who must confront issues of autonomy when another man, and ultimately AIDS, threatens to separate them. Shot within an apartment done up in competing iconographies of high modernism, Christian fundamentalism, and American kitsch, Stephen records the silence resulting from the clash of discordant cultural codes. Shows with *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*, by Mark Rapport, on June 4, 6, 8, at 7:30 pm; June 5, 7, 9, at 9:30 pm, at HFA.

■ *Agora* (1992). "Agora" is a Greek term for the marketplace or site of civic, economic, and religious activity. "Agoraphobia" is a phobic fear of public places. *Agora* focuses on a Midwestern supermarket (a microcosm of the larger society) as seen through the eyes of a young, agoraphobically closeted gay man, and two outsize couples—one lesbian, one gay—whose lives intersect in a roadside motel. Shows June 11, 7:30 pm; and June 12, 9:30 pm, at HFA. The Kinneys will be present for both screenings.

■ Other featured artists making personal appearances at the Festival include Patricia Rozema (award-winning director of *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*), Ellen Spiro, Barbara Hammer, and Cheryl Dunye. For a complete program, call 495-4700.