

Haggard's escort takes real stage in Boulder

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Mike Jones, the prostitute/drug liaison who brought down pastor Ted Haggard, is about to appear in his first stage play. And it's for a theater company called Perfect Disgrace.

Insert your own joke here.

The play is called "Porridge," and Jones, 50, will be playing a role inspired by - himself. Boulder playwright Brian Bauman, a 29-year-old gay man, sees Jones as a man who took a risk, uncovered a hypocrite, and was then abandoned by the gay community.

"I find Mike Jones to be heroic," Bauman said. "And that is why I cast him in this play."

Jones' theater background? "I don't have any," he said with a laugh.

No matter to Bauman. He calls it a casting coup. "I'm not concerned with



As a masseuse and escort, Mike Jones claims to have had many military clients seeking both services. "When I had men come to me that were in the military, a lot of the encounters were emotional," Jones said. "They were scared." (The Denver Post / Cyrus McCrimmon) ideas of 'traditional' acting expertise," he said. "I have complete faith in Mike's performing abilities."

"Porridge" deals with issues of truth and hypocrisy in power relationships. More specifically, Bauman said, "it's the story of three Gulf War Marines who go AWOL after being exposed to friendly-fire nerve gas in an all-base orgy."

Bauman calls it a scathing (and "decimatingly funny") investigation of American cultural imperialism in the Middle East, the quagmire of the Persian Gulf War and the shadows cast by "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

It will be performed five times at the Boulder International Fringe Festival, which opens Thursday.

It's fiction, of course. But not entirely. Jones, who prefers to be described as "a masseuse and escort," claims to have had many military clients seeking both services over his 26 years in the sex industry.

"When I had men come to me that were in the military, a lot of the encounters were emotional," Jones said. "They were scared. These were people that could never truly be themselves in the military. It's all secrets. In my book, I wrote about a soldier who was crying in my arms because he's got to go back to (Iraq). It's pretty powerful."

After Bauman read "I Had to Say Something: The Art of Ted Haggard's Fall," he was moved to incorporate new monologues into his play. So who better to fully render his "tough and sincere" new character - Private Ed - than Jones?

"My monologues are very poetic, and they talk about men that just can't be themselves," said Jones. "It deals with people dealing with lies. And it allows me to express the emotions that I saw in these men."

Jones had told The New York Times Sunday Magazine what he'd like to do next is act in a play. When Bauman read that, he went back to work.

"The book has had an influential impact on the development of 'Porridge,' specifically in terms of what is considered



Of his theater background, novice actor Mike Jones admits, "I don't have any." (Associated Press / Ed Andrieski)
'heroic' in an upside-down world," said Bauman.

In October, Jones alleged a three-year, meth-fueled sexual relationship with Haggard, then head of the 14,000-strong New Life megachurch in Colorado Springs. Haggard, who then resigned,

had vocally opposed a statewide referendum that would have provided basic legal rights for same-sex couples.

Jones outed Haggard six days before the referendum's failure, prompting criticism from inside and outside the gay community that Jones had likely hastened its demise by fostering images of the worst kind of gay stereotypes.

Jones disagrees.

"What it did is (foster the) stereotype that evangelical pastors can't be trusted," he said.

"I've had more straight people come up to me and tell me, 'I voted for Referendum I because of what you did, Mike. I have not had one person say, 'I voted against it because of what you did.' I am so tired of those people trying to use me as a scapegoat for that. In fact, I think it came closer than it would have if I had said nothing."

Unlike many gay people in Colorado, Bauman "was actually really thrilled" Jones broke the news when he did.

"I was disappointed with Ref. I because I felt it was apologetic and was asking for less than equal rights," said Bauman, who married his partner in San Francisco during the brief window when Mayor Gavin Newsom legalized gay marriage.

"I'm against civil unions. I want the whole shebang - marriage, the word and the deed. Mike Jones was made a scapegoat. The measure was doomed from the start. You can't incrementally gain rights. You have to fight for them outright."

Jones has parlayed his tryst into a book tour, lecture circuit and great media exposure, so he says he's becoming better about taking shots from critics.

"I'm a public figure now, so people can say whatever they want," he said. "But I think when people actually meet me and talk to me and find out where I am coming from, then usually they have a different perspective."

He knows that public interest in him won't last. So what's next for him?

"I don't know what direction my life is heading in, but I am certainly open to anything, and this (theater) gives me another outlet to vent my emotions," he said. "There is a lot more to Mike Jones than the prostitute-slash-drug-dealer that people read."

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