

# ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

INTERVIEW BY DINA LAURA

Can an overweight gay man find love with the help of his drag queen roommate, a stripper-turned-evangelist, a lazy-eyed nymphomaniac and even the soulful presence of Afrodite? Such is the question posed by playwright Peter Zachari in his latest play, "One Love," opening this month at Theater for the New City in NYC. A six-year resident of Astoria, Peter has penned a multitude of shows, several of which have won awards. His musical, "Parker & Dizzy's Fabulous Journey to the End of the Rainbow," starring Karen Lynn Gomey ("Saturday Night Fever"), Rodney Santiago ("The A-List: New York") and drag-personality Hedda Lettuce, premiered at The New York International Fringe Festival in 2011. He holds an MFA from the University of Florida and taught acting and directing at Salem State College for more than six years. I recently sat down with this versatile artist to ask him just how, exactly, he is able to do all the things he does.

## What inspired you to write this story? How much of yourself is in it?

"One Love" is actually the very first play I ever wrote and the only play of mine that hasn't been produced. I wrote it 15 years ago. When I was an auditioning actor, my oversized body led me to the most unflattering roles. One time just my stomach got an audition. Truly, "Lift up your shirt and show us how your stomach feels. Make it happy! Make it excited!" My physical "type" overshadowed my talent and I was the punch line of many a visual joke. I wanted more control over the

roles I played, and what overweight characters could say and be, so I started playwrighting. My objective evolved past body size to give a voice to other voiceless members of society. I wanted to tell untold stories of unlikely heroes: outcasts, misfits. My characters challenge the

audience's perceptions of gender, sexuality, beauty, politics and authenticity. So I'd like to think that a lot of me is in this, no pun intended. But then I also think there are pieces of me scattered throughout all my plays.



## What is the heart of your story about and who do you think it will most appeal to?

Hunter is an overweight gay man who got burned by love in the past. The ghost of that relationship leaves him unable to find love even in his fantasies. Only when

a sexy stranger from Idaho enters his life does he have the courage to finally face those demons preventing him from finding happiness. I imagine this story appeals to just about everybody. You could probably poll a hundred people on the streets of New York from all walks of life and asked if they have been burned by love and the majority of them would say, "Definitely." The theme is pretty universal. We just happen to tell it with an overweight gay man, a drag queen, a former-stripper-turned-Conservative, a lazy-eyed nymphomaniac and a mysterious woman named Afrodite.

## You have partnered with Theater for the New City on four of your shows. How did that relationship come about?

My collaborator Joey and I were looking around Manhattan trying to find a space to perform "Fat Asses: The Musical." We randomly passed Theater for the New City and decided, "What the hell? Let's go in." We explained who we were and then Crystal Field, the executive director, turned the corner. I knew I had about 30 seconds to pitch the show. So I did, and she just paused, looked at us and said, "Well, you two look really interesting." When we walked out the door, we didn't even make it to the subway before we got a call. Crystal wanted to

present our show. And we've been there for four years in a row. We work with the whole TNC design staff. They're family.

## You are an actor, writer, director and teacher. What do you like about each, and is there one that you prefer and why?

Writing is the most solitary and spiritual part. You are actually creating lives to present to the world so it really feels like giving birth. Directing brings the baby to life as you assist them to learn to walk, to talk and feel. Actors get to be the life of these characters and agree to temporarily lend their bodies and voices to these creations. And the teacher in me beams during rehearsal when any discovery is made by the artist. Ultimately you hope to create a piece of material that will ignite the passions of all artists involved, which in turn will make for a very enjoyable experience for the audience.

## In your last play "Under the Knife," which also debuted at Theater for the New City, you were the writer, director and one of the actors. What made you step back from acting in this piece?

"Under the Knife" was a fantastic experience. We had a solid ensemble of top-notch actors so it was easy to inject myself into the craziness of that farce. But it is quite taxing.