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**trodding the boards
...from 70**

situation; hers was another lovely voice. Alys Murray found the right comic yet stern mix to make Jack's Mother adoring yet frustrated with her cow-loving son. Madeline Davis well-conveyed the romantic ambivalence of the Baker's Wife, while Adler Hyatt made for a refreshing change as he demonstrated that the Baker doesn't have to be nebbishy in either appearance or demeanor as long as his maturation springs convincingly from deep inside his soul.

Meghan Kessel, Christian Tarzetti and Amelie Gelpi contributed nasty fun as Cinderella's Stepmother and Stepsisters. Connor Appel's voice seemed to be off in the first act but he was much stronger as Cinderella's Prince in the second. And David Murray, a Best Actor in a Musical Ambie nominee last year for *Honk!*, is now in league with the teenagers and was fine in the small but important role of the Steward.

So what'll it be next year? *Follies*? *The Magic Flute*?

**The Wiz at
The Anthony Bean
Community Theater**

You know a show's a success when it's hugely entertaining and its featured attraction—a beloved Grammy Award winner—hasn't even appeared yet. Such was the case with the ABCT/NORD Summer Camp pro-

duction of *The Wiz*.

The Wiz is probably never going to top anyone's list of greatest musicals. But by casting his production with both kids and adults, Director Anthony Bean not only brought out the fairly simple humor in William F. Brown's book that is well-suited for kids to put over but, more importantly, the visceral sense of authority that adults have over children, a quality so essential to this coming of age story that is usually missing when the cast consists only of adults.

Bean's direction was simple but effective; Act One, which often drags, flew by here. Bean seemingly didn't talk down to his young cast but guided them to develop their characterizations with the same depth as he does when doing August Wilson's plays.

Musical Director Jeremy Pierre did an outstanding job and if the addition of off-stage singers was a little distracting, it nicely sweetened the sound. Griffin Collins' choreography was vibrant and imaginative but not so complex as to overwhelm the youngest members of the cast.

And who were those youngest cast members? The cutest Munchkins you've ever seen complete with attitude to spare.

It takes a real actress to stand up to those li'l Munchkins and this *Wiz* had one in its Dorothy, Prinsey Walker who achieved the perfect balance of spunk and deference to those characters she meets along the yellow brick road. Walker endowed *You're a Lion* with staggering conviction and passion and, if the tears falling from her eyes in the last scene came, in part, from her feelings about doing the show itself (or so I was told), she remained

poised and enfolded those heart-stopping tears into Dorothy's emotional journey. At a mere 13, Walker eclipsed the 18-year-old Stephanie Mills' slicker performance. And let's not even talk about Miss Ross's!

With his rubbery limbs, Jeremiah Croft brought to life a delightfully amusing Scarecrow. Justin Brown's Tinman betrayed an

innate sweetness even before he got his heart. Ambie winner Josh Kagler made a welcome return to the local stage as the blustery Cowardly Lion, singing and acting up a tornado, well, a storm and, along with Croft and Brown, displaying sharp comic

[continued on 77]

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**trodding the boards
...from 76**

timing.

Among the older folks, Gavin Bell was a large presence, literally and figuratively, as The Wiz. Brittney James, a fine, funny actress with a strong voice, was amusing as the wicked Evillene but swallowed some of her lyrics in *Don't Nobody Bring Me No Bad News*. Irma Thomas had no such problem and when she finally did appear to sing *If You Believe*, it was goose bump time.

Sure there were some shortcomings, mostly in the technical area, but this was the most joyous, the most heartfelt, and simply the most entertaining *Wiz* I have ever seen.

**Dinner With Friends
at Actor's Theatre of
New Orleans**

Congratulations to Actor's Theatre of New Orleans on their 5th anniversary and their pitch perfect revival of Donald Margulies' *Dinner With Friends*.

René J.F. Piazza's inspired direction was sensitive to all the nuances of this drama about two fortysomething couples, one of whom is in the ugly process of splitting up. What could've been an evening of talktalktalk passed by in the blink of an eye.



**Chelle Ambrose, Benjamin
Clement, Vanessa Cloke & Leon
Contavesprie in
*Dinner With Friends***

Benjamin Clement was extremely good as the boorish Tom who has left Beth (Vanessa Cloke) for a young travel agent. Clement embodied all those guys who come down to New Orleans who hit the strip clubs on Bourbon Street in a specious quest to recapture their youth and sexual vigor.

Cloke, a remarkable actress new to me, gave Beth, an aspiring artist, a genuine prickliness in an emotionally drawn out and open performance. Suffice to say, she reminded me of people I know.

In the less showy parts of Karen and Gabe, Chelle Ambrose and Leon Contavesprie reprised their roles from ATNO's debut production. Ambrose used the lightest of touches to express Karen's controlling streak, and a dusting of bonhomie to cover her censorious nature that, unconsciously perhaps, chafes at her friends' happiness.

If Contavesprie's Gabe was something of a goofball, this actor let the audience wonder if there were any infidelities in Gabe's past, conveying the thought and maybe even the urge, yet seeming incapable or at least unlikely of carrying out the

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Krystal

Bourbon St. at Canal St.

action. Absolutely smashing. Together he and Ambrose were completely natural as two scared individuals standing on the edge of the unfathomable future.

Despite ATNO's exemplary production, however, I had reservations about the play itself. While Margulies raises some legitimate questions and issues about

middle-age life, he never goes further to provide any real illumination about them. For me, *Dinner* is the theatrical equivalent of a genre painting, a superficial snapshot of some not very interesting people's lives.

Admittedly, I've been underwhelmed by Margulies' other plays that I've seen (*Collected Stories*, *Sight Unseen*). Or

maybe, as a single GWM, the concerns of these marrieds-with-kids just don't touch me as they do other m-w-k's. But still, why *Dinner* was awarded the 2000 Pulitzer Prize is beyond me.

Regardless, I tremendously enjoyed ATNO's brilliant staging of this not-so-brilliant play. Here's to ATNO's next five years!



Good Friends mgr. Neel & Rawhide mgr. Joe welcome you to Rawhide's Wednesday BYOM Night



Andy being wetted down @ Corner Pocket's Wet Jockey Shorts Contest



Marcy Marcell joins Stewart Butler as Larry Bagneris presents Mayoral Proclamation declaring Stewart Butler Day



Jordy David, Cody, Gina, Stephen & Justin @ 700 Club



Rawhide's Meat Night brings out the New Orleans Bears



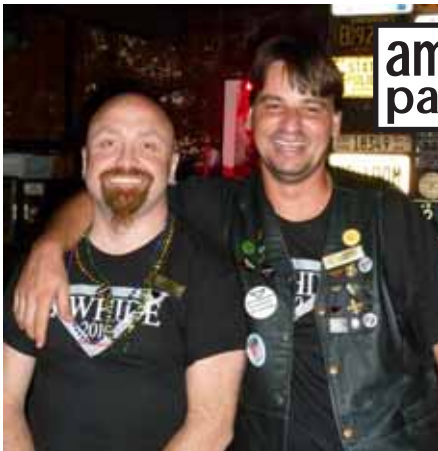
Richard gets ready for SD Wet Jockey Shorts Contest Wednesday @ The Corner Pocket



Lloyd Sensat & Gene Cizik wishing Stewart Happy 80th b-day @ JohnPaul's



Isaac & Joe welcome you to Oz



Catch bartenders Greg & Jason @ Rawhide



Dancer Joel on the bar @ The Corner Pocket



Marcy Marcell joins Stewart as Ron Jullian presents beautiful b-day poster by Larry Graham



JR behind the bar @ Cutter's



Smokin' hot Charlie Bear shows off his meat!



Johnny dancing @ The Corner Pocket



Buttercup hails from Bourbon Pub Parade



Marigny Wii Bowling League Champions Todd & Toby (standing) & runner-ups Ronnie & Rene @ Cutter's



Rawhide bartender RJ



Catch Preston @ The Corner Pocket dancing on the bar



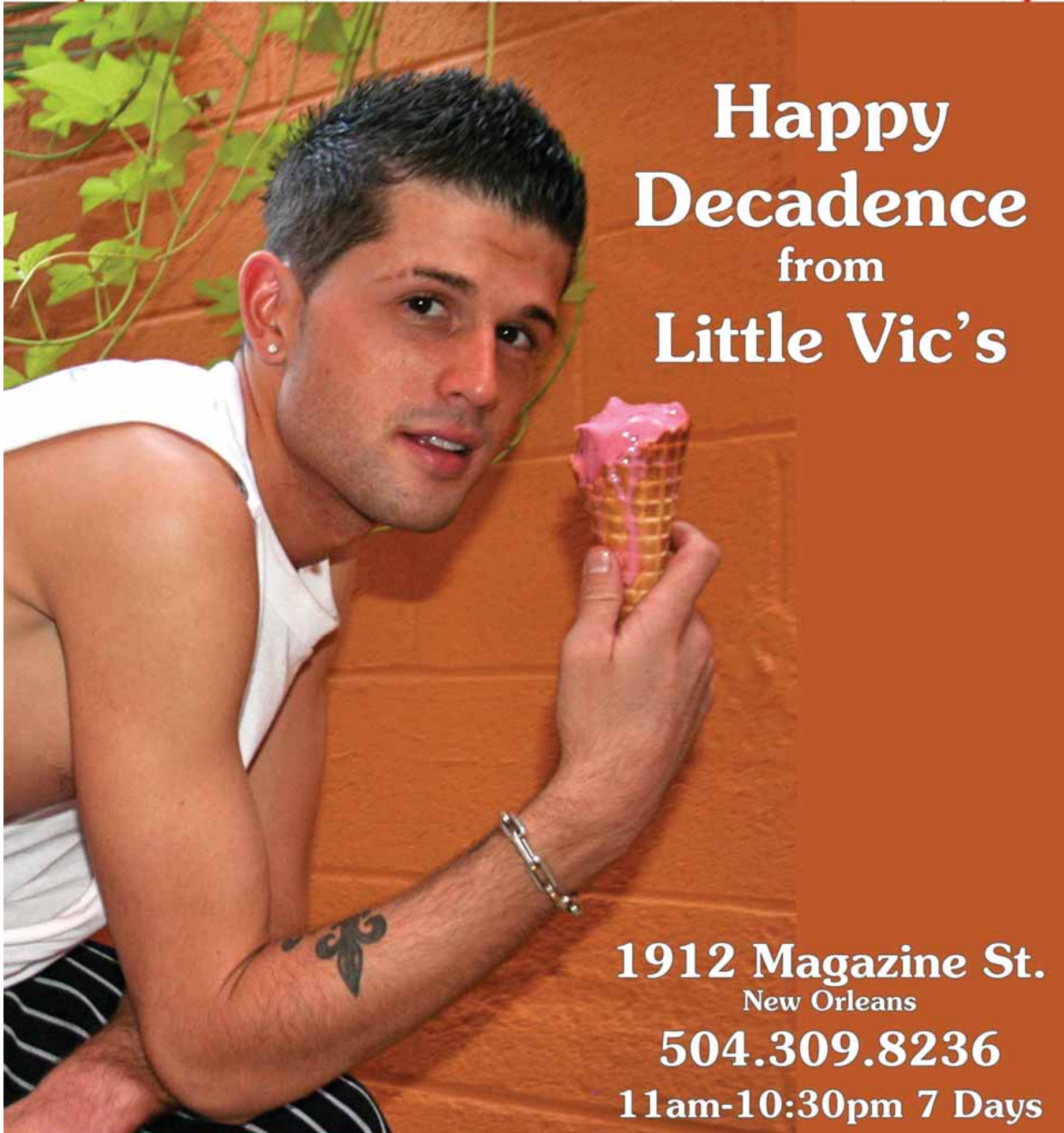
Mr. Gay Pride Travis behind the bar @ Bourbon Pub



Sharon, Regina, Marcy, Princesse & Raven @ JohnPaul's

The Big Easy ~ New Orleans ~ Photos by Devin Black, Larry Graham, Tony Leggio, Cody Warembourg

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