

Theater

OL' DOG'S NEW TRICKS

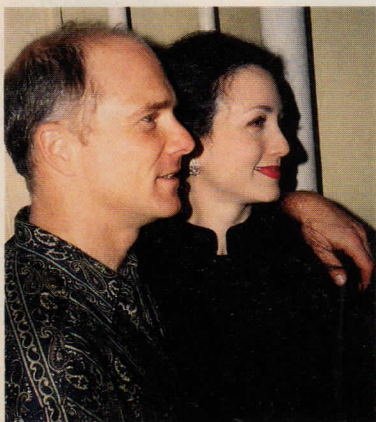
The resident male chauvinist pig of NBC's *Frasier*, actor Dan Butler shows a different side—or two—in his one-man play.



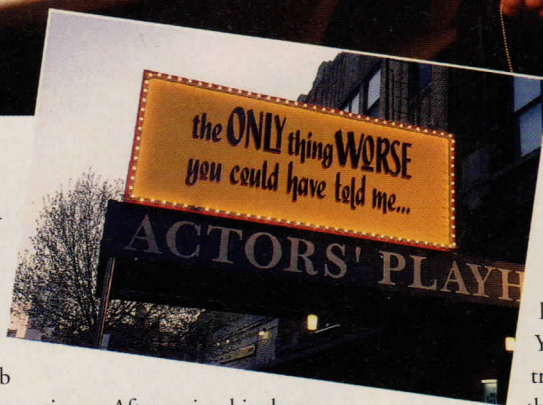
“I am interested in the contradictions in people,” says actor/writer Dan Butler.

You don't need to look further than the man himself for an example. Best known to television audiences as Bob “Bulldog” Briscoe in NBC's hit series *Frasier*—the very personification of macho heterosexuality—Butler is currently performing in a one-man show that is based in part on his own experiences as a gay man.

“We sometimes fix and define people, lock them into a box, without allowing them to be all they can be,” Butler con-



Cheers regular and *Frasier* guest star Bebe Neuwirth (Dr. Lilith Stimson-Crane) drops in on the opening of Butler's one-man show *The Only Thing Worse....*
Photos by John Wilton.



tinues. After seeing his show, titled *The Only Thing Worse You Could Have Told Me*, no one is likely to typecast the handsome, balding forty year-old Indiana-born performer with any single label. Transforming himself like a chameleon into several memorable characters, Butler presents a series of vignettes which explore various facets of contemporary gay life.

He starts off with a portrait of a loud-mouthed straight man at a bar who reveals an unexpected sensitive side when his best friend comes out to him. The succeeding gallery of characters that Butler brings to life in the show—an impressive range which includes a blue-collar worker, a flamboyant queen, a bigoted activist and a self-loathing cynic—may initially seem like familiar types to a gay audience member, but Butler has a few tricks up his sleeve. The actor hopes his sketches will “shake up” our preconceived ideas. “We get so angry at the people who label us with what they think gay is, but we do it to ourselves all the time.”

The seed for *The Only Thing Worse...* germinated in Los Angeles, where Butler has lived since he moved from New York nearly five years ago. He traveled to the West Coast with the tour of Terrence McNally's

The Lisbon Traviata and stayed because he started getting a lot of television work; A recent break-up with a lover also added to his desire for new scenery. “I never expected that it would turn out to be such a creative time,” he says. “You have this extra energy out there, which, in New York, you use up just to get by every day.”

Butler started writing the short pieces which comprise the show to quell his restlessness in between acting jobs. An earlier effort at writing for the stage—the book and lyrics for *The Case of the Dead Flamingo Dancer*, a musical about a tap-dancing detective—had already been staged in England. Some of the material in his current show comes from his own life; some characters are amalgams of his friends. “Along the way there are sentences, phrases or snippets of stories woven into the show which remind me of my friends. So it's fun visiting them during the night.”

The opening sketch was inspired by an episode from his own life, Butler says.

"People would take for granted that I was straight, and I let that go for a while. One time—this was maybe ten years ago—my lover at the time came down to the theater to meet me and I didn't introduce him to the other cast members, to my co-workers. When we got home he called me on it and I realized that I had been embarrassed." The incident prompted him to call up his straight best friend and come out.

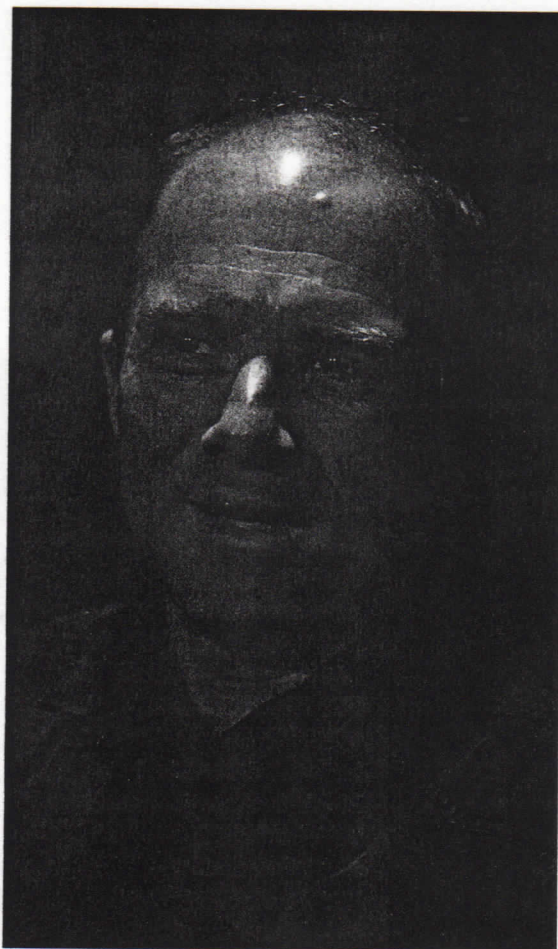
Butler's coming out to his parents forms the emotional core of *The Only Thing Worse...* The title refers to his father's reaction: the only thing worse, the father declares, would have been if his son had announced his own death. In a scene titled "Conversations with my Mother," Butler plays for the audience a tape recording of a conversation he had with his mother about whether or not he should come out to his stepfather. She accepts her son's sexuality, but draws the line at informing her husband. "He just thinks you're great and I wouldn't..." Her voice trails off, unable to articulate her fears.

That conversation, Butler recalls, took place while he was driving around with his mother during a visit back home to Fort Wayne, Indiana. "I had the tape recorder on in the front seat. I had no idea that this was going to be part of a show, but listening over the tape, the roundabout way...she never did finish that sentence..." He doesn't finish his sentence either, but adds, "I'm really proud of that piece."

Despite the uncomfortable moments with his parents, Butler says that compared to other people he knows, his coming out wasn't that difficult. He dedicated his show to Reed Hollister, someone who truly suffered for being gay. "His family ended up being very accepting when he finally told them, but he held on to his self-hatred for a long time," Butler explains. "Every day after high school he would drive out to this gravel pit and scream at the top of his lungs for God to kill

him until he lost his voice. Every day."

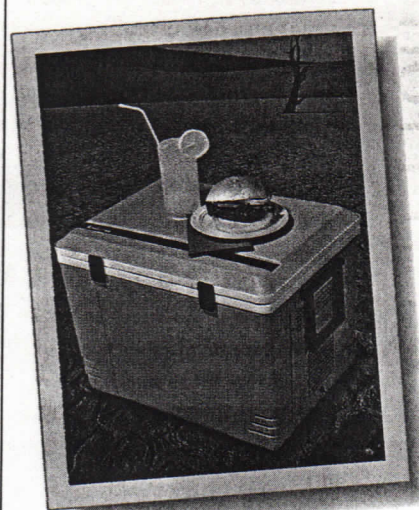
Unlike some performers who enjoy playing a part even outside the theater, Butler's off-stage persona is very low-key, though he is clearly basking in the success of his show. "It's great playing a lot of different characters because I think one of my strengths is my versatility. And then, writing for myself is very empowering." Out of the many reviews his show received in New York, there was only one negative write-up. Despite his down-to-earth demeanor, it affected him; the feeling reminded him of the way he felt



"We get so angry at the people who label us with what they think gay is," says Butler, "but we do it to ourselves all the time."

when his father turned away from him. "I can laugh at that and dismiss it in my own way, but it sticks." Reading that review forced him to look at his play again. He smiles, radiating the confidence which shines like a beacon through his work on stage. "But I am very clear. This is what I want to say."

by Gerard Raymond



500 miles from nowhere it'll give you a cold drink or a warm burger...

NASA-inspired Koolatron replaces conventional coolers and alternates as a food warmer.

Recognize the ice cooler in this picture? Surprisingly enough, there isn't one. What you see instead is a Koolatron, an invention that replaces the traditional ice cooler with technology even more sophisticated than your home fridge. What's more, the Koolatron is not only a refrigerator, it's also a food warmer.

NASA inspired. Space travel's tough demands forced scientists to find something more dependable than traditional refrigeration coils and compressors. Research led them to discover a miraculous component called the thermo-electric module. No bigger than a matchbook, it actually delivers the cooling power of a 10 pound block of ice. Koolatron is the first manufacturer to make this technology available to fishermen, hunters, campers, or anyone else on the move. Now—for a reasonable price—all the advantages of electronic home cooling are conveniently available to you.

Hot or cold. In the cool mode, the Koolatron reduces the outside temperature by 40° F. With the switch of a plug, the Koolatron can warm food up to 125°. And, because there are no compressors or gases, Koolatron works perfectly in any situation. The large model weighs only 12 pounds, and can hold up to 40 12-oz cans. The smaller model weighs seven pounds and holds six cans.

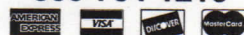
Try it risk free. At Comtrad, all of our products are backed by our "No Questions Asked" 30 day money-back guarantee. If you're not satisfied, just return it for a full refund.

30-quart Koolatron (P24A)\$99 \$16 S&H
7-quart Koolatron (P9).....\$79 \$8 S&H
Optional AC Adapter (AC 10)...\$49 \$6 S&H

Please mention promotional code 025-MY-1207.

For fastest service call toll-free 24 hours a day

800-704-1210



To order by mail send check or money order for the total amount including S&H (VA residents add 4.5% sales tax) or charge it to your credit card by enclosing your account number and exp. date.

Comtrad Industries
2820 Waterford Lake Drive, Suite 106
Midlothian, Virginia 23113