

## ARTS

# An interview with Scot Zeller on his show, coming soon to Vashon

From Queer Fury to Gay Gratitude (and Back Again)

By David Schmader For The Beachcomber • June 4, 2025 1:30 am



Scot Zeller will perform his one-man show on June 11 at Vashon Center for the Arts. (Courtesy photo)

Scot Zeller's early years were spent in Portland, Oregon, back when that now-progressive city's understanding of homosexuality was as stunted as the rest of Reagan-era America.

A quarter century before "Glee" and the mainstream belief that sexual minorities deserve human rights, the teenage Zeller fashioned a gay existence out of classic closet-era materials: deep secrecy, coded language, and that inexhaustible beacon of energized outsidership, "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

"I came out when I was okay with letting go of whoever hated me," said Zeller. "And then — nobody did. And then I was mad that no one wanted to fight me, because I was ready for the fight."

Zeller packed up his fight prep and headed to Seattle, where he joined the proudly confrontational activist organization Queer Nation, dedicated to raging against anti-gay violence and the government's inaction on AIDS, and famous for its same-sex kiss-ins in homophobic establishments and chants of "Queers bash back!"

Alongside political theatrics, Zeller did actual theater, becoming a brilliant fixture in Seattle's alternative theater scene. A dynamic presence onstage — spry, brainy, animated but always grounded, with a face you remember on sight — Zeller ultimately took his talents to Los Angeles, finding work in commercials, TV, and film, and leaving Seattle pals to play a perpetual game of “Spot Scot!,” as Zeller popped up in everything from daytime soaps and hit sitcoms to a primetime Pepsi ad starring Zeller and Colombian pop goddess Shakira tangoing through a convenience store.

The earth spun, the cameras rolled, and eventually Zeller found himself cast in the real-life role of Gay Elder—sometimes respectfully, sometimes disparagingly.

All these experiences fueled the creation of “H@ppy F@ggxt: A Queer Love Letter from a Member of Gen X.”

Zeller's one-man show maps the progress he's witnessed, his longing for “intergenerational queer conversation,” and the bewildering task of communicating the experience of LGBT life in the 1960s, when the medical establishment officially categorized homosexuality as a mental disorder, to someone who grew up with Target pride merch and “RuPaul's Drag Race.”

In advance of his show's Vashon premiere at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 11, at Vashon Center for the Arts, Zeller fielded questions over the phone from Los Angeles.

**How did the idea for “H@ppy F@ggxt” and specifically the theme of “intergenerational queer conversation” come to you?**

When Matt and I first moved to LA in the late '90s, we found a piano bar with this fabulous piano player Roger Carr, and older gay men would get up and sing, and it's LA, so some have been on Broadway and retired and some are career studio singers and retired, so — gorgeous voices and fabulous gay men. After we'd been there four or five times, Roger came to our table and said, “Look around and tell me what you see.”

We looked and said, “A piano and a microphone and gay men?”

Roger asked, “What specifically about the gay men?” We weren't sure what he was asking, and finally he said, “What you'll see is older men, 60, 70, 80 and above. What you won't see are men between 35 and 50. Because we lost all of them. So if you guys are going to be part of the bar, I encourage you to say hi to these older gentlemen, sit down at their table, ask them questions, because the middle group which would normally be the bridge group between you is gone.” And that was really empowering and beautiful, because that's how we learn our history, talking to the next group that we bump up against.

**You're not just a gay elder, you're a gay actor. Did the late-90s mainstreaming of gay culture — summed up by Ellen [DeGeneres'] coming out and the widespread acceptance that homosexuals exist and are our friends, enemies, neighbors, co-workers, baristas, etc — affect your audition/casting life? Once gays were released conceptually into the general population, were there more opportunities to bring a little queer sparkle to a role?**

After Ellen's coming out, the industry remained deeply homophobic. I was certainly cautioned about disclosing my sexuality. I chose to be open about it and found that my casting opportunities did change. I started playing characters that had careers — doctors, lawyers, veterinarians — but not lives, particularly not sex lives.

The industry opened up quite a bit after “Will & Grace.” That show had queer sparkle to spare and casting agents got more comfortable with a more outward appearance of queerness in auditions [and] roles. But there were also a lot of queer stereotypes that the industry deemed acceptable that I think presented the queer experience as very one-dimensional. I can't even imagine what a pitch meeting for a show like “Heartstopper” [Netflix's unabashedly romantic gay teen soap opera] would have been like in the late 1990s or early 2000s. It would have been a multi-dimensional, queer-experience math problem no network executive would have been able to work out.

**Back to “H@ppy F@ggxt”:** It’s a ballsy thing to declare yourself happy, and I want details.

I’m happy! I’m happy I survived. I’m happy I survived the process of becoming who I am, I’m happy that I survived the horror of the AIDS crisis, I’m happy that I found love. Every moment that I’ve been through, good or bad — and a lot of things were bad — brought me to the next place in my life. And instead of taking those negative moments and letting them destroy me, they ended up opening me up more to community and friendship and finding love and sharing love and giving.

**Hell yeah. In closing, please activate your great queer brain and determine which of the following entities is the most queer: intermittent fasting, wigs and wiglets, pink salt, Just for Men beard dye, actual sodomy.**

Wigs and wiglets. My answer is highly influenced by a recent trip to New York, where we saw the ferociously queer “Oh, Mary!” on Broadway. Cole Escola’s wig is truly iconic and a character all its own.

*Get tickets for “H@ppy F@ggxt,” to be performed at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 11, at [vashoncenterforthearts.org](http://vashoncenterforthearts.org).*

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