



## Bo Allen & Alan Ware

*Came out while clowning in the Ringling circus, making one big tent welcoming for gays*

The latest edition of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus contains a surprising skit: a hilariously nasty swipe at Dr. Laura. So it's no shock that gay performers Bo Allen and Alan Ware are comfortable being open on the job. "There is a circus family," says Ware, 33. "The moment I found clowning, it made sense. Being a clown is kind of like coming out. You hang around friends who have similar tastes and dress the same, and you all like the same type of music."

"And you wear makeup and elaborate costumes," chimes in Allen, 27. Both are trained actors—Ware studied mime under Marcel Marceau, and Allen worked in the theater—and both plan to return to more conventional acting down the road. But for now, "I have a two-year contract, and I'm having the time of my life," says Allen. "Studying clown-

ing is something I believe all actors should do. Try and possess a 20,000-seat arena!"

Though the circus is always romantically pictured as a haven for misfits, Allen and Ware describe a world not so different from the real one. The roustabouts aren't always enlightened, and the older performers from Eastern Europe are predictably backward. But the younger performers don't really have any problems with anyone who's gay.

Allen and Ware make clear that acceptance is a proud tradition of the "greatest show on Earth." Both of them have talked with circus retirees in Florida who remember the strong queer streak that's always flourished under the big top.

"Back in that time," says Ware, "it was a haven. It was one of the few places where you could breathe and be with your own." It still is.

Allen came out publicly by writing a skit about being



### BIG-TOP MEN

Allen (left) and Ware say they're part of a tradition of gay clowns.

gay for a theater company he was in. Ware knew he had some explaining to do when his dad found him sneaking home early one Sunday morning—dressed as Marlene Dietrich. "Well, if you're going to get caught, it might as well be as Marlene," he recalls with a laugh. Both came from small towns and found their calling in acting and a home with the circus.

The level of acceptance varies from year to year, along with the cast members. But Allen and Ware, who are both single, have fun occasionally letting queer audience members know they aren't alone. "We're not trying to fill our social calendar," explains Ware. (He'd be worried about a guy who found clown makeup sexy, anyway.) Adds Allen: "We just want them to know that we are gay too." —Michael Giltz ▶