



## Lovelorn Divas Make 'Wig Out!' a Glorious Drag: Jeremy Gerard

Review by Jeremy Gerard



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Oct. 10 (Bloomberg) -- With its spinning disco ball, pumped up music, swooning transvestite divas and thrift-shop glittery setting, "Wig Out!" is a charming if raunchy fairy tale. The show, at off-Broadway's adventurous **Vineyard Theatre**, concerns an epic nightclub showdown between the good female impersonators of the "House of Light" and the sinister denizens of the "House of Di'Abolique."

Entry into this world, part Oz, part Wonderland, begins, New York-style, on a subway. Eric (**Andre Holland**), a deceptively reticent young man in a red hoodie, catches the eye of the splendid, outsize beauty Nina, also known as Wilson (and played with irrepressible charm by Clifton Oliver).

Nina plays mother hen to the real and pretend girls of the House of Light, where Eric soon becomes part of a highly dysfunctional but never less than endearing family.

They include the Fates, three spectacularly talented singers (Rebecca Naomi Jones, Angela Grovey and McKenzie Frye) who function as a Greek chorus, commenting on the rivalries, passions, betrayals and ever-shifting power trips unfolding in this freaky funhouse.

A coming-of-age story full of X-rated humor, Tarell Alvin McCraney's script also brims with feeling and empathy for the drag queens and the men who use, deceive and ultimately love them. They all occupy a shadow world where traditional sex roles have a shelf life of about however long it takes to get from here to sunrise.

Loud, Proud

For this giddy, dramatic mashup, McCraney lifts unembarrassedly from what seems like half of Western literature, from Voltaire to Sam Shepard, and pop music from the **Jefferson Airplane** to "Dreamgirls" and Kanye West. (Daniel T. Booth, simultaneously channeling the Airplane's Grace Slick and the legendary transvestite Divine, performs a cover of "White Rabbit" you won't soon forget.)

Yet for all its wicked humor, "Wig Out!" is a time-honored story of self-acceptance given a distinctly contemporary spin. The phrase "My grandmother wore a wig," repeated by various characters, becomes a poignant leitmotif. McCraney, whose "Brothers Size" last season at the Public Theater introduced an extraordinary new talent, isn't one to settle for subtle inference when a grand theatrical gesture is available to drive home a point.

Risque Costumes

Director Tina Landau brings a conductor's concision and control to the proceedings. James Schuette's sets and **Peter Kaczorowski's** dazzling lighting, evoking La Cage aux folles, Studio 54 and perhaps the Kit Kat Klub, reach out into the space, bringing the actors close enough to us to enjoy Toni-Leslie James's risqué costumes.

The first act has its longueurs, not to mention a certain retro-gay sensibility; McCraney owes a debt to path breakers including **Harvey Fierstein** and Mart Crowley.

McCraney's voice is his own, however, and it's utterly original. The showdown, sort of a grand camp slam that occupies most of Act 2, is a nonstop farrago of queen-size song, dance and soul. You won't forget it, either.

Through Nov. 2 at the Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. in Manhattan. Information: +1-212-353-0303;

<http://www.vineyardtheatre.org>.

(**Jeremy Gerard** is an editor for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

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