

**Wig Out!**

by Winnie McCroy  
EDGE Contributor  
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**Paris is Still Burning!**

The Vineyard Theatre opens its season on September 30 with the world premiere of the new play **Wig Out!**, by Tarell Alvin McCraney, winner of the 2007 Paula Vogel Playwriting Award. This fast-paced, funny, fierce production takes a look into the modern-day drag ball scene and the dreams and dramas that draw its members together.

The action focuses on the rivalry between two drag houses, The House of Light and The House of Di'Abolique ("It's French, bitch!," as quipped by house mother Serena, drag queen Sweetie, aka "Project Runway" star Daniel T. Booth). The play opens with House of Light star Ms. Nina/Wilson (Clifton Oliver) working a subway pickup on red-skinned cutie Eric (Andre Holland), with lines like, "You're a real boy, like Pinocchio! Tell a lie, so I can watch it grow!"

When the two return to The House of Light, Ms. Nina discovers that competing drag house Di'Abolique has issued a challenge for a Cinderella Ball, a sneaky, last minute

tactic to best a rival by giving them only a few hours notice before a midnight competition. But under classic, aging drag mother the Legendary Rey-Rey (Nathan Lee Graham), The House of Light intends to win this ball. Beautiful drag diva Venus will compete in face and realness, her man Deity by her side. Ms. Nina will walk in runway, and the Fates will handle performance.

The house needs to work it, but before they do, discipline must be delivered from masculine house father Lucien, played by Erik King of Showtime's "Dexter." Ms. Nina receives a stern reproach for arriving late and in masculine apparel. Lucien chastises young Eric, who was also his trick, for both standing him up and for bottoming for Ms. Nina, and brutishly seduces him in a scene that is almost uncomfortable to watch. He even calls for Rey-Rey to step down from the competition. She refuses, and puts her position as house mother on the line -- a move that proves unwise.

This stern, intimidating man calls the shots in The House of Light, and although he seems almost as if he is a sociopath, his cruelty is forged by hard realities; when Rey-Rey attempts suicide after being chopped at the ball, he forbids anyone to call the paramedics. He handles the crisis himself, knowing what the official reaction will be to a tranny with a face full of Max Factor and a belly full of pills.

The runway-inspired set suits the show nicely, as a large portion of the action revolves around vogueing. The costumes and walk-offs are well done, and drag queen Sweetie raises the stakes with her dream sequence rendition of Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit," gyrating her gold codpiece with perverse wickedness. Her Medusa costume in act two is also a winner, and her skinny, highly flexible sidekick Loki (Sean Patrick Doyle) is a great addition to the cast, adding a deliciously sinister, snakelike patina to the underhanded tactics of Di'Abolique.

The dialogue is inspired and cutting, with the characters reading each other like The New York Post -- fast and filthy. These queens throw shade like a Baptist's Sunday go-to-church bonnet. But the play also tackles many serious issues. Rey-Rey recalls how she lost most of her house to AIDS, lamenting that, "the kids didn't know how to survive." And the characters of Lucien, and to a lesser extent, Deity and Eric, illustrate the gay black/Hispanic man's struggle with machismo. Lucien's posturing and

disparaging comments about "faggots" reveal his own inner homophobia, and both younger men deal with shame over the perceived weakness of being topped by a tranny.

McCraney employs several interesting techniques to tie the narrative together. The Fates, three "sisters" a la Dreamgirls, serve as a sort of Greek chorus, weaving the action together through song. Storytelling is also used to explain how the characters got involved in the world of drag, each story beginning with, "My grandmother wore a wig." The play ends with this line, spoken by Eric the Red, presumably foreshadowing his own eventual entry into the world of drag balls.

This touching, fierce look into drag houses is a surefire hit, likely to be embraced by the gay community and all who remember the heyday of New York City's legendary drag houses. It may be 20 years since Madonna's "Vogue" brought drag balls into the spotlight, but Paris is still burning.

*"Wig Out"*  
Through October 19  
The Vineyard Theatre  
108 E. 15th St.  
\$20-55.  
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[www.vineyardtheatre.org](http://www.vineyardtheatre.org)

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