

## Reviews

# Wig Out!

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Reviewed By: [Dan Bacalzo](#) · Oct 1, 2008 · New York

Without question, Tarell Alvin McCraney's vibrant and innovative new play [Wig Out!](#), now at the Vineyard Theatre, has got style to spare, especially in this bold production by director Tina Landau.

The work is set in and around the predominantly African-American and Latino "House Ball" culture that is perhaps known to some from the 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning*, although the scene has changed significantly since that time. It still features drag -- both feminine and masculine -- but the impact of Hip-Hop has influenced the kinds of categories in which contestants compete.



Nathan Lee Graham and company in *Wig Out!*  
(© Carol Rosegg)

The play's action centers on The House of Light, which is both a social network and performance-oriented ensemble loosely structured as a "family." But this particular family is incredibly dysfunctional. The "father" Lucian (a solid Erik King) is emotionally manipulative and eager to replace his "mother" Rey-Rey (fiercely performed by Nathan Lee Graham) with someone younger. There are sexual tensions already existing between numerous household members, such as the recently broken up couple Venus (Joshua Cruz, exuding confidence and attitude) and Deity (Glenn Davis). But things become even more complicated when Ms. Nina (Clifton Oliver) brings a new love interest, Eric (Andre Holland), into the mix.

While the first act introduces the various characters and their troubled relationships with one other, the second act is dominated by the Ball and its aftermath. Daniel T. Booth -- better known as the drag queen "Sweetie" -- presents two jaw-dropping production numbers, first in an Act One dream sequence as a Kabuki-like figure doing a scary rendition of "White Rabbit," and then an even more amazing act during the Ball segment as House of Di'Abolique leader Serena, performing to Emelie Autumn's "I Want My Innocence Back." Also making strong impressions at the ball are Sean Patrick Doyle's Loki, who just might have the most flexibility outside of a Cirque du Soleil performer, and Davis and Cruz, who team up for a routine to Jay-Z and Beyonce's "Hollywood."

A trio of "real girl" singers known collectively as the Fates -- Rebecca Naomi Jones, Angela Grove, and McKenzie Frye -- are also quite fabulous. The Fates are not only members of The

House of Light, but serve as a kind of Greek chorus for the play as a whole, commenting on the action and blending their beautiful voices in song.

The design elements of *Wig Out!* are stunningly realized by Toni-Leslie James' eye-popping costumes, the dazzling lighting by Peter Kaczorowski, and James Schuette's runway-style set. But despite all of the spectacle, at the core of the play is a focus on storytelling. Numerous characters break the fourth wall to tell the audience some of their early childhood experiences, which usually start out with the phrase, "My grandmother wore a wig." The script is particularly compelling in its nuanced treatment of various aspects of gay sexuality, which both reinforces and subverts traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.

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