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Hedwig and the Angry Inch

by Winnie McCroy

EDGE Editor

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Lena Hall as Hedwig and Neil Patrick Harris as Yitzhak (Source:Joan Marcus)

When John Cameron Mitchell first staged "**Hedwig and the Angry Inch**" at the Jane Street Theatre in 1998, it shook the theater community with its humorous and painful story of a boy from East Berlin who gave it all up (all but one "angry inch," that is) to marry a soldier and come to Junction City, Kansas, only to be instantly left to fend for herself.

The play was produced around the world and eventually made into a film in 2001, with Mitchell playing the lead role. It won countless awards, from the Audience and Best Director awards at Sundance to Best New Director taps for Mitchell from the National Board of Review, the Gotham Awards and the LA Critics Society.

Fast-forward to more than a decade later, and the world's favorite trans glam rock semi-star is now taking on Broadway, courtesy of America's golden gay, Neil Patrick Harris. Although he is best known for his comedy, Harris does an excellent job with this tragicomic play that's more rock show than Broadway musical.

Strapping on a sleek pair of gold boots and flashing a saucy smile, NPH brings Hedwig to life in this new production with music and lyrics by Stephen Trask,

directed by Michael Mayer. He is simultaneously NPH and Hedwig, a defiant "slip of a girly-boy" who has used his "oral skills" to secure a gig on Broadway.

The main strength of this new production is that instead of being rooted in the '90s, it resides firmly in the present, with Harris breaking the fourth wall to address (and spit on, and kiss) the audience. He uses modern references that serve to bring the character of Hedwig truly alive and allows Harris to tell her story without being an outsider to the action.

He tackles the raw, dark humor with the tongue-in-cheek charm that we have come to know him for, but doesn't put up walls to prevent the audience from empathizing with Hedwig's brittle desperation. As he notes, "I laugh, to keep from crying."

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Neil Patrick Harris Leaving 'Hedwig' on Broadway

By Mark Kennedy | Jun 13

Neil Patrick Harris will leave hit Broadway show "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" and Andrew Rannells will slip into his old wigs.

Harris also handles the play's music extremely well, thanks to help from some of his friends, and keeps Hedwig's punk-rock persona going strong throughout the performance through songs like "Tear Me Down," "Wig in a Box" "The Origin of Love" and my personal, all-time favorite, "Wicked Little Town."

He gets big props for his dancing and acrobatic rocking, as he leaps, kicks, shimmies and tosses the silky hair of his beloved wigs again and again. Harris clearly buffed up for this role, as evidenced in the final scene, when he strips down to tiny leather shorts.

Joining him on stage are Justin Craig and Tim Mislock on guitar, Matt Duncan on bass, Peter Yanowitz on drums and on Lena Hall of "Kinky Boots" fame, also in a gender-bending role as Hedwig's "Boy Friday" and husband. But the barrier to their wedded bliss is the boy she used to babysit, the former lump of clay that she molded into international rock star, Tommy Gnosis.

The play follows Hedwig's struggle to eke a living out of third-rate rock gigs, while at the same time choking down her immense anger at being lied to, hacked at, repeatedly dumped and denied the fame and glory she clearly craves. Although we feel for Hedwig, we never feel sorry for Hedwig, and that stands as the story's shining success.

Kudos to musical staging by Spencer Liff, scenic design by Julian Crouch, costumes by Arianne Phillips, lighting by Kevin Adam, hair and makeup by Mike Potter and sound by Timothy O'Heir.

This is one of the hottest tickets on the Great White Way, and if you can score seats, you'll be the envy of all the girls in the steno pool. Best of all, it's yet another example of successful queer theater offerings currently taking over Broadway. Think of it like "Kinky Boots" -- with a little less boots, and a little more kink.

"Hedwig and the Angry Inch" runs through August 17 at the Belasco Theatre, 111 W. 44th Street in New York City. For information or tickets, call 212-239-6200 or visit hedwig.broadwayticketscenter.com

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she writes about local restaurants in her food blog, <http://brooklyniscookin.blogspot.com/>



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