



THEATRE REVIEW

Female trouble: 'Hedwig and the Angry Inch'



What's a girl to do? When a botched sex-change operation leaves an East German boy named Hansel with a Barbi doll crotch and an inch of useless scar tissue? When lovers betray and abandon and steal from her? When a bad hair day lasts for decades?

Why, what else but pour her heart and soul into "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," an "anatomically incorrect rock odyssey" now showing at Florida Studio Theatre that packs a punch as potent as the physical Hedwig is impotent.

As our unlikely, but ultimately endearing heroine, Hedwig, a transsexual punk rock girl, becomes "an internationally ignored song stylist" touring the U.S. with a rock band as she tells her life story between songs.

David Colbert is brilliant as the title character in Florida Studio Theatre's production of "Hedwig and the Angry Inch."

The dreamy Hansel underwent a sex-change operation in order to marry a American G.I. and flee to the West. But the West turns out to be a trailer park near an army base in Kansas, and Hedwig watches the Berlin Wall tumble on television.

Her love for Iggy Pop and David Bowie is shared with a lonely general's son, who she nurtures into Tommy Gnosis and then who leaves, taking all of the her songs with him.

Now she performs at Bilgewater Inn seafood restaurants, on dates that just happen to coincide with those of arena-rock star Gnosis, who she is suing for a share of the royalties.

Hedwig (brilliantly played by David Colbert) just uses what she "has to work with," like everyone. She spends her whole life, every waking moment, searching for her "other half." She thinks it may be Tommy, or maybe band member Yitzhak (Petra DeLuca).

As we witness Hedwig's formative years, her failed marriage, her preoccupation and obsession with Tommy, we are taken on a journey of cries and whispers through anticipation, melancholy, anger, joy and, ultimately, self-discovery.

John Cameron Mitchell wrote and starred in "Hedwig," which became an off-Broadway cult hit in the late '90s, and a movie in 2001.

Along with "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" (1975), "Tommy" (1975) and the newcomer "Velvet Goldmine" (1998), "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" has taken its place among classic rock operas, and arguably is the best of the lot.

"Hedwig" can be enjoyed on many levels. It can be enjoyed as camp and pure entertainment, or can be mined for deeper, more universal meanings. How many musicals, after all, explore the Platonic notion that sex is no more than a desire to unite our complementary and incomplete body parts?

Stephan Trask's songs are absolutely incredible. Loud, raw and powerful, the songs in "Hedwig" are as good as any of the bands from which they were inspired (Lou Reed, Bowie, Iggy Pop). I have already ordered the soundtrack.

The whole cast is outstanding. Colbert, in black leather platform boots and a divinely hideous blonde wig, is mesmerizing. He has performed the role in four previous productions, and is equally talented as a singer, actor and strutter of outrageous stuff. DeLuca is gender-bender perfection as Hedwig's diffident current lover Yitzhak, and the band – Don Dean, Phyliss Gessler, Stephan Rosser and Justin Wierbonski – is solid industrial-strength rock.

Director Dennis Courtney, lighting designer Michael Newton-Brown and costume and scene designer Marcella Beckwith all deserve some of a very large bouquet.

No matter who you are or what your sexuality is, there is a bit of Hedwig in everybody. Bravo to FST for bringing her to town.

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