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Hit the Wall

by Daniel Scheffler

EDGE Contributor

Tuesday Mar 19, 2013

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A scene from 'Hit the Wall' (Source:Matthew Murphy)

There is a certain venerable importance surrounding the Stonewall riots of September 1969. At President Obama's inauguration of Jan. 21, 2013, he was the first U.S. president to address gay rights during such a speech and made a significant stand for the gay community and a deeper impression in this country's fight for equality than ever before.

It is with this sentiment that a play, or musical or and show really, should be cautious when producing, writing or directing a performance. Unfortunately **"Hit The Wall,"** currently showing at the Barrow Street Theatre in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, manages to miss the political and social gravity with tremendous weakness in all of its limbs. As apt as the venue for the play may be, the actual play lacks the fire and the

gravitas of the story's marrow.

The writer, Ike Holter, a graduate of the Theatre School at DePaul University, clammers together the supposed-to-be precious story of a bunch of residents, and non-residents of course, of the legendary Christopher Street just before the spontaneous revolutionary upsurge at the Stonewall Inn. The Inn, a popular underground fun hovel even today, is the scene of the early morning raid by violent police officers that induced the riots.



Popular Stories in Entertainment

Beth Ditto Busted For Disorderly Conduct in Portland, Ore.

By Jason St. Amand | Mar 19

Violent protests, street demonstrations and true fights for liberating freedom for the gay community were pricked in the heart that night with adrenaline that still gushes through the Village of New York. Thousands of gay men (coming out or already out) make a pilgrimage to this town and this beacon of liberation every year not only during Pride but also at any other available opportunity.

"Hit The Wall" focuses on the first night of the riots and tries to produce a clever look at gay society at that time; but with the clichéd and stereotyped characters, most with zero depth or development, the feeling of the time is impotent as theatre-goers start to doze off and read their iPhones during the production.

Perhaps intentionally, the script does not allow for much exploration in terms of character but what ultimately happens is that the action scenes are explored for too long with inappropriate music, dance scenes feel inauthentic and boring, and some extended periods of darkness where the cast is supposed to be having fun (perhaps) rather feels impuissant and trite.

As apt as the venue for the play may be, the actual play lacks the fire and the gravitas of the story's marrow.

We meet the only two interesting, albeit completely stereotyped, characters the "Snap Queen Team": the proverbial Latino queer Tano (played by Arturo Soria) and the obvious African-American, Mika, queer from out of the city (played by Gregory Haney) who almost hold the reins for the story as they "own" their stoop with all their bitch quips and man-hunting techniques. Even when an "A-gay" comes near them, they manage to play on an earlier form of "voguing" but it certainly feels out of place with the era -- notwithstanding that it was sharply acted.

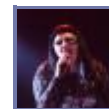
There is also Carson (played by Nathan Lee Graham), a black drag queen who mourns the death of Judy Garland and hysterically concerns herself with the well-being of Liza Minnelli, and then the butch lesbian Peg (played Rania Salem Manganaro), who has been ostracized by her family.

These roles are lackluster and add very little to the story line: they (although bruised and beaten) cannot summon any sympathy from the audience

as they over-play their formulaic roles and so their contribution feels kaput even when they are supposed to propel the story forward.

Even with a set of other banal characters, including a terribly contrived uptown naysayer, a bigoted police officer, a loudmouthed, overly friendly hippy, a "straight-acting" newbie and a strangely casted traveling hippie, the play cannot ignite to anything that would be representative of what the actual riots were. It somehow loses the plot with a gimmicked "I was there," spoken by everyone at some point during the performance.

The riots, a significant gay liberation event, has up to now been unrepresented in thorough cultural representations. Possibly the TV networks, Broadway or even HBO couldn't find enough material for a full season or series. But possibly they stayed away out of respect for the material and its importance



Beth Ditto, the lead singer of the indie dance punk band, was arrested in Portland, Ore., on Saturday for disorderly conduct after allegedly being involved in a drunken incident outside a bar.



Cock Bling :: Venfield 8 on His Phallic Fashion Statements

By Kilian Melloy | Mar 7

When a Los Angeles-based fashion photographer combined the beauty of the male member with the élan of elite fashion labels, he struck a cultural nerve -- and artistic pay dirt. Just who is Venfield 8? The artist opens up to EDGE.



The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2

By Steve Weinstein | Nov 16

The wait is over as director Bill Condon entertainingly closes the door on the franchise that, love or hate it, has had teenage girls everywhere obsessing about a whiny teenage girl, a depressed vampire and a hot werewolf.



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in history.

Broadway (or off-Broadway) should challenge the story but with real characters, a less contrived script and with actors that can seriously represent this delicate and noteworthy account of actual events.

Daniel Scheffler is a writer who spends his time in New York, Cape Town and India. Follow him on Twitter @danielscheffler

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