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Hair



Is it possible to love the world so much that you yourself disappear? When Diane Paulus's Tony-award winning production of "Hair" comes to Los Angeles, we get a chance to revisit that question with a classic rock musical touches the audience (literally!) so directly that we seem to lose ourselves in the lives of those crazy singing, dancing hippies from a different generation.

Portraying the anti-war counter-culture of the 1960s, "Hair" begins by introducing Berger (Steel Burkhardt), a hairy free spirit who removes his pants and gives it to audience. Sheila (Caren Lyn Tackett) is the activist of the group who gives Berger the present of a bright yellow shirt, which he tears up, ignoring her love for him. The musical centers around Claude (Paris Remillard), a self-proclaimed "beautiful beast from the forest" who dons a fake accent from Manchester, England. Claude's parents want him to get a real job, but Claude joins the gang's burning of their draft cards. In the song "Where Do I Go," the conflicted Claude puts his card in the fire only to take it out, because he doesn't know "why [he should] live and die."

The second half begins with white ladies praising the "Black Boys" and black ladies praising the "White Boys." Claude hallucinates on the joint given to him by the group, but after the trip, he returns to his premise that he wants to be invisible, because he doesn't want to live conspicuously "moment to moment on the streets" anymore. At the protest, surprisingly Claude really does disappear, because he has had his hair cut, and walks around as a newly minted soldier, so that his friends could no longer recognize him. Thus even Claude is taken, and with that the music of "Let the Sun Shine In" is played, and everyone is invited up to dance on stage.

The role of Hud (Darius Nichols) has a big voice in this production. Proclaiming himself the "president of the United States of love" in the song "Colored Spade," Nichols rocks the joint, especially when he along with the others rush into the audience to stroke our hair. In another song, Nichols extols the virtues of being an outsider with Woof (Matt DeAngelis), a gentle man who practices sodomy and other sexually deviant acts who tells everybody "we are all one." Hilariously, Woof is hung up on Mick Jagger, as well as the three-some of Claude, Berger, and Sheila, and he, along with the group pay hilarious tribute to the American flag near the end of the first half, which unlike the end of the second half, ends with the audience in suspense.

Another unique feature of Paulus's production is the fast pace of the second act, which sees a long hallucination from Claude turn into a quick trip into plot (my goodness!) and ends faster than one would expect. Claude's invisibility wish has been creeping up on the audience throughout, and by the end, things happen so quickly that we don't have time to think. Paulus doesn't let the ending sink in until the final, deafening final moments when "Let the Sun Shine In" is sung without any musical accompaniment, and the huge American flag that reminded us of the end of the first act is here on full display, as well as the person lying on top it, telling us what the end of the previous half only hinted at.

All the songs from this production rock, but by far the one with greatest staying power is "Aquarius," which opens the musical in the right frame of mind, propping up high-minded ideals like "harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding." The rock version of "Aquarius" flows much better, but more importantly, it truly involves every single member of the cast, who also go around the entire

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building, treating everyone like they are part of the show. Perhaps it's this concern with every person in the audience, every person in the cast that makes the whole production seem bigger than any individual, and lets us feel "invisible" in the middle of all that music created.

"Hair" is performed at Pantages Theatre (<http://www.broadwayla.org/>) in Hollywood, California, until 23rd of January, 2010.