

**THEATER**

# Wham, dram, thank you ma'am

Wade McCollum takes home a Drammy and restores our belief in musical theater

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

There's no better person to be at this particular moment in Portland's theater scene than Wade McCollum.

In the role of a lifetime, McCollum is the energetic, vivacious star of triangle productions' massively successful *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. His performance is a juggernaut of rock 'n' roll wit and emotion, and it hasn't escaped the notice of the local theater community—the Portland Critics Circle recently rewarded McCollum with its Drammy Award, the region's most prestigious theater honor.

"I'm humbled and very grateful to have the honor of receiving recognition in my field," McCollum says. "I was there at the awards ceremony, which was really amazing—to see and feel the powerful and supportive interconnectedness of the Portland theater community, so palpable and celebratory."

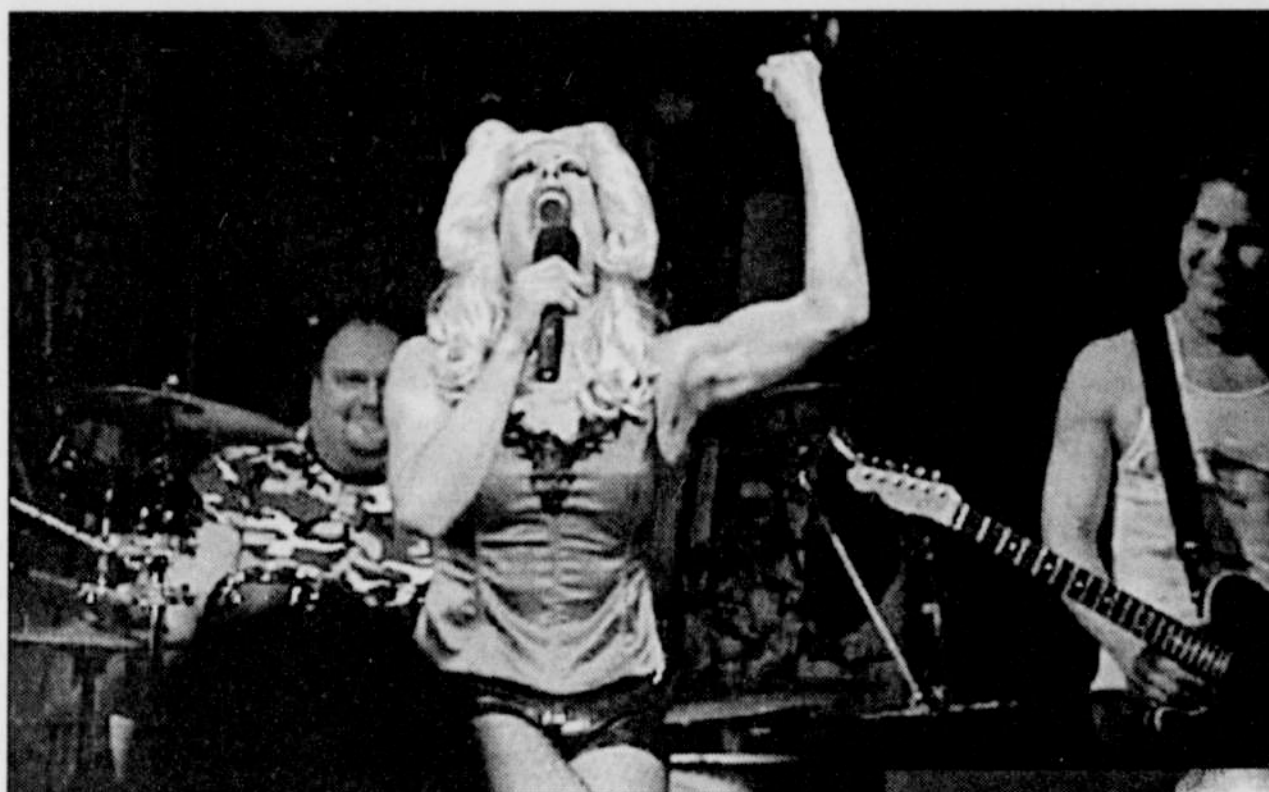
The Portlander was prepared for his current rocker persona early on—his family lived something of a rock 'n' roll lifestyle. He was "born on the road," he says. "My father is a drummer and met my mother on the road. She joined him and adopted this nomadic and adventurous lifestyle. I was conceived in Valentine, Neb., I came out in Chico, Calif., and two weeks later we were in Alberta, Canada. So when Hedwig says, 'The road is my home, my home the road,' I can relate."

The roving family landed in Ashland when McCollum was 5, and his parents divorced when he was 7. His summers with dad were a bit more glamorous than those of most. "I would spend the school year in Ashland and the summers on the road with my father," he recalls.

His teen-age years found McCollum an independent, poetic free spirit carving out an oasis for his introspection and creativity. "I left home at 15, inspired by Thoreau's *Walden*, and moved into a one-room half of an A-frame cabin in the woods. It had no electricity or water and was right on the bank of a small creek. I read and wrote by candlelight and began to paint. I look back at this incredible time of life and think that's when I tapped into the real me."

His theater roots, though, can be traced back to junior high. "I have always told stories," he explains. "I was in seventh grade when I realized there was a formal place to do that called 'the theater.' I was cast by two eighth-grade girls as Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*... I was hooked!"

He goes on to talk about his first "legit" show with Kirk Boyd, then of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and now the producing director of Willamette Repertory Theatre. Boyd directed George Herman's *A Company of Wayward Saints* during McCollum's sophomore year, and "it was by far the most magical show I have done to this day," he admits. "It was all so



new, and the magic of ensemble felt like a true miracle."

"She goes to music, and so do I": Wade McCollum as Hedwig (above), Wade McCollum as Wade McCollum (right)

After attending Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts in California and graduating in 1997, McCollum worked with Boyd again in another production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this time as Puck, in collaboration with the Eugene Symphony. "The exhilaration of an 80-piece orchestra supporting the action of a play—yum," notes McCollum. Then came his star turn in triangle's *Hedwig* production last summer.

The play was such a smash that, in addition to his Drammy, McCollum was asked back for a revival run of *Hedwig* this summer, with the same band and director, which will run through Aug. 2. It's selling out again.

"I think that all people, regardless of sexual identity, go through feeling other than normal," states McCollum. "There is a core-indigenous human feeling of being an outcast, different or misunderstood. The search for wholeness is a lifelong pilgrimage that all humans undergo, so Hedwig speaks to many different people."

McCollum says, apropos of revisiting his role: "I did receive several offers for this summer, but none that could match a summer

doing an awe-inspiring show with an amazing group of people in an incredible city. What specifically drew me back to the show? Getting my whole body waxed again. Just kidding."

Which brings us to the question, though, of whether McCollum's sexuality has a bearing on his interpretation of gender-bent, sexual-outsider

Hedwig. "I do have to say there are...layers of socially programmed behaviors and collective agreements we've made as a culture that...are not in right relationship with all the elements of this diverse human race, and this imbalance did contribute to my feeling 'outside.' This feeling of being a sexual anomaly is fuel for Hedwig's rage; when you don't fit at all, anywhere, then where do you go? She goes to music, and so do I."

The actor's interest in music is also reflected in the upcoming premiere of *One*, which he completed during his time off from *Hedwig* last year. The musical will be produced by Insight Out Theatre Collective, a nonprofit McCollum recently co-founded.

In addition, he has acted in and composed music for a film and will be acting in Portland Center Stage's *Merchant of Venice* as well as starring in its production of the much-acclaimed tabloid-satirizing musical *Bat Boy*.

"I'm passionate about becoming human together; I'm passionate about listening to my fellow humans' stories," McCollum shares. "I believe it's time for the world to come together to address the issues at hand; we must listen to the women and children again, we must restore balance, we must repair some wounds."

Stoking his myriad endeavors is McCollum's underlying devotion to affecting the world through art. "It's an exciting time to be alive on the planet, and I am so grateful to be part of the process of us coming together. I see my career and all the media I'm working in—film, stage, writing, acting—as keys to open paths to be of greater service to humanity." □

HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH runs through Aug. 2 at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. Tickets are \$23-\$30 from 503-239-5919 or TicketsWest.

CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN is a Seattle free-lance writer.

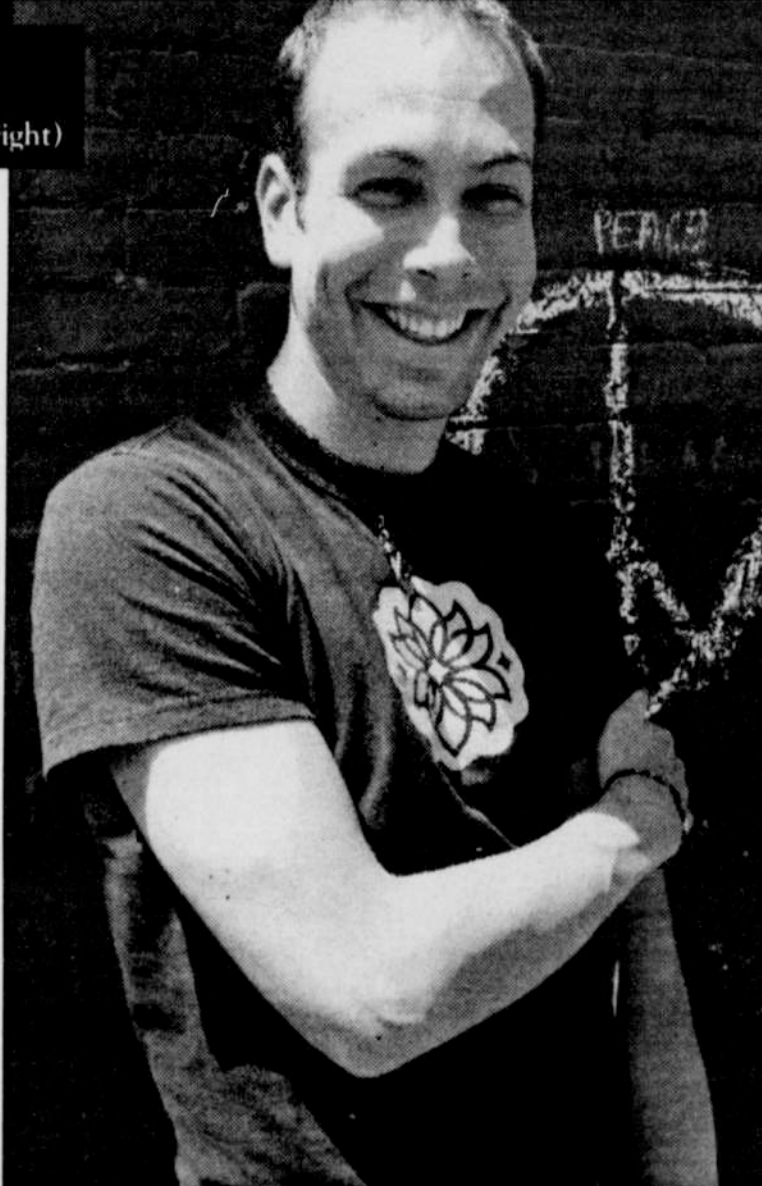


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