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PHOTO BY KATE SZROM/COURTESY PORTLAND CENTER STAGE AT THE ARMORY
 Delphon "DJ" Curtis Jr. as Hedwig in the rock musical 'Hedwig and the Angry Inch,' now playing through Feb. 23 at Portland Center State at the Armory.

Hedwig and the Angry Inch

Local actors front award-winning rock musical

OPINIONATED JUDGE
 BY **DARLEEN ORTEGA**



Portland Center Stage's current production of "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" is my third experience of this iconic show. And this production is the one that captured my imagination and moved me at the heart level. It's the one that motivated me to jump to my feet at the end, and the one I can most enthusiastically recommend.

For the uninitiated, "Hedwig" is a gritty, glittery drag-punk musical centered on two characters--Hedwig, a refugee from the former East Germany, and her bitter and much-abused husband, Yitzhak (typically played by a woman), who manages her act and performs alongside her and

her band, the Angry Inch. The band is named for what is left after the botched sex-change operation that was part of Hedwig's scheme to leave East Berlin with an American GI, a year before the wall came down. But her aim and story don't exactly place her as transgender in the usual sense; she is what we would now call gender-queer--but more specifically, as playwright John Cameron Mitchell (who originated the role) has famously said, "she's

a gender of one, and that is accidentally so beautiful." The play began in drag-punk clubs in New York City, evolving into a successful but still underground off-Broadway show in 1998. After its two-year run off-Broadway, the show became an indie film in 2001, which is where I stepped on the bus. Back then, I don't think I knew what to make of a story of a gender-queer performer singing her soul and ass off on stage in an of-

ten vengeful rendition of her life, loves, and botched sex-change operation. She was breaking free with something I respected, but couldn't really identify with. I did admire the music. The show had a successful Broadway revival in 2014, earning eight Tony awards, including a best actor award for Neil Patrick Harris. I saw a later iteration of that production with Michael

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