

‘WTF Happened To Baby Sister?’ at Rainbow Theatre Project

By **David Friscic** - November 24, 2014



A hilarious, unique and a “no-holds barred” approach to satire was offered to an appreciative audience in the creative and subversive comedy *WTF Happened to Baby Sister?*. Presented by the **Brave Soul Collective** and the **Rainbow Theatre Project**, this entertaining spoof of the campy, classic 1962 film *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Starring Bette Davis and Joan Crawford) was presented with dynamism and verve within a very compelling ninety-five minutes.

What was already campy and subversive material was even further subverted by the theatrical overlay of gender-bending elements and the New York drag ball scene. As if these extremely well-integrated elements were not enough to challenge an audience, the visionary talents behind this provocative text (see the next paragraph, folks! for kudos all around–), the two main protagonists interspersed their lines with cutting-edge lip –synching replete with larger-than-life inflection and attitude. The alter-egos of musical divas Patti Labelle and Diana Ross permeated the stage and added yet another captivating aspect to this production.



Inspired by Michael Sainte-Andress and conceived and directed by James Foster Jr., a charismatic cast went through their paces with skill and finesse. Writer Thembi Duncan takes the basic pulpy and schlocky source material and creatively re-energizes it with layers of theatrical complexity and originality. Conventional responses are subverted by the unique approach to the material. The campy elements of the play are interspersed with “over-the-top” musical performances that startle and stimulate the imagination. Scenes flow fluidly from one to another and there is an element of spontaneous surprise in each and every moment.

Set against a glitzy background with tawdry underpinnings by Graphic Designers Jeremy Hunter and Monte J. Wolfe, this production has the appropriate ambience for two aging stars who wish to hold onto their memories and dreams. Marvelously evocative and colorful costumes by Rayceen Pendarvis add to the appropriate atmosphere of the play.

Monte J. Wolfe as the long-suffering Sister B. (Wolfe also produced) is sublimely funny and displays perfect timing whether delivering a slow burn or delivering a caustic remark. Wolfe

channels the musical spirit of Diana Ross with aplomb. Jared Shamberger as the more overtly aggressive Sister J moves with a fierce physicality and confidence. Shamberger's scenes are hysterically raucous and cruelly humorous whether he is serving up a plate of rat for "din-din" or belittling his despised sister.

In supporting performances, Stanley Z. Freeman II as Roselin possesses an endearing accent as the male attendant to Sister B. His comic timing is spot-on. As the trainer, Arnold, Jivon Lee Jackson exhibits all the requisite physicality and sensual awareness that his role as a sexy stud of a trainer requires. Jackson's "training session" is wildly funny.



'WTF Happened to Baby Sister?' Photo by O'mar Miguel.

It is very rare to find a campy and satiric play that integrates so many original themes and ideas into one satisfying whole. This entire ensemble –from conception/writing to acting to technical – should be credited for a venture into highly original and creative terrain.

The Rainbow Theatre Project and the Brave Soul Collective should be commended for filling a void in Theatre offerings in the Washington, DC metro region's LBGTQ (Lesbian, Bi, Gay, Transsexual, and Queer) Community. A feeling of family and inclusiveness permeated this very unique project and that is what, I am sure, was intended. Let's hope that support for this theatrical organization grows even bigger in the future.

Running Time: 95 minutes, with one 15-minute intermission.



WTF Happened To Baby Sister? was performed on November 21-22, 2014 at **The Rainbow Theatre Project** and the **Brave Soul Collective** performing a Source – 1835 14th Street NW, in Washington, DC.

LINKS

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David Friscic

David has always had a passionate interest in the arts from acting in professional dinner theatre and community theatre to reviewing film and local theatre in college to making numerous treks to New York City to indulge his interest in live theatre. An enthusiastic interest in writing has shown itself in a BA in English/Education and an MA in English Literature. Taken together, these two interests have culminated in the logical conclusion of writing for an arts blog. David moved up and down the East Coast due to his father's job at General Electric and this has helped him to perceive the world in a very open way. After his schooling, David taught in Catholic school systems for awhile and, then, spent three years in the seminary with two years at Catholic University studying Theology and one year in a practicum working at a church in New York State. David currently works at the National Science Foundation as a Technical Information Specialist for the Office of Polar Programs and has had the great opportunity to go to Antarctica twice and Greenland once in support of the research community. He enjoys living in Bethesda and has taken courses at the Writer's Center. David enjoys swimming, traveling, reading, and working on committees at his condo. His major interest, however, is the arts and all it encompasses---from symphony, to film, to museum treks to live theatre. He counts having lunch with Lillian Gish and meeting Lily Tomlin, Geraldine Page, Maureen Stapleton, Liza Minnelli and Sandy Dennis as some of the more exciting encounters of his life.