

**THEATRE**

## So much more than a weird wedding



**RICHARD OUZOUNIAN**

**B**etter late than never. I've always found that an unsatisfactory motto, making procrastination sound like a virtue, but I'm willing to change my tune thanks to a tuneful, terrific show: *My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding*. I was out of town both during its original Fringe run, as well as at the start of its first mounting at the Panasonic Theatre. And even though plenty of other critics and people seemed to love it, there was something that kept me away. It sounded a little too artless, a bit too cutesy, the kind of thing that makes me run screaming into the night in search of order and design. Boy, was I wrong. On March 2, *MMLJWW* opened for yet another engagement at the Panasonic, and I thought it was finally time to check it out. Surprise! I absolutely loved it. Yes, the show is fun and feisty and

will give you a serious case of the warm fuzzies, but it's much more than that. And the amazing thing is that even the musical's biggest supporters haven't really recognized its secret weapon. Authors David Hein and Irene Carl Sankoff may have started out writing a tribute show to Hein's mother, who evolved from an uptight Saskatchewan housewife into a liberated, lesbian, wiccan-loving Ottawa woman, but along the way it became a lot more than that. And no, I'm not talking about the gay tolerance message that the show waves like a banner during Pride Week. That's nice, but a bit obvious. No, *MMLJWW* has a message everyone can take home with them and live by, no matter what religion, sexuality or side of the spirit world you favour. And that message first comes, as much wisdom does, not out



of the mouths of babes, but out of the mouth of a babe, specifically one who works as a waitress at Hooters. In the middle of a hilarious lunch scene that I'm not going to ruin by spilling too many beans, this fuzzy-haired wing-pusher, resplendent in orange Lycra, looks at the people she's serving and says, "No matter where you go, there you are." At first, it's just pleasantly arresting, the kind of thing a clever friend might post on their Facebook wall. But as the show rolls on and our various characters discover their destinies, it acquires added resonance, and by the time it's repeated by our leading lady just before the final curtain it clicks into place like tumblers on the finest safe. **KEITH BEATY/TORONTO STAR** David Hein with his onstage "mom" Lisa Horner in *My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding*. Hein based the play on his real mom's life.

*MMLJWW* is about going on the life journey that fate intended for you, no matter how strange or difficult it may seem. And by writing a very specific story, Hein and Sankoff have given us a show with a broadly based message. There are lots of other good things to celebrate as well, starting with Hein's own super-charming persona as the narrator, and the clever, catchy tunes he wrote for the show. Lisa Horner gives such a warm-hearted, open performance as his mom, Claire (the Jewish lesbian of the title), that you constantly want to reach out and hug her, but you'd be fighting stiff competition from Rosemary Doyle's wondrous Wiccan, Jane. Just like *Mamma Mia!* and *Wicked* and *Evil Dead* and *da kink in my hair*, this is a show that the people, rather than the critics, have made a hit. And that's really the most lasting and honest kind of success. *MMLJWW* is on at the Panasonic Theatre until March 21. For tickets or information call 416-872-1212 or visit [www.mirvish.com](http://www.mirvish.com)

**Play's wise message first comes from an orange-Lycra-wearing waitress at Hooters**



**MUSICAL PREVIEW**

## Wedding-bell belles

Fringe hit opens the closet on same-sex marriage... and Wiccans **By GLENN SUMI**

**MY MOTHER'S LESBIAN JEWISH WICCAN WEDDING** by David Hein and Irene Carl Sankoff, directed by Andrew Lamb (Mirvish). At the Panasonic (651 Yonge). In previews, opens Sunday (November 15) and runs to November 29. \$25-\$60. 416-872-1212. See Opening, page 62. I KNOW WHAT THE FOLKS BEHIND My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding did last summer. They won the Canadian theatre lottery. Barely a week after the heart-warming comedy with the catchy title opened at the Fringe, the show's creative team was in David Mirvish's office negotiating a deal. "I remember standing at the elevator after the meeting, saying, 'Did

that just happen?'" says Andrew Lamb, who directed the original and helms the expanded remount at the Panasonic. "It was one of those pinch-yourself moments." David Hein and Irene Carl Sankoff's autobiographical musical about Hein's relationship with his mother, who came out late in life, has made the move from the postage-stamp-sized Bread & Circus performing space to the former We Will Rock You venue. "Actually, I always envisioned it at a bigger space," says Lamb, who's directed several Fringe and SummerWorks shows and is director of education and outreach at the Tarragon. "We didn't have the budget for a

set, but there are lots more costumes," says Lamb. "There are also more scenic elements, and sometimes people become scenic elements." The original cast of seven has grown to 10, while the band (including narrator Hein) has increased from four to five. Many of Mirvish's suggestions to expand the 60-minute show to 90 were ones Hein, Sankoff and Lamb had already discussed. The rather unsympathetic character of Garth, Hein's father, has been given more stage time. The mother's growing relationship with her lover is more fully developed.



Andrew Lamb says meeting with the Mirvishes during the Fringe was surreal. "And one of the things Mirvish said he wanted to know more about was Wiccans," says Lamb. We both chuckle at that idea.

Of course, the show couldn't come at a timelier moment, a year after California's Prop 8 shocker and a week after Maine's rejection of a same-sex marriage bill. "I was down at Lincoln Center at a director's lab earlier this year and met the artistic director of the Pasadena Theatre," says Lamb. "I told him I'd love to mount it in California, especially for those fence-sitters on the same-sex marriage issue. 'The show forces you to think, 'What if one of my parents came out to me? Would I accept them for who they are?'" Lamb says he and the *MMLJWW* cast know how lucky they are to be able to present the show at all. "We probably wouldn't be able to do it in Edmonton or Calgary," he says. "To us it's a nice, heartfelt comedy. But there are many countries where you wouldn't be able to even talk about this subject without being turned over to the authorities." © [glenns@nowtoronto.com](http://glenns@nowtoronto.com)