

Taylor Mac breaks Spoleto mold with 'Be(a)st'

Review

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Amidst all the splish and splash of Spoleto, at last! A performance that rivals the mold-breaking entertainment of past triumphs like "The Warrior Ant" and the Zulu dancers.

"The Be(a)st of Taylor Mac" ran for a fast and frenetic 90 minutes Friday night at the Emmett Robinson Theatre to a sold-out crowd that started whooping and hollering, whistling and clapping before Mac made it down the aisle toting a huge, rolling suitcase.

In signature drag queen get-up complete with wacky wig, glittering lips and masses of eyeliner, Mac crawled onto the stage, then welcomed, and taunted, late-comers "on South Carolina time" parading in front of the house, commentary that had to be extemporaneous. He elicited huge laughs before his 'plays' even began.

Describing a New York subway station ("urine, sweat and gum"), he tossed out of the suitcase a ukulele (which he plays madly, sweetly, hauntingly throughout) and a mess of sparkly-frayed-flowing-gorgeous costumes. They might look random, but they are designed to fit particular topics and to acknowledge he is masculine and feminine.

Funny to the bone, "Tay" takes on subjects as diverse as the Iraq war, homosexual encounters and "The Revolution" ("which won't be masculinized").

He deplures comparisons, so I will not mention comic asides reminiscent of Groucho Marx, physical comedy recalling Lucille Ball, patter as quick and easy as the best stand-up comedian, and a versatile singing voice that approaches the sublime. He does not mind his accolades as "The Bob Hope of Drag" and award-winner at the Stiletto Festival.

After a madcap rendition of one of his original songs, "I Need a Contingency Plan," he hastens to assure us, "Yes, it's gonna be that kind of show."

He makes us all delight in his songs that become monologues that become dialogues that become burlesque routines disguised as political rants. This consummate theater artist celebrates variance.