



THE AGE OF AQUARIUS, CIRCA 2011: Phyre Hawkins as Dionne (center) & the cast of *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*. Photo: Joan Marcus



Theater Review

***Hair*: 'Sunshine' is lost in uneven return of revival for 'Summer of Love 2011'**

HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL

Book & lyrics by Gerome Ragni & James Rado

Music by Galt MacDermot

Choreography by Karole Armitage

Directed by Diane Paulus

Through September 10, 2011

St. James Theatre

246 West 44th Street, (212-239-6200)

www.hairbroadway.com

By Scott Harrah

Hair changed the American musical in so many ways. First produced on Broadway in 1968, it was the ebullient voice of the hippie and flower-child generation, and its anti-war message and in-your-face countercultural zeal made all the classic musicals that preceded it seem irrelevant and anachronistic. This once-outstanding revival, which created a sensation in Central Park three years ago—and moved to Broadway in 2009—was a bona fide party, and won a Tony for Best Revival of a Musical. Unfortunately, this "Summer of Love 2011" version, brought back for a limited run after touring the USA and London, now seems like community theater masquerading as a Broadway show, particularly since it is a musical that was so seamless just two seasons ago.

Director Diane Paulus made the 2009 production a true crowd-pleaser, but something has been lost since it has returned from the road. Nearly everyone knows the score of *Hair* because it is now part of America's pop-cultural sensibility. Regardless of what decade one grew up in, most of us know the show's infectious songs like "Age of Aquarius," "Let the Sun Shine In" and "Good Morning Starshine." Today, these hippie anthems are as recognizable worldwide as anything written by Rodgers and Hammerstein. So it is particularly frustrating hearing such

classics sung by some actors who have trouble staying in key. Although this show is a summer replacement, it *is* still Broadway—not a showcase.

Hair is essentially a musical revue with a paper-thin plot about a group of hippies against the Vietnam War. Led by the longhaired Berger (Steel Burkhardt), the "tribe" members burn their draft cards, drop out of school, drop acid and indulge in free love. Claude (Paris Remillard) is a hippie who is torn between dodging the draft and obeying his parents' wish to go fight in Vietnam. This essential plot element was so powerful in 2009 as the growing number of casualties of American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan spread grief and anger throughout our nation.

Hair was never merely about sex, drugs and rock and roll, and that is why it was still relevant in the 2009 revival, back when America was still heavily involved in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, and there were so many similarities between those wars and Vietnam. Although Osama Bin Laden is dead now and the Iraq/Afghanistan battles have simmered down somewhat as the American military focus shifts to other Middle Eastern countries, *Hair* still works as an anti-war musical, but it is starting to look—dare I say it? —dated.

Two years ago, director Diane Paulus allowed the individuality of each character to shine, while still managing to make the cast work together as a multitalented unit. Now, so much emphasis has been placed on the gimmicky audience participation (hippies climbing through the audience, touching people, dancing in the aisles, and so on) that more important things like the acting itself are allowed to unravel, and the production is not nearly as tight and enjoyable as it once was.

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