

# SEX, DRAG & ROCK 'N' ROLL

THIS IS FOR ALL YOU STRANGE ROCK 'N' ROLLERS, MISFITS AND LOSERS. KEEP SPINNING TO YOUR ROCK 'N' ROLL...



MIKE POTTER  
Makeup Artist &  
Wig creator for  
"Hedwig"

## HEDWIG and the ANGRY INCH

21 YEARS LATER

BY MIRANDA RODRIGUEZ



**JOHN CAMERON MITCHELL**  
Writer, Director and Star of "Hedwig and the Angry Inch"

**T**wenty-one years after the film's release, "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" is still teaching generations of people that gender is fluid and it is OK to not conform to society's idea of gender. This film is a journey toward self-acceptance and self-love.

"I think people can relate to Hedwig, in so many ways. Gay, straight, trans, young and old. I think it's a universal message about loving yourself," said Mike Potter, makeup artist and wig creator for "Hedwig."

"Hedwig" tells the story of the internationally ignored song stylist, Hedwig Robinson, né Hansel Schmidt. A person who is forced by the binarchy to undergo gender-reassignment surgery and gender abnegation in order to marry a man and escape Communist East Berlin for America. By putting on some makeup, pulling the wig down from the shelf and spinning

some rock 'n' roll, she learns to accept herself and ultimately become a gender of one.

Constructed in a punk rock drag club called SqueezeBox, John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask sewed together this exquisite corpse of a story. Influenced by Plato's "Symposium" and Mitchell's childhood babysitter, "Hedwig" was developed as an off-Broadway musical in the late 90s; turned into a film in 2001, with Mitchell writing, directing and starring in the lead role; and made its Broadway debut in 2014. With a style influenced by Dolly Parton, Marlene Deitrich, David Bowie and something uniquely Hedwig, and a musical style that rivals David Bowie, Lou Reed and Iggy Pop, Hedwig truly cements herself as a punk rock icon.

Growing up in a Hispanic-American household, conversations around gender and sexuality weren't really mentioned or acknowledged. If gender or sexuality was brought up it was often something that was looked down upon and often made fun of. As someone who never fit conventional gender roles and narratives, this didn't sit right with me. Through my teens and early adulthood, I began to question authority and challenge the culture I was exposed to as a child. Through this journey, I dove into queer cinema.

Like many, my first introduction to queer cinema was through "Rocky Horror Picture Show." "Rocky Horror" walked, so "Hedwig" could run. I love "Rocky Horror," but I was in search of something that felt real...human. This is when I found "Hedwig." I followed her voice through the dark turns and noise of this wicked little town, and found an escape. She helped me become more accepting of myself and others who don't fit into this labeled society.

So why am I writing about a 21-year-old movie? The short answer is this film remains timeless and relevant, maybe even more so than

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"Hedwig" on Broadway

it was in 2001. Prior to this film, queer stories were often tragic. "Hedwig" creates a narrative that explores the complexity of being queer and gender diverse. Even though the term non-binary isn't mentioned in the film, "Hedwig" explored these identities before it was seen on television or film.

As a person who never really felt like they belonged, through this film I found a community. A place where I belong. "Hedwig" has garnered a large fanbase known as HedHeads. The overwhelming consensus about this production is that it has had a huge impact in people's lives.

Personally, "Hedwig" has helped me come to terms with myself and to accept my differences. I got tired of pretending to be someone I'm not. Like the lyrics in "Midnight Radio," "know in your soul, like your blood knows the way from your heart to your brain, knows that you're whole," I'm still learning to be whole, but hopefully I can finally become the person I want to be.

I spoke with several other HedHeads about what "Hedwig" means to them. For many, "Hedwig" broadened their perception of what a musical can be and were entranced by the transformative power of the music.

Kristopher Weaver summed up "Hedwig" best: "Hedwig" is a breathtaking mountain of comedic storytelling steeped in transformative songs that each move the soul differently. Leaving an audience with a new realization of what life can be."

Hayley St. James said that "Hedwig" and John Cameron Mitchell, were instrumental in their gender journey."

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Some use “Hedwig” as a teaching tool, like Daniel Gerling, an English professor at Augustana University in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who teaches it as part of his literature class. It has also helped people embrace their masculine or feminine energies, like Nehedar who played Schlatko in the Hedwig NYC shadowcast or Anja Dick, who left a 20-year tech career to become a full time drag performer.

Reflecting on the history and life of “Hedwig” and its renaissance, I spoke with Potter, creator of the iconic look. “Hedwig” has already conquered Broadway and is a star

of stage and screen. What’s next for her?

“I think ‘Hedwig’ will be on Broadway again (sooner than later). And will continue to be performed all over the world in small productions,” said Potter.

Twenty-four years since the musical opened at the Jane Street Theatre, “Hedwig” still has a future and will continue to live on.

“I find it constantly surprising that people are still interested in ‘Hedwig.’ I’m very happy, she stood the test of time. It’s a testament to Stephen and John’s work,” said Potter.

↑  
HEDHEAD ART  
BY JOE WATERMAN