

Lena Hall

By Iris Wiener

Best Performance by an Actress in a Featured Role in a Musical, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*

Lena Hall's transformation in *Hedwig* is so consuming that her own mother couldn't find her on the Belasco Theatre stage. When she finally identified Hall, who plays Hedwig's Croatian male husband Yitzhak, she said, "My girl. She's so handsome," Hall laughs of her mother's reaction to her engrossingly nuanced disguise. It's no surprise that Hall has been nominated for her first Tony Award, as her performance is revelatory to all audiences – even those not in her family.

Hall first auditioned for the coveted role of Neil Patrick Harris's co-star using a video of herself in character, vehemently promoting a fake Kickstarter campaign. She speaks of the role of Yitzhak with great fondness, due in part to the fact that she has been a fan of *Hedwig* since it first ran off-Broadway in 1998 ("My sister and I were crying and sobbing at the end of the show with our arms in the air – it was like a religious experience for us!" she laughs.)

"Yitzhak has this great talent and is amazing, but is clueless because he's so foreign," she says of the character who is berated repeatedly by his transgender wife. "He has a really open heart, but that really works against him because people just take advantage of him." Though Hall's personality is nothing like that of Yitzhak's, she does see much of herself in the character. "*Hedwig* is about longing for something that you desire to be," she says. "Yitzhak wants so badly to be in the spotlight. I constantly long for having the roles and the opportunities to really show who I am on stage and to be given the spotlight and show the world what I have bottled up inside."

Being on stage is nothing new for Hall, whose theatrical credits include *Kinky Boots*, *Cats*, and *The Toxic Avenger*. Hall is also the frontwoman for The Deafening, a rock band with whom she says she gets to express herself ... to a limited number of people. Yitzhak and *Hedwig* finally allow her the opportunity to share a large portion of herself.

That being said, portraying a man does present an interesting task for Hall. "The biggest challenge is that you can never relax," she says of playing someone of the opposite gender. "The minute I relax my back starts to sway, my hip goes out to the side, and then I'm a girl. I'm so aware of my body. It's like a 100-minute dance that is constantly moving."

Despite the added attention heaped on her due to her first Tony nomination, Hall maintains her bubbly personality and creative sense of humor. "Starting with the first preview, I had this idea that as Yitzhak I

wanted to write Hedwig a card before every show documenting something funny that had happened to either the character or something that was relevant within the production," she laughs of her personal ritual. "Every day I've been giving Neil cards that are story lines. One day I said that I went to a really big Russian therapist (which was just a scam to take my money) and the only thing he said was, 'You no cry.' Sometimes I'll get a card back from Hedwig that's always some horrible insult. It's a fun little thing that helps me develop some stuff for myself." Could the cards be some ideas for a *Hedwig* spin-off, perhaps? Hall lets the thought sink in. "Oh my god, that would be amazing!"

