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MUSICAL THEATRE REVIEW

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THROUGH 12/20: *The Wiz* Is Another Brick in the Yellow Brick Road

By [Spencer P. Phillips](#)

December 5, 2015 - Raleigh, NC:

As the holidays draw near, [Burning Coal Theatre Company](#) meets the energy of the season with [The Wiz](#), the popular 1974 musical adaptation of L. Frank Baum's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In the wake of other big-budget adaptations of tales from Oz (such as mega-musical *Wicked*, the 1978 film adaptation of *The Wiz*, and NBC's recent *The Wiz, LIVE!* [which incidentally premiered on Burning Coal's opening night]), modern audiences may be used to all the high-dollar spectacle of elaborate costumes, extravagant sets, and special effects. In their signature minimalist style, Burning Coal offers a different perspective with an almost cabaret-style production of the American favorite.

Set designer Snow celebrates the tellings and retellings of Oz through the years with a painted backdrop detailing just how far the yellow brick road has traveled since 1900. The story of Dorothy and her unlikely companions has been shaped and integrated many times over into the diverse and ever-changing American culture.

On Saturday night, the space felt intimate and the rapport between the company and the spectators was familiar. Confident in the audience's comfort with the plot, director [Randolph Curtis Rand](#) gives a nod to the storyline but puts his company's vocal talent on display. The Burning Coal cast cut loose with belty solos and high-energy choreography under the instruction of music director [Julie Florin](#) and choreographer [Avis HatcherPuzzo](#). Costume designer [Kima Baffour](#)'s inclusion of the occasional eccentric wig or glitzy footwear kept one foot in the world of Oz. Characters otherwise donned simple street-wear, contributing to the familiar cabaret feel of the night.

The talented vocalists took turns wowing the crowd with the soulful compositions by [Charlie Smalls](#) (with contributions by a team of other composers, including Luther Vandross). The fun the cast had performing made them fun to watch. Carly Prentis Jones was a bubbly and endearing Dorothy with her trio of loyal companions. Jamaal Anthony explored a range of vocal talent as the raspy Scarecrow. Juan Isler got laugh after laugh as the grumpy and irreverent Lion, while Demetrius Jackson seemed to channel the King of Pop as the Tin Man (though Michael played Scarecrow in the film adaptation). Aaron Wright was almost unrecognizable in his transformation from ensemble member to *The Wiz* himself. His embodiment of the eccentric wizard was thorough and hilarious. Supporting actors Emelia Cowans-Taylor, Brittany Nicole Timmons, and Tyanna West infused the performance with their rich voices and energies. Cowans-Taylor was perfectly funny and evil and shone in her introduction of Evillene, the Wicked Witch of the West. Timmons was inspiring as Glinda in her solo reprise of "Believe in Yourself," and West gave such fabulous energy as both Addaperle, the Good Witch of the North, and as a lady of Oz that she seemed to be capable of another two-and-a-half hour run without breaking a sweat.

Burning Coal has displayed great awareness once again by choosing a story both classic and relevant, carrying off an often big-budget show with a simple hometown feel, and showcasing a fine company of vocal talent. *The Wiz* was a relatable, feel-good time, and the cast at Burning Coal was ready and able to welcome audiences down that yellow brick road into their very own world of Oz.

The Wiz continues through Sunday, December 20. For more details on this production, please view the sidebar.

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EVENT INFORMATION

Raleigh -- Thu., Dec. 17, 2015 at
7:30 PM (*Thu., Dec. 3, 2015 - Sun.,
Dec. 20, 2015*)

[Burning Coal Theatre
Company: *The Wiz*](#)

Adult \$25; Seniors (65+) \$20;
Students \$15; All Thursday Tickets
\$10 -- Burning Coal Theatre at the
Murphey School , (919) 834-4001 ,
<http://www.burningcoal.org/>