

Lesbian Love Octagon

Kraire Theatre, 85 East 4th Street · [Tickets on sale through Jun 29](#)

nytheatre.com review by Ed Malin
June 6, 2013

Lesbians of the Lower East Side, Unite! It's definitely time for a large-cast musical about late 90s queer culture, and thank goddess this wonderful show has arrived. Whether you're non-heteronormative, butch, or neither, you will have a great time. Right before the show started, a Hitachi Magic Wand (TM) was raffled off, so arrive early and relax.

It is 1998 and a few dozen women are buzzing about and singing in a New York Women's Bookstore. How do you know it's 1998? From these lyrics:

"Ani isn't carried."
"Why?"
"She got married."

Ani DiFranco, k.d lang, Adrienne Rich and other icons are mentioned, but the action centers on a bunch of 20-somethings who are in love with each other, or most likely dated each other in the past. The song "The Ubiquitous Ex-Girlfriend" elaborates on this charming lesbian cliché. Sue (Caitlin Lee Reid) just broke up with Darla (Kristian Espiritu), who suddenly and somewhat insecurely starts dating Sue's ex-girlfriend-but-now-transgender-male Jerry (Jax Jacskon). Wendy (Lindsay Naas) and Jess (Ti Grieco) are breaking up again and again, which is an excellent excuse for former lovers Anya (Jenny Atwood)--the femme of the cast--and Chris (Taniesha Duggan) to take Sue out to the bar run by Scout (Kelly Lockwood Larson) and sing about the joys of being single. Sue fears she's not assertive enough but that's OK, Anya knows how to build a butch, and is happy to sing about it, too. A pleasurable visit to a store resembling [Toys in] Babeland rounds out Act One.



Jaimie Kelton, Lindsay Naas and Lauren Sapienza in a scene from *Lesbian Love Octagon* | KL Thomas

Sue ends intermission by waking from a dream in which all her exes and even her cat sing about dumping her. It's quite tender, and the mood only gets more hopeful when Sue places an internet personal ad, something we are assured will be an inescapable dating reality five years down the road. There are many women looking for love online, but one interest they all share: slam poetry, naturally. The night's love news is recounted in the song "Dyke Drama and Tofu Scramble". Does Darla take Jerry and Sue for granted? Who will fall in love at the (disturbingly familiar) lesbian open mic? By the end, if cohabitation is an option, someone is going to break into song about renting a U-Haul.

How can you not love this musical? Even when the characters argue, they are part of a large, safe, trans-friendly community which one can only envy. I miss the 90s-era Lower East Side. Is that supposed to be Meow Mix, and Bluestockings? The book and lyrics by Kim Kressal delight, as does the driving keyboard music of Will Larche. Felicia Blum and Kim Kressal team up to choreograph the ever-moving pageant. Ms. Kressal also directed the show and designed the costumes, answering the nostalgia for striped everything. Michael McClain effectively created the entire set out of multi-purpose plastic crates. It's a complex story full of complex relationships, hence the Octagon in the title. But if you know that life and musicals are not simple, you will break even and laugh.