



Razor-sharp wit: Writer/director Sky Gilbert takes a look at non-conformity in *Drag Queens On Trial* starring, left to right, Doug Millar, Leonard Chow and Kent Staines. The play continues until Nov. 3 at the Toronto Cinema.

Drag Queens On Trial is not for the faint-hearted

By Henry Mietkiewicz
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For too long, a gap has existed between Sky Gilbert the man and Sky Gilbert the writer/director.

As the creative force behind the Buddies in Bad Time experimental theatre group, Gilbert has explored homosexual themes with a solemnity that sometimes borders on-melodrama or avant-garde self-indulgence.

In person, however, he's an expressive, supercharged conversationalist who peppers his remarks with stinging, one-line barbs and a keen, self-effacing wit.

Why, we've wondered, doesn't more of Gilbert's flamboyance and cutting humor find its way on to the stage?

Now, at last, it does in *Drag Queens On Trial*, a wonderfully outrageous new show playing until Nov. 3 at the Toronto Cinema, 677 Bloor St. W.

First, a word of caution. Although it does not actively promote homosexuality and chooses instead to advocate tolerance to-

Theatre review

ward society's fringe elements, *Drag Queens On Trial* is not for the faint-hearted.

The three men are decked out in skimpy lingerie or tight-fitting women's clothing, occasionally with parts of the anatomy exaggerated. Rarely does a minute go by without a four-letter word or some off-color reference to genitalia or sexual deviation.

And, to enhance the campiness of the project, Gilbert is presenting his show in what is normally a theatre for soft-core sex films. In fact, right next door, is another movie house where skin flicks are screened.

And yet, *Drag Queens On Trial* is an often exhilarating emotional roller coaster of a production. Gilbert, as writer and director, ably uses razor-sharp dialogue, low humor and wild postures as counterweights to ensure that the few serious sequences do not descend to mawkishness.

On trial are the statuesque,

demonstrative Marlene Daylorme (Doug Millar), snarky Lana Lust (Kent Staines) and diminutive, tightly coiled Judi Goose (Leonard Chow) — all in engaging, dynamic, believable performances.

In his turn, each performer plays defendant, prosecuting attorney and surprise witness. As defendant, each attempts to invent for himself a colorful, romantic history. And, when challenged, each finally must admit to a tawdry, lonely past and the prospect of a bleak future full of ridicule, prejudice and possible death from AIDS.

"But," murmurs Marlene in a moment of rare vulnerability, "the passion to live dangerously is the most exciting disease in the world — and it's catching."

Chances are that many of us will leave the theatre still convinced the drag queens are freaks. But that's hardly the issue. Gilbert has spoken eloquently about society's persecution and misunderstanding of non-conformity — and that's a theme that goes beyond the specifics of homosexuality.