

Caprice hits a high note

RENT

Prince of Wales Theatre
London W1

Review by Francesca Fearon

Caprice has fronted the Wonderbra advertising campaign and graced the covers of magazines around the world, but can she act? That was the question that gripped first night audiences of *Rent*, the rock musical making a return to the West End stage for a 12-week run.

And judging by her performance, the answer is definitely yes. She has splendid comic timing and can belt out a number with the best of them. Caprice set out earlier this year to prove that she's more than just a model when she appeared in the hit show *The Vagina Monologues*.

In *Rent* she confirms the talent she displayed there, playing Maureen, a bisexual performing artist and lover of diva-voiced civil

liberties lawyer Joanne Jefferson (Wendy Mae Brown). Whether dressed in raunchy black rubber or as a cute little girl with bunches from Hicksville - with a cowbell hung suggestively from her waist - her girlish voice and body language provide some great comic moments.

Rent is a reworking of Puccini's *La Bohème* by Jonathon Larson, who sets the action in a Manhattan neighbourhood inhabited by artists

and musicians, gays and straights living in the shadow of AIDS and New York's rent riots of the late Eighties. The musical, narrated by Mark (Dougal Irvine), a film-maker, follows a year in the life of a group of young Bohemians. At the centre of the group is Roger (Damien Flood), an angry rock musician desperate to compose a hit (which eventually becomes his epitaph as he has AIDS). His love affair with Mimi (Debbie Kurup), a feisty Latino wild child also in the grip of AIDS, cheekily mirrors the theme of Puccini's opera.

However, it is the relationship between Tom Collins (Mykal Rand) and drag artist Angel (Mig Ayesa) which steals the show. They meet when Angel rescues Collins after a street mugging. Together they create some of *Rent*'s most entertaining and poignant interludes, in particular the mellow-voiced Collins' heart-rending solo of *Without You*.

Despite the raw inner-city landscape, the alienation of the characters and the sad events depicted, there are many uplifting moments provided by such rousing songs as *La Vie Bohème* and *Living In America*. The show offers a spirit of hope to those who feel their fate

