Life Is Sweet

December 1, 2000 By Tony Peregrin

Living with HIV is hard, but you can still live a sweet existence," says Joseph C. Wilson, HIVer and creator of *Hard Candy*, a San Francisco–based "urban musical" that he's hyping as the *Rent* of the new millennium.

Now in its sophomore year, *Hard Candy* follows the journey of Lucas, who—in a headline-inspired fantasy—has a baboon-bone-marrow transplant that, miraculously, cures AIDS. Now that the magic bullet is coursing through his veins, the play's drug companies will stop at nothing to exploit him.

"I crafted this musical to invent a new way to send the same message we've been sending for two decades: *HIV causes AIDS, and people must have safe sex*," says the 39-year-old HIV positive Wilson, who drew on many of his own experiences—including having once been homeless—in writing the musical. "Despite all the walks, rides and ribbons, HIV continues to spread."

Even before the curtain rises December 1, Wilson says the 90-minute *Hard Candy* has met his goals. "When I was casting the show, I could tell in the interviews that many of the performers didn't know much about HIV," he says. "Nine out of 10 didn't know that people are often thrust into poverty when they get HIV. A lot of them weren't hip to the transformation the body goes through, like the 'hump-man syndrome,' and had no idea the show hinged on my life. It really showed them that people with AIDS are everywhere."

While there are no immediate touring plans, Wilson is lobbying for New York's Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS to move the show east. Meanwhile, the show will go on for three nights at San Francisco's Glide Memorial Methodist Church. (Call 415. 674.6133 for info.)

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