



Groundbreaking Musical RENT Comes to the Bingen Theater

Everyone has heard of Hamilton, Lin Manuel Miranda's popular rap musical. It changed musical theatre forever. But Hamilton was not the first musical to use the language of pop, rock or rap. Miranda has said, "There would be no Hamilton without Rent."

Now, for the first time ever, local audiences can see what all the fuss is about, courtesy of CGOA Stages. Rent is coming to the Bingen Theater. The Pulitzer-prize winning musical opens May 6 for an eight show run.

Rent is very loosely based on Puccini's opera La Boheme, but don't let the word opera scare you. There are no sopranos screaming in Italian in Rent. Puccini's opera was about a group of young artists trying to eke out a living, pay their rent and manage their love lives. Rent places the artists in 1990s New York, where they struggle to make a living, pay their rent, and manage their love lives.

Where Puccini used the sound of classical music, Rent uses rock. It's authentic, too. It sounds like the kind of music you'd hear on the radio.

Rent is joyous and filled with hope, but it isn't afraid to tackle the important issues of the day, like economic inequality and homelessness. Maybe the heaviest theme is the HIV/Aids epidemic that was upending the gay community.

Musical director Dan Kenealy said that while the show is about a specific group of people, the theme is more universal. "The message of Rent is fairly all-encompassing of what it means to be human, which is a mixture of tragedies and triumphs."

Since its first, long-running premiere on Broadway, Rent has received dozens of revivals, two movie versions and countless productions around the world. Singers continue to record the show's most famous song, Seasons of Love.

This past year, Miranda directed a movie version of Tick, Tick, Boom, Rent composer Jonathan Larson's autobiographical musical. Larson tragically died the night before Rent opened on Broadway, adding a real-life note of poignancy to the musical.

The show is being directed by Joe Garoutte. You might remember him as the smarmy lawyer Billy Flynn in CGOA's sold-out production of Chicago. Now in the role of director, Garoutte said, "Audience members will be so moved at many

points in the show and will truly experience that love is love. The whole cast has pulled together to create something that will send everyone home buzzing with hope and great conversation.”

Speaking of conversations, there will be cast talk backs on Friday, May 13 and Sunday, May 15. It’s a great way for audiences to connect with the actors and talk about the musical they’ve seen.

Those actors make up a cast of both familiar faces and many new ones, making their debut in a Stages production. Kenealy said, “This is a wonderful cast who has worked incredibly hard to tell the story of RENT. They have developed deep connections to the music.”

The diverse cast includes principal players Reuben Betts, William Thayer-Daugherty, Amalia Vasquez, Seth Kelly, Ashly Will, Ayanna Hamilton, Chal Oates and Ryan Maxwell. The ensemble includes Emily Vawter, David Dye, Marcos Galvez, Cynthia Yoshida, Lesley Saunders, Kelly Mahon, Abby Rankin, Norah Baker, Carol Thayer, Noah Harkin, Jerry Vasquez and Ann Marie Wagar.

In addition to Garoutte and Kenealy, the production crew includes Ann Egan (Choreography), Jodi Wright (Costumes) and Rachel Hamilton (Stage Manager).

The music is at the heart of a rock opera like Rent and is powered by a top-notch band that includes Corin Parker, Larry Wyatt, Kurt Schneider and Kandi Pritchard.

Rent opens May 6 at 7 PM. Additional shows are May 7,13,14,20,21 at 7 PM, and May 8 and 15 at 2 PM. Tickets are \$20 adults (\$15 for CGOA members), \$5 youth ages 10-17, and free for kids under 10.

The show is rated PG-13 for language, drug use and sexual content. Parents are encouraged to research the show before bringing children to the production.

Audiences are required to show proof of full vaccination or recent negative test. Masks are not required but are optional. Due to the limited seating in the Bingen Theater, the show may sell out, so it’s recommended to get tickets early. Tickets are available at gorgeorchestra.org.