

**The Fort Wayne Civic Theatre
IN THE WINGS Arts-In-Education Program**

Presents

A study guide of



BOOK, MUSIC, AND LYRICS BY JONATHAN LARSON

ORIGINAL CONCEPT AND ADDITIONAL LYRICS BY BILLY ARONSON

IN THE WINGS PERFORMANCE

SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 2010 @ 2:00 P.M.

Study Guide written by Hadley Todoran

Additional Material & Editing by Eunice Wadewitz

THE CAST OF RENT

FORT WAYNE CIVIC THEATRE

FEBRUARY 27 – MARCH 13, 2011



BILLY DAWSON



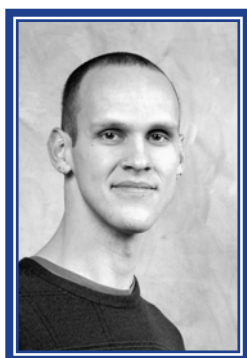
BRENDAN KELLY



HANNAH BERCOT



SHERMAN GANAWAY



JOEL MILLER



KAYLEY HINEN



TERINA WAKEFIELD



PRENTIS MOORE



AMANDA SIMPKINS



ANDREA KRIDER



ANDREW SHADE



ANNIE ROBINSON



BOBBI JO CARROLL



C. LOVEY MARSHALL



KEVIN TORWELLE



LUKE HOLLIGER



MATT ROBINSON

Director's Notes

Everything about this production has been rigorous and challenging. The auditions were intense, lengthy, emotional and surprising. The casting required hours of conversation, consultation and rumination; for once a show is cast the die is set. Skillful casting is absolutely crucial to the success or failure of a production.

Rehearsals have been physically and emotionally demanding for everyone involved. This is difficult music and a different style than most musical theatre. The dancing takes places on platforms and tables, in high heels. Cast and crew have to create and manage multiple costume changes and the task of moving very heavy (to ensure safety of the actors) tables around in the dark. Designing a set and lights for a play with rapid-fire scene changes and a rock-concert look has been exhilarating - but building that set and focusing the lights in two days has been a breathtaking task.

Whenever a cast delves deeply into material as raw as this, emotions run the gamut. It takes courage to expose oneself and avoid hiding behind a facade of performance. We have had low, low nights in the rehearsal room. And we have had transcendent moments that will surely be remembered and cherished for a lifetime (at least by this director).

RENT has been a rollercoaster for many of us. And it has been terrifying.

We wish to thank the AIDS Task Force for their help. We honor those who lost their lives to the disease and salute those who live with it today.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with the oppressed who continue to suffer the indignity of prejudice and misunderstanding and we understand the great honor and responsibility of presenting this to Fort Wayne.

We thank you for opening your heart to the possibility of what you are about to experience. We hope that at the end of the rollercoaster ride, you leave feeling as exhilarated as we have been for the past six weeks. Shaken, stirred, and quickened.

- GUEST DIRECTOR RANAE BUTLER

Love. Hope. Struggle. Triumph.

BOOK, MUSIC, AND LYRICS BY JONATHAN LARSON



Evelyn McDonnell and Katherine Silberger, authors of the text that accompanied the libretto of *Rent* in a 1997 book published by Morrow, summed up this ironic alignment of events by noting that "it's hard not to think of this story, ultimately, as a tragedy." Yet Larson, who had supported himself as a waiter for the ten years prior to *Rent*'s first production, left an enormous legacy. John Lahr in the *New Yorker*, while noting that Larson was far from the first composer to attempt the marriage of rock and the Broadway musical, noted that he may have been the first to succeed. Larson's "gift for direct, compelling, colloquial lyrical statement," Lahr wrote, "seems to prove that the show tune can once again become pertinent and popular."

Larson was raised in White Plains, New York, and enjoyed what *Entertainment Weekly* called an "idyllic Jewish middle-class childhood." Music was important to him from the beginning, according to his father. The latter told McDonnell and Silberger: "I was changing his diaper, so he had to be pretty young, and he started singing 'Yellow Bird.' In tune."

In an interview with John Istel for *American Theatre* shortly before his death, Larson named several musical figures who had been important influences on him. Later in life, he had come to appreciate Kurt Cobain of Nirvana, he said, along with fellow "alternative" musician Liz Phair. As a teen, his influences had included the Police and the artist who at that time went by the name of Prince. Still earlier, he had enjoyed the Beatles and the Who's Pete Townsend, the latter known for his rock opera *Tommy* that would have an impact on Larson's later work.

But Larson also appreciated composers Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, whose work would not normally be found among the typical American teenager's favorites. Sondheim, who wrote the lyrics for Bernstein's *West Side Story* (1957) and composed the musicals including *A Little Night Music* (1973) and the Pulitzer Prizewinning *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), would eventually become Larson's mentor. Still another influence lay even further in the musical past. When Larson was a child, he was taken to see a children's version of *La Boheme*, Giacomo Puccini's opera about a group of struggling young artists, or "Bohemians." From that seed, the idea that would become *Rent* slowly germinated over the next two decades.

After high school, Larson attended Adelphi University in Garden City, New York on an acting scholarship. Recalling his college experience in his *American Theatre* interview, Larson said, "Adelphi was a lousy place to go to school in the sense that it's in suburbia and that's where I grew up." But, he went on to say, he was fortunate to study under Jacques Burdick, who had been strongly influenced by theatre critic Robert Brustein. Burdick had established what Larson described as an undergraduate version of the prestigious drama school program at Yale University.

Under Burdick's direction, Larson studied works by a wide range of playwrights. Even more important, he had his first opportunity to write plays. Four times a year, the university theatre program put on cabarets and they were always in need of writers. Thus, Larson said, by the time he finished school he had written "eight or ten" shows.

Following graduation in 1982, Larson moved to New York City. Because he had performed in summer stock productions, he was able to obtain his Actor's Equity card, and started going to auditions. He also had an opportunity to meet his hero, Stephen Sondheim, and this coincided with a change in his career plans. Larson's father Al later explained to *People* magazine: "Sondheim told him there were a lot more starving actors out there than starving composers."

Sondheim encouraged him to become involved with the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). Larson described ASCAP as "a sort of 12-step meeting for people who write musicals" but, he told *American Theatre*, his experience with other composers he met through the organization gave him greater confidence in his work. By the time he had written some 100 songs, he said, he knew when to accept and when to reject the comments of a would-be critic - even Sondheim.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, Larson stayed very busy. In 1985 or 1986, he began working as a waiter in a restaurant called Moondance, located in New York City's fashionable SoHo district. The job gave him a reliable income, and he would support himself this way for the next decade, up until the eve of *Rent's* first stage production. He also earned money through freelance work, composing songs for the children's show *Sesame Street*.

Larson continued to work on other projects, which satisfied his creative urge even if they did not "pay the rent." Among these were the musicals *J. P. Morgan Saves the Nation* and *Superbia*, as well as a rock monologue called *Tick, Tick ... Boom!*, which Larson performed himself. He obtained a number of grants for his productions, including a Richard Rodgers Development Grant and a Stephen Sondheim Award, both for *Superbia*. He also became involved with the New York Theatre Workshop, the company that would eventually produce *Rent*.

Through a mutual friend in the theatre, Larson met writer Billy Aronson, who he described in his *American Theatre* interview as "a sort of Woody Allen type." Aronson had an idea for an updated version of *La Boheme* as a comedy set on New York's Upper West Side with yuppie characters, and he wanted Larson to write the music. Larson, in turn, said he liked the basic concept, having been influenced by Puccini's opera as well; however, he envisioned the musical as a serious one. On Aronson's urging, Larson wrote three songs for the proposed musical: "Santa Fe," "I Should Tell You," and what would become the title composition, "Rent."

The two men made a demo tape and shared it with people they knew. The music received a positive response, but the libretto did not. Therefore, Larson said, "we just put it on hold. I loved the concept, but I didn't have a burning reason to go back to it. And then I did."

In the early 1990s, several of Larson's friends discovered they had HIV. Devastated, he began to re-conceive the *La Boheme* story as one involving characters with AIDS. He went to Aronson and asked the latter to let him proceed with resurrecting the defunct musical on his own. Aronson agreed. In 1992 Larson and James Nicola of the New York Theatre Workshop began working together on the production, and two years later, they obtained a \$50,000 Richard Rodgers award. By early 1996 *Rent* and its author were on the verge of success.

John Bemrose of *Maclean's* described *Rent's* plot as "a hodgepodge of lover's quarrels, with the unusual twist (at least for a mainstream musical) that several of the lovers are of the same sex." The stage design, too, was unusual: as the show begins, "the uncurtained stage gives the impression that the show is far from ready.... there is no scenery in sight: a catwalk crosses in front of a brick wall, while a few red folding chairs are scattered around a long metal table. Nearby looms an enormous abstract sculpture containing, among other things, pieces of a shopping cart and several bicycles. It looks like a windmill rearranged by a hurricane."

What made *Rent* a success, according to Bemrose and other critics, were songs such as "Without You," a ballad; and "Out Tonight," which Bemrose described as a "raunchy" number. Lahr wrote that three songs from the show were "as passionate, unpretentious, and powerful as anything I've heard in the musical theatre for more than a decade." Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* praised *Rent* as a "rousing, moving, scathingly funny show" which "has brought a shocking jolt of creative juice to Broadway."

Larson would never read these accolades. Late in 1995, he left his job to work full-time on *Rent*; but in January of 1996, three weeks before *Rent* opened at New York's Nederlander Theatre, he began experiencing chest pains. He went to the emergency room of one hospital, where he was treated for food poisoning. When this did not help, he went to another emergency room, and there was diagnosed with a viral infection. On January 25, the day of the last dress rehearsal, Larson died from a foot-long tear in his aorta. New York State would ultimately fine both hospitals for their negligence, and according to *Time* magazine, Larson's family planned to sue the institutions for \$250 million.

Though nothing would bring Larson back to life, death could not silence the effect of his work. Later in 1996, his sister accepted the Pulitzer Prize on his behalf. *Rent* became a Broadway sensation, and attracted fans around the United States and the world. As for Larson's ultimate musical legacy, it seems clear that he made great strides toward his goal of redefining the American musical, but fans can only wonder what he might have done if he had lived longer. Sondheim told *Entertainment Weekly* that when he last spoke with Larson about a month before his death, "He was learning to swallow his pride....He felt pleased with himself for growing up."

ORIGINAL CONCEPT AND ADDITIONAL LYRICS BY BILLY ARONSON

Billy Aronson's plays have been produced at Playwrights Horizons, the Ensemble Studio Theatre, the Woolly Mammoth Theatre, and the Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theatre; published in *Best American Short Plays 1992-93* and *1999-2000* (Applause Books), *Best Stage Scenes 2003* (Smith and Kraus), *Ten Minute Plays From the Actors Theatre of Louisville* (Samuel French), and *Plays From the Woolly Mammoth* (Broadway Play Publishing); and awarded a New York Foundation for the Arts Grant. Plays published by Playscripts, Inc. are *Light Years*, *Light Years Part One: Freshman Year*, and *Little Red Riding Hood*. His writing for the musical theater includes the original concept and additional lyrics for the Broadway musical *Rent*. His writing for television includes scripts for *Postcards From Buster* (PBS), *The Wonder Pets* (Nickelodeon), *Courage the Cowardly Dog* (Cartoon Network), and *Beavis & Butt-head* (MTV). He lives in Brooklyn with his wife Lisa Vogel and their children Jake and Anna.

HISTORY OF RENT

If the real-life "back story" behind the phenomenon of RENT had been submitted to a Hollywood studio, most executives probably would have dismissed the script as "unbelievable:" A struggling composer spends years waiting tables and enduring frustration and rejection. Then, on the very night his career is finally about to take flight, he inexplicably collapses and dies, never knowing the degree to which his work would eventually impact the theatrical world of which he so desperately wanted to be part.

Yet, as anyone who follows theater is aware, this is precisely what happened to Jonathan Larson, the 35 year old composer of RENT, who suffered a fatal aortic aneurysm on January 25, 1996, which was to have been the first off-Broadway preview of RENT at the New York Theater Workshop. Jonathan Larson had been a "starving artist" living the bohemian life for several years, when, in 1989, his friend and fellow struggling playwright, Billy Aronson suggested a contemporary, American version of Puccini's *La Boheme*. Instantly, Larson saw the possibilities of exploring AIDS, homelessness, sexuality, and the struggle for art in an East Village setting. He envisioned a "*Hair* for the 90s", that could "bring musical theater to the MTV generation."

Initially, Aronson and Larson developed RENT together, writing early drafts of the title song, as well as "Santa Fe" and "I Should Tell You." Eventually, the two parted ways amicably, and Larson continued to develop the show on his own.

In the fall of 1992, Larson had a completed first draft, which he dropped off with a demo tape at the office of James Nicola, the Artistic Director of New York Theater Workshop, who agreed to stage a reading of the show. "What drew Jonathan and me together in a philosophical place was the belief in how tragic it was that pop music and theater music had gotten a divorce. I felt he was the first composer I had run into who had the possibility of doing something about it," Nicola said. The first staged reading occurred in March, 1993. Although the response to the music was overwhelmingly positive, it was clear that there were structural problems with the piece. Director Michael Greif was brought on board to begin to address some of these issues. As Greif recalled in *The New York Times*, "Jonathan had firm ideas and he loved battling them out with us, but there was give and take."

In January 1994, Larson was awarded a Richard Rodgers Development Award, which he had applied for on the advice of his mentor and hero, Stephen Sondheim. The \$45,000 prize helped finance a two week workshop of RENT that took place in November of that year. Two of the people in the audience were up-and-coming producers Jeffrey Seller and Kevin McCollum. Based on the strength of the workshop presentation, the two agreed to partner with New York Theater Workshop to stage a full production the following year.

Throughout 1995, Larson continued to hone the work, and dramaturge Lynn Thompson assisted in the sharpening of characters and structure. A final draft of the show was delivered to Nicola and the production team at the end of the summer. Everyone but Larson agreed that there was still further work to be done. He felt the show was finished. "There was real terror that the production wouldn't happen," Greif recalled. Luckily, Larson's mentor, Stephen Sondheim, reminded the young composer that theater is all about collaboration, and Larson agreed to further rewrites.

While the work continued, the show was cast, and rehearsals finally began. The show continued to change and evolve. The night of the final dress rehearsal, Larson complained of continued chest pains and fever, which he had started to experience a few days earlier. Still, he watched the show and afterward, gave what would be his final interview to *The New York Times*. A few hours later he was dead. He would achieve his "One Song Glory" and then some, but sadly, did not live to reap the benefits of his hard work.

The cruel irony of life imitating art propelled RENT, almost instantly, to a show of mythic proportions. The reviews for the Off-Broadway production were the most ecstatic that the theater community had seen since *A Chorus Line*. The show was indeed called a "landmark musical," the label that Larson had always hoped for. The demand for tickets created a frenzy, and the show was quickly moved from its downtown location to the Nederlander theater, where it opened on April 29, 1996. It went on to win the Tony for Best Musical as well as the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, an honor bestowed on only a handful of musicals since the inception of that award.

In 2005, the film version of RENT was released, featuring many members of the original cast, including Adam Pascal, Anthony Rapp, Idina Menzel, Wilson Jermaine Heredia, Taye Diggs and Jesse L. Martin.

RENT closed on September 7, 2008 after 12 years on Broadway. The show has also toured the U.S. and been performed on five continents. Knowing that Larson is not here to enjoy this incredible success serves as a constant, poignant reminder of the show's message to live your life to the fullest, for there is "no day but today."

SUMMARY

Jonathan Larson's Pulitzer-prize winning Broadway musical based loosely on Puccini's opera *La Bohème*. It follows a year in the lives of seven friends living the disappearing Bohemian lifestyle in New York's East Village. AIDS and both its physical and emotional complications pervade the lives of Roger, Mimi, Tom, and Angel; Maureen deals with her chronic infidelity through performance art; her partner, Joanne, wonders if their relationship is worth the trouble; Benjamin has sold out his Bohemian ideals in exchange for a hefty income and is on the outs with his former friends; and Mark, an aspiring filmmaker, feels like an outsider to life in general, always behind the camera recording the events but never playing a part.

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE:

Mark, a filmmaker and the show's narrator, is spending a cold Christmas Eve in the Lower East Side industrial loft he shares with his roommate Roger, a musician. They receive several phone calls ("Tune Up/ Voice Mail #1"). The first is from Mark's mother consoling him over the loss of his girlfriend Maureen, a performance artist, to Joanne, a Harvard Law School graduate. The second is from their friend Tom Collins who is detained by muggers. The last is from their landlord Benny demanding the rent. The power blows and so do Roger and Mark's tops ("Rent").

Outside, Collins is reeling from the mugging. He is comforted by Angel, a street musician, who offers him a helping hand ("You Okay Honey?"). Both HIV+, Angel and Collins head out for a night on the town and a life support meeting.

In response to a call for help, Mark sets out for the lot where Maureen is performing a protest against Benny's eviction of the homeless from a nearby lot. He urges Roger to come along but he refuses. As Mark reports, Roger has not left the apartment in six months. He is still reeling from the suicide of his girlfriend, who slashed her wrists upon learning that she had AIDS. Roger tries to write a song but the only melody he finds is "Musetta's Waltz" from Puccini's *La Bohème* ("One Song Glory").

Mimi, an S&M dancer who lives below Mark and Roger, knocks with a request: "Light My Candle." The attraction between her and Roger is immediate, but Roger shies away and shows her the door. Mimi knocks again. She has lost her stash. Roger helps her look and Mimi eventually finds it- in Roger's back pocket.

As Joanne wrangles with the sound equipment for Maureen's performance, her parents leave her "Voice Mail #2," pleading with her to come to her mother's confirmation hearings in Washington. Collins arrives at the loft with a bag full of goodies. This includes Angel, transvested into Angel Dumott Shunard and gloriously arrayed in his Christmas finest- wig, glitter, and platform pumps. In "Today 4 U," Angel explains how he earned \$1,000: a wealthy woman hired him to play the drums until her neighbor's yappy Akita barked itself to death.

Benny enters with a proposal ("You'll See"): if Mark and Roger stop Maureen's protest, he will forgo the rent. He entices them with plans for Cyber Arts, a state-of-the-art, multimedia studio that will realize all of their dreams. Unsuccessful, Benny leaves. Mark, Collins and Angel try to coax Roger into coming to the life support meeting with them but he refuses.

Mark finally reaches the lot where Maureen will perform her protest. He encounters Joanne, still struggling with the sound equipment and the many demands Maureen makes upon her. Mark offers help. Though they dreaded meeting, they have a lot in common ("Tango: Maureen"). Once he finishes, Mark joins Angel and Collins at the "Life Support" meeting.

In her apartment, Mimi dresses and appeals to an imaginary Roger to take her "Out Tonight." She barges into his apartment and continues her appeal to Roger himself but after a passionate kiss he vehemently rejects her. They fight, her words blending with the affirmation of the support group that emphasizes the importance of living the moment ("Another Day"). A young man from the support group asks quietly "Will I lose my dignity/Will someone care?" ("Will I?"). His thoughts and fears are echoed by each member of the community. The thoughts are Roger's too, and he decides to go outside.

After the meeting, Mark, Angel and Collins roam the lot and rescue a homeless woman from the taunts and nightsticks of the neighborhood cops ("On the Street"). Discouraged by life in New York, the three dream of opening up a restaurant in "Santa Fe." Alone at last, Angel and Collins finally express their love for each other ("I'll Cover You"). Joanne, meanwhile has her hands full juggling work, parents, and the ever-demanding Maureen...all over the phone("We're Okay").

The scene changes to St. Mark's Place where vendors hawk their wares to the bohemians of the East Village ("Christmas Bells"). Angel buys a new coat for Collins. Mark finds Roger who spots Mimi looking for drugs. Roger apologizes and asks her to dinner. Just as the snow begins to fall, Maureen finally appears on her motorcycle to perform her protest, "Over the Moon."

Following the protest, all convene at the Life Café, including Benny who announces that Bohemia is dead. Thus ensues a makeshift mock-wake that quickly segues into a celebration of "La Vie Boheme." During the song, Benny confronts Mimi and threatens to reveal their past affair to Roger. Beepers go off to remind the revelers to take their AZT. Roger and Mimi each discover that the other is HIV+. Frightened, excited, they vow to be together ("I Should Tell You").

Joanne has been sent back to the lot by Maureen several times to check on the equipment. She finally rebels, telling Maureen that their relationship is over and announcing a riot in the lot: Benny has padlocked the building and called the cops but the homeless are standing their ground. And mooing. The artists rejoice, the riot continues, and Roger and Mimi share a small, lovely kiss.

ACT TWO:

The second act begins with the company posing the question, "How do you measure a year in the life?" ("Seasons of Love"). It is one week later, New Year's Eve, and Mark, Roger, Mimi, Maureen, Joanne, Angel and Collins are having a breaking-back-into-the-building party ("Happy New Year"). Once inside, Mark listens to one more phone message from his mother in Scarsdale as well as one from Alexi Darling, a tabloid TV producer salivating over his footage of the riot ("Voice Mail #3"). Benny crashes the party, angering Roger and alienating Roger from Mimi. Dejected, Mimi wanders outside and into the welcoming arms of her drug dealer.

Mark fastforwards to Valentine's Day. Roger and Mimi are still together. Angel and Collins could be anywhere. Maureen and Joanne are still rehearsing another show, but it is not going well ("Take Me or Leave Me").

The company reprises "Seasons of Love" and time marches forward again, to spring. Roger and Mimi have a fight and Roger walks out. Alone, Mimi reflects on what life would be like without Roger ("Without You"). At the same time, Collins nurses a sick Angel; Maureen and Joanne reconcile; as do Mimi and Roger.

At the end of the summer, Alexi is still courting Mark for her TV show ("Voice Mail #4"). Roger and Mimi, unsatisfied by love's complications, break up, as do Maureen and Joanne. Angel dies ("Contact"). At a memorial service, his friends remember his spirit. Collins remembers his love ("I'll Cover You: Reprise").

Outside the church, Mark phones Alexi to accept the job. Mark ponders how life has changed since last year as he recalls the joys of that one night last Christmas ("Halloween"). As the mourners leave the church, Mimi confirms that Roger has sold his guitar and is leaving town. Roger confirms that Mimi is now with Benny. A fight erupts among Roger, Mimi, Maureen, Benny, and Joanne. Collins interrupts them with the sorrowful reality that the family is breaking up. Joanne and Maureen reunite. Mimi and Benny leave.

Mark tries to convince Roger to stay in New York and face his pain and the fact that Mimi is very sick. Roger attacks Mark, accusing him of hiding from his feelings. Mimi enters, having overheard the entire angry exchange, and bids Roger farewell ("Goodbye, Love"). Roger leaves town. Mimi turns to Mark for help. Benny offers one helping hand to Mimi and extends the other to Collins to help him pay Angel's funeral expenses. Mimi refuses the help and flees. Collins accepts and he and Benny go out for a drink.

Mark considers the events and faces the last year, as does Roger, who is on his way to Santa Fe. Roger begins to discover his own song and Mark turns down the television job to finish his own film ("What You Own").

Roger's mom, Mark's mom, Mimi's mom, and Joanne's father all wonder where their children are ("Voice Mail #5"). Back at the loft, Mark tells us again it's Christmas and he now has a rough version of his film, which he's going to show tonight. Roger has returned, has written his song, but cannot find Mimi. Collins enters with money he has gotten from an ATM rewired to give money to anyone with a special code. The password? Angel.

Maureen and Joanne suddenly arrive holding Mimi, whom they found collapsed and near death in the park. Roger begs her not to die and sings for her the song it has taken him all year to write, "Your Eyes." Mimi dies as Roger wails her name over a blast of Puccini's music. Suddenly Mimi awakens; it seems that a guardian Angel was watching over her.

The company joins in a reprise of the affirmation that love is all and that there is "no day but today" ("Finale").

CHARACTERS

- ANGEL DUMOTT SCHUNARD – A transvestite street drummer infected with HIV. An incredible dancer with a magnetic personality. Angel is Collins' lover.
- BENJAMIN "BENNY" COFFIN III – The wealthy landlord of Mark and Roger's building and their former roommate. He wants to start a multimedia studio.
- JOANNE JEFFERSON – A headstrong public interest lawyer and Maureen's lover.
- MARK COHEN – A filmmaker and video artist, determined to capture "real" life on film. Roger's best friend and roommate.
- MAUREEN JOHNSON – A flirtatious performance artist and Mark's ex-girlfriend.
- MIMI MARQUEZ – A dancer with AIDS and a drug problem. Desperate for a place to feel safe and protected.
- ROGER DAVIS – An edgy, struggling musician who is HIV+. He hopes to write one last meaningful song before he dies.
- TOM COLLINS – An HIV+ computer genius who has recently returned to New York after an absence. He has a deep capacity for love and understanding.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT ONE:

1. Tune Up A – Mark, Roger
2. Voice Mail #1 – Mrs. Cohen
3. Tune Up B – Mark, Roger, Collins, Benny
4. Rent – Mark, Roger, Collins, Joanne, Benny, Company
5. Christmas Bells #1 – A Homeless Man
6. You Okay, Honey? - Angel, Collins
7. Tune Up (Reprise) – Mark
8. One Song Glory – Roger
9. Light My Candle – Roger, Mimi
10. Voice Mail #2 – Mr. & Mrs. Jefferson
11. Today for You – Mark, Collins, Angel, Roger
12. You'll See – Benny, Mark, Roger, Collins, Angel
13. Tango Maureen – Mark, Joanne
14. Support Group – Mark, Paul, Gordon, Roger, Company
15. Out Tonight – Mimi
16. Another Day – Roger, Mimi, Company
17. Will I – Roger, Steve, Company
18. On the Street – Squeegee Man, Mark, Angel, Bag Lady, Company
19. Santa Fe – Angel, Mark, Collins
20. I'll Cover You – Angel, Collins
21. We're Okay – Joanne
22. Christmas Bells – Company
23. Over the Moon – Maureen, Company
24. La Vie Boheme/I Should Tell You – Company

ACT TWO:

1. Seasons of Love A – Company
2. Happy New Year A – Mimi, Mark, Maureen, Roger, Joanne, Collins, Angel
3. Voice Mail #3 – Mrs. Cohen
4. Voice Mail #4 – Alexi Darling
5. Happy New Year B – Maureen, Mark, Joanne, Mimi, Angel, Benny, Roger, Collins, The Man
6. Take Me or Leave Me – Joanne, Maureen
7. Seasons of Love B – Company
8. Without You – Mimi, Roger
9. Voice Mail #5 – Alexi Darling
10. Contact – Company
11. I'll Cover You (Reprise) – Collins, Company
12. Halloween – Mark
13. Goodbye Love – Mimi, Roger, Benny, Mark, Maureen, Joanne, Collins
14. What You Own – Pastor, Collins, Benny, Mark, Collins, Roger
15. Voice Mail #6 – Roger's Mother, Mimi's Mother, Mr. Jefferson, Mrs. Cohen
16. Finale A – Mark, Roger, Collins, Maureen, Mimi, Joanne, Company
17. Your Eyes – Roger
18. Finale B – Maureen, Mark, Roger, Mimi, Company

DEFINITIONS OF LYRICS

#1 "TUNE UP A"

- ◆ Fender guitar – guitar made by Fender, dedicated to and recognized as creating the world's best guitars and amplifiers
- ◆ Answering machine – machine attached to telephone to accept recorded messages when not answered after specified number of rings. Usually had pre-recorded outgoing message, followed by a "beep" to begin recording time.

#1a "VOICE MAIL #1"

- ◆ Hot plate – an electrically heated tabletop device with one or two burners for cooking or warming
- ◆ C'est la vie – "That's life"

#3 "RENT"

- ◆ "something's stuck in your flue" – in a fireplace, the flue is part of the chimney – if something is stuck in the flue, a fire will not burn safely or efficiently (it could start a chimney fire)

#5 "YOU OKAY, HONEY"

- ◆ Purloined – stolen
- ◆ **HIV** - To answer the question what is HIV AIDS, we have to start early in the epidemic. In 1985, scientists discovered the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and with it the question what is aids was answered. HIV is a virus that is transmitted from person to person through the exchange of body fluids such as blood, semen, breast milk and vaginal secretions. Sexual contact is the most common way to spread HIV AIDS, but it can also be transmitted by sharing needles when injecting drugs, or during childbirth and breastfeeding. As HIV AIDS reproduces, it damages the body's immune system and the body becomes susceptible to illness and infection. There is no known cure for HIV infection.
- ◆ **AIDS** - Acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS, is a condition that describes an advanced state of HIV infection. With AIDS, the virus has progressed, causing significant loss of white blood cells (CD4 cells) or any of the cancers or infections that result from immune system damage. Those illnesses and infections are said to be "AIDS-defining" because they mark the onset of AIDS. Like HIV, there is no known cure for AIDS.

#6 "TUNE UP – REPRISE"

- ◆ A.Z.T. – azidothymidine, also called zidovudine. A drug used to delay the development of AIDS in patients infected with HIV.

#8 "LIGHT MY CANDLE"

- ◆ stash – a hidden or secret supply of drugs
- ◆ junkie – a drug addict, especially one addicted to heroin
- ◆ "Spike Lee's shooting down the street" –
 1. Spike Lee: popular American film director, producer, writer, and actor. His movies examine political issues such as race relations, the role of the media in contemporary life, urban crime and poverty.
 2. Shooting down the street: making a movie down the street (setting is in New York City)

#9 “VOICE MAIL #2”

- ◆ Doc Martens – footwear distinctive for its air-cushioned sole, developed by Dr. Klaus Maertens of Germany

#10 “TODAY FOR YOU A”

- ◆ vagabond – a person who wanders from place to place (usually having no permanent home)
- ◆ anarchist – a person who promotes disorder or excites revolt against any established rule, law, or custom
- ◆ The Parthenon – the temple of Athena Parthenos on the Acropolis (the citadel –high fortified are) at Athens, completed circa 438 BCE; regarded as the finest Doric temple
- ◆ Bustelo – Café Bustelo, a potent, cheap coffee with a plain yellow and red can, long an item on the bohemian shopping list; found in bodegas (Spanish grocery stores).
- ◆ Marlboro – a brand of cigarettes made by Philip Morris within the US
- ◆ Stoli – Stolichnaya, a Russian vodka made of wheat and rye grain
- ◆ M.I.T. – Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- ◆ benefactor – one who helps
- ◆ Alphabet City – a neighborhood located within the Lower East Side and East Village in the New York City borough of Manhattan. Also known as Loisaída, a Spanglish adaptation of “Lower East Side.” Its name comes from Avenues A, B, C, and D, the only avenues in Manhattan to have single-letter names. The neighborhood has a long history serving as a cultural center and ethnic enclave for Manhattan’s German, Polish, Hispanic, and Jewish populations.
- ◆ A-vant-garde – the advance group in any field, especially in the visual, literary, or musical arts, whose works are characterized chiefly by unorthodox and experimental methods; unorthodox or daring, radical

#10A “TODAY FOR YOU B”

- ◆ Akita, Evita –
 1. Akita: one of a Japanese breed of large, muscular dogs, originally bred for hunting, now often used as a guard dog
 2. Evita: a musical by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber based on Eva Peron, an Argentine political leader; in the show RENT, Evita is the name of an Akita dog Angel is hired to over-excite with his drumming in the hopes the dog will “bark himself to death.”
- ◆ Thelma and Louise – 1991 film characters who become empowered as their lives spiral out of control on a road trip; the film ends with them driving off a cliff into the Grand Canyon rather than going to jail
- ◆ Gracie Mews – a high-rise apartment building/diner on New York’s Upper East Side
- ◆ Mercurochrome – a brand of merbromine, an iridescent green, water-soluble powder that forms a red solution when dissolved in water and is used as an antiseptic and as a germicide

#11 “YOU’LL SEE”

- ◆ Range Rover – four-wheel drive luxury sport utility vehicle produced by Land Rover in the United Kingdom, introduced in 1970
- ◆ Westport – a coastal town located on Long Island Sound, in Connecticut, 47 miles north of New York City; home to well-to-do families
- ◆ tent city – an area set up with tents, especially to house homeless or displaced persons

- ◆ “It’s a Wonderful Life” – a 1946 American film in which an angel appears during the Christmas season to show a suicidal man how he has touched the lives of those in his community. It is regarded as a classic, and is a staple of television during the Christmas season
- ◆ Prozac – trademark name for a brand of fluoxetine, a drug that prolongs the action of serotonin in the brain; used as an antidepressant

#12 “TANGO MAUREEN - INTRO”

- ◆ abyss – a deep, immeasurable space or hole

#12A “TANGO MAUREEN”

- ◆ diva – a person/performer who expects privileged treatment and reacts moodily when criticized or inconvenienced

#13 “SUPPORT GROUP”

- ◆ credo – basic belief
- ◆ “t-cells are low” – T-cells are a type of white blood cell that targets/responds to specific pathogens (bacteria, virus, etc. that cause disease). If T-cells are low, the body’s immune response does not properly protect the body from disease

#14 “OUT TONIGHT”

- ◆ “city of neon and chrome” – New York City – (neon) the bright lights that illuminate the night in the city and (chrome) ever-present cars

#15 “ANOTHER DAY”

- ◆ smack - heroin

#17 “ON THE STREET”

- ◆ Feliz Navidad – Spanish for Merry Christmas
- ◆ Ted Koppel – an English-born American broadcast journalist, best known as the anchor of ABC’s *Nightline*

#18 “SANTA FE”

- ◆ metaphysic - part of philosophy that studies non-physical things; the part of philosophy that involves the study of ideas about life, existence, and other things that are not part of the physical world
- ◆ esthete – a person who has or professes to have refined sensitivity toward art, music, and poetry, and is indifferent to practical matters
- ◆ Heidegger – Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher known for his explorations of the “question of Being”

#21 “CHRISTMAS BELLS”

- ◆ Saks – Saks Fifth Avenue, a luxury specialty store with headquarters in Manhattan
- ◆ forty-fives – a vinyl phonograph record of music (preceded CDs) designed to be played at 45 revolutions per minute; 7” in diameter, played for approximately eight minutes
- ◆ a tweed (coat) – a coarse woolen coat
- ◆ the jam – cocaine
- ◆ “got any D man” – D is LSD, PCP

- ◆ “got any C man” – C is cocaine
- ◆ smack – heroine
- ◆ horse – heroin
- ◆ jugie boogie boy – crack cocaine
- ◆ blow – cocaine
- ◆ “got any B man” – B is marijuana sized to fit into a match box
- ◆ “got any X ” – X is marijuana
- ◆ crack – cocaine
- ◆ Tuckahoe – a village in Westchester County, New York, 34 minutes from New York City

#22 “OVER THE MOON”

- ◆ “like I’m being tied to the hood of a yellow rental truck packed in with fertilizer and fuel oil and pushed over a cliff by a suicidal Mickey Mouse’ – this truck would be a bomb on wheels

#23 “LA VIE BOHEME / I SHOULD TELL YOU”

- ◆ oy vey – a Yiddish interjection used to express dismay, pain, annoyance, grief, ...
- ◆ mogul – an important, powerful, or influential person
- ◆ tickets comped – tickets given free of charge
- ◆ Bohemia – a district inhabited typically by artists, writers and intellectuals whose way of life, dress, and behavior are generally unconventional
- ◆ Calcutta – refers to the fact that Calcutta, one of the largest cities in the world, suffers from poverty, overcrowding, and unemployment
- ◆ Dies irae dies illa – day of wrath, day of anger – from Mozart’s *Requiem*
- ◆ Kyrie eleison – Lord have mercy on us
- ◆ Yitkaddal v’yitkaddash – Hebrew, magnified and sanctified
- ◆ La Vie Boheme – the Bohemian life – living without regard for conventional rules or practices
- ◆ Absolut – a French vodka, the third largest brand of alcohol in the world
- ◆ Miso soup – soup made with a seasoning paste of soybeans
- ◆ Maya Angelou – a renowned African-American poet, novelist, memoirist, educator, dramatist, producer, actress, historian, filmmaker, and civil rights activist
- ◆ Sontag – Susan Sontag, an American author, literary theorist, and political activist
- ◆ Sondheim – Stephen Sondheim, a prolific American composer and lyricist for stage and film. Works include *Sweeney Todd*, *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*
- ◆ Ginsberg – Irwin Allen Ginsberg was an American poet who vigorously opposed militarism, materialism and sexual repression. In the 1950s, he was a leading figure of the Beat Generation, an anarchic group of young men and women who celebrated poetry, song, sex, wine, illicit drugs and passion for personal freedoms and political ideas
- ◆ Dylan – Bob Dylan (born Robert Allen Zimmerman), an American folk-rock singer-songwriter who incorporated political, social and philosophical influences into his lyrics. He has been a major figure in music for five decades. Much of his most celebrated work dates from the 1960s when he was an informal chronicler, and an apparently reluctant figurehead, of social unrest. The Pulitzer Prize jury in 2008 awarded him a special citation for "his profound impact on popular music and American culture, marked by lyrical compositions of extraordinary poetic power."

- ◆ Cunningham – Mercier "Merce" Philip Cunningham was an American dancer and choreographer who was at the forefront of the American a·vant-garde for more than 50 years. Throughout much of his life, Cunningham was considered one of the greatest creative forces in American dance.
- ◆ Cage – John Milton Cage Jr. was an American composer, philosopher, poet, music theorist, artist, printmaker, and amateur mycologist (a branch of botany that specializes in the scientific study of fungi) and mushroom collector. A pioneer of chance music, electronic music and non-standard use of musical instruments, Cage was one of the leading figures of the post-war a·vant-garde. Critics have lauded him as one of the most influential American composers of the 20th century. He was also instrumental in the development of modern dance, mostly through his association with choreographer Merce Cunningham, who was also Cage's romantic partner for most of their lives.
- ◆ Lenny Bruce – Leonard Alfred Schneider, better known by the stage name Lenny Bruce, was a Jewish-American comedian and satirist well known for heavy use of profanity.
- ◆ Langston Hughes - James Mercer Langston Hughes was a Jewish-American novelist, playwright, short story writer, and columnist. He was one of the earliest innovators of the new literary art form jazz poetry. Hughes is best-known for his work during the Harlem Renaissance. He famously wrote about the period that "Harlem was in vogue."
- ◆ Uta – Uta Hagen, noted stage actress and acting teacher/coach
- ◆ Buddha – spiritual teacher in ancient India who founded Buddhism
- ◆ Pablo Neruda – Chilean Nobel Prize winning poet
- ◆ bisexuals – those sexually attracted to both men and women
- ◆ trisexuals – those who have sex with males, females, and themselves
- ◆ Homosapiens – modern human beings
- ◆ carcinogens – substances that cause or tend to cause cancer
- ◆ hallucinogens – substances that produce hallucinations (false impressions or delusions)
- ◆ Pee Wee Herman – alter ego of Paul Reubens, popularized on television show *Pee Wee's Playhouse*
- ◆ turpentine – a colorless, flammable oil derived from conifer trees used in paints and varnishes
- ◆ Gertrude Stein – an American-Jewish lesbian writer, poet and art collector who spent most of her life in France, most well known for her relationship with Alice B. Toklas (American-born member of the Parisian a·vant-garde of the early 20th century) and the many luminaries who visited her Paris salon.
- ◆ Antonioni – Michelangelo Antonioni, Italian avant-garde motion-picture director and screenwriter, whose films are known for their haunting images of human isolation. Antonioni is known for a unique cinematographic style that employs lengthy tracking shots of human figures against a barren natural landscape or a scene of urban sterility.
- ◆ Bertolucci – Bernardo Bertolucci, Italian filmmaker known for his colorful visual style; his films include *The Conformist*, *Last Tango in Paris* and *Stealing Beauty*.
- ◆ Kurosawa – Akira Kurosawa, a Japanese film director, producer, screenwriter and editor regarded as one of the most important and influential filmmakers, and the first significant Japanese director recognized by Western filmmakers and intellectuals.
- ◆ *Carmina Burana* – a scenic cantata composed by Carl Orff in 1935 and 1936. It is based on 24 of the poems found in the medieval collection *Carmina Burana* – a 13th century German manuscript; the songs included themes of love, drinking, gambling, gluttony, sex, and fate.

- ◆ apathy – lack of interest or concern
- ◆ entropy – a doctrine of social decline and degeneration; a lack of pattern or organization
- ◆ empathy – the identification with another’s feelings, thoughts, or attitudes
- ◆ ecstasy – an overpowering feeling of delight; intense emotion
- ◆ Vaclav Havel – a Czech playwright, and essayist; tenth (and last) president of the Czech Republic; dissident who spent most of the 1980s in Communist jails writing plays and essays
- ◆ Sex Pistols – an English punk rock band formed in London in 1975, considered responsible for starting the punk movement in the United Kingdom
- ◆ 8BC - a seminal performance space, art gallery, and nightclub in the underground art scene that exploded in New York's East Village in the mid 1980s. Founded by Cornelius Conboy and Dennis Gatra it was the most critically acclaimed of the many venues that sprang up in response to the influx of artists and performers reclaiming the abandoned neighborhood known as Alphabet City.
- ◆ No Shame – No Shame Theatre, a forum for original stage performance work usually presented as a weekly talent show
- ◆ marijuana – a narcotic drug prepared from the hemp plant
- ◆ sodomy - also known as anal sex: intercourse via the anus, committed by a man with a man or woman, and may or not involve coercion; the term can also include oral sex and bestiality
- ◆ S and M – sadism and masochism: a relationship, especially sexual activity, in which one person enjoys inflicting physical or mental suffering (sadism) on the other person, who gains pleasure from experiencing pain (masochism)
- ◆ Musetta’s Waltz – a melody originally from the Puccini opera *La boheme*
- ◆ Act Up – AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power – “a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis” created in New York in 1987
- ◆ AZT break – a break to take AZT medication (a pill) – the characters have HIV and AZT medication holds off the onset of full-blown AIDS for a while. AZT is azidothymidine (also called zidovudine), a drug used to delay development of AIDS in patients infected with HIV
- ◆ anarchy! – a state of lawlessness or political disorder due to the absence of governmental authority; it could also mean a utopian society where individuals enjoy complete freedom with no government

#25 “HAPPY NEW YEAR A”

- ◆ apropos – fitting, at the right time
- ◆ wench – usually used facetiously; a country lass, a young girl, a strumpet
- ◆ Bond, James Bond – the usual way that the suave British spy (James Bond) would introduce himself in the films
- ◆ Pussy Galore – the “Bond girl” (main female lead opposite the James Bond character) in the James Bond film *Goldfinger*, played by Honor Blackman
- ◆ Money Penny – in James Bond films, secretary to M, Bond’s boss and head of the British Secret Service; there is always a romantic tension between her and Bond as they converse
- ◆ “...martini...shaken, not stirred” – James Bond’s usual drink order
- ◆ boho boys – socially unconventional, Bohemian boys; hippies

#26 "VOICE MAIL #3"

- ◆ Wicked Witch of the West – a character in the book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as well as the movie *The Wizard of Oz*; she poses the greatest threat to the main character; also used to designate someone who is mean
- ◆ Scarsdale – a village in Westchester County, New York, in the suburbs of New York City
- ◆ "Mazel tov!" – a Jewish expression of congratulations and best wishes; literally means "good luck"

#33 "VOICE MAIL #5"

- ◆ East Hampton – the easternmost town in the state of New York; located at the eastern end of the South Shore of Long Island, surrounded on three sides by water; sometimes called a "playground for the rich"
- ◆ Alec Baldwin – an American actor who has appeared on film, stage, and television; first recognized for the soap opera *Knots Landing*, also appeared in films such as *Beetle Juice* and *The Hunt for Red October*

#40 "FINALE A"

- ◆ out of hock – redeemed from a pawn shop
- ◆ N.Y.U. honorarium – a payment for services rendered by a professional person (usually a speech), paid by New York University
- ◆ banquette – a long bench with an upholstered seat, especially one along a wall, as in a restaurant

Quotes from RENT – Broadway Musical and Movie

Mark: [sung] We're dying in America at the end of the millennium. We're dying in America to come into our own. And when you're dying in America, at the end of the millennium, you're not alone.

* * * * *

Mimi: I'm looking for baggage that goes with mine.

* * * * *

Roger: How do you start a fire when there's nothing to burn, and it feels like something's stuck in your flue?

Mark: How can you generate heat when you can't feel your feet...

Roger, Mark: And they're turning blue?

Mark: [setting one of his old scripts alight] You light up a mean blaze...

Roger: [adding one of his old posters] With posters...

Mark: And screenplays!

Roger, Mark: How we gonna pay, how we gonna pay, how we gonna pay... last year's rent!

* * * * *

from RENT the Movie

[about his parents message on the answering machine]

Mark: There are times when we're dirt broke, hungry, and freezing, and I ask myself, why the hell am I still living here?

[beat]

Mark: And then *they* call. And I remember.

* * * * *

Mark, Roger: I don't own emotion, I rent.

* * * * *

Mimi: There's only us, There's only this, Forget regret, Or life is yours to miss. No other road, No other way, No day but today.

* * * * *

Collins: I think they meant it when they said you can't buy love. Now I know you can rent it, a new lease you are my love - on life... be my life.

* * * * *

Gordon: I'm a New Yorker. Fear's my life.

* * * * *

Benjamin Coffin III: *[sung]* But my investors would rather I handle this quietly.

Roger Davis: You can't quietly wipe out an entire tent city, then watch "It's a Wonderful Life" on TV!

* * * * *

Roger Davis: *[sung]* All your words are nice Mimi but love's not a three-way street.

* * * * *

Mark: How do you leave the past behind when it keeps finding ways to get to your heart? It reaches way down deep and tears you inside out till you're torn apart - rent!

Mark, Tenants, Roger: How can you connect in an age where strangers, landlords, lovers, your own blood cells betray? What binds the fabric together when the raging, shifting winds of change keep ripping away?

Benjamin Coffin III: Draw a line in the sand and then make your stand...

Roger: Use your camera to spar!

Mark: Use your guitar!

Mark, Tenants, Roger: When they act tough, you call their bluff. We're not gonna pay... we're not gonna pay... We're not gonna pay... last year's rent! This year's rent! Next year's rent! Rent, rent, rent, re-rent, rent! We're not gonna pay rent! Cause everything is rent!

* * * * *

Benjamin Coffin III: *[about Maureen]* Still dating her?

Mark: Last month I was dumped.

Benjamin Coffin III: She's got a new man?

Mark: Well, no.

Benjamin Coffin III: What's his name?

Mark, Roger: Joanne.

* * * * *

Mark: *[sung]* How do you document real life when real life's getting more like fiction each day?

Collins, Mark, Roger, Angel, Ali, Paul, Steve, Pam: *[sung]* Will I lose my dignity? Will someone care? Will I wake tomorrow, from this nightmare?

* * * * *

Roger: *[to Mimi, as she lies dying]* You were the song all along.

* * * * *

Mark: Must be nice to have money.

AWARDS

1996 Tony Awards:

- Best Musical – **[winner]**
- Best Book of a Musical – **[winner]**
 - *Book by Jonathan Larson*
- Best Original Score – **[winner]**
 - *Music and lyrics by Jonathan Larson*
- Best Featured Actor in a Musical – **[winner]**
 - *Wilson Jermaine Heredia as Angel*
- Best Actor in a Musical – **[nominee]**
 - *Adam Pascal as Roger*
- Best Actress in a Musical – **[nominee]**
 - *Daphne Rubin-Vega as Mimi*
- Best Featured Actress in a Musical – **[nominee]**
 - *Idina Menzel as Maureen*
- Best Lighting Design – **[nominee]**
 - *Lighting design by Blake Burba*
- Best Choreography – **[nominee]**
 - *Choreography by Marlies Yearby*
- Best Direction of a Musical – **[nominee]**
 - *Directed by Michael Greif*

1996 Theatre World Award

- Adam Pascal as Roger – **[winner]**
- Daphne Rubin-Vega as Mimi – **[winner]**

1996 Drama Desk Awards

- Outstanding Musical – **[winner]**
- Outstanding Book – **[winner]**
 - *Book by Jonathan Larson*
- Outstanding Featured Actor in a Musical – **[winner]**
 - *Wilson Jermaine Heredia as Angel*
- Outstanding Orchestrations – **[winner]**
 - *Orchestrations by Steve Skinner*
- Outstanding Lyrics – **[winner]**
 - *Lyrics by Jonathan Larson*
- Outstanding Music – **[winner]**
 - *Music by Jonathan Larson*
- Outstanding Actor in a Musical – **[nominee]**
 - *Adam Pascal as Roger*
- Outstanding Actress in a Musical – **[nominee]**
 - *Daphne Rubin-Vega as Mimi*
- Outstanding Director of a Musical – **[nominee]**
 - *Directed by Michael Greif*
- Outstanding Costume Design – **[nominee]**
 - *Costume Design by Angel Wendt*

1996 Pulitzer Prize for Drama

* * * * *

BACKGROUND: AIDS IN THE US

In a speech given on December 1, 2006, World AIDS Day, Kofi Annan declared HIV/AIDS to be the greatest challenge of our generation. This dreaded infectious disease has claimed the lives of over 25 million people worldwide and infected 40 million more. In the United States alone, 1.2 million are infected with the HIV virus and more than 500,000 have died. No virus has been as well studied or understood as the human immunodeficiency virus, yet we are far from controlling this pandemic.

When the first reference to AIDS was published in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report on June 5, 1981, physicians were taken aback by the presence of pneumocystis pneumonia in five previously healthy young men. As more and more cases of unusual opportunistic infections were identified, the medical community felt helpless in the face of this

challenge. No one had any idea what was causing this disease, how it was transmitted, or how it could be treated.

Before long, pioneers in dealing with this disease discovered that it was transmitted through sexual contact, blood products, and needle sharing and could begin to discourage people from behavior that put them at risk. HIV was identified as the disease-causing agent in early 1984. The next year, the first test to detect antibodies to HIV was developed and the US blood supply was declared to be free of contamination. The numbers of new HIV infections in the US reached their height in the 1980's at approximately 160,000. Since the 90's, however, prevention and education efforts have stabilized infection rates around 40,000.

Doctors had nothing to offer their patients until AZT, a nucleoside analog, was approved by the FDA in 1987. By the end of the decade, the first candidate vaccine began testing, the first comprehensive needle exchange program was established, and the Americans with Disabilities Act was expanded to include people living with HIV/AIDS. The CDC announced measures that could be taken to prevent HIV infection and to avoid some of the opportunistic infections common among people with AIDS.

While they offered hope, none of these efforts really changed the reality for people living with the disease, and by 1994-1995, AIDS was the leading cause of death among Americans aged 25 to 44. The death sentence for AIDS patients was finally lifted in 1995 when highly active antiretroviral therapy was introduced with the first protease inhibitor, saquinavir. The following year, the FDA approved the first non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor, nevirapine, and a viral load test to measure levels of HIV in the body. Since then, these developments have led to a 70% reduction in AIDS-related deaths.

While new treatments have revolutionized the face of the AIDS epidemic, drastic changes in epidemiology and populations infected have altered the way people view the disease. Originally seen as a highly stigmatized disease of the gay community and feared for its mystery and lethality, AIDS is now recognized as a controllable disease that preys on men, women, and children alike. Homosexual contact remains the highest mode of transmission in the US, but heterosexual contact has grown significantly as a mode of transmission. Women constituted 8% of new HIV cases in 1985, but rose to account for 27% of new cases in 2005. HIV is slowly becoming a plague of the minorities. Blacks disproportionately constitute over half of new HIV infections while the incidence among whites is decreasing.

Despite the many breakthroughs that have been made to alter the HIV epidemic, many challenges remain. Stigma still persists as a major debilitating factor of this illness. Over a quarter of a million people are living with HIV but do not know they are infected. While it is no longer the leading killer, AIDS remains the sixth leading cause of death in this country. There are currently 29 drugs on the FDA's list of drugs approved for the treatment of HIV/AIDS, but a cure or an effective preventative vaccine remain elusive. The American public finally realized that this disease could not be ignored and has recently embraced it more than ever before. Billions of dollars have been allocated towards HIV programs in the US and abroad. Nonetheless, HIV/AIDS will continue to pose the greatest challenge to our generation as we strive to halt transmission, provide diagnosis and treatment to those in need, and develop a cure to this deadly virus.

REVIEWS OF THE ORIGINAL BROADWAY PRODUCTION

JEREMY GERARD of VARIETY

After all the hype and hoopla -- the winning of the Pulitzer Prize for drama, the countless stories of the young composer/lyricist who died hours before the public got its first look at his masterwork, the frenzy to secure recording and film rights -- it's a pleasure to report that Jonathan Larson's "Rent" has moved uptown, where it's bigger, bolder, louder, sadder, wilder, and every bit as powerful as it was in the East Village.

The final musical entry in the 1995-96 season, "Rent" is the best show in years, if not decades. Larson, on the cusp of 36 when he died of an aortic aneurysm, wrote songs in a wide range of pop idioms, from rock anthems and ballads to gospel to loping Western laments to old-fashioned Broadway show-stoppers. That catholicity has been the hallmark of Broadway's greatest composers from Irving Berlin to Richard Rodgers to Stephen Sondheim; it's worth noting that "Rent" opened within days of a star-driven revival of Sondheim's first show as composer/lyricist, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum." "Forum" was a spoof of musical-comedy conventions perfectly at home on Broadway. Though "Rent," the better work, also boasts an anti-Establishment attitude, it, too, will fit right in there.

With Alan Menken -- the best post-Sondheim composer the theater has produced -- long since lost to Disney, the tragedy of Larson's death is a public as well as a private one, for no one else has shown such promise in restoring the theater's preeminence as a source of popular music. "Rent" undoubtedly will be the first musical in years to reach a non-theater audience, as pop artists line up to cover the songs from a score that overflows with great numbers.

In writing about the struggling artists, AIDS sufferers, homeless people and other East Village denizens he lived among, Larson took his inspiration from Puccini's "La Boheme." The central characters are Roger (Adam Pascal), an HIV-infected composer struggling to write one great song before he dies, and his roommate Mark, a filmmaker recording their lives and those of their motley crowd. They are squatters in a building owned by Benny (Taye Diggs), a former classmate who has married money and wants to build a "cyber-studio" there; the musical opens with Benny demanding a year's worth of back rent and the chorus insisting, in the title song, "We're never gonna pay!"

Roger, an ex-junkie, falls in love with a neighbor, Mimi (Daphne Rubin-Vega), also HIV-positive and a user to boot, who supports her habit by dancing in a local S&M club. Their crowd includes Tom (Jesse L. Martin), a former academic who falls in love with Angel (Wilson Jermaine Heredia), and Mark's ex-girlfriend Maureen (Idina Menzel), a performance artist who has taken up with her producer, Joanne (Fredrick Walker), and who stars in a Christmastime protest concerning Benny's plan to evict the folks in his building.

The year between one Christmas and another is the show's time frame; a year is also the subject of its greatest song, "Seasons of Love," in which the company lists the many prosaic ways in which the passing of time may be measured, but asks, with a joyous insistence that provides its own answer, "What about love?" A soaring anthem that opens the second act, it's effectively reprised several times. The other keepers in the score are Roger's anguished "One Song Glory," the tender "Light My Candle," which Mimi sings upon meeting him, and the ballad, "I'll Cover You," sung by Tom and Angel and reprised heartbreakingly later.

The ethos of "Rent" is complicated, to say the least. Larson had no wish to be an unknown, unsung artist. But, like the characters presented here, he was suspicious of compromise and contemptuous of those who sell out in an America, as one of the more blatant lyrics has it, where

you are what you own. The show is all about taking chances, living on the edge, testing -- best summed up in Mimi's riveting solo, "Out Tonight," a song that celebrates danger and which finds her thirsty for life and literally howling at the moon.

It's also one of two unforgettable showcases for Rubin-Vega, the show's revelation, in a performance at once ferocious, vulnerable, sexy, warm and tough. The other number is "Without You," a classic ballad in which a deserted lover observes that while life goes on, she has died inside. Rubin-Vega sings with the pop inflections -- the sob in the back of the throat, the slightly forced vibrato -- more commonly heard, and more annoying, in shows like "Les Miserables" and "The Phantom of the Opera." Here, however, they seem as intrinsic as the head mikes the actors all wear. And in singling out Rubin-Vega, I mean no slight to the rest of the ensemble, whose members are not only individually effective, but who are sensational in the big choral numbers.

I still think "Rent" goes a bit flabby in the second act, and that Larson was as susceptible as any gifted artist to hawking more wares than he needed to. It's wonderful to have a score with so many songs, but a couple feel tacked on, and the "one great song" Roger finally produces is the weakest number in the score. And while it's nice to hear the ensemble at full throttle, director Michael Greif too often lines them up at the lip of the stage -- more hawking.

Does it matter? Not really. To his credit, Greif and musical director Tim Weil build the show seamlessly, and the energy never dissipates. Paul Clay's raw set, a tangled slash of urban detritus that threatens to burst through the roof, has grown steroidally, with elements reaching out into the house. Blake Burba's lighting is wondrous -- by turns inviting and garishly harsh -- and Angela Wendt's costumes are totally hip. Kurt Fischer's sound design handles the high-decibel action with great clarity.

In a season full of surprises, "Rent" is the pinnacle. Like Tony Kushner's "Angels in America" and Sondheim's "Passion," "Rent" proves Broadway's enduring attraction for the most important new work the theater is producing. Unlike those shows, however, "Rent" also promises to be more than a *succes d'estime* [*critical but not popular success*]. It's going to earn a lot of money, because everyone will want to savor its pleasures. "Rent" makes the musical theater joyously important again.

BEN BRANTLY of THE NEW YORK TIMES

Two months, one Pulitzer Prize and acres of magazine and newspaper pages later, the waiflike hopes of the American musical are living in fancier digs. Uprooted by a cyclone of critical ecstasy and a hunger for theatrical novelty, they have posed for fashion layouts, inspired a Bloomingdale's ad campaign and will record their songs about life on the edge for David Geffen's DreamWorks label. They even have a producer who is comparing their spirit to that of -- oh, dear -- the movie "Forrest Gump."

"Rent," Jonathan Larson's luminous, youthful musical that started off at the tiny New York Theater Workshop on East Fourth Street in February, opened on Broadway last night at the Nederlander Theater, after previews that drew such paparazzi's dreams as Billy Joel, David Bowie and Ralph Fiennes. And, no, Toto, I don't think we're in the East Village anymore.

Everyone can breathe one quick sigh of relief, however, before lamenting the way of all flash. Anyone who loved "Rent" in its first incarnation is not going to feel like the victim of a Champagne hangover who wakes up next to a creepy stranger.

The vibrant 15 cast members are actually even better, as if they had found fresh reserves of energy in the glow of mainstream starlight. And the ingenuity and dexterity of Mr. Larson's rock-

pop score, translated with loving skill by Tim Weill's onstage band, are, in fact, more evident now.

Indeed, great care has obviously been taken to keep this charming, poignant rock opera much as it looked when it was seen by Mr. Larson, who died of an aortic aneurysm at the age of 35 on the night of its last dress rehearsal downtown. And therein lies the one, conspicuous problem of the transplanted "Rent." The show remains a sentimental triumph, and it will doubtless have, and deserves, a long and healthy run.

But in the haste to take this contemporary answer to Puccini's "Boheme" to Broadway, no one seems to have thought rationally about re-conceiving the show for a larger house (and we're talking about 1,173 seats versus the 150 of the Theater Workshop). Unlike "Bring In da Noise, Bring In da Funk," which recently moved from the Joseph Papp Public Theater to the Ambassador on Broadway, this "Rent" verges on being lost in space.

Thank heavens for its top-flight cast, which does indeed pump the theater full of emotional adrenaline. But the actors work harder than they should have to. And even at Saturday night's preview, some of their voices were already edged in raggedness, despite the continued use of head mikes.

The philosophy behind the transfer, overseen by the show's director, Michael Greif, seems to have been to create the illusion that "Rent" never really moved at all. Paul Clay's original grungy, deliberately makeshift-looking set, with its white paper lantern of a moon, has simply been scaled up, as if by a Xerox enlarger. The back brick wall of the stage is visible here, too, and the cast still wanders casually into place before the houselights go down, as if to remind us that these are real, funky people up there.

Furthermore, the Nederlander, a theater that has long been dark, has been decorated with all manner of downtown accouterments: its exterior has hand-painted urban murals, and inside there is fake leopard carpeting and the sort of crockery mosaics that can be found on the bases of lamp posts on St. Mark's Place.

But let's not kid ourselves. This is the stuff of theater-as-theme park, and the Nederlander has become East Village Land, much in the way that the Eugene O'Neill Theater, where the revival of "Grease" is running, is 1950's Land. And the top ticket price for "Rent" is a whopping \$67.50, a figure that would feed most of its cast in an Avenue B restaurant.

This, however, is simply the unfortunate economic reality of Broadway today. The problem is what's happening onstage, which is almost move for move what it was downtown. Mr. Greif's direction was always a tad wooden, often merely configuring the ensemble like performers in a staged concert. This was less noticeable in a small space: those performers had such intense presences, and they were so close, that they seemed almost to be embracing you.

The eye must travel much further from the orchestra (let alone the balcony) to the stage now. And it needs more to divert it than is being offered. Mr. Larson had spoken in interviews about creating theater for the MTV generation. But MTV videos make lip-synching seem kinetic with changing camera angles, close-ups and cross-cutting; they become the equivalent of choreography and strategic stage lighting, which "Rent" could definitely use more of.

Mr. Larson's music has an infectious pulse that begs to be danced to. And Marlies Yearby, the show's choreographer, brings such wit and verve to the first-act finale (the banquet number, "La Vie Boheme") that you feel frustrated that it's the only thing approaching an ensemble dance number.

That "Rent" still qualifies as a major success, and it does, is almost entirely because of Mr. Larson's clever but deeply felt words and score and the cast and musicians who interpret them. What makes "Rent" so wonderful is not its hipness quotient, but its extraordinary spirit of hopeful defiance and humanity.

Mr. Larson has conceived his show's surrogate family of fringe artists, drag queens and H.I.V.-infected drug users with such rich affection and compassion that it is impossible not to care about them. "Rent" is ultimately as sentimental as "Carousel" or "South Pacific," and the splendid cast members make no apologies about this. They're as gritty-seeming as they should be, but they also beam with the good will and against-the-odds optimism that is at the heart of the American musical.

Adam Pascal as Roger, the H.I.V.-positive songwriter, has an enhanced, effortless-seeming radiance that should quickly turn him into a matinee idol for a new generation. His shimmering sensuality is ideally complemented by the more shadowy eroticism of Daphne Rubin-Vega, whose Mimi gives off a transfixing blend of street swagger and mortal fragility. The couple's moonlit duet, "Light My Candle," and the recurring "I Should Tell You" remain the show's romantic centerpieces.

Anthony Rapp's Mark, the self-styled experimental auteur at war with his own defensive detachment, seems to be pushing a bit hard these days, but he is still the production's energetic engine. Wilson Jermaine Heredia's angelic transvestite, Jesse L. Martin's renegade philosopher and Fredi Walker's lesbian lawyer emerge as fully defined characters you feel you've known all your life. And Idina Menzel, as the performance artist Maureen, brings new, welcome satiric shadings to her character's artistic affectations.

The second act still feels more awkward than the first (and includes some unfortunate lyrics like, "You're living in America; leave your conscience at the tone"). But there's no denying that Mr. Larson discovered a winningly accessible and ground-breaking musical formula that combines rock's drive, pop's memory-grabbing melodiousness and the leitmotifs and harmonic counterpoints of opera. And when the whole ensemble sings of making the most of limited time in "Seasons of Love," the heart still melts and the eyes still mist.

At one point, when Mr. Rapp's Mark, who worries about prostituting his talent after taking a job with a tabloid television show, asks, "How did I get here?" he might be speaking for the entire "Rent" team. The answer, above all, is an original talent and a flame of youth that the mummified world of Broadway musicals so needs. Even without a fully developed support system, that talent continues to blaze at the Nederlander.

MARTIN DENTON of THEATERMANIA

At last, a show that lives up to its hype! *Rent* is theatre at its best: passionate, exuberant, uplifting, and joyous. Author Jonathan Larson, who died tragically of an aortic aneurism on the day of the show's first dress rehearsal, presents panoramically a year in the life of a dozen or so East Villagers. Faced with the squalor of a squatter's existence and the ravages of HIV, these incredible young heroes and heroines somehow build family and community with passion and style. Larson had an enormous amount on his mind and in his heart, and as a result *Rent* is imperfect, but only because it so brims and rocks with excess enthusiasms and energy. *Rent* features the best theatre score in years--maybe decades--and has a winning and wonderful cast. I love this show: it's an absolute must-see.

SOURCES

http://www.mtishows.com/show_detail.asp?showid=000281

<http://www.playscripts.com/author.php3?authorid=99>

<http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=4791>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/jonathan-larson>

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117905201.html?categoryid=33&cs=1&query=rent+broadway>

http://www.theatermania.com/broadway/reviews/10-1999/rent_68.html

<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/04/30/theater/theater-review-enter-singing-young-hopeful-and-taking-on-the-big-time.html>

<http://www.sfgate.com/blogs/>

<http://the-aids-pandemic.blogspot.com/2007/02/history-of-hiv-aids-in-united-states.html>

<http://wikipedia.com>