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Hamilton on Broadway: Yes, It's That Good!

David Sheward · Wednesday, August 12th, 2015

About every ten years, a Broadway musical is christened by the theater pundit class and audiences as a landmark in the development of the art form and becomes more than just a smash hit—it transforms into a phenomenon in the larger culture. *Show Boat, Oklahoma!, Hair, A Chorus Line*, and *Rent* are the most prominent examples of such fiery productions. *Spring Awakening* and *The Book of Mormon* approached the status of game-changer, but didn't quite make it. *Hamilton*, the latest entry in this explosive category, looks to be the most shattering mold-breaker in recent years.

Lin-Manuel Miranda's sung-through biography of our most controversial Founding Father opened last February at the Public Theater with the force of a tidal wave washing away familiar musical-theater forms and winning every award imaginable. Now on Broadway at the Richard Rodgers, *Hamilton* is poised to add several Tonys to its collection and run at least until the next presidential election and probably the one after that. Is it worth the hype? Definitely. Since the Public Theater engagement, Thomas Kail's non-stop production and Andy Blankenbuehler's seamless choreography have maintained their propulsive power and the performances have deepened.

Jonathan Groff in *Hamilton*
Credit: Joan Marcus

The Off-Broadway staging was overwhelming in its innovation—Hamilton's revolutionary career and personal tragedy is played by a mostly African-American and Latino cast and told through a hip-hop filter. Miranda's brilliantly intricate score and script draws parallels between the protagonist's immigrant status and that of contemporary American minorities striving to establish their own identities just as the colonists were struggling to break free of the oppressive British motherland, personified by a sneering, dandy-ish King George III. (He even has his own signature musical style, 1960s British pop, to distinguish him from the Americans' rap.)

On this second viewing, a layer of tender emotions are revealed in addition to the cleverness. Hamilton's relationships with his wife Eliza, her sister Angelica, his son Philip, and his arch-nemesis Aaron Burr, who eventually killed him in their famous duel, are now more complex and heart-rending. Miranda, who also stars in the title role, has added a passionate tenderness to Hamilton's bluster. Leslie Odom, Jr. is even more multi-faceted as the jealous Burr, exposing the character's burning desire to be as central to the infant government as his rival.

Phillipa Soo makes for a sweet Eliza while Renee Elise Goldsberry attractively displays the intelligence of Angelica and her barely-concealed, more-than-sisterly love for Alexander. David

Diggs is an exuberantly engaging doubling as the merry Marquis de Lafayette and a peacock of a Thomas Jefferson.

The only major cast change is Jonathan Groff who took over the King George role so Brian d'Arcy James could star in *Something Rotten.* It's a relatively small role, but Groff turns it into a hilarious cameo, delightfully disdainful of the new United States. Like all the other elements of *Hamilton*, the performance is perfection.

Opened Aug. 6 for an open run. Richard Rodgers Theater, 226 W. 46th St., NYC. Mon.—Tue., Thu., 7 p.m.; Wed., Fri.—Sat., 8 p.m.; Wed., Sat., 2 p.m. Running time: two hours and 45 mins. including intermissions. $65—$180. (800) 745-3000 or www.ticketmaster.com.

This review has previously appeared on ArtsinNY.com and Theaterlife.com.

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