
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Spamilton, Shpamilton, It's Your Shot!

Sylvie Drake · Wednesday, November 15th, 2017

Given all the hoopla surrounding Lin Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*, it was impossible for Gerard Alessandrini — the creator of *Forbidden Broadway* and *Forbidden Hollywood* — to resist the chance of spoofing it. Or so he tells us in a couple of published interviews. So presto, there came *Spamilton*. And when Alessandrini decided to bring *Spamilton* to Los Angeles, it became, at least for this writer, impossible to ignore when it opened in Los Angeles this past Sunday.

Since I haven't seen *Hamilton* — and given the stratospheric price of tickets to that musical I may never — it was a relief to have Alessandrini claim that you don't have to have seen *Hamilton* in order to appreciate *Spamilton*.

Yippee. It's not just a matter of economics with me; it's also a matter of principle. Market and dynamic pricing be damned. Of all of the arts, theatre surely is the most populist and plebeian, and it should be a lot more accessible to the general populace, especially since it is most often at its best when it is.

But enough about that. We could argue the point until a year from next Tuesday. The truth is that *Spamilton* is slightly mistitled because, somewhere along the way, the *Hamilton* spoof turned into a parody of Broadway glories past and present.



William Cooper Howell as Lin Manuel Miranda in *Spamilton* at the Kirk Douglas Theatre.

The key to this lies in the song that acts as *Spamilton*'s anchor. Taking his cue from *Hamilton*'s "My Shot" (*I won't throw away my shot... yes, I have the album*), Alessandrini has created his own little anthem: "His Shot" (*I am not gonna let Broadway rot...*), which doesn't implicate *Hamilton*, but rather opens the door for *Spamilton* to aim its arrows at a lot more of Broadway's triumphs than just that one show. A better, if less catchy title might have been *Spamilton and Oh So Very Much More*.

So *Spamilton* ends up being plenty of fun for anyone who has a decent Broadway background and a good memory and who will recognize the tunes, the people, the barbs and the productions that wither under Alessandrini's pen. Aside from his cheerful skewering, his breezy direction and Gerry McIntyre's sassy choreography, the ensemble of five actor/singers is an exceptionally talented L.A. cast, with top honors going to Zakiya Young, the only woman in the line-up. (Up with women!) Young seems at ease with everything she undertakes, from Michele Obama to *The Lion King* to Audra McDonald and well beyond (make that Beyon[d]-cé).

The show has the added interpolation of two guest "stars": Susanne Blakeslee as the "Diva" who gives us goofy impersonations of Glenn Close, Liza M. and Barbra Streisand. The second guest star, Glenn Bassett, delivers befuddled royalty as King George, fully decked out in crown, ermine and ditziness. They are welcome intrusions both, even if they seem to have stepped into the wrong cabaret and are a bit disconnected to the rest of the show, which really fully belongs to the ensemble.

Since the program does not identify who's who in that ensemble, let alone who plays what (we figured some of that out), here are their names: Zakiya Young, as mentioned above of course, and the rest of the gang in alpha order: Dedrick A. Bonner (of the glorious voice), John Deveraux, Willie Ferguson III and William Cooper Howell (who plays Lin Manuel Miranda and looks, or is made to look, a lot like him).

Super-duper talents all.

Trouble is, if we can even call it that, everything whizzes by so fast that it's sometimes hard to catch all the nuances, the clever rhymes, the tongue-in-cheek refinements and internal jokes although, to the production's credit these actors are well-spoken, can sing loud and clear, and they can move and dance as well as act. It's just that the wit is just as nimble as they are, and it flies by so quickly that it's easy to miss too many of its inspired moments.



Zakiya Young and John Deveraux in *Porgy and Bess* as part of *Spamilton* at The Kirk Douglas Theatre.

As a theatrical meal this qualifies as tasty, light and healthy. The more you know about Broadway, the better you'll enjoy *Spamilton*. It also eminently qualifies as populist theatre, testifying to what I said earlier about all that. Although Bassett is credited as design consultant for set and props, this show has no set, and its props consist of a number of cute hand puppets and other smallish items to be worn or carried. It has few, mostly Hamiltonian costumes (designed by Dustin Cross), good lighting by Karyn D. Lawrence and good sound design by Adam Phalen. James Lent is listed as musical director, with music supervision and arrangements by Fred Barton and added arrangements by Richard Danley. Presumably, all the music we hear is pre-recorded or performed by gnomes backstage. No musicians listed.



The cast of *Spamilton* at the Kirk Douglas Theatre.

Final note. The day before seeing *Spamilton* I attended a celebration of life for one of television's great comedy writers who left us at 98 after a life supremely well lived. Among the abundance of shared memories and funny moments and funnier lines came the surprising comment that comedy is basically a spiritual event. I had never thought of it that way, but indeed it is. It is beneficial to our health and our humanity because laughter puts everything in perspective: what's important and what's not, what real joy is and what's not, what matters and what doesn't. It provides a survival mechanism of exquisite and exceptional dimensions.

File that one under "good things to remember."

Top image: The cast of Spamilton thumbing its nose at us!

Photos by Craig Schwartz.

WHAT: *Spamilton*

WHERE: Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232.

WHEN: Tuesdays-Fridays, 8pm; Saturdays, 2 & 8 pm; Sundays, 1 & 6:30 pm. No performance on Thanksgiving Day. Added 8pm performance Monday, December 18. No performances December 24. Ends Dec. 31.

HOW: Tickets, \$30-\$80 (subject to change), available online at www.centertheatregroup.org, or by phone at 213.628.2772, or in person at Center Theatre Group Box Office at the Ahmanson Theatre Downtown, or two hours prior to performances at the Kirk Douglas Theatre Box Office. Groups: 213.972.7231. Deaf community: Information and charge, visit CenterTheatreGroup.org/ACCESS.

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