

RENT musical heads to Johannesburg

Following recent sell-out shows in Cape Town and in celebration of its 20th anniversary, RENT, the award-winning Rock Musical, will take place at Joburg Theatre from 28 April-7 May.

The original rock musical, composed by Jonathan Larson in 1996, was a Pulitzer Prize and Tony-Award winning masterpiece that changed the landscape of musical theatre. Previously featuring well-known actors such as Neil Patrick Harris, Rosario Dawson and Taye Diggs in various Broadway adaptations, including the 2005 feature film, the show has enjoyed on-going success with diehard fans being dubbed 'RENT-heads.' Inspired by Puccini's classic opera *La bohème* RENT tackles issues of homelessness, homosexuality, drug addiction and HIV and Aids.



Familiar to South Africans

Director, Byron Bure, highlights the significance of the issues, particularly in a South African context, as they are still very relevant today. "Every day we see the divisive effects of nativism and intolerance which ends up in violent conflict between different communities. The story of RENT may be specific to the artists in New York's Bohemian East Village in the early 1990s, but the theme of a community in crises and how they struggle to deal with it still resonates today."

Bure stresses the importance of addressing these issues through art and performance wherever possible. "As South-Africans we often see the impulse to turn against one another when threatened by these external forces. RENT challenges to turn towards one another to weather a storm and to choose love and respect. In our fractured society, this is a message that desperately needs to be heard."



While setting the bohemian scene, much like in the original, Bure's production focuses on the group dynamics of the characters. "We spent a great deal of time analysing the characters and their needs within the piece, which informed how we were going to construct a production that best serves Jonathan Larson's vision. We set about finding actors that could embody the characters both physically and vocally."

Having played to full houses in Cape Town and receiving rave reviews, RENT producer, Stephan Fourie, who is making his debut with The Stephan Fourie Theatre Company, believes the success of the first run is due to the vibrancy and relevance of the production. "The feedback we received from Cape Town audiences was incredible. We had tonnes of comments on the energy of the cast, the fantastic choreography, the set, and significance of the show's themes. I am particularly excited to bring this sell-out sensation to a Johannesburg stage as the story holds its relevance today more than ever. RENT brings on a unified sense of community, making difficult themes and conversations more palatable, and we are now working hard to bring an even more spectacular production to Johannesburg this April. "

Introducing the cast

The cast members include award-winning theatre and performance artists from around the country, technically trained across musical theatre, acting, singing, dance and choreography. Anzio September (23), who plays drag-queen 'Angel' has not only the challenge of performing dynamic dance moves in four-inch platforms, but to also bring to life the true essence of one of the show's most complex and lovable characters. "The role of Angel has made me realise that fear is the only thing that keeps us alive in this life. We are caged by normative thinking and what is deemed 'socially acceptable'. If love and respect was at the core of humanity, peace would prevail and wars would be an unknown entity. One has to be true to themselves even if the world says no."



Classical and contemporary singer and recipient of an invitation to audition for Juilliard Performing Arts School in 2012, Namisa Mdlalose (22), who plays the role of the brooding 'Joanne', echoes September's sentiments. "RENT tells a story of a community of broken people begging to be loved, to be forgiven, to be seen, to be healed. Ultimately, we find, love wins."

The ultimate rock opera

Taking on the task of the music itself is no small feat. RENT set the bar for rock musicals 20 years ago, quickly becoming best-selling cast album of the decade. The musical score is technically a challenging one since it is a completely sung-through production. Rooted in rebellion and protest, the show is a blend of soulful gospel, grungy rock and pop. Bure explains that the music is well-written, but that it's the place of the lyrics in the narrative that imbues them with relevance. He describes the real magic of the show as the hybrid of 80s and 90s rock combined with the unique sounds of contemporary musical theatre.

Ticket details

Bookings can be made through Webtickets or by visiting www.joburgtheatre.com/rent.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>