

# Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

## With Humor and Tenderness

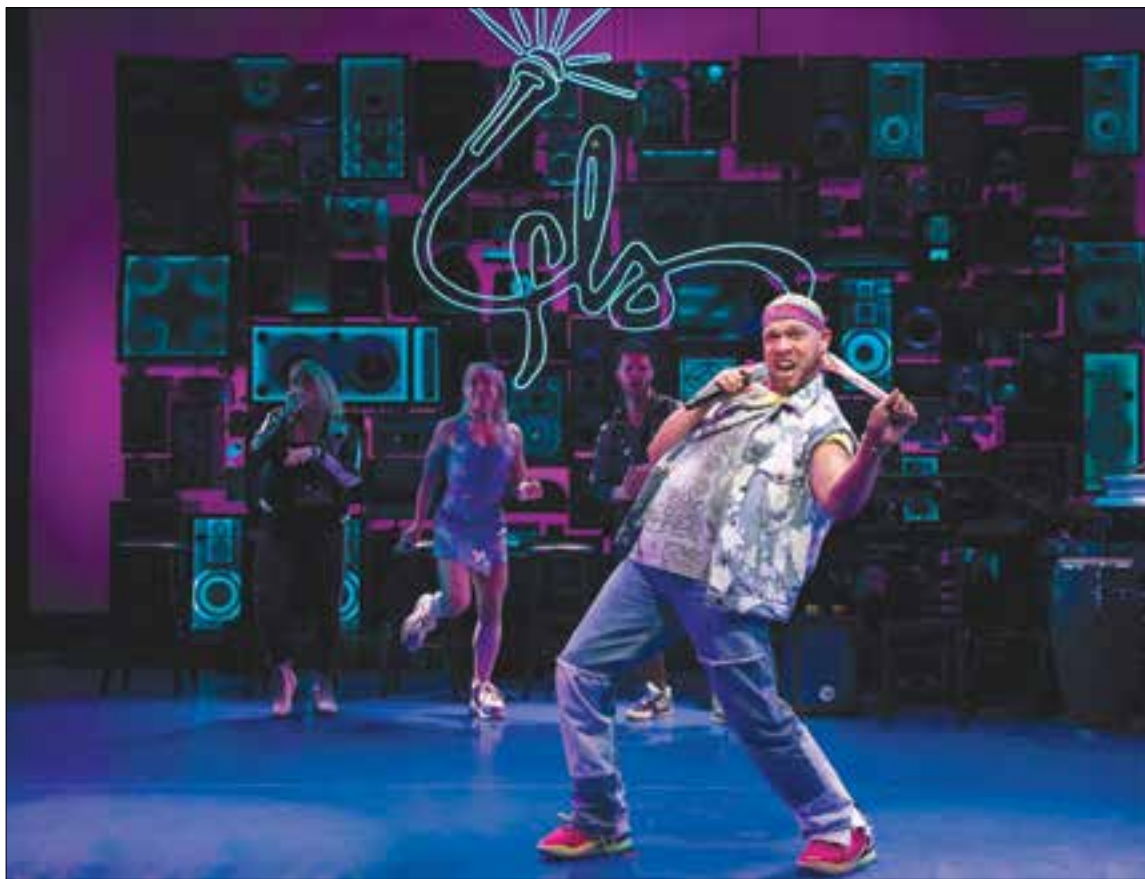


PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS/PORTLAND CENTER STAGE

Artists riff, rhyme, improvise and connect with an audience in "Freestyle Love Supreme," now showing through May 1 at Portland Center Stage. Pictured are Kaila Mullady (from left), Morgan Reilly, Andrew Bancroft, and Jay C. Ellis.

### Cast connects in "Freestyle Love Supreme"



The national tour of "Freestyle Love Supreme," now having a run at Portland Center Stage, isn't a play in the traditional sense. It's more of a method, a process, a practice of playfulness and collaboration and community. For 90 minutes, several talented artists riff, rhyme, improvise, and play with the audience and with each other. A rotating cast of performers invite audience members to toss out ideas, stories, and pet peeves; each audience offering gets at least a friendly toss, and some get embroidered into an intuitive comedic mash-up. No two performances are the same.

The project was born during rehearsal breaks for the original production of "In the Heights." Anthony Veneziale, who was the host of the performance I saw, is credited as having conceived the show, and co-created it with Lin-Manuel Miranda and

director Thomas Kail (who also directed Miranda's hit musicals "In the Heights" and "Hamilton").

Veneziale and Kail were fast friends in college, and lightning struck when they met Miranda. In the midst of other projects—and, indeed, powering those projects—the friends, along with others they gathered, built a show around engagement. Starting with a loose but intentional structure, they built each show on their collective love for each other, for rapping and beat-boxing and singing and entertaining, and for the joy of performing and connecting with an audience.

The show lived on through 15 years of performing in venues of all sizes even after the energies of Miranda and Kail got pulled into other major projects. Then, in 2019, they gathered the original crew for a Broadway run in 2019 and 2020. The history of the show is well-captured in the 2020 documentary, "We Are Freestyle Love Supreme" (available on Hulu), which includes footage from throughout the show's various iterations and makes a great accompaniment to the show itself.

Veneziale played his foundational role as host in the Portland show I saw, and he is a wonder.

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**Polina Nazaykinskaya:**  
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**Saint-Saëns:**  
 Violin Concerto No. 3,  
 featuring violinist, Katie Liu

**MAY 8 | 4:00 PM**  
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