



tick, tick ... BOOM! at Portland Center Stage

OPINIONATED JUDGE
BY DARLEEN ORTEGA



Portland Center Stage has opened its season with a superb main stage production of the musical, “tick, tick . . . BOOM!” Allowing for the fact that Lin-Manuel Miranda played the lead in a 2014 revival of the show that also featured Leslie Odom, Jr. (which must have been something), I wonder if this might be the definitive production.

I say that as someone not especially in the thrall of the show’s creator, Jonathan Larson, who famously and tragically died immediately before the first production of his smash hit, “Rent,” for which he later posthumously won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and a Tony Award for Best Musical. I have experienced Larson’s work as a cultural phenomenon which captured a generation’s experience of struggle and loss but which had some maturing to do, thwarted by

his untimely death.

“tick, tick . . . BOOM!” is an earlier work than “Rent,” devised as a one-man show starring Larson himself and depicting his own youthful struggle as an aspiring artist who wanted to write the next great musical before his impending 30th birthday. After Larson’s death, playwright David Auburn restructured the show as a three-person musical, necessarily a more modest show than “Rent,” and sometimes called a prequel to that iconic show.

But even with that somewhat self-indulgent set-up, this production doesn’t feel self-indulgent. In fact, more than any production of Larson’s work that I’ve seen, the cast and creators of Portland Center Stage’s production manage to hold the time and place of the show (and of Larson himself) more vividly, inspiring warmth and sympathy and even reflection. A bit surprisingly, it’s a revelation.

Perhaps the most obvious reason is its terrific cast. Jesse Weil, who happens to bear a striking resemblance to Larson, soars as Jon. His vocal range is rich and

vibrant, a joy to listen to, and he invests each movement with intention that moves you to invest in his youthful dreams. Importantly, he is a wonderful scene partner to the other members of the cast, both Black Portland actors brimming with charisma and range. Tyler Andrew Jones is riveting as Jon’s best friend Michael, along with a range of other roles; he bristles with energy and commands attention without hogging it. And Lauren Steele, likewise, is brilliant as Jon’s girlfriend Susan, along with a range of other roles; her vocal range is so dramatic that by the time she gets to her solo as Karessa in Jon’s production of his new show and implores you to “Come to Your Senses,” it sounds like you are listening to a different person than you have been listening to for an hour. Jones and Steele turn themselves into a larger cast, catching your breath with each transformation.

The three cast members together are a marvel, making the most

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New Members Join Oregon Arts Commission



Founder and CEO of The Black Whole, Kamilah Long

Roberta Lavadour, the executive director of the Pendleton Center for the Arts, and Kamilah Long, founder and CEO of The Black Whole, have been appointed to the Oregon Arts Commission by Governor Kate Brown.

Lavadour is an artist and arts administrator who lives and works in Pendleton. In addition

to her leadership position with the Pendleton Center for the Arts, she serves as an advisor to the Roundhouse Foundation Residency program and as a member of the City of Pendleton’s Art Commission.

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