

# RENT

A STUDY GUIDE



Jeffrey Seller Kevin McCollum Allan S. Gordon  
and New York Theatre Workshop

present

# RENT

Book, Music and Lyrics by

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Find Glory

In a song that rings true Truth like a blazing fire

# ABOUT RENT

With *RENT*, his fresh and ground-breaking new musical, Jonathan Larson wanted to find a true song for his generation, to attract young people back to the experience of live theatre. In the pulse of its rock score, *RENT* sings of our time, of facing an uncertain future with courage, humor, loyalty and love.

The story of passionate young artists struggling to survive with their ideals intact, *RENT* is Giacomo Puccini's classic 1896 opera, *La Boheme*, yanked into the '90s, kicking and screaming for joy. *RENT* reaches into the past while putting the questions facing us today on the musical stage: How do I connect? Where is my community? What is a family? How do I deal with homelessness and poverty? Cynicism and indifference? How do I keep my ideals? **How do I measure my life?**

"The rock lyric is a literary form...a powerful and versatile new word style to match the new music, expressive of any feeling from despair to ecstasy, of any social comment..." (Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., *The Best Plays of 1969-1970*) With *RENT*, Jonathan Larson follows the path set by shows of that era such as *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, both of which used rock music to tell the stories of that generation, while continuing the legacy of early classics like *Show Boat* and *Oklahoma!* In *RENT*, the characters sing, "How do you leave the past behind, when it keeps finding ways to get to your heart?", but Larson had no intention of leaving the past behind. *RENT* is startlingly up-to-the-minute while respecting traditional forms; Larson was influenced by Kurt Cobain and De La Soul as well as by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim. This study guide explores *RENT* as a literary form as well as a musical one, **a work worthy of serious study as well as being a roaring good time.**

The idea of *community* runs through *RENT*, not only connecting the different threads of the story, but connecting the narrative on stage with the backstage tale of *RENT*'s creation. *RENT* offers a vision of the members of a community finding themselves stronger together than apart.

The lyricist Oscar Hammerstein said "**the most important word in theatre is collaboration.**" To see a production about a community of young people finding common strength, *created* by a community of theatrical artists, can be a valuable and moving educational tool. And it can't hurt that *RENT* tells its story with clever, intelligent lyrics and a fiery rock beat! Too many young people have abandoned live theatre in favor of film, television and music videos. Jonathan Larson wanted to make the American musical attractive to young people again, "to bring musical theatre to the MTV generation."

In his review of *RENT* in *Variety*, Jeremy Gerard said that the show "more clearly and more defiantly than any other in recent memory, points the American musical toward the future." More than anything, Larson wanted young people to be part of that future.

# LA VIE BOHEME

To days of inspiration, playing hooky,  
 making something out of nothing,  
 the need to express -  
 to Communicate,  
 To going against the grain,  
 going insane, going mad

“Bohemian: a person (as a writer or an artist) living an unconventional life, usually in a colony with others...”

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition



## ZOOM IN: GOALS OF THIS SECTION

- Explore the world of the bohemians: artists who purposely cut themselves off from society.
- Introducing Giacomo Puccini and Henry Murger, whose work influenced the creation of *RENT*.
- Who are the bohemians today?

The name was originally given to the gypsies of the 15th century - wandering adventurers who were thought to have come from the middle European kingdom of Bohemia, but truly had no permanent home. By the early 19th century, struggling artists would adopt their name as a badge of honor. Like the gypsies, they would create their own homes, their own communities, their own families.

Over the centuries, Bohemia has had many capitals: Paris' Latin Quarter, New York's Greenwich Village, Harlem or the East Village, San Francisco's Haight Ashbury, or simply "on the road." But, true to its origins, **Bohemia is never in one place for long.** It lives in the hearts and heads of people who dare to cherish their own invention and audacity over the conventions of society.

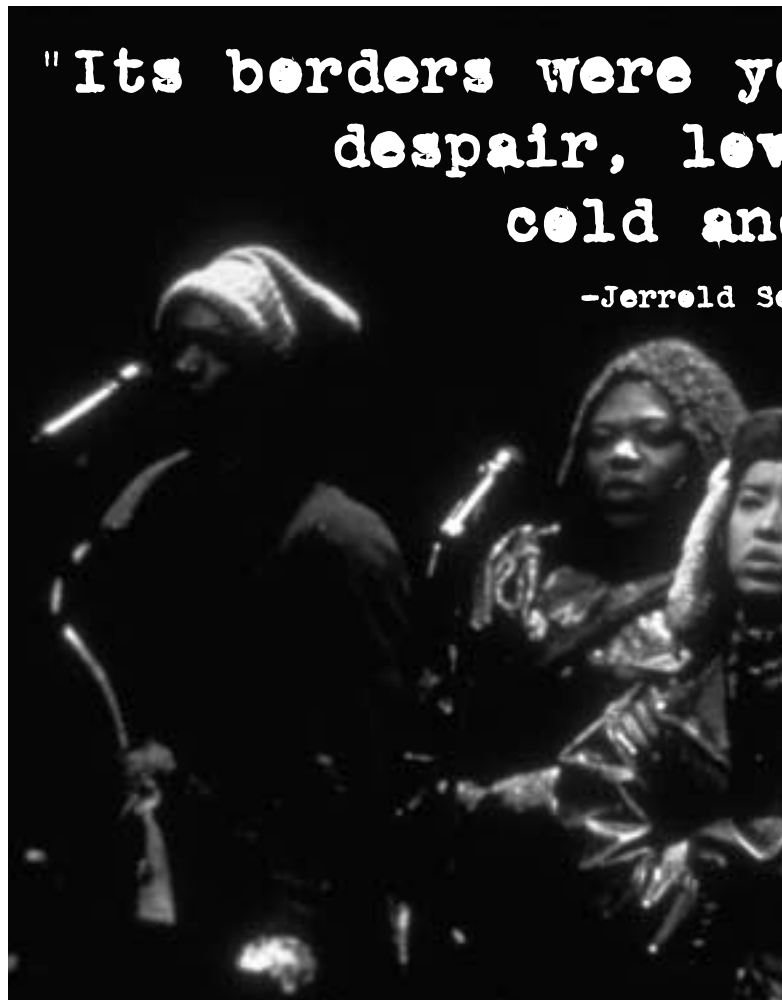
## PUCCINI and LA BOHEME

How do you leave the past behind,  
 When it keeps finding ways  
 to get into your heart,  
 It reaches way down deep  
 and tears you inside out',  
 Til you're torn apart

He was baptized Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria **Puccini**. Born on December 22, 1858 into a family of musicians and composers, young Puccini was expected to take his father's place as head organist at St. Martino, the cathedral of Lucca, Italy.

"Its borders were you  
 despair, love  
 cold and

-Jerrold S



At 17, he began writing his own pieces for the organ. He surprised and sometimes annoyed churchgoers by incorporating pieces of popular operas and folk songs into the traditional music - as if bits of Bob Dylan or Stephen Sondheim were mixed into the most religious hymns. Thus began his life-long passion for mixing high and low culture, the romantic with the realistic, the sacred with the profane. He said, "The only music I can compose is of little things."

He drifted away from the quiet life of an organist, finding himself attracted to opera, **where emotions were so strong they had to be sung.** In 1883, after three years at Milan University, he was encouraged to enter his first full opera, *Le Villi* (1884), in a competition sponsored by a large music publishing company. Although it did not win, it gained him notice as a young composer with promising talent. He continued to compose, being drawn more and more to the potential theatricality of opera.

It was his third opera, *Manon Lescaut* (1893), which gained him critical acclaim - he was hailed as a young genius. Encouraged to experiment, he began to work on an opera based on a French novel by **Henry Murger** (1822-1861) called ***Scenes de la vie de boheme***. Murger's novel, a raw and gritty description of the lives of young artists, had been the literary sensation of Paris. Murger was essentially writing about his own life, just as Jonathan Larson did with *RENT*. His bohemians live for their work, thinking only of the here and now.

Murger understood the attractions and dangers of the artistic community. He described Bohemia as "the preface to the hospital, the morgue or the Academy." (The Academy was the pantheon of artists and intellectuals). In other words, the poor life was a kind of crucible in which artists could be fire tested and either destroy themselves or become famous. How does Larson show this process in *RENT*?

Puccini strove to mix the realism of Murger's novel with his own lyric and emotional music. Throughout the opera, now called *La Boheme*, comedy mixes easily with tragedy. The songs have a conversational tone. Puccini was trying to achieve the rhythms of real life, balancing the romantic with the modern.

outh and hope and gaiety and  
re, poverty, courage,  
d the hospital. "

riegel, "The Rise of Bohemia"



**He was entering a new century, writing an opera about real people, poor people, not kings and queens.**

Puccini's *La Boheme* had its world premiere at the Teatro Regio in Turin, Italy, on February 1, 1896. One hundred years later, almost to the month, *RENT*, a "rock opera" about struggling young artists, began its run at the New York Theatre Workshop.



*Montabone*

*1877*



*Puccini*

Milano

7 - Piazza Durini - 7.



Geraldine Ferrar as Mimi  
in a 1931 production of  
La Boheme

Daphne Rubin-Vega as Mimi  
in the original Broadway  
production of RENT



Opposite page :  
Giacome Puccini (on the  
left) and La Boheme's  
lyricists Luigi Illica  
and Giuseppe Giacosa



## IDEAS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

- What is opera? How is it different from musical theatre?
- How does Larson intertwine Puccini's music throughout the music of *RENT*? Larson said, "I analyzed the libretto, broke it down beat by beat. Who would these characters be in my world? That's what I kept asking." If you can, study a libretto of *La Boheme* while listening to the score. How does Larson mirror Puccini? How do they differ? More important - *why* do you think they differ?
- Puccini was known as the leading composer of the style known as *verismo*. This style was standard for the Italian operas of the late 19th century. **In *verismo*, the plot is contemporary, the characters are often poor, the action is often violent and harsh.** Some examples of the *verismo* style are *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni (1890), and *Pagliacci* by Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1892). Study more about this style, and relate it to *RENT* - how does *RENT* use the *verismo* style?



FREDI WALKER



IDINA MENZEL

## RESOURCES:

### Texts:

- Opera - What's All the Screaming About?* by Roger Englander. Walker and Company, NY, 1983.
- An Illustrated Guide to Composers of Opera* by Peter Gammond. Arco Publishing, NY, 1980.
- Opera as Drama* by Joseph Kerman. California, rev.ed. 1988.
- The Magic of Opera* by Merrill J. Knapp. Harper, 1972

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The image shows a handwritten musical score for the opera *La Bohème*. The score is written on multiple staves for various instruments, including Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon, Oboe, English Horn, Fagotto, Horns, Trumpets, Trombones, Cello, and Double Bass. The score is heavily annotated with large, bold, handwritten scribbles and diagonal lines that cross out significant portions of the music. In the center of the page, there is a self-portrait doodle of a man's face, drawn with simple lines and shading. The word "Crescendo" is written in large, cursive script across the middle of the score, and "Tempo" is written below it. At the bottom of the page, the words "Crescendo Tempo" are written in a similar cursive style. The overall appearance is that of a working draft or a composer's sketch, characterized by its expressive and somewhat chaotic handwriting.

Original sheet music from *La Bohème* (including a self-portrait doodle by Puccini)

# FINDING A FAMILY:

## THE ARTIST AND SOCIETY

To being an us - for once  
 Instead of a them  
 La Vie Boheme



### ZOOM IN: GOALS OF THIS SECTION

- Why are we attracted to stories of young, struggling artists?
- Compare the artists in *RENT* to those in classic texts, which may be in your curriculum.
- Students can ask and answer the question: what is an artist? Emphasis is given to personal opinion and thought over dictionary definitions.

ANTHONY RAPP AND JESSE L. MARTIN

In his biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American writer Henry James describes the importance of community to art: **“the best things come as a general thing, from the talents that are members of a group; every man works better when he has companions working in the same line, and yielding the stimulus of suggestion, comparison and emulation.”**

Throughout history, artists have come together to share ideas, but the 19th and 20th centuries saw new types of artists, who lived their lives as if they were creating works of art, and placed themselves purposely on the outskirts of society, outside of the “mainstream.” They renamed themselves, remade themselves, saying to the world, as Maureen sings in *RENT*, **“Take me for what I am.”**

In *RENT*, Mark sings, “Is anyone in the mainstream?” The bohemians that Puccini and Larson portray consciously thrive on the outskirts of the norm. Are such rebels necessary?

Are they more effective outside or within the “mainstream”? Many artists throughout history, such as Shakespeare and Leonardo Da Vinci, have worked within the mainstream, usually for a patron who subsidized their work. But the artists in *La Boheme* and in *RENT* place themselves intentionally on the fringes of society. Think about it: as *RENT* opens, Mark and Roger are broke, but they have families to fall back on. Roger sings, “Some life we’ve chosen”; they’ve *chosen* to live the way they do. Why?



## IDEAS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

- Compare the young artists in *RENT* to the struggling artists in these novels and poems:
  - *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* by James Joyce
  - *Look Homeward, Angel* by Thomas Wolfe
  - *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell
  - *A Moveable Feast* by Ernest Hemingway
  - *The Dharma Bums* and *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac
  - "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg
- **Why are we attracted to stories of artists - their lives and their struggles?**
- How has the role of the artist changed throughout the 20th century? How have events in the 20th century changed the nature of art and the artist? Use your studies, (or check out *The Timetables of American History*, Laurence Urdang, Editor, Touchstone Press, NY, 1981). Create a time-line and let the events of history and politics stand side by side with events of the arts.
- The new and exciting work that modern artists present has gained the term "avant-garde." The term comes from a French military term meaning "vanguard," or the regiments that lead the rest of the army. Why do think this term has come to mean new and modern art? Why a military term? How does this term relate to Mark's statement in *RENT*, "**The opposite of war isn't peace... it's creation!**"
- Make your own version of the song "La Vie Boheme." Make a list of people who inspire you, or events that have been important in your life. Don't think about it too much - just list the first people you think of who are important to you. Afterwards, pool your list with other students. With your class or group, write a collective poem, song or rap using your inspirations - an anthem about your generation.
- **What is an artist?** Don't worry about the dictionary definition: **what is an artist to you?** What is the responsibility of the artist to society? What is the responsibility of society to the artist?

WILSON JERMAINE HEREDIA AND JESSE L. MARTIN



# ALIENATION AND COMMUNITY

How do you connect  
in an age  
Where strangers,  
landlords, lovers,  
Your own blood cells  
betray?



WILSON JERMAINE HEREDIA

## Z

### OOM IN: GOALS OF THIS SECTION



ANTHONY RAPP

- Students will be encouraged to ask: what is a community? What is a family? Again, standard definitions will be put aside in favor of personal exploration and discussion.
- Students will explore the importance of community and alienation throughout *RENT*.
- Discuss how communities will change in the future with the Internet and the World Wide Web.

**"Among democratic nations,  
each new generation  
is a new people."**  
- Alexis de Tocqueville (1835)

## O

### DEAS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

- You've read about "community" throughout this guide, but what *is* community? Getting the dictionary definition is easy ("a unified body of individuals," "a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society" - Webster's Ninth New Collegiate), but your definition is more important. Is it a place where you feel welcome? Where your ideas and judgments are valued? How is your definition different from the dictionary meaning? How can you relate these definitions to the different communities in *RENT*?

I SHOULD TELL YOU  
I SHOULD TELL YOU

- Write an editorial about alienation. Remember, it's not enough simply to describe the problem - offer solid solutions to the problems of indifference and alienation.
- Consider that the words "community" and "communication" have the same root: the Latin word *communis*, meaning "common." Think about what the characters in *RENT* have in "common." What is the relationship between community and communication?

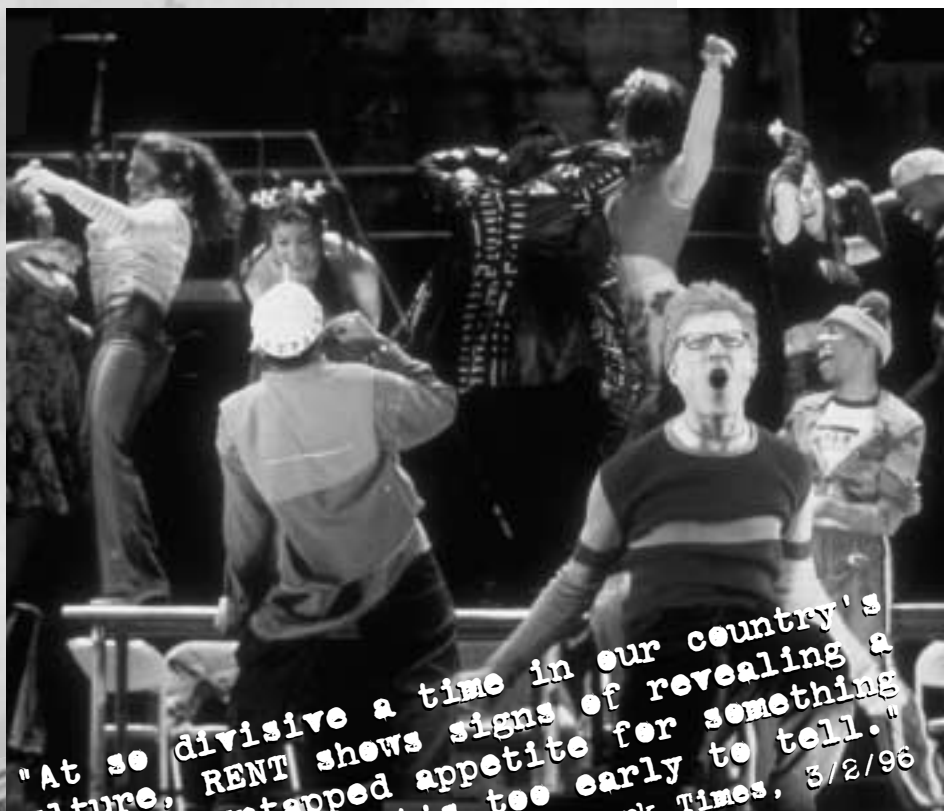
ADAM PASCAL AND DAPHNE RUBIN-VEGA

- **Alienation is, in essence, the opposite of communication.** In *RENT*, Roger spends half a year in his apartment after learning he is HIV positive - separating himself from the world. Even when Mimi coaxes him out, they hesitate to truly communicate. Find instances in *RENT* when true communication happens between characters. What is the result? Find instances when alienation occurs between characters. What is the result?
- What are the different communities in *RENT* (i.e. the artists, the homeless, the drug addicts, the police, etc.)? How do the different communities relate to each other? How does Larson reveal and describe the different communities with distinct musical styles?
- Who are the members of your family? Sounds like a strange question, but beyond your relatives, you probably have friends, teachers, even people you respect but may not even know, whom you consider "family." With this in mind, redefine what "family" means to you, and create your own personal family tree.

**WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THAT NIGHT • CONNECTION - IN AN ISOLATING AGE  
FOR ONCE THE SHADOWS GAVE WAY TO LIGHT • FOR ONCE I DIDN'T DISENGAGE.**

- How is your class like a community? Your school? How can you make them more like a community?
- Today new kinds of communities are forming on-line, through the Internet and World Wide Web. As we enter the 21st century, how do you think the Internet will change how people relate to one another? You can discuss how you felt about *RENT* on the musical newsgroup, or check out facts and figures on the official *RENT* web site ([www.siteforrent.com](http://www.siteforrent.com)).

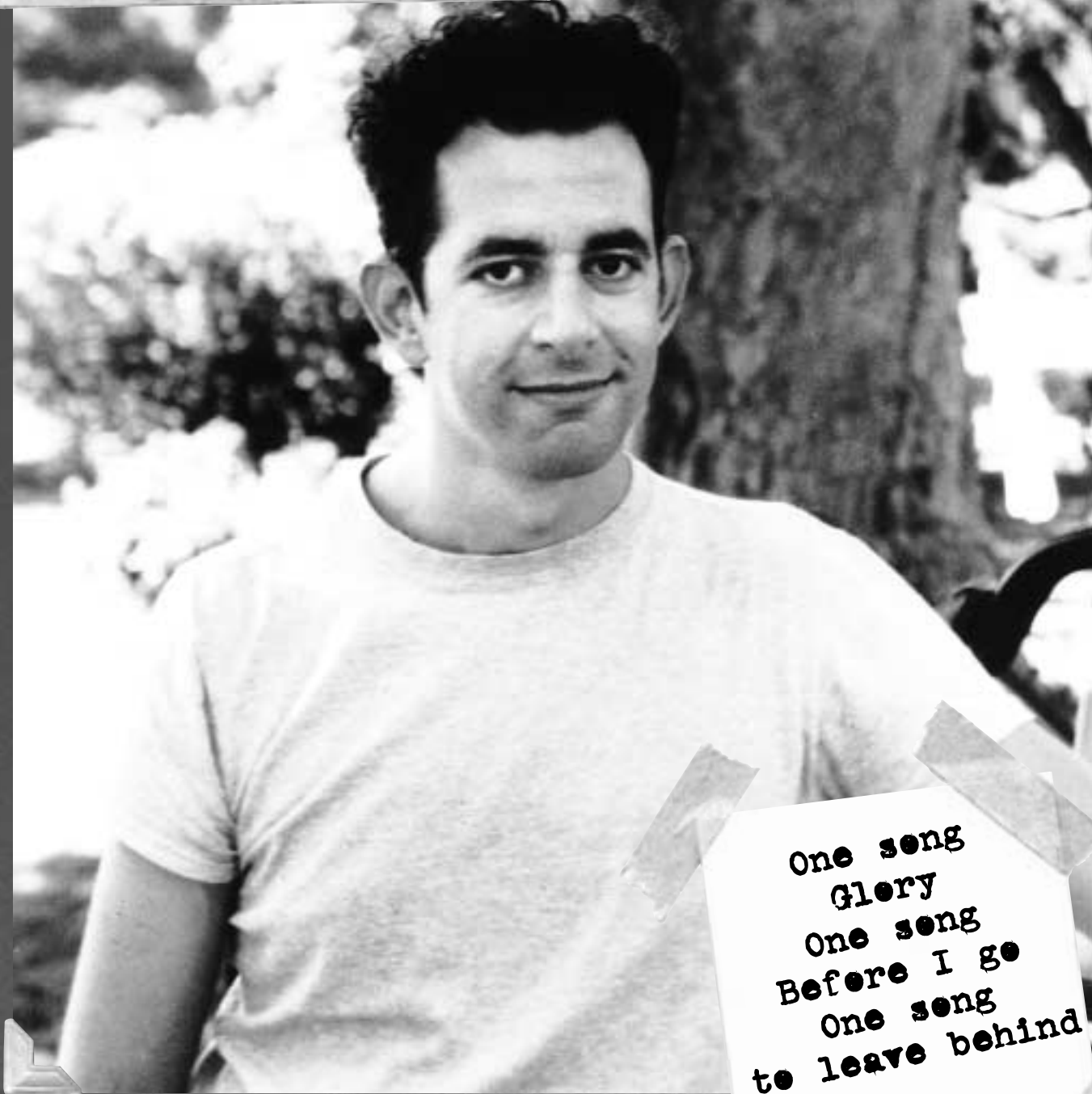
But don't forget! A computer is only a tool and it can't take the place of real community. In *RENT*, Tom Collins preaches "actual reality" - dealing with the joys and sorrows of real life vs. virtual reality. As the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Through our scientific genius, we have made this world a neighborhood; now through our moral and spiritual development, we must make it a brotherhood."



"At so divisive a time in our country's culture, *RENT* shows signs of revealing a large, untapped appetite for something better. It's too early to tell."  
-Frank Rich, New York Times, 3/2/96

# JONATHAN LARSON

and **THE CREATION OF *RENT***



One song  
Glory  
One song  
Before I go  
One song  
to leave behind



## ZOOM IN: GOALS OF THIS SECTION

- Explore the life and death of Jonathan Larson, the creator of *RENT*.
- See the creation of a theatrical work such as *RENT* as the work of a tightly knit community.





Jenathan, age four, with  
his parents Al and Nan.

Jenathan on his bicycle,  
age five.



Jenathan performing  
in "SUBURBIA" at the  
Village Gate, 1989.



WOMEN BOTH

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THEM? MAUREEN

CAN'T LIVE- BOTH

WITH THEM- JOANNE

OR WITHOUT THEM! BOTH

TAKE ME FOR WHAT I AM  
 WHO I WAS MEANT TO BE  
 \*AND IF YOU GIVE A DAMN!  
 TAKE ME BABY OR LEAVE ME  
 TAKE ME BABY  
 OR LEAVE ME

GUESS I'M LEAVIN' BOTH  
 I'M GONE!

(THEY part)

32. SEASONS OF LOVE B

COMPANY  
 IN DIAPERS - REPORT CARDS  
 IN SPOKE WHEELS - IN SPEEDING  
 IN CONTRACTS - DOLLARS  
 IN FUNERALS - IN BIRTHS

IN - FIVE HUNDRED TWENTY FIVE  
 SIX HUNDRED MINUTES  
 \*HOW DO YOU FIGURE  
 A LAST YEAR ON EARTH?

FIGURE IN LOVE  
 FIGURE IN LOVE  
 FIGURE (ON) LOVE  
 MEASURE IN LOVE \*  
 SEASONS OF LOVE  
 SEASONS OF LOVE

33. WITHOUT YOU Mimi's Apartment

**JANUARY 25, 1996:** James Nicola, Artistic Director of The New York Theatre Workshop looked out at the 150 seat auditorium that made up his East Village theatre. "I don't want to welcome you here tonight. I don't want to be here at all under these conditions," he said to the packed house. What had been planned as the first public performance of a new musical called *RENT* had become part private performance, part mourning ritual. The show's young composer, Jonathan Larson, had died suddenly of a heart aneurysm. The stunned company of *RENT*, along with Larson's family and friends, had come to celebrate the life of a man many believed had been ready to set the aging institution, American Musical Theatre, joyfully on fire.

**I've got these melodies in my head**

Jonathan Larson, who writes so truthfully of New York's East Village life in *RENT*, grew up in a typical American suburb: White Plains, New York, about an hour north of New York City. **Like Mark and Roger in *RENT*, Larson left the security of the suburbs for the exhilarating energy of the city.**

He had studied theatre. He won a full drama scholarship to Adelphi University in Long Island, NY, but his father remembered the moment when his son realized that music would be his life: "He took one music theory course in high school and that was it. He told his teacher, 'I've got these melodies in my head and I have to get them out.'"

With those melodies still buzzing through his head, he moved to NY's East Village, ready to make a life as a songwriter by hook or by crook.

Larson lived in a 4th floor walk-up in the SoHo (short for "south of Houston St") section of Manhattan. The bathroom was in the kitchen and, just like Mark and Roger in *RENT*, he had to lower the key down to visitors on the street.

**From here on in I shoot without a script**

Larson wrote songs whenever and wherever he could. In 1990 he presented an autobiographical rock monologue called *Tick...Tick...BOOM!* about a young man, played by Larson himself, torn between writing commercial jingles or serious musicals.

Jonathan Larson was gaining a reputation as a songwriter who used modern music and modern language to tell modern stories. In the audience of *Tick...Tick...BOOM!* in 1990 was Jeffrey Seller, who would later produce *RENT*: "I was 25 years old, and I was blown away by the emotional impact of this piece, and by the fact that I was watching musical theatre about real people."

**The only thing to do is jump over the moon**

*RENT* began life in a conversation between Larson and his friend, Billy Aronson. An opera buff, Aronson proposed a modern American version of Puccini's *La Boheme*. The idea excited Larson - here was a canvas big enough for his ambitious dreams. In 1968, the musical *Hair* had put the counter-culture on the musical stage with a brash rock score. With this new project, Larson envisioned a *Hair* for the '90s. Too many young people had abandoned live theatre for film and music videos. He wanted "to bring musical theatre to the MTV generation."

Larson began to work through the beginnings of *RENT* with Aronson, but their visions for the show soon diverged. Aronson saw the project as an ironic satire of the New York elite. But several of Larson's friends had died of AIDS and Larson wanted this new show to honor not only their deaths, but their courage in living life to the fullest, 'til the end.

**To riding your bike, midday past the three piece suits**

In 1992, Larson was riding his bike through the East Village when he rode by the New York Theatre Workshop on East 4th street. "He saw the construction, stuck his head in the theatre and knew immediately that this was the perfect spot for *RENT*," James Nicola later said.

Larson sent Nicola a script and a tape of several songs. Nicola had "an immediately-positive response. I felt that this was an amazingly talented pop song writer." He

THE STARS GLEAM  
THE POETS DREAM  
THE EAGLES FLY  
WITHOUT YOU

THE EARTH TURNS  
THE SUN BURNS  
BUT I DIE  
WITHOUT YOU

WITHOUT YOU  
THE BREEZE WARMS  
THE GIRL SMILES  
THE CLOUD MOVES

WITHOUT YOU  
THE TIDES CHANGE  
THE BOYS RUN  
THE OCEANS CRASH

THE CROWDS ROAR  
THE DAYS SOAR  
THE BABIES CRY  
WITHOUT YOU

THE MOON GLOWS  
THE RIVER FLOWS  
BUT I DIE  
WITHOUT YOU

ROGER  
THE WORLD REVIVES

MIMI  
COLORS RENEW

BOTH  
BUT I KNOW BLUE  
ONLY BLUE  
LONELY BLUE  
WITHIN ME, BLUE  
WITHOUT YOU

MIMI  
WITHOUT YOU  
THE HAND GROPE  
THE EAR HEARS  
THE PULSE BEATS

ROGER  
WITHOUT YOU  
THE EYES GAZE  
THE LEGS WALK  
THE LUNGS BREATHE

*Handwritten notes:*  
 (J) look at (MN)  
 TURN OUTS BACK  
 M, slide back, he c  
 (A) R fatal  
 K  
 (C) x 2 L T  
 HAND ON SHOUL  
 (C) x ← 2(A)  
 HANDS ON  
 (C) TURN (A)  
 (A) arm up  
 (A) ↑ w/ (A) help  
 (C) KISS (A) FIREHORN P  
 (C) ↑ (A) carry (A)  
 (R) x √ 2 L T  
 (A) ↓ (A)  
 (C) TURN (A) legs

Stage Managers prompt pages from *RENT*

offered Larson the most valuable gift you can put before an artist: “a place to work.” Larson worked with Nicola and company for two years, fine tuning the show.

With a home for his work and a family of artists offering support, Larson poured his passion into *RENT*. The New York Theatre Workshop allowed Larson to encounter a community of nurturing artists (the mission of the New York Theatre Workshop is to “nurture individual artists and develop their work”). *RENT* itself became more about a community than single individuals. Nicola later said, “*RENT* would not have emerged without the seeds in this soil. The sense of a community of artists as a healing force is our theme. And it became the play’s theme.”

“Originally, we felt the whole piece was too 19th century for a 20th century story. Like *La Boheme*, it centered on Roger and Mimi, surrounded by subplots. We thought it would be more interesting, and democratic, to **see the struggle of a community**. Mimi and Roger are still the main lovers, but we brought the other love stories up front. The challenge was to make a community of people the protagonist of the play.”

## "What do you want?"

In 1994, Jeffrey Seller, who had stayed in contact with Larson since *Tick...Tick...BOOM!*, came to see an initial reading of *RENT* with another young producer, Kevin McCollum. It was a rough work-through of the piece, with



few costumes, little lighting and scraps of a set. Still, they could feel the power of the show. Their response was “through the roof.” Later they brought in another partner, Allan Gordon, who was also wildly enthusiastic about the show.

McCollum remembers: "At the end of Act I, I went over to Jonathan and asked, 'What do you want?' He said, 'A full production.'" And when I said, 'Okay,' he thought I was joking. 'Shouldn't you see the second act?' he asked."

"All the ingredients were there at the first workshop," says Seller, "**the viscerally moving characters, the emotion, the music, God knows...**we immediately said we would like to help realize a full production of *RENT*."

Rehearsals began for the full production of *RENT*, scheduled to open in late January, 1996 at the New York Theatre Workshop. Larson was in the thick of rehearsals, casting, constantly reworking the show.

#### Stage Managers prompt pages from *RENT*

JOANNE  
 DON'T SCREEN, MAUREEN  
 IT'S ME - JOANNE  
 YOUR SUBSTITUTE PRODUCTION MANAGER  
 HEY HEY HEY! (DID YOU EAT)  
 DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT MAUREEN  
 BUT DARLING - YOU HAVEN'T EATEN ALL DAY

YOU WON'T THROW UP  
 YOU WON'T THROW UP  
 THE DIGITAL DELAY--  
 -DIDN'T BLOW UP (EXACTLY)  
 \*THERE MAY HAVE BEEN ONE, TEENY TINY SPARK  
 YOU'RE NOT CALLING MARK

(COLLINS struggles to get off the floor)

COLLINS  
 HOW DO YOU STAY ON YOUR FEET  
 WHEN ON EVERY STREET  
 IT'S 'TRICK OR TREAT'  
 (AND TONIGHT IT'S 'TRICK')  
 'WELCOME BACK TO TOWN'  
 \*I SHOULD LIE DOWN  
 EVERYTHING'S BROWN  
 AND UH - OH  
 I FEEL SICK

(B) TURN 2 (C) on last last paragraph  
 (B) 11 11  
 (B) ↑ on SCAFF  
 (D) at OC SCAFF  
 (A) X10 2 WE WALL w/ (E) on  
 (C) TREAT  
 (D) X2 2 2L  
 all focus on (C)

Twice during dress rehearsal week, always a frantic, stressful time, Larson had complained of chest pains. He was taken to local hospitals, diagnosed with food poisoning or the flu, and sent home. On January 25, 1996, he left rehearsal after an interview with *The New York Times*, running a fever and still experiencing chest pains.

Late that night, his roommate came home and found his body on the kitchen floor. Jonathan Larson was gone.

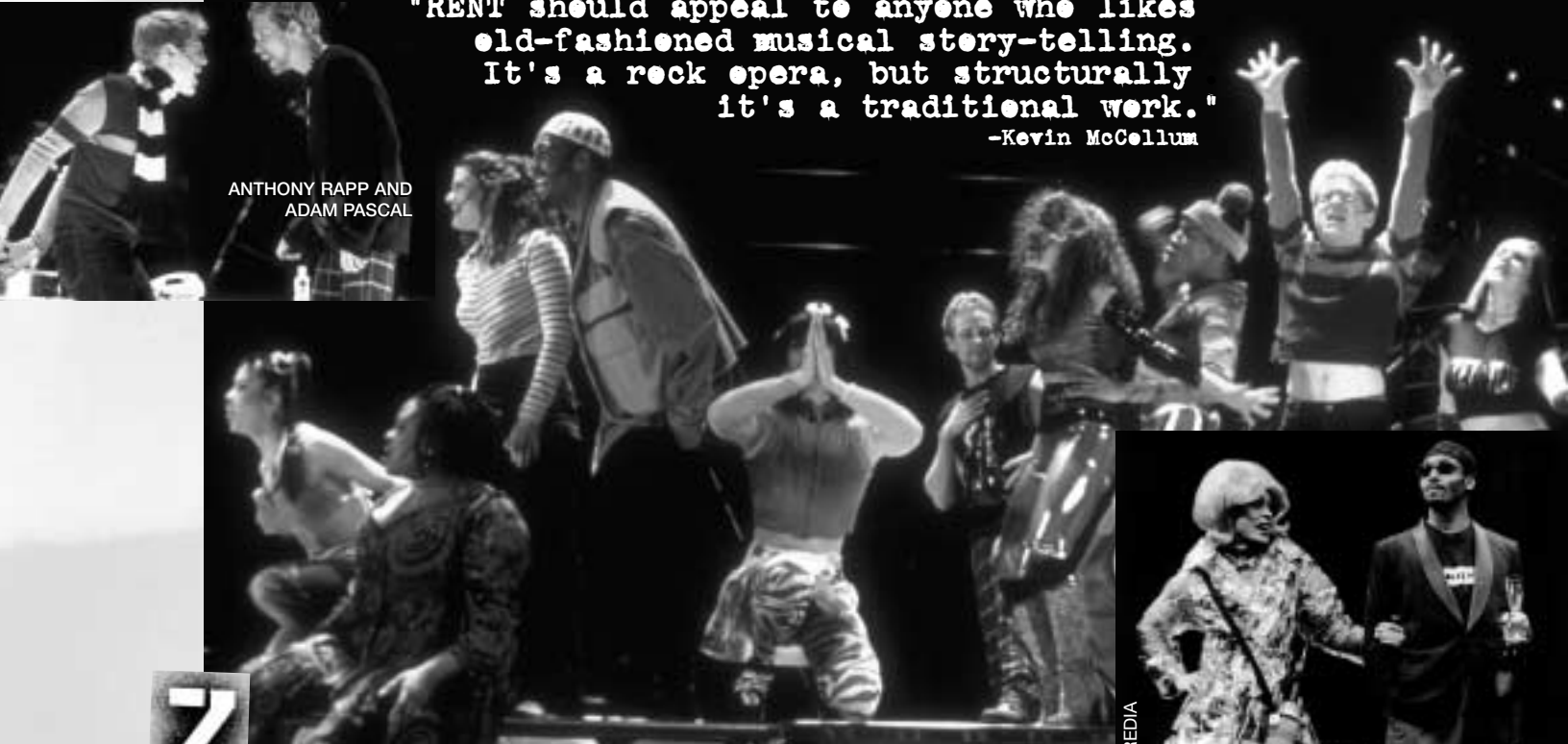
"I sit every night in that theatre and think about what was to come that's now denied to us," says James Nicola, "Thirty years of great theatre have been lost."



# MUSICAL THEATRE: AN AMERICAN SOUND

"RENT should appeal to anyone who likes old-fashioned musical story-telling. It's a rock opera, but structurally it's a traditional work."  
-Kevin McCollum

ANTHONY RAPP AND  
ADAM PASCAL



Z

## ZOOM IN: GOALS OF THIS SECTION

- Investigate musical theatre as a uniquely American art form.
- Study the golden age of songwriting, when songwriters created an American sound.
- Explore how Jonathan Larson continues this tradition with *RENT*.
- Investigate how Larson uses music in *RENT* to create characters, mood, conflicts, and move the story.

WILSON JERMAINE HEREDIA  
AND JESSE L. MARTIN



Jonathan Larson loved rock and roll's infectious beat and its potent emotion, but recognized that **musical theatre needed songs that told stories, and moved characters through those stories.**

Listen to your favorite song, whether by Bruce Springsteen, Dr. Dre, Sheryl Crow or Smashing Pumpkins. How does it make you feel? Does it tell a story, or just express a feeling? Do the lyrics create a character? Does the character change through the song?

With *RENT*, Larson combined the rhythms of popular music with the traditional story-telling forms of musical theatre.

***RENT* is the latest in a tradition of musical theatre and songwriting that began more than a century ago.**

Here is a very brief overview of the work that influenced *RENT* and resources for further research and discovery. The musical theatre, like jazz, is a uniquely American art form that has influenced artists throughout the world. In your research, explore how musical theatre has changed as the culture has changed, culminating in *RENT*.

## TIN PAN ALLEY (*THE LANGUAGE OF THE STREET*)

The early part of this century was a golden age of song-writing. Tin Pan Alley song-writers ( so *nick-named because the sound of dozens of pianos all playing at once heard through the open windows on West 28th street, Music Publishers Row, sounded like crashing tin pans*) such as Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein II, Richard Rodgers, George M. Cohan, George and Ira Gershwin and Cole Porter wrote songs that were witty, sharp, elegant, and used the language of the streets, moving away from old-fashioned European standards and finding what Gerald Mast, author of *Can't Help Singin': The American Musical On Stage and Screen*, called, "a more informal, colloquial, American sound."

In her review of *RENT*, Margo Jefferson of *The New York Times* said, "Once upon a time, American musicals were fresh and daring, eager to take the culture's temperature and catch its tempo." For these Tin Pan Alley song writers, the world around them was inspiration.

At the turn of the century, with radio, film and television still only dreams of the future, Tin Pan Alley sold its songs through sheet music. In order to entice the public to buy a particular song, music publishers had it sung in bars, taverns, street corners - and in theatres. In the emerging Broadway theatre, Tin Pan Alley found a perfect audience. The songs were urbane and witty, but remained unintegrated. That is, they could easily stand alone outside the musicals. These shows were really created to showcase the songs.

### **R**ESOURCES:

*The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America's Great Lyricists* by Philip Furia. Oxford Press, NY, 1990.

*Can't Help Singin': The American Musical on Stage and Screen* by Gerald Mast. Overlook Press, Woodstock, NY, 1987.

*125 Years of Musical Theatre* by Hollis Alpert. Arcade Publishing, NY, 1991.

*American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* by Gerald Bordman. Oxford University Press, NY, 1978.



ANTHONY RAPP AND ADAM PASCAL



## IDEAS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

- Listen to these songs from Tin Pan Alley composers. Keep in mind that these songs were often used in several Broadway shows regardless of the story. A show's story wasn't as important as the wit and beauty (and profit value) of the songs.

Irving Berlin - "There's No Business Like Show Business" (1946)

Rodgers & Hart - "Manhattan" (1920)

Cole Porter - "Let's Misbehave" (1927)  
 "Night And Day" (1932)  
 "You're the Top" (1934)  
 "It's De-Lovely" (1936)

George and Ira Gershwin - "Someone To Watch Over Me" (1926)  
 "I Got Rhythm" (1930)

IRVING BERLIN



RODGERS & HART



Compare these songs to songs in *RENT* in terms of how the lyricists use language, rhyme, how they refer to events of the day.

- The lyricist Yip Harburg (who wrote such classics as "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" and "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?") once said, "**Words make you think thoughts. Music makes you feel a feeling. But a song makes you feel a thought.**" What does he mean? Listen to the songs in *RENT*. How do they make you feel a thought?

## MUSIC AND LYRICS

Musical theatre changed in 1927, when Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern wrote a musical called *Show Boat*, based on Edna Ferber's 1926 novel about life in America after the Civil War. It was the first musical to present rousing song and dance numbers while exploring serious subjects like race relations, alcoholism and child abandonment. Most important, **the songs were integrated into the story; they moved the story along and helped to define the characters.** In his book "Broadway Musicals" (Abradale Press, NY, 1984), Martin Gottfried states that Hammerstein's lyrics allowed the audience to "keep the story in mind while enjoying the musical numbers."

In 1943, Hammerstein worked with composer Richard Rodgers on *Oklahoma!*. Everything in the show, every song, every line, every dance, was used to advance the story. And, since the show was a great hit, with songs like "Oh, What A Beautiful Morning" and "People Will Say We're In Love," the sound of musical theatre changed.

RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN







## IDEAS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

- Listen to recordings (or, if you're lucky, see a production!) of one of these Rodgers & Hammerstein musicals:

*Oklahoma!* (1943)

*Carousel* (1945)

*South Pacific* (1949)

*The King and I* (1951)

*The Sound of Music* (1959)

- How are the songs integrated into the story? Compare these shows to *RENT* - how does Larson integrate the songs into the story? How do the songs move the story of the musical along - how do they help create the characters?
- How does Jonathan Larson use the different meanings of the word "rent" in *RENT*?
- Chicken or the egg question: What is more important, the music or the lyrics?

"What drew Jonathan and me together in a philosophical place was the belief in how tragic it was that pop music and theatre music had gotten a divorce. I felt he was the first composer I had run into to do something about it."

- James Nicela



"Once upon a time, musical theatre was the contemporary music. Somewhere along the way, the Broadway sound became an art form unto itself, as opposed to something applicable to the world around it."

- George Wolfe, Producer, New York Shakespeare Festival (in USA Today 3/29/96)

- Study the recent history of musical theatre. Why have the past 30 years seen the rise and success of musicals that deal with timely problems and issues? Listen to recordings of these musicals. How do they deal with contemporary issues?

**West Side Story (1957)**  
**Cabaret (1966)**  
**Hair (1968)**  
**Company (1970)**  
**Follies (1971)**  
**Godspell (1971)**

**Jesus Christ Superstar (1971)**  
**The Wiz (1975)**  
**A Chorus Line (1975)**  
**Runaways (1978)**  
**Working (1978)**  
**Merrily We Roll Along (1981)**  
**Assassins (1990)**

- Choose a rock or rap song that you like. Would it work in a musical? Does it tell a story or simply set a mood or a feeling? Take 10 of your favorite songs, by the same or different artists. Try to string them together into a story.
- In *RENT*, how does Jonathan Larson use and mix these different musical genres:

**rock**  
**soul**  
**gospel**  
**R & B**  
**rap**  
**reggae**  
**punk rock**  
**torch song**  
**tango**  
**ballad**  
**call and response**

- How does Jonathan Larson use changing meter, rhythm patterns and beats to create characters and move the story?
- Why are composers attracted to classic works as the inspiration for modern musicals?
- List classic novels, poems or movies that you think would make good musicals. Describe your reasons for picking these works. How would you translate your classics onto the musical stage? What would the music sound like? What would the set and costumes look like? How would you create the atmosphere of the original work? Would you change the time period of the piece, as Larson has done with *RENT*?
- Write a personal music philosophy statement: what kinds of music do you like, and why?

**"I think RENT talks to a culture that can no longer sing and needs to learn that music, and following one's voice, regardless of the odds, heals the soul."**

**- Producer Kevin McCollum**

WILSON JERMAINE HEREDIA  
 AND IDINA MENZEL



# R ESOURCES

## MUSICAL THEATRE WEBSITES:

-Theatre Direct International -  
<http://www.theatredirect.com>

-Playbill.com - <http://www.playbill.com>

-*RENT* website  
<http://www.siteforrent.com>

## TEXTS:

-*RENT* by Jonathan Larson, William  
Morrow, NY, 1997

LEFT TO RIGHT:  
ADAM PASCAL  
ANTHONY RAPP  
DAPHNE RUBIN-VEGA



# NO DAY BUT TODAY:

## LIVING WITH DEATH

There's only us  
There's only this  
Forget regret  
Or life is yours to miss

No other road  
No other way  
No day but today



JESSE L. MARTIN AND ADAM PASCAL



## ZOOM IN: GOALS OF THIS SECTION

- Explore how Jonathan Larson used the AIDS crisis as an inspiration for *RENT*, just as Murger and Puccini had used tuberculosis in the 19th century.
- Using the toast in the song "La Vie Boheme," "To living with, not dying from disease," discuss the courage and support needed to live with disease.
- Explore the need, in life and literature, for grief and ritual mourning.

"With this work, I celebrate my friends and the many others who continue to fulfill their dreams and live their lives in the shadow of AIDS. In these dangerous times, where it seems the world is ripping apart at the seams, we can all learn how to survive from those who stare death squarely in the face every day, and we should reach out to each other and bend as a community, rather than hide from terrors at the end of the millennium."

-Jonathan Larson

How do you continue to live in the shadow of death? When he wrote *Scenes de la vie de boheme*, Henry Murger was reacting to the death of many of his friends from tuberculosis, just as Jonathan Larson later wanted to record the lives of his friends living with AIDS in *RENT*. But Larson explores in depth what Murger and Puccini only touch on: the great courage of those "living with, not dying from, disease."

## FRIENDS IN DEED

When Larson's childhood friend, Matthew O'Grady, learned that he was HIV positive, he went with Larson to a support group called Friends In Deed. "Jonathan came with me to the meeting and held my hand," O'Grady remembers, "He went through this with me."

Although Larson had no way of knowing that his own life would be cut short, watching his friends deal with illness gave him a new outlook on life. A friend, Edward Rothstein says: "Somehow, Jonathan found the nerve to keep working in the diner, to be true to his art, to realize that life was to be lived a day at a time. How could he kvetch about his struggles when friends were dying?"

Friends In Deed was founded by the director Mike Nichols and Cynthia O'Neal to provide emotional, spiritual and psychological support to anyone affected by a life-threatening illness, primarily HIV/AIDS and cancer. The former director of development, Robert McNamara says, "The premise that guides Friends is that **no one should be ill without strong, loving, emotional and spiritual support.** It is through this support that people find the psychological well-being that improves and often extends life."

Every week, a large group (called the Big Group) meets, where people can express their fears, their pride and gather strength from the community. McNamara: "By seeing our work first-hand, Jonathan was able to capture the essence of what Friends is all about. **That's why the song 'No Day But Today,' feels like an anthem.**"

One of the guiding principles at Friends In Deed is, ... "when I am in good shape, and you're having a difficult time, I'll support you. When the reverse is true, you'll support me. One of the most healing things we can do for ourselves is service."

Consider this in regards to *RENT*. How do the different characters support each other?



DAPHNE RUBIN-VEGA AND ADAM PASCAL

### Consider that communication is a form of healing.



JESSE L. MARTIN, ANTHONY RAPP AND TAYE DIGGS

If you're in the New York area and wish to attend a Big Group meeting, Friends In Deed welcomes visitors. Call or write to them for more information at:

**FRIENDS IN DEED, INC.**  
 594 Broadway, Suite 706  
 New York, NY 10012  
 Phone: 212-925-2009  
 Fax: 212-925-2688  
 web-site: <http://www.stepstones.com/friends>

If you live outside the New York area, visit a local support group for AIDS or cancer patients. How is their community like the "Life Support" group that Larson created in *RENT*? How do you create a life when death can come at anytime? Just as an artist makes "something out of nothing," as Mark sings, someone with a serious disease must create a new kind of life. In *RENT*, this is done with a support group, surrounded by supportive friends, singing, "there's only us."



## IDEAS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

- After Larson's death, the company gathered at the New York Theatre Workshop for a private performance. Discuss funeral rituals from different societies, and how people come together after a friend has died. How does ritual comfort the living? How do the characters in *RENT* remember the dead? How do communities come together to mourn the dead? How does the sense of community in *RENT* help the characters to cope with the fear and inevitability of death?

**Five hundred twenty five thousand  
Six hundred minutes**



**How can you measure the life  
Of a woman or a man?**

- Discuss the need for grief and ritual mourning. How do the characters in *RENT* create rituals to deal with their grief, and remember those who died?
- Write a year-long journal, describing your life and the important moments. **Can you answer Larson's "How do you measure a year in the life?"**
- The Latin phrase *carpe diem* means, "**Seize the Day.**" Apply this phrase to the characters in *RENT* and to Jonathan Larson.
- Compare the attitudes towards life and death in *RENT* to those seen in these novels and poems:

***The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery**

***Death, Be Not Proud* by John Gunther**

***A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis**

***The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank**

***The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane**

***Night* by Elie Wiesel**

**"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" by Thomas Gray**

**"Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas**

**"The Death of the Hired Man" by Robert Frost**

**"Annabel Lee" by Edgar Allan Poe**

**Every Shakespeare tragedy and most of his comedies!**

**"It's not how many years you live, but how you  
fulfill the time you spend here. That's sort of  
the point of the show."  
-Jonathan Larson**



# HIV AND AIDS



Find  
One song  
Before the virus takes hold  
Glory  
Like a sunset

## Z

### OOM IN: GOALS OF THIS SECTION

- **Students are given a brief overview of AIDS and the history of the AIDS crisis.**
- **Explore how AIDS affects the characters in *RENT*.**

Many characters in *RENT* are infected with the HIV virus or have AIDS, so here's a brief background on the disease and its effects. At the 1996 Republican National Convention, a little girl infected with AIDS spoke to the assembly and said, "**I am the future and I have AIDS.**" Although scientists are more hopeful than ever, AIDS is not going away.

Most scientists believe that AIDS is caused by infection with a virus called Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV attacks the main front of the body's defense, or immune, system. AIDS kills by breaking down the body's defenses, leaving the body vulnerable to common ailments, such as pneumonia, which a functioning immune system would normally be able to fend off.

People can live for a decade or longer with HIV before symptoms develop. AIDS is the last stage of HIV, when characteristic infections appear and the immune system begins to decline.

Infection by HIV cannot be caused by casual contact, but through a specific set of behaviors:

- Unprotected heterosexual or homosexual intercourse
- Sharing contaminated needles or other injection equipment
- Mothers can transmit the virus to their unborn infants
- A transfusion of contaminated blood or transplant of tissue



ADAM PASCAL AND DAPHNE RUBIN-VEGA



Although those infected with HIV and AIDS were included in the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990, making discrimination against them illegal, fear has contributed to hate crimes against the infected. Retired Admiral James D. Watkins, Chairman of the Presidential AIDS Commission has said that discrimination was “the most significant obstacle to progress” against the disease.

**Consider that communication can be a powerful weapon against the effects of AIDS.**

Although initial medicines and treatments looked promising, by 1987 there was only one drug licensed to treat HIV: zidovudine, or AZT. AZT works by destroying the chemicals HIV needs to begin its deadly cycle. AZT is not a cure for AIDS, but can stop it from growing. Although AZT has helped many with HIV and AIDS to improve their quality of life and increase their survival, it has many drawbacks. It must be taken on a rigorous time schedule (this is why Mimi and Roger carry beepers to remind them when to take their AZT). In some cases, the HIV virus may become resistant to the effects of AZT.

**Today, scientists are more hopeful than ever that a treatment, if not a cure, for AIDS can be found.** There is much hope in new drugs, which neutralize chemicals HIV needs to thrive toward the end of its cycle. Scientists have great hope in new therapies which involve combinations of these drugs, which attack the virus and at the same time, do not allow the virus to become resistant to one drug.

Although hope is high about new treatments, this disease is far from cured. As Jon Cohen writes in “AIDS Isn’t Over,” (“Slate” online magazine, 11/22/96) “HIV has a long history of laughing last.”

All studies have shown that support, such as that given by Friends In Deed, in the form of regular care giving, and emotional support, go a long way in fighting the effects of HIV and AIDS. In the end, community, and communication, may be among the most effective treatments for dealing with the continuing threat of AIDS.

**To people living with,  
living with,  
living with,  
Not dying from disease**

**R**

**RESOURCES:**

*Know About AIDS (Second Edition)* by Margaret O. Hyde and Elizabeth Forsyth, Walker and Co., NY, 1990.

*AIDS: What Does It Mean To You?* By Margaret O. Hyde and Elizabeth Forsyth, Walker and Co., NY 1990.

*And the Band Played On* by Randy Shilts, St. Martin’s Press, NY, 1987.

# LIVING AT THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM

When you're living in America  
At the end of the Millennium  
You're not alone

## Z

### OOM IN: GOALS OF THIS SECTION

- As young people living at the end of the Millennium, students will be encouraged to think about the progress and problems that have arisen in the 20th century and contemplate the future they will be a part of.

A millennium is a period of a thousand years. Many believe that the next millennium will be a time of rebirth and unity, while others believe we are moving toward an era of chaos. In his book "Century's End" (Doubleday, NY, 1990), Hillel Schwartz says that the end of each century brings up "the best and the worst...the most desperate and the most exultant."



ANTHONY RAPP

## I

### DEAS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

- What are your feelings as we enter the next century, the next millennium? Are you optimistic or pessimistic? Why?



DAPHNE RUBIN-VEGA AND ADAM PASCAL

- First, think about what ideas, artistic movements, inventions, or philosophies have most influenced the 20th century. Then, create a "time-line" for the next century.
- What events, inventions, artistic achievements do you think will occur in the next hundred years? Speak to your grandparents or older members of your community about how they felt when this century was still new. How do their feelings compare with yours?

- Write a story, skit or poem about the characters in *RENT*. What do you think happens to them after the events in the show?



# AN INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN LARSON

BY JOHN ISTELE

Do you see your music as part of the American Musical tradition?

My whole thing is that American popular music used to come from theatre and Tin Pan Alley, and there's no reason why contemporary theatre can't reflect real contemporary music, and why music that's recorded or that's made into a video cannot be from a show. Popular music being part of theatre ended with *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Hair* and rock musicals in the late 1960s. A number of things happened. One was that there had been singers in the '40s, '50s, even early '60s, who would sing anybody's material - Frank Sinatra, what have you. Then, beginning with the Beatles, you had songwriters and bands who were only singing their own material. So you didn't have that venue for theatre music to be popular.

What do you think about Randy Newman's latest musical project (*Faust*) and other pop stars working in the theatre?

New York Magazine ran this article (about what was killing Broadway). The last part had a 12-step program - 12 ways to renovate Broadway. Number 12 was bringing new music to Broadway. They were getting all excited about Randy Newman, and Prince is evidently thinking about it, and Paul Simon is working on a new musical. That's exciting if they're successful and if they bring younger people to the theatre who wouldn't normally go. But it's almost going backward to have a musical that is songwriter-generated because of the traps they can fall into.

They're used to a number of things: not collaborating, not making changes and writing in their own voice. There's so much that Rodgers and Hammerstein and Sondheim have taught us about how to

advance plot and character and theme in a song. Often, you get contemporary pop writers who know how to write a verse and a chorus, but they don't necessarily know how to write an inner monologue where a character goes through a change by the end of the song so the plot and story continues.



What's Jonathan Larson's style?

**I'm a rock-and-roller at heart and I'm influenced by contemporary music. There is a Jonathan Larson style, but I can't totally describe it.**

Who were your favorite composers?

**Well, I loved Pete Townshend growing up, and I loved the old Police and Prince - or whatever his name is - he's brilliant. I love Kurt Cobain and Liz Phair. Beatles. And in the theatre - Leonard Bernstein, Sondheim. I absolutely love them.**

On the Genesis of *RENT* -

**Ira Weitzman put me in touch with Billy Aronson who had an idea - years ago - to do a modern-day *La Boheme*. Billy's done stuff at Ensemble Studio Theatre and with Showtime and TV, and he's a sort of Woody Allen type and he wanted to do a modern-day *La Boheme*, set it on the Upper West Side, and make it about Yuppies and funny. I said, "That doesn't interest me, but if you want to set it in Tompkins Square park and do it seriously, I like that idea a lot." He had never spent any time in the East Village, but he wrote a libretto. He wanted to write the book and lyrics, and I was to set a few of the songs to music and see what everyone's response was. I also came up with the title of *RENT*. So I wrote "Rent," "Santa Fe" and "I Should Tell You."**

**I found different types of contemporary music for each character, so the hero (Roger) in *RENT* sings in a Kurt Cobain-esque style and the street transvestite sings like De La Soul. And there's a Tom Waits-esque character. The American musical has always been taking contemporary music and using it to tell a story. So I'm just trying to do that.**

**We made a demo tape and everyone loved the concepts, loved the music - but when they read the accompanying libretto, they weren't too strong on it. So we just put it on hold. I loved the concept, but I didn't have a burning reason to go back to it. And then I did.**

**Two years later a number of my friends, men and women, were finding out they were HIV-positive. I was devastated, and needed to do something. I decided to ask Billy if he could let me continue by myself, and he was very cool about it.**

**I am the kind of person that when I write my own work, I have something I need to say. It surprises me that in musicals, even plays today, sometimes I don't see what the impetus was, other than thinking it was a good smart idea, or it could make them some money or something.**

What's it like making a living as a composer in the theatre these days?

**Well, the old thing about how you can make a killing but you can't make a living is absolutely true. I'm proof of that. Now, I have the ability to compete trying to write jingles, trying to do other kinds of music that makes money, and I haven't put myself out there. My feeling is that it's not what I want to do, and I would be competing with guys who want to. So I'm just working on musicals - it's like this huge wall, and I'm chipping away at it with a screwdriver. I just keep making a little more headway. I've had a lot of very generous grants, but they all go to the play. I get a little stipend, but I can't live off the commissions.**

**I work two days a week waiting tables at the Moondance in SoHo. I've been there for eight-and-a-half years but I don't mind it. In fact, I love the customers - the regulars are fantastic. The management and the owner totally support me. I can take a couple of months off when I need to do a show, come back, and I've actually gotten work there twice. There was a little piece on me in *New York Magazine* a few years ago, and one of the regular customers who I'd known for years, Bob Golden, brought it up and said, "I saw that you were in *New York Magazine*, and that you wrote for Sesame Street." I said, "Yeah, it was mostly freelance." He said, "Have you ever considered making a children's video yourself? You can make a lot of money." I said, "I'd love to but I don't have the capital to put up." He said, "Well, I do."**

And the next week, I brought in a five-page budget and concept, and handed it to him with his eggs, and he totally went for it. It's a half-hour video called *Away We Go*. It stars a puppet called Newt the Newt. (Unfortunately, we came up with that name before it took on other connotations.) It's for very young kids - Sesame Street age. The great thing about that - besides that someone was trusting me and putting up the money - was that I had something tangible that no one could take away from me. Theatre is so ethereal. You have programs, and you have maybe a recording of the show, but that's it. It's such a weird medium.

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## The Author of the *RENT* Study Guide

Peter Royston is the Educational Sales Manager for Theatre Direct International, a theatrical ticket sales and marketing agency working with the Broadway, Off-Broadway and London theatre communities. He is the author of study guides for *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Rent*, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, *Magic On Broadway*, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, *Les Misérables* (co-author), *Miss Saigon* (co-author), the touring productions of *A Chorus Line*, and *Jam On The Groove*. He is the editor and primary writer for *Theatre Direct International Magazine* and is writer and webmaster for the Theatre Direct Web Site (<http://www.theatredirect.com>). He is co-author of the *Les Misérables* Web Site (<http://www.lesmis.com>). His interview with director Baayork Lee appears in the *Chorus Line* souvenir brochure. He is a member of the Education Committee at the League of American Theatres and Producers. Before working with TDI, he was an assistant to Alan Wasser, General Manager for the Broadway and Touring productions of *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon*. Mr. Royston is the former Artistic Director of The Royston Theatre Company, a New York based troupe of actors, musicians and artists. With the RTC, he directed critically acclaimed productions of *Twelfth Night*, *Saint Joan*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *Don Carlos*, *The Tempest*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Coriolanus*. He and his wife, Ann, are very proud of their beautiful children, William, Timothy and Claire.

## CITATIONS

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RENT STUDY GUIDE



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