

'Rent' cast: There's no day, but today

Dramatic rock opera comes to Opera House Tuesday



The cast of 'Rent' comes to the Detroit Opera House this week.

BY LANA MINI
STAFF WRITER

It's a rock opera with a vivacious message that appeals to young and hip, mature and cultured audiences.

"Rent jolts viewers physically, mentally and spiritually if you're willing to let it seep in," said Kevin Spencer, who portrays Roger. He's performed it nearly 500 times in two years and embraces its underlying theme of love and immediacy.

Rent, inspired by La Bohème, is the Pulitzer Prize- and Tony Award-winning rock musical that's coming to the Detroit Opera House, Tuesday-Sunday, March 18-23.

The musical was originally geared toward Generation X and celebrates a community of New York artists circa 1995. They're perplexed by hardships they endure while trying to live their artistic ideals. Art, creativity, HIV, hope, love and heartbreak are prevalent themes.

Spencer is an interesting character to watch both on and off stage. The Canadian actor had an ascending musical career before joining Rent. The guitarist-drummer-vocalist performed in Lilith Fair and for the Queen of England. His band Mezzanine, described as Bach-meets-Peter Dinklage-produced-by-Radiohead, was gaining serious label, fan and media attention before Rent called for his voice.

So for the moment, Rent is Spencer's love.

"The recurring message is 'there's no day but today,' but you don't realize it until the end," Spencer said. "If we

stopped measuring our accomplishments with money, stock or oil and instead measured life with love and how we treat others, then the world would be even more beautiful than it is today. It's not just a theater production, it's an experience."

Rent features musical direction by Tim Weil and choreography by Marlies Yearby. Widely publicized is that Rent's creator, Jonathan Larson never saw the play's success. Larson died unexpectedly of an aortic aneurysm in 1996, hours after Rent's final off-Broadway dress rehearsal.

"Larson's writing was genius not because he writes great songs and scripts, but the way the music tells the same story as the lyrics," Spencer explained. "When I sing a song where the lyrics tell the same story as the music, I have no choice but to be completely absorbed by it."

His character, Roger—who has HIV, but not AIDS—constantly fights with himself. He needs to learn to love himself. Spencer understood Roger's character even before Rent.

"Before Rent I was in a pretty dark place," Spencer said. "I was doing things that weren't healthy for me. I went through a hard break-up from a serious long-term relationship, personally I wasn't in a positive place. I can understand some of the pain, the 'poor me' feeling that the character Roger endures."

"Rent is for anyone with an open mind."

And for anyone who wants to leave the theater with a desire to love more than before.

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IF YOU GO

What: Rent

Where: March 18-23

Where: Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway

Shows: 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, 7:30 p.m. Sunday.

Tickets: On opening night March 18, prime seats are discounted \$13 off regular price. Tickets that night are \$20-\$42.50. Tickets for remaining shows \$20-\$55.50, available at the Detroit Opera House or Fisher Theatre, or call (248) 645-6666. For information, call (313) 872-1000 or visit www.nederlander.com.

For more about Rent, visit www.rentthetour.com

From 'Rent' to Mezzanine and back again

BY LANA MINI
STAFF WRITER

Kevin Spencer, who plays Roger in *Rent*, is the guitarist for the Canadian band Mezzanine.

The band was gaining serious momentum by MTV, its fans, and big record labels before *Rent* entered Spencer's life.

Rent came to Spencer, not vice versa. He wasn't originally thrilled about the idea of leaving his bandmates—his friends.

"I talked with the band and they knew that *Rent* is serious stuff," Spencer said. "And they know I'll be back." And he will.

When *Rent* is over, he'll re-direct his energy to Mezzanine.

In the meantime, watch for news about the band and hear the music on the Internet at www.mezzaninemusic.net.

UPCOMING EVENTS

UMS Choral Union

Wind Ensemble of the Greater Lansing Symphony Orchestra
Thomas Sheets conductor

Sat 3/22 8 pm
Pecore Auditorium • Ypsilanti

After serving as conductor of the UMS Choral Union for the past decade, Thomas Sheets conducts his final performance with the Choral Union. Under Dr. Sheets' leadership, the UMS Choral Union has won high praise for its glorious sound. The Choral Union "made this uncompromising music... sound at once sublime and altogether manageable." (The Detroit News)

PROGRAM
Hanninger King David
Dunfee Requiem

Kodo

Mon 3/24 1 pm

Tue 3/25 1 pm

Wed 3/26 8 pm

Michigan Theater • Ann Arbor

Nothing can quite compare with the visceral power and transcendent beauty of Kodo. A group that must be experienced to be believed, these mesmerizing drummers from Japan's Sado Island have generated a wildly enthusiastic following since their stunning debut in 1981.

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Susan Graham

mezzo-soprano

Malcolm Marneau soprano

Fri 3/28 8 pm

Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre • Ann Arbor

Graced with a seamless and remarkably creamy sound, Susan Graham has emerged as one of the most sought-after singers of our time. At the apex of her career, Ms. Graham's imaginative portrayals of the most demanding lyric mezzo-soprano roles and her compelling interpretations of art song and symphonic literature place her in the same league as Cecilia Bartoli, Vesselina Kasarova, Jennifer Lorraine, and Anne Sofie von Otter.

Takács Quartet and Muzsikás

Sat 3/29 1 pm

Rackham Auditorium • Ann Arbor

The Takács Quartet returns with the popular Hungarian gypsy ensemble, Muzsikás, for a program of chamber music with Hungarian influences. Muzsikás traces Hungarian melodies back to their roots in the folk songs of Transylvania, performing the folk songs that inspired the conventional chamber music works of Bartók and Kodály performed in this program.

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Muzsikás

Featuring Márta Sebestyén

Sun 3/30 4 pm

Rackham Auditorium • Ann Arbor

"Muzsikás, with the breathtaking vocals of Márta Sebestyén, has made Hungarian music one of the most popular folk styles in Europe." (Boston Globe) Recognized around the world for their outstanding musicianship and enchanting interpretations of traditional Eastern European folk music, Muzsikás has been featured in a number of film scores, including *The English Patient*, which won an Oscar for music.

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