

Immigrants, We Get the Job Done: Michael's Rock and Roll Posse

As I noted to Posse readers lately, Tina and I were in NYC last week for a conference, and we saw HAMILTON at the Richard Rodgers Theater. (Bruce Springsteen was across the street, also on Broadway, but I couldn't snag any tickets for his acoustic show. Bruce tickets outside were going for \$5400, and if I had been alone, I might have bitten.)

Because I have had the CD for almost a year, I have listened to it several times each week, yet seeing it performed was an entirely different experience. I confess that I have listened to the original dozens of times, and have reveled in its freshness, and its articulate cleverness, and its cheekiness, and its immigrant sensibility. But because I do not have perfect pitch, I had not sussed out all the roles and never came to know the specifics of the complex narrative flow. Seeing it in person was like removing scales from my eyes. Inasmuch as it was written before Trump's campaign and victory, it was astounding how fresh the references were—political intrigues, cheating in humiliating fashion on his wife, being blackmailed for the infidelity, overwhelming personal ambition, exquisite betrayals, impetuous rivalries, and other headlines ripped from today's news, before they actually happened.

I was also completely overwhelmed by the racial audacity of the casting. The major roles—all historically white—were completely reversed here, with Hamilton, Washington, Jefferson, Burr, and Lafayette all played by African Americans: in order, Donald Webber, Jr, Bryan Clark, James Iglehart, Daniel Breaker, and James Iglehart doubling as Lafayette. I confess tremendous pride in its bold casting against type, and that it was entirely written by a Puerto Rican (music and lyrics, as well as playing the lead role).

This play is traveling all over, and is actually reprising here in Houston now, and has exceptional casting, but the Broadway version will always have the best available for the venue, even if not the original cast, with Lin-Manuel Miranda, Leslie Odom Jr., and others at the top of their game. In our show, the only memorable white character was Euan Morton, playing the fey King George as if it were a drag revue. Until I first heard the original cast recording, I had not known that Alexander Hamilton was an immigrant—another stream of its current relevance, pre-Trump, but which resonated throughout. Indeed, immigrants feature prominently in the show, as in *Immigrants, We Get the Job Done* (“Immigrants, we get the job done, Look how far I come, Look how far I come, Look how far I come, We get the job done.”)

But I was truly gobsmacked when I realized that it is really the women who are at the center of this work, notably the three Schuyler sisters (Angelica: Mandy Gonzalez, Eliza: Lexi Lawson, and Peggy: Joanna Jones). They provide much of the balance and pathos of the play, especially Hamilton's wife Eliza, whose role goes from glorious bride in a whirlwind romance and then loneliness, betrayal, and the deaths both of her son and husband in duels. I thought Gonzalez has the more fulsome vocal range, but Lawson was perfect in the complex central role of Eliza.

It is one of the best musicals I have ever known, going all the way back to the first albums I ever owned, CAMELOT and MY FAIR LADY. Throughout, I was struck by the conventional tools Miranda used, even though the stunning rap lyrics permeate the music, truly carving out a masala style of current and traditional musical genres. In a *60 Minutes* interview several years ago, Miranda shows the family's collection of Broadway musical albums, and he pulls out MY FAIR LADY and CAMELOT, and showing the influences of the Lerner and Loewe on his own work, IN THE HEIGHTS and especially the sing-song style of speaking that featured Rex Harrison as Professor Henry Higgins, a clear progenitor to the rapid-fire rap/hip hop lyrics in HAMILTON.

To close this review, I share the redoubtable Lin-Manuel Miranda, who did this spontaneous rap on a NYC two-decker, and I pass it along to you as a graduation gift, at the end of the semester. Enjoy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuVip8tDS30>

Happy final exam/grading/commencements to all of you,

Michael

PS: I attach a picture of Tina in front of the stage.

PPS: Next up: Paul Simon at the Toyota Center, June 2

Transcript of sentence:

“Look, having nuclear — my uncle was a great professor and scientist and engineer, Dr. John Trump at MIT; good genes, very good genes, OK, very smart, the Wharton School of Finance, very good, very smart — you know, if you're a conservative Republican, if I were a liberal, if, like, OK, if I ran as a liberal Democrat, they would say I'm one of the smartest people anywhere in the world — it's true! — but when you're a conservative Republican they try — oh, do they do

a number — that's why I always start off: Went to Wharton, was a good student, went there, went there, did this, built a fortune — you know I have to give my like credentials all the time, because we're a little disadvantaged — but you look at the nuclear deal, the thing that really bothers me — it would have been so easy, and it's not as important as these lives are — nuclear is powerful; my uncle explained that to me many, many years ago, the power and that was 35 years ago; he would explain the power of what's going to happen and he was right, who would have thought? — but when you look at what's going on with the four prisoners — now it used to be three, now it's four — but when it was three and even now, I would have said it's all in the messenger; fellas, and it is fellas because, you know, they don't, they haven't figured that the women are smarter right now than the men, so, you know, it's gonna take them about another 150 years — but the Persians are great negotiators, the Iranians are great negotiators, so, and they, they just killed, they just killed us.”

