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## PLATOON PICKS

Mets, Yankees instituting two-man rotations at infield positions. 23-24



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There's no sun, but that doesn't mean you can't get your vitamin D. 16

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# 'FROZEN' GROWS UP

The Oscar-winning songwriters behind 'Frozen' on Broadway tell us how their new musical, opening tonight, has grown up since the Disney movie. 19



DEEN VAN MEER



The musical goes deeper into the relationship of Elsa (Caissie Levy) and Anna (Patti Murin).  
ALL PHOTOS BY DEEN VAN MEER

"Women need to learn that they are the center of the universe," says Frozen co-songwriter Bobby Lopez.

# Broadway's **Frozen** is for grown-ups

Oscar-winning songwriters Robert and Kristen Anderson Lopez tell us about taking their musical "Frozen" from Disney film to Broadway.

T. MICHELLE MURPHY

Sure, "Frozen" is a Disney classic, but trying to sell weary parents on yet more of the musical — this time on Broadway at the St. James Theatre, opening March 22 — is not an easy task.

Despite the movie having come out in 2013, "Let It Go" remains in heavy rotation in the homes of every parent with children under age 10.

But Oscar-winning songwriters Robert and Kristen Anderson Lopez really want you to know that Broadway's "Frozen" is for grown-ups.

"This isn't the cartoon," Kristen explains over the phone from the Brooklyn home she shares with her husband. "It's about a family that's frozen into its roles because of a trauma, and how that dysfunction plays out, and how they heal it."

"Right on the ticket, it says, 'Recommended for

ages 8 and up,'" says Kristen, though she adds that she thinks "a sophisticated 5-year-old can have a really wonderful time."

We'll take her word, as the mother to two young daughters — who, it's no



Bobby Lopez and Kristen Anderson-Lopez  
PROVIDED

secret, helped inform Elsa and Anna in the film (and even loaned their voices). The making of "Frozen" has truly been a family affair, which is something the Lopezes hope comes through in the stage adaptation.

## From movie to stage

Expanding on those issues — in a film already packed with plenty of darker themes — was what kept the Lopezes with the franchise as it transitioned to the stage.

"One of the most exciting things leading us into this project was widening the lens of what true love is," Kristen says. "As a woman, I had stories in my head that you can fall

in love in one day and your problems are solved because of that.

"Actually, it's a lot more complicated; sometimes the love you're looking for means going back and connecting with your childhood and healing some stuff before you meet the handsome guy — or girl!"

Though Kristen brought a woman's essential perspective to the story, her husband Robert — the first double

EGOT-winning artist as of the 2018 Academy Awards — had his own feminist insights during his journey with Frozen.

"Kristen identified that men go on this journey, when they come of age, to discover that they're indeed not the center of the universe, that other people do exist," says Robert (or Bobby, as he introduces himself).

"Women need to learn that they are the center

of the universe, and their feelings are the only ones that matter. That's really what 'Let It Go' is about."

## New for Broadway

Complementing what Kristen calls "Shakespearean undertones" in the storyline, there are 12 all-new songs — doubling the total from the film itself.

They're woven into what's essentially the same plot from the movie, but help emphasize some of the moments that were formerly told through the animation.

"On stage, you really are telling an emotional story to music, and you don't have the benefit of close-ups or action sequences or complex plotting," Bobby says.

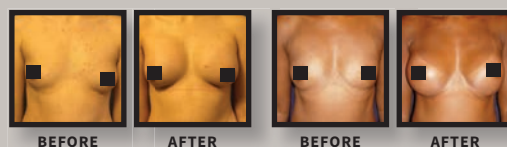
"And so what you need to do is take the moments that are really undoable onstage ... those are the moments we circled and chose to focus on and write the new songs."



Broadway newcomer Jelani Alladin stars as Kristoff.



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## LIFESTYLE

Star George Salazar tells us why "Be More Chill" is the coming-of-age musical for the 21st century.

T. MICHELLE MURPHY  
letters@metro.us

Coming-of-age stories have always featured plenty of drama, outrageous characters and over-the-top settings — so why are they just now trending on Broadway? The last couple years have seen the genre become a hugely popular niche in musicals, with "Dear Evan Hansen" racking up six Tony Awards in 2017 (including Best Musical) and "Mean Girls" being the hottest ticket of the 2018 season. And the next big thing is "Be More Chill."

Poised to be the next "Dear Evan Hansen" — if its die-hard fans have anything to say about it — the "Be More Chill" is in previews now and opens off-Broadway on Aug. 3. Fans have been buzzing about the musical since it premiered in New Jersey in 2015, and after selling out seven concerts at Feinstein's/54 Below in February, it's getting another fully staged run at the Pershing Square



Be More Chill is getting an off-Broadway run thanks to fans who have been supporting it since 2015. PROVIDED

Signature Center.

"At first we were devastated that there wasn't going to be a life beyond New Jersey for this show," says George Salazar, who returns as the protagonist's best friend, Michael. "We did a cast recording, but then we all kind of moved on."

Thankfully, that wasn't the end of the story. Like with many cult classics, it just took a little time for the show to find its fans where many underground hits ultimately do: online. "[Last May], I started to notice dozens of fan-art posts on a daily basis," says Salazar, who's

on Twitter as @george-salazar. "When it started, I think I was getting tagged in 50 posts a day. Which is crazy, because my social-media following back then was my friends and family! And it has not died down since."

"I remember tweeting: 'If the cast album isn't enough, and you want to see 'Be More Chill' live, retweet this.' That was the first time a tweet of mine went viral."

### So how does one "Be More Chill"?

A modern coming-of-age story like "Dear Evan

Hansen," it's no wonder "Be More Chill" became the second-highest trending musical on Tumblr in 2017 (no points for guessing that "Hamilton" was first). It starts, as many high school problems do, with a teen who isn't popular and can't get the girl he likes to notice him — to wit, he has zero chill. But he gets the chance to step up his game with the help of an addictive, personality-altering stimulant known as Squib. If he takes it, he is promised that he will, indeed, be cool — but at what cost?

The premise speaks to a generation raised is a minefield of digital adversity straight out of science fiction: cyber-bullying, hacking and doxxing; performance-enhancing drugs at every level of sports, even high school locker rooms; and about as many people on antidepressants as birth control. And that's just high school. "I can't imagine what

it must be like to grow up in this digital age, in the Trump era, when a little bit of difference in your life is bad," Salazar says. "Or people try to make you feel bad for being yourself."

It also helps that the show has an addictive score with lyrics by Joe Iconis (NBC's "Smash") and a quippy, of-the-moment book by Joe Tracz ("The Lightning Thief") that doesn't veer into patronizing or naive tropes.

"To this day, the show is the highlight of my career," Salazar says. "It's just a gift that we get to do this again."

Be More Chill runs through Sept. 23 at Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. Tickets are \$65-\$140 [bemorechillmusical.com](http://bemorechillmusical.com)



George Salazar

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# Three reasons to see 'Hamilton' on Broadway

Check out the play that even President Obama couldn't miss.



T. MICHELLE MURPHY  
@TMichelleMurphy  
tmichelle.murphy@metro.us

No one can predict the future, but there's a lot we can learn by rapping about the past. So it goes with "Hamilton," a new musical about the life and legacy of founding father Alexander Hamilton opening at the Richard Rodgers Theatre in New York today after a sold-out off-Broadway run.

This play challenges us to think about what's changed in politics in the past 200 years (and what hasn't). Putting the unpredictable presidential election into historical context is just one reason to catch this buzzy show on Broadway.

Here are a few more:



Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote and stars in "Hamilton," now on Broadway. JOAN MARCUS

## 'Hamilton'

Opens Aug. 6  
Richard Rodgers Theatre  
226 W. 46th St., New York  
\$57-\$167  
HamiltonBroadway.com

It's vital to support original plays on the world's most famous stage. After hip-hop musical "In the Heights" changed people's idea of what a show tune could be, the Great White Way

tried once again to get hip with "Holler if Ya Hear Me," a jukebox musical featuring the discography of Tupac Shakur. It closed after just six weeks. "Hamilton" finally gets the recipe right with a winning combi-

nation of today's sounds and tomorrow's ideas: Stephen Sondheim meets "The West Wing."

2 Not only is "Hamilton" groundbreaking stylistically, but the show goes one step fur-

ther with a cast almost entirely composed of people of color (with the exception of Jonathan Groff as King George). That's not just color-blind casting; it's throwing down the gauntlet for every other stage and screen produc-

tion to rethink who's best suited for a role.

3 So who's the rebel making waves on Broadway? Lin-Manuel Miranda, who wrote and starred in "In the Heights," is doing the same with "Hamilton." After taking on the titular role at the Public Theater in 2014, he continues to awe audiences (including President Obama) eight times a week. This isn't just a rising star — Miranda is a proven young talent you should experience for yourself.

These are the very same reasons that "Hamilton" is currently sold out. The good news is that a new block of tickets will go on sale Friday, while American Express cardholders can already buy seats through Ticketmaster.com. Otherwise, unless you're part of Obama's inner circle, there's always the box office lottery.

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Lucas Steele and Denee Benton in "Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812" CHAD BATKA

# 'Great' romance

The stars of "Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812" on finding love in "War and Peace."



T. MICHELLE MURPHY  
@TMichelleMurphy  
letters@metro.us

"Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812" has been evolving on the fringes of Broadway since 2012, but its debut at the Imperial Theatre has finally arrived. With a score that blends elements of rock musicals, Russian folk music and even a little opera (Josh Groban co-stars), the show tells the story of star-crossed love based on a slice of "War and Peace."

So far, so Broadway, but there's a unique intimacy to the show, too. The musical, set in Russia, begins with a round of pierogies for the audience, a portion of whom actually sit onstage; the actors also move through the aisles. But what's the story really about? We spoke to the musical's young lovers, Denee Benton (naive teen Natasha) and Lucas Steele (bad boy Anatole), to get to the heart of "Great Comet."

**It's Natasha's first love, so her actions are painfully relatable to anyone at any time in history.**

**Denee Benton:** Natasha feels that way about everything: She's that in love with the moon, with Andrey, with Anatole. I was definitely that 16-year-old (and I'm kind of that way now). Like: This is the best opera ever! This is the best flower ever!

**Lucas Steele:** I don't know that I had an experience this dramatic or filled with as much manipulation. But the thing about this that speaks to a lot of people is that it's kind of a soap opera.

**Anatole is the other man — how do you address that challenge of creating compassion for him?**

**LS:** His actions are rather despicable, but he's not conscious of them. He's not aware of anyone's feelings but his own. Having a wonderful co-star to fill every moment with this believable connection is important for this idea that he's not just in it to conquer something, he actually has feelings — though they're very misguided.

**DB:** I really like that about Tolstoy. Someone can ruin your whole life and you can still remember a time you laughed, and that's complicated. That's what's really great about this story.

**Lucas, you've been with the show since the start, and Denee, you just joined in 2015. How did you create the chemistry necessary to propel the drama of the show?**

**DB:** It was helpful to have people who knew the essence of the story so well. I got to bring my imagination, but the world was already carefully constructed, and I found that comforting because the role was challenging on its own. **LS:** It helped that there are a lot of similarities between us. When I need to fall in love with somebody quickly, I find all of the things that I recognize as my own.

Perhaps that makes me a narcissist. [Laughs]

**You're also working with Josh Groban, who's making his Broadway debut as Anatole's brother-in-law, Pierre.**

**LS:** I am continuously surprised at how much of a regular guy he is and how he's willing to embrace this piece. It's a tricky thing with Anatole, because he's got two main relationships: There's the romance and the bromance. The bromance, unfortunately, is much less genuine and there's much more manipulation going on than there is with [Natasha]. I'm hard-pressed to think of any other person that's as known as he is, who actually has the skill set to pull off this role.

**Denee, you stepped into a role originated by Philippa Soo, who went on to star in "Hamilton." Was there added pressure?**

**DB:** I was mostly comforted by the fact that someone my age had already successfully done it. Like: OK, it's possible. It helps that I was never made to feel like a second pick; I was embraced.

**LS:** Her coming in at this level, when it's so much larger than it was before, physically and the stamina that's required, she's faced it like a champ. And in no way to detract from anyone who came before, she's certainly come in at the most epic version of this production. And when it's one of your first jobs? It's incredible.

**DB:** Thank you. I call my mom crying a lot. [Laughs] But we've made it.



"In Transit" CRISTOBAL VIVAR

## Hot shows for cold weather

Get your tickets now to the best of Broadway and beyond.

T. MICHELLE MURPHY

When it comes to winter theater, NYC offers niche holiday fare with everything from singing Santas (at the "Christmas Spectacular") to naughty Nutcrackers (with risqué cabaret from Company XIV). But there are also plenty of traditional shows opening on and off-Broadway. Here are our top picks.

### "Dear Evan Hansen"

Written by hotshot composer and lyricist Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, "Dear Evan Hansen" was a smash hit when it debuted off-Broadway this year. Part of its fast appeal is the timely nature of its message, which involves a high school's reaction to the death of a student — and what one unpopular teenager (Ben Platt of "Pitch Perfect") will do when he spots an unique opportunity to fit in. Like an episode of "Glee" with undertones of "Next to Normal," the new musical touches on topics like suicide, social anxiety and how communities grieve. *Opens Dec. 4; dearevanhansen.com*



"Dear Evan Hansen" MATTHEW MURPHY

### "In Transit"

It was bound to happen: Broadway finally gets its first capella musical. "In Transit," as the name suggests, is an ode to New York City on the move, via the subway. While underground, 11 strangers find their lives interlocking in ways they couldn't have anticipated when they swiped their Metrocard at the turnstile. The upbeat score features vocal arrangements by Deke Sharon ("Pitch Perfect") and composition by Kristen Anderson-Lopez ("Frozen"). The musical is directed and choreographed by three-time Tony Award winner Kathleen Marshall. *Opens Dec. 11; intransitbroadway.com*

### "Othello"

Best known as Britain's premier spy but no stranger to the New York stage, Daniel Craig heads uptown to take on one of Shakespeare's most notorious villains, Iago, in New York Theatre Workshop's "Othello." The title role is played by a formidable David Oyelowo ("Selma"), joined by Rachel Brosnahan ("House of Cards") as Des-

demonia. Only membership, benefit and lottery tickets are still available to this highly anticipated production, helmed by returning NYTW director and Tony Award winner Sam Gold. *Opens Dec. 12; nytw.org*

### "Sunset Boulevard"

In a history-making production, Glenn Close returns to her Tony Award-winning role as Norma Desmond in the first Broadway revival of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Sunset Boulevard." An adaptation of the 1950 film, the story follows a fading diva and the tragedy that ensues when her delusions of grandeur are propped up by an opportunistic hustler; its classic score includes "With One Look" and "As If We Never Said Goodbye." Directed by Lonny Price, the musical will feature the largest orchestra on the Great White Way and is scheduled to run for just 16 weeks. Close is joined by co-stars from her West End appearance last April, including Michael Xavier (Joe Gillis). *Opens Feb. 9; sunsetboulevardthemusical.com*



"Sunset Boulevard" NICK WALL

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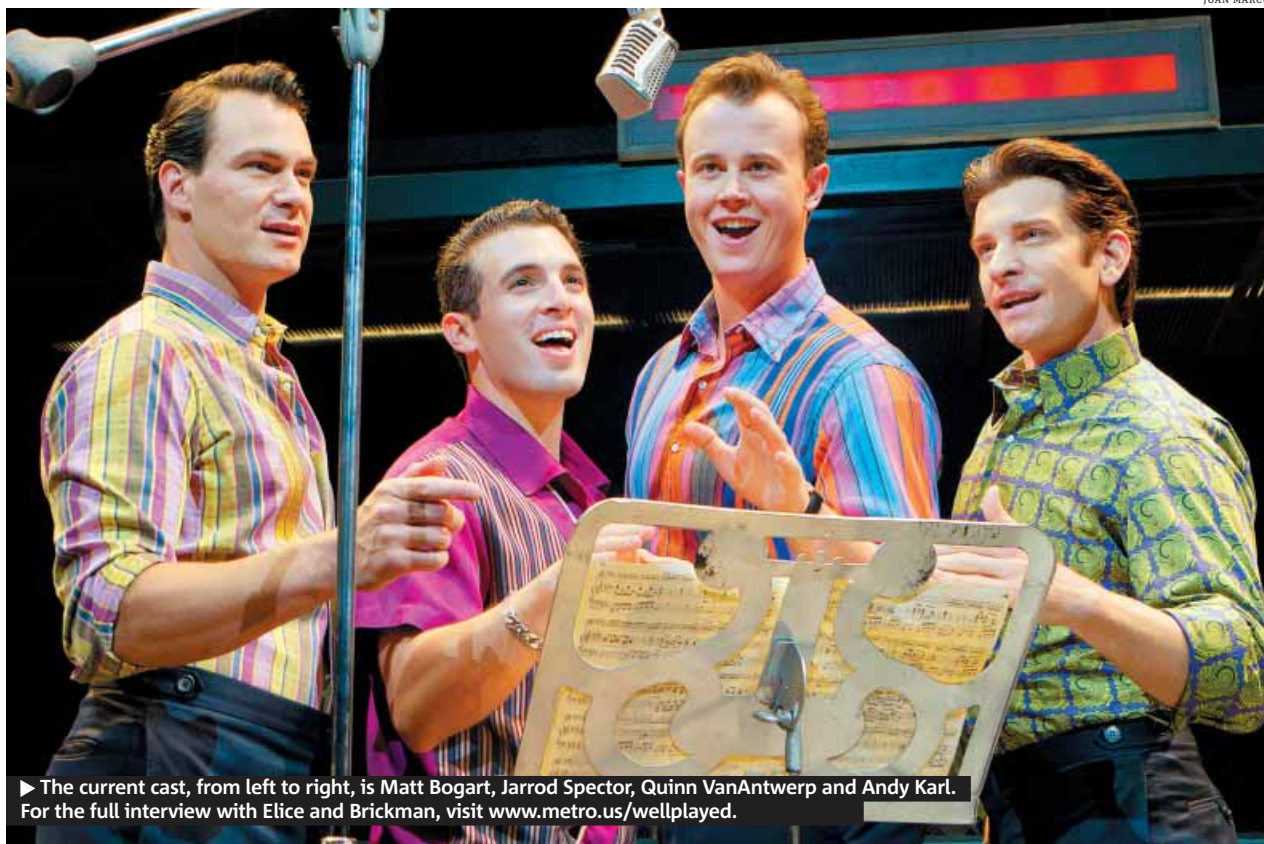
Now entering its seventh year onstage, "Jersey Boys" is a wildly popular musical revealing the behind-the-scenes story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. Intrigued by its ongoing ubiquity, we sat down with book writers Rick Elice and Marshall Brickman to discuss how this hit came about and what elements contributed to its indisputable success.

Unsurprisingly, the music was the main selling point. "A friend of mine had the rights to the catalog of the Four Seasons songs and said, 'How would you like to write a musical about Frankie Valli?'" recalls Elice. "I said, 'You mean the guy with the really high voice?' He started rattling off these song titles, all of which I knew, never associating them with the same group. I said, 'Marshall Brickman and I have been looking to write something.'"

Elice and Brickman had never professionally collaborated — and neither one had experience writing a Broadway musical. So Elice simply told his friend, "We'll see what can happen."

The resulting play follows the release time line of radio favorites such as "Sherry," "Walk Like a Man" and "Can't Take My Eyes Off Of You," and is subsequently known as a jukebox musical — a stigmatic label in the arts world.

"Theater has always been about adaptation," Elice re-



▶ The current cast, from left to right, is Matt Bogart, Jarrod Spector, Quinn VanAntwerp and Andy Karl. For the full interview with Elice and Brickman, visit [www.metro.us/wellplayed](http://www.metro.us/wellplayed).

**"Not only was it a true story, it was a good story. ... We had accidentally stepped on the mother lode."** ELICE

minds. "It's just about how you're going to tell it." Brickman agrees, arguing: "Nothing in life is a documentary. Anytime you're exercising editorial discretion, it's not truth anymore."

So what are the challenges of conveying someone's story

when they're still around to see it? (Valli is now 77 years old and still touring.)

"There was a bit of negotiation going on," admits Brickman. "We had to change some things at the request of Bob [Guardio] and Frankie — which we happily did." He adds

slyly, "Everybody has an ego, and everybody has an ex-wife."

So what's up next for this musical? The second national tour recently started in Philadelphia. And in April, the show will debut in Auckland, New Zealand. Valli has also booked two weeks of gigs

## Fast facts



- ▶ It's the 21st longest-running show on Broadway.
- ▶ It won four Tony Awards, including Best Musical in 2006.
- ▶ It's been seen by more than 13 million people worldwide.
- ▶ It's one of the highest-grossing weekly shows on Broadway.
- ▶ It raised more than \$1.2 million for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS.

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there. "[You can tell] he's excited, because he's taking a very long plane trip," jokes Elice.

Offstage, a "Jersey Boys" movie adaptation is in the works for 2014.

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**JERSEY BOYS**

# Names to know: Pasek and Paul

**Theater.** The duo could win a Tony, like their doubles on NBC's "Smash."

Benj Pasek and Justin Paul collaborated on the scores for both "Dogfight" and "A Christmas Story," which is nominated for three Tony Awards. But you might know their music from the play "Hit List" on NBC's "Smash." We asked about their sudden thrust into the limelight — and what it's like to see your life on TV.

**Are you nervous about Sunday?**

**Pasek:** It's more awesome than nerve-racking, but it's nerve-rackingly awesome! Every time we're watching a performance of our show, it's like, "Will the actors remember their lines?!" ... We would freak out and freeze up and be looking at the camera and be like, "What do we do?"

**Tune in**

## The American Theatre Wing Tony Awards

The 67th annual awards ceremony takes place this Sunday at Radio City Music Hall. Watch it live on CBS at 8 p.m. or visit the Nexxus simulcast in Times Square (Duffy Square, between 45th and 47th streets). See the full nominees list at [www.tonyawards.com](http://www.tonyawards.com).

**Paul:** We're like, "Oh, this is why we're writers!"

**Are you adapting well to the limelight?**

**Paul:** We get to be surrounded by these people that we've looked up to forever — that is the most surreal thing. We're obsessed with Judith Light. **Pasek:** She's been a real



Read more from our interview with Benj Pasek, left, and Justin Paul on Metro.us / KERRY LONG

godmother to us. She keeps calling me her son. I'm like, "OK, be my mom!" I sat next to her at a luncheon, and she's like, "Use this fork when you're eating!" She's giving me all this advice on how to be OK at fancy events.

**Is there anyone you still want to meet?**

**Pasek:** I would've said Tom Hanks, but we got to talk with him. So cool!

**Paul:** We were next to Tracy Letts once in an elevator, but I was too nervous to say anything.

**Pasek:** Harvey Fierstein gave us a slogan for our show: "Everyone needs a little f—ing Christmas!" **Do you feel like "A**

**Christmas Story" was written off as a holiday show?**

**Pasek:** We feel like the show has been written on! This is the first Christmas show that's been nominated for Best Musical, so we're really thrilled with how people have responded to it.

**How much were the**

**young writers on "Smash" based on you two?**

**Paul:** It's funny, we got excited at first. Some of the stories we would tell ended up in a couple of episodes.

**Pasek:** And then we watched the show and one, like, cheats on his boyfriend and gets killed in a car crash — and we're like, "THEY'RE NOT BASED ON US!"

**And now your work is going to the Tonys, just like theirs did. Do you think that means you'll also come out winners?**

**Paul:** We're just excited to be there, and that we're gonna be on a red carpet with Cyndi Lauper. **Pasek:** Like, please! We had no greater expectations than that — and it's on my birthday, too, so regardless of the outcome, it's gonna be a celebration.

**T. MICHELLE MURPHY**  
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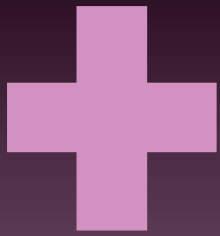
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PLUS

# TUPAC ON BROADWAY



These aren't holograms — they're just amazingly talented artists giving Tupac's music a fresh take. / JOAN MARCUS



For (almost) all ages

## Introducing his music to a new generation

"A lot of people bring up the fact that it's the young people that will come out — but folks in their 30s and 40s and even their 50s listen to hip-hop as well. It's always just sort of been seen as a young culture, but Jay-Z's 38! And he's arguably one of the most popular artists in the world. I don't think that it's just for 15-year-old kids. We're telling the story that [Tupac] went through some very serious life issues, and we've selected the kinds of things folks are going through every day. Of course there are more traditional styles, musically, but to characterize something as a Broadway show, I think that whole paradigm has shifted. You've got jazz musicals like 'After Midnight,' you've got hip-hop like 'In the Heights.' I think finally Broadway is starting to reflect our culture in a larger sense — and developing a larger audience in the process."

**Theater.** We can't say if you'll cheer it, but we know you'll buy tickets to hear this new musical when it opens next week.

The buzziest production hitting Broadway this summer is "Holler If Ya Hear Me," which adopts the music and lyrics of celebrated rapper Tupac Shakur. Although the soundtrack will be familiar, the plot follows a fictional storyline. It's about young men in the Midwest struggling with love (both familial and romantic) while navigating life on the streets. We spoke with star Christopher Jackson ("Bronx Bombers," "After Midnight") ahead of opening night, June 16.

**If it's not a Tupac biography, what's "Holler" actually about?**  
It was inspired by Tupac's music and written by Todd Kreidler. [I play] a character named Vertus who is waking up and coming to terms with the fact that his best friend is back from jail. He had a

really big problem with some of the decisions he had to make regarding his friend and his girlfriend and his mother, and on behalf of his brothers, so lots of stuff is happening in a very short amount of time.

**Is it intimidating to be presenting Tupac's music in this format?**

No, it's fun! I've been a fan of his my whole life, so to be telling the story using his lyrics and his music is pretty fulfilling for me. As an actor who grew up in the hip-hop generation, it's great to be a part of another show that highlights this culture in the '70s and exposes [it] to the world of Broadway, the storytelling aspect of what hip-hop really has become and all it has been.

**Tupac's music is the story of his life. So you've taken a real inner city experience and transposed it to the**

### Quoted

"The thing that was universal to us was that there were hard times everywhere. The music was reflecting what they were going through in their daily lives and what they were seeing in their immediate surroundings. I think everybody can relate to that one way or the other." Jackson

### Natural progression

**How does hip-hop fit on Broadway?**

Hip-hop is obviously one of the greatest cultural movements of my generation. I think it's great theater just on record, in terms of the storytelling aspect, the personalities that exist in it, the musical influences and the way that it's affected just about every aspect of our culture. I think it's the natural progression to see it on the Broadway stage.



Chris Jackson / PROVIDED

**Midwest — that means that the messages can resonate with anyone.**

I think that's the story of hip-hop. I grew up in southern Illinois; I didn't have a lot of stuff in common with these young guys that came out of South Central LA. The thing that was universal to us was that there were

hard times everywhere. The music was reflecting what they were going through in their daily lives and what they were seeing in their immediate surroundings. I think everybody can relate to that one way or the other.

**How do you feel with the opening night rapidly**

**approaching?**

I'm more concerned with what's happening today. We're still in rehearsals, still in previews. It's great to get it out in front of people. It feels great to know that it's not just our own, it's not just some secret that we're holding on to anymore, that folks can come and take a look at what we're working on.

**Who do you think is going to be the immediate crowd coming in?**

Obviously, fans of [Tupac] are going to come and hear his music. I think that the traditional Broadway fan is going to enjoy it because it's a really strong story [with] a really strong cast, and it's the kind of show I think is entertaining and also thought-provoking. You know Tupac was nothing if not an activist. He was an underdog. And I think that the spirit of Tupac will shine through. I think that anybody who loves theater is going to love to see this. Certainly, Tupac fans are going to love it.

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