Seneca Daily Journal
2/12/2010



A Clemson first, a Broadway smash

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — The message. The music. The mayhem that marks maturity.

It's all covered in the Clemson Player's production of "RENT" coming up the weekend of Feb. 26 at The Brooks Center.

The Broadway hit has racked up numerous awards since its powerful entrance onto the New York stage in 1996.

As one of the only universities to be granted rights to reproduce the musical nationwide, Mark Charney, director of the play and the theater program at Clemson, said the production is adored.

'We love the musical and believe in its message of love in times of great stress. The characters are well drawn and the music is great.'

Mark Charney
Director

"Audiences love 'RENT' for a number of reasons," he said. "For the college and some of the high school generation, it's not unlike HAIR in the '60s. Its message is love in a time of great turmoil — especially related to the epidemic AIDS. It's about artists who struggle to produce their work in times of economic hardship."

Set in New York's lower East Side, the characters are rich with raw talent, from artists to musicians to filmmakers, their struggles are anything but remote.

"It's about a group of young artists living in a loft in New York, who attempt to produce their art at the end of the millennium. It's about life and loss, about forgiveness and friendship. It's about how much can happen in a year, and about an extended family who work to preserve their love. And, of course, it's based on Puccini's 'La bohème,'" he added.

The music is acclaimed, as composer Jonathan Larson navigated many catchy arrangements like "Today 4 U," "On the Street," "I'll Cover You" and "Seasons of Love."

"The music drives the show, but the success of the musical really can be attributed to its 'bohemian' challenges to the status quo," Charney said.

And, the love for the message of the show really comes alive on stage with the enthusiastic actors that make up the Clemson Player's troupe.

"We love the musical and believe in its message of love in times of great stress. The characters are well drawn and the music is great," he said.

While some of the material may be a bit risqué for a younger audience, Charney said his cast has put its own touch on the show.

"We are directing our own production of 'RENT,'" he said. "We are trying hard to not imitate the Broadway version, and working diligently to make the relationships honest and viable."

Leading the cast lineup is Mark Cohen, the straight talking documentary filmmaker who has his fair share of ups and downs as he narrates the show.

Then there is Roger Davis, an ex-professional musician and drug addict, who is living with HIV and, more importantly, like he's dying.

Mark's former girlfriend, Maureen Johnson, is in the mix, adding a bit of drama with a flirtatious aura that draws in both men and women.

Other characters include Angel Dumott Schunard, a drag queen street percussionist; Joanne Jefferson, an educated public interest lawyer whose parents are influential political figures; and former friend and current landlord Benjamin Coffin III, who isn't well liked, to say the least.

But through their bumps, bruises and let downs, they come together to form a very well known family ... a dysfunctional one that knows understanding and love can conquer all.

"RENT" runs Thursday — Saturday, Feb. 25-27, at 8 p.m. and at 3 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 28. Tickets are $10 for adults and $5 for students. Additional information is available at www.clemson.edu/Brooks or by calling the Brooks Center box office at (864) 656-7787, Monday – Friday, 1 p.m. – 5 p.m.

jsibley@dailyjm.com | (864) 882-2375



FOR THE JOURNAL

The success of Broadway's "RENT" took off nationwide. The first production hit center stage in 1996.



FOR THE JOURNAL

Clemson University is one of the only colleges that has been given the rights to produce the Broadway hit, "RENT"