

# How tick, tick... BOOM! Composer Jonathan Larson Inspired Lin-Manuel Miranda to Tony-Winning Success

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June 25, 2014

Special Features How *tick, tick... BOOM!* Composer Jonathan Larson Inspired Lin-Manuel Miranda to Tony-Winning Success

By Michelle Vellucci

Jun 25, 2014

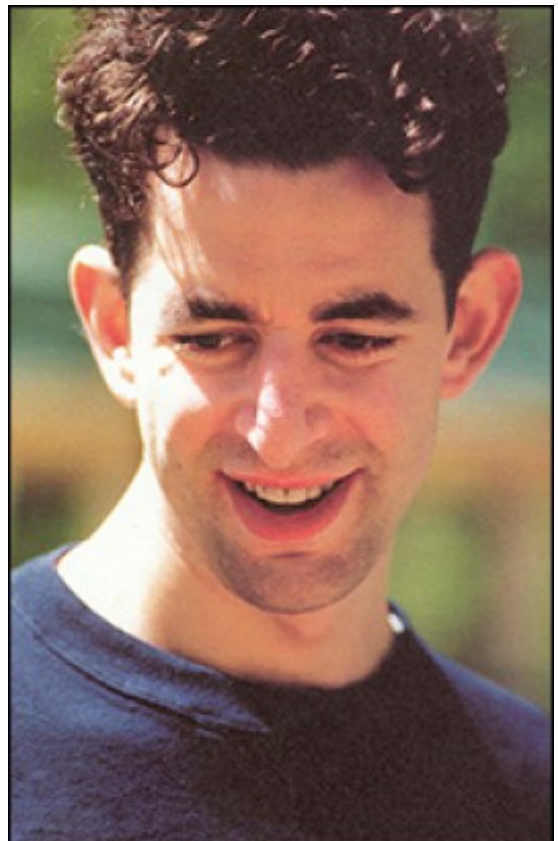
Tony-winning composer-lyricist and performer Lin-Manuel Miranda, starring in *tick, tick... BOOM!* at Encores! Off Center, opens up about his very personal history with the show. Jonathan Larson

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Lin-Manuel Miranda discovered Jonathan Larson's work at exactly the right time — twice.

The first time was in 1997, when Miranda saw the Broadway production of *Rent* for his 17th birthday. "It was the first contemporary musical that ever spoke to me," he said. "This was someone writing about his own experience."

The second time was in 2001, when Miranda, then a senior at Wesleyan University, saw the Off-Broadway production of *tick, tick... BOOM!* As he watched Larson's autobiographical show about an aspiring composer who fears he will never find success, Miranda felt like he was watching his own life play out onstage. "I'm a theatre major, which means I have no marketable skills, and I'm terrified because I'm about to go out there and try to make a living at it. And then I see Jonathan's show, which is about everything that I am about to be facing... I drove down from school in Connecticut to see it three times."

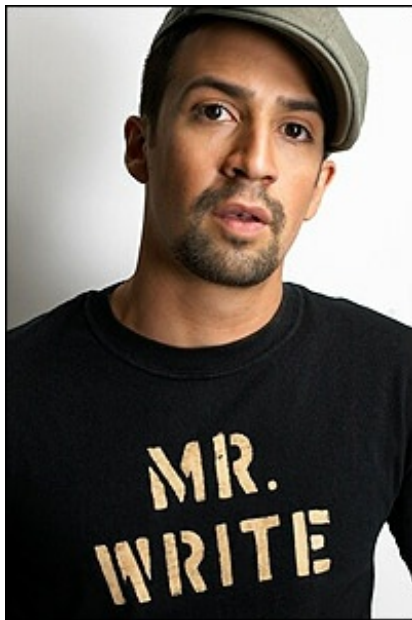


In the dozen years that have passed since then, Miranda has made the leap from anxious theatre major to award-winning composer-lyricist and performer: His musical *In the Heights* won four Tony Awards, a Grammy Award and was a finalist for the 2009 Pulitzer Prize in Drama, among other accolades. Miranda was co-composer (with Tom Kitt), and co-lyricist (with Amanda Green) of Broadway's *Bring It on: The Musical*; he contributed new songs to the revival of Stephen Schwartz' *Working*; and he worked with Arthur Laurents and Stephen

Sondheim on the 2009 Broadway Revival of West Side Story. In 2012, Miranda made his Encores! debut starring alongside Colin Donnell and Celia Keenan-Bolger in Merrily We Roll Along. This summer, Miranda will return to City Center and Encores! to star in a new production of the show that inspired him to get where he is today.

*tick, tick... BOOM!*, directed by Oliver Butler, will kick off the second season of Encores! Off-Center June 25–28. A one-night-only performance of Randy Newman's *Faust: The Concert*, starring Randy Newman, will follow July 1, and Pump Boys and Dinettes, directed by Lear De Bessonete, will wrap up the season July 16–19.

Off-Center, led by award-winning composer Jeanine Tesori (*Fun Home*, *Violet*), revives landmark Off-Broadway musicals for new generations of artists and audiences. The series debuted last summer with productions of Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, Jeanine Tesori and Brian Crawley's *Violet* (now on Broadway) and Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford's *I'm Getting my Act Together and Taking It on the Road*.



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Lin-Manuel Miranda

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Photo by Corey Hayes

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In the Encores! tradition, Off-Center places a great emphasis on the scores, with the orchestra performing onstage. Also like Encores!, each show receives a very brief rehearsal period followed by only a handful of performances.

Miranda said he is looking forward to taking part in another Encores! whirlwind. "What's amazing about Encores! is that there's so little time that you really can't fake anything," he said. "I was cast alongside Colin and Celia, and it was like, 'we don't have time; we just have to be best friends now,' and as a result they now really are two of my best friends. It was an incredible, singular experience. And the fact that we were lucky enough to record a cast album was icing on the cake."

When Miranda heard that Tesori was starting Encores! Off-Center, he asked her to keep him in mind if she ever decided to do *tick, tick... BOOM!* The two met in 2007, when Tesori saw the Off-Broadway production of *In the Heights* and afterward invited Miranda to do a talk with her for The Dramatists Guild of America. "It was the first thing I ever did that made me feel like a writer," Miranda said. "I was like, 'Why are we asking me questions? We should be asking you the questions!' Jeanine has been like a den mother to me ever since then. She's really supportive of new artists, and she champions new work."

With Off-Center, Tesori's idea was to create something fresh by pairing yesterday's groundbreaking works with today's groundbreaking artists. And Miranda's deep connection to Larson's work makes this particular pairing especially exciting.

"One of the great joys, for me, is to look backwards and forwards with regards to contemporary artists performing these classic shows," Tesori said. "That means that it's not just casting actors or directors, it's connecting them to a show they're arguably already connected to, whether they realize it or not. In Lin-Manuel's case, Jonathan's work was directly responsible for his own path as a writer, and what greater way to express that than to participate at the center of *tick, tick... BOOM!*?"

Miranda said it would be impossible to overstate Larson's influence on his own career path. Larson "inspired me to start drawing on my own experience," he said. "He was a huge influence on me and on the creation of *In the Heights*. He was a beacon.

"I'm really thrilled to get this show seen by as many people as possible," Miranda continued. "It's crazy how many people love *Rent* who don't even know that *tick, tick... BOOM!* exists. They're both great shows, but the specificity of *tick, tick... BOOM!* is what is so exhilarating, and so heartbreaking."

A First Look at City Center *tick, tick... BOOM!* Stars Lin-Manuel Miranda, Karen Olivo and Leslie Odom Jr.

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A First Look at City Center *tick, tick... BOOM!* Stars Lin-Manuel Miranda, Karen Olivo and Leslie Odom Jr.

Leslie Odom Jr. and Tony winners Lin-Manuel Miranda and Karen Olivo will star in the New York City Center Encores! Off-Center production of Jonathan Larson's *tick, tick... BOOM!*. Read the [Playbill.com story](#).

12 PHOTOS

Leslie Odom Jr., Lin-Manuel Miranda and Karen Olivo Joan Marcus

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