



CCMT Kicks off Their Fiftieth “Season of Love”

Contra Costa Musical Theatre Opens Their Golden Anniversary Season with RENT

WALNUT CREEK, July 19, 2010 — Contra Costa Musical Theatre (CCMT) will present Jonathan Larson’s *RENT* at Walnut Creek’s Leshner Center for the Arts, August 20 through September 4. Tickets for *RENT* range from \$40 to \$45 (with discounts available for seniors, youth, and groups) and are on sale now at the Leshner Center for the Arts Ticket Office, 1601 Civic Drive in Walnut Creek, 925.943.SHOW (943-7469). Tickets can also be purchased online at www.lesherartscenter.org.

RENT is a Pulitzer Prize-winning show based on Puccini’s *La Bohème* and features favorite songs such as “Seasons of Love,” “La Vie Bohème” and the title song. It tells the story of a group of struggling young artists and musicians trying to make ends meet while creating art and love in New York under the shadow of HIV/AIDS.

This will be the first production in Contra Costa County of the Jonathan Larson musical. The original Broadway production closed in 2008 after a 12-year run, making it the eighth longest-running show in Broadway history. The show also took residence at San Francisco’s Golden Gate Theater for several years, proving to be a Bay Area favorite.

***RENT* Features a New Directorial Staff and Talented Bay Area Performers**

Making their CCMT directorial debuts are Jasen Jeffrey, director, and Devon LaRussa, choreographer. Matt Smart, musical director of CCMT’s 2006 East Bay Premiere production of *Urinetown, the Musical* returns for his second assignment.

Jeffrey has a very personal connection to the show. Over ten years ago, he took a trip to New York to experience his first Broadway show. Without having purchased tickets in advance, he consulted the hotel concierge who happened to have tickets to *RENT* (which was playing to sold out crowds). As the show began and the heart-pounding score started pumping through the theater, he knew this was not going to be the Broadway experience he had anticipated. After the show, Jeffrey pointed to the theater and said, simply, “That is what I want to do with my life.” As he walked up Fifth Avenue in the rain, he knew that his life was forever changed. The words of the show’s creator Jonathan Larson have become the soundtrack to the last 13 years of his life - and the show’s message, “No Day But Today,” his mantra. Today, Jeffrey is beyond proud to be directing CCMT’s production of *RENT* - a dream that was born on that night in New York.

“I have a very personal connection to the show, so to have the opportunity to bring the story to life for my community means a lot to me,” said Jeffrey. “I look forward to sharing Larson’s songs and emotions to those who are seeing it for the first time and those who know the words to every song (like me).”

Over the years Jeffrey has been lucky enough to build friendships with those he saw on the stage that fateful December night. As a result, CCMT's production will be proud to feature props and costume pieces from the original production.

The cast will feature CCMT favorites Will Skrip as Mark, Alex Rodriguez as Angel and Meghann Reynolds as Maureen. Skrip was born and raised in the Bay Area and is soon going to be a senior in the renowned Music Theatre Certificate Program at Northwestern University. CCMT is thrilled to have him home for the summer so he can play this role. CCMT audiences will recognize the actor playing Angel. In the 2009 production of CCMT's *Evita*, Rodriguez played the role of Che. This is the second time he will be playing the role of Angel in the Bay Area. Another Bay Area favorite, Reynolds (Sandy in CCMT's *Grease*, Sergeant Sarah Brown in CCMT's *Guys and Dolls*) is taking some time away from her home in New York to play the part of Maureen.

RENT will also feature some new and exciting talent - Robert Lopez as Roger, Taylor Jones as Mimi, C.R. Lewis as Collins and Christina Eskridge as Joanne. Lewis has played the part of Collins before and performed with the national tour of Disney's *The Lion King* as Simba.

When *RENT* originally opened in New York, the producers offered discounted \$20 rush tickets to each performance, so that people who would otherwise be unable to afford the ticket prices could enjoy the show. These discounted tickets were for seats in the first two rows of the theater reserved for sale by lottery two hours prior to each show. In true *RENT* spirit and tradition, CCMT will be offering \$20 lottery tickets prior to every show for a limited number of seats in the first two rows. For ticket lottery details, please visit ccmt.org

Contra Costa Musical Theatre Celebrates 50 Years

To celebrate 50 years of producing Broadway musicals in Walnut Creek, CCMT will present three fully-staged musicals instead of the customary two productions. Following the company's production of *RENT*, CCMT will present *A Chorus Line*, opening in October 2010 and *Hairspray* in March of 2011. Tickets for all three shows are on sale now.

Based in Walnut Creek, Contra Costa Musical Theatre has a fifty year history of producing dynamic musical productions and providing a home to local and national talent. CCMT has won more Shellie Awards for musicals than any other regional company, including a virtual sweep at the 30th Annual Shellie Awards ceremony, winning six Shellie Awards for its smash hit Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Cinderella*, including Outstanding Production of the season. Since their move to the Leshner Center for the Arts in 1990, they have produced more than 30 full-scale productions, including the East Bay premieres of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, *Urinetown, the Musical*, *The Full Monty*, and *Titanic, the Musical*.

*SPECIAL: 2010-2011 Season subscriptions are also available in a variety of series packages, all of which provide the opportunity for subscribers to purchase tickets to *RENT* at the deeply-discounted price of \$25/seat; that's up to 45% of regular ticket prices. More information on CCMT can be found at www.ccmt.org.

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