

# RENT

## MUSICAL TO HIT OMAHA

In the rarest of cases, the voice that ends up speaking the loudest is the one that begins as a whisper.

It is born tiny and quiet, without the strength to scream, and suddenly, without notice, explodes into something it never thought it could be — something that resonates throughout the world, into the ears and eyes of people of all colors, ages and mindsets.

This is most definitely the story of "Rent," the musical that, arguably, has left a smear on pop culture that will never be erased.

Inspired by Puccini's "La Boheme," the opera about a clique of struggling Parisian artists in the early 19th century, "Rent," a modern day rock opera, encapsulates present day bohemia in New York's East Village — including artists, drug addicts, transvestites, drag queens and S&M dancers.

The people of "Rent" struggle with the same issues of those in the original opera — love, heartbreak and poverty — with one '90s update! — the plague of the AIDS virus.

Off the stage, the hype surrounding "Rent" becomes more poignant in the personal story of its creator, Jonathan Larson, who died before getting the chance to see his creation achieve its phenomenal status.

His story has been described as many things, but most often it has been described as



for themselves "Rentheads," and continue to follow the show with a near-religious fervor.

Mandy Murphy, a UNL freshman vocal performance major and self-proclaimed "Renthead," has seen the show four times and plans to see it again in Omaha — at least once.

"We got tickets, and we plan to wait in line to get more tickets," Murphy said.

She's seen the show four times so far — twice in New York, once in Kansas City and once in Des Moines.

It was difficult for her to pin down just one reason why the show appeals to her.

"I think the music is really powerful," she said. "It's just a great story."

The play, in some ways, does represent her generation, she said.

"It brings up issues but doesn't focus on them," she said. "That's not what you're thinking about while you watch it. You know the people for who they are, not what they are."

Keaney agreed, saying the audience — especially younger audience members — will have something to think about when they leave.

"They will think, 'What a great voice for our generation,'" she said. "They will be humming the songs and at the same time feeling really good about where we are going as a group of people."

"It's like an anthem for acceptance."

Drama.

Each of the show's characters represents something different to someone different, Keaney said.

Take, for instance, her character, Maureen.

"She is a lesbian performance artist — or trying to be," Keaney said of Maureen. "She has put together a piece that will bring awareness to what's happening in the show."

Maureen performs her piece in protest against a moneymaking scheme one of the other characters is brewing.

"Her girlfriend helps her," Keaney said. "The show deals with the relationships and how these kids are dealing with life and where they are."

Keaney said the show finds acceptance even in "conservative" cities and that she thinks the run in Omaha will be no different.

"We did the show in Salt Lake City (Utah), and it sold out," she said. "The theme is simple — it's one of love and supporting the people you love through doing good."

"Although it may discuss situations that some people aren't familiar with, what they are familiar with is love and understanding. If they can't see themselves or someone they know in it, they can relate to the relationships and love and death and coming together as a family. That's universal."

Keaney said the show attracts a singular crowd each time it is performed.

"There are people of all different ages and sizes," she said. "Some people leave at intermission who don't enjoy it, and some are there for the sixth or seventh time."

To continue one of Larson's goals surrounding the show, the first two rows of seats will be reserved for students and will be sold at a lower price. The "Rush Line" offers seats for \$20 and will be at every performance.

Keaney said the line adds to the already incredible dynamic of the show.

"Jon Larson wanted to do a show that was accessible to younger audience members, and they can't put down \$80 to see a show," she said. "There's a lineup at every show — people are always talking about it."

Those who have attended the show more than once, usually numerous times, have titled

the voice of a generation.

This continues to be its unintended moniker. It's a moniker that keeps audiences coming back again and again.

"It's the music and the message," said Erin Keaney, who plays Maureen in tomorrow night's Omaha debut of the musical.

"I think people have a good time — it's like a rock concert. It's definitely a musical with an edge and with a theme," she said. "Different kinds of people come for different things."

"It's a very personal show."

This company represents the second to tour the United States, the first did the same beginning in 1997. The show won the 1996 Tony award for Best Musical and the Pulitzer Prize

## RENT

**WHERE:**  
Orpheum Theater  
409 S. 16th St., Omaha

**WHEN:**  
Tuesday, April 25 - Friday,  
April 28 @ 7:30 p.m.  
Saturday, April 29 @ 2 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.  
Sunday, April 30 @ 1 p.m. & 6:30 p.m.

Ticket prices vary according to showtimes & are available @ the Civic Auditorium Box Office & all Ticketmaster locations, including [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com). For more information, call (402) 422-1212 or (402) 475-1212 in Lincoln.

Students who wish to wait in line for seats in the first two rows can do so every night. The tickets are \$20 each and subject to availability.

Melanie Falk/DN

**STORY BY SARAH BAKER**



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