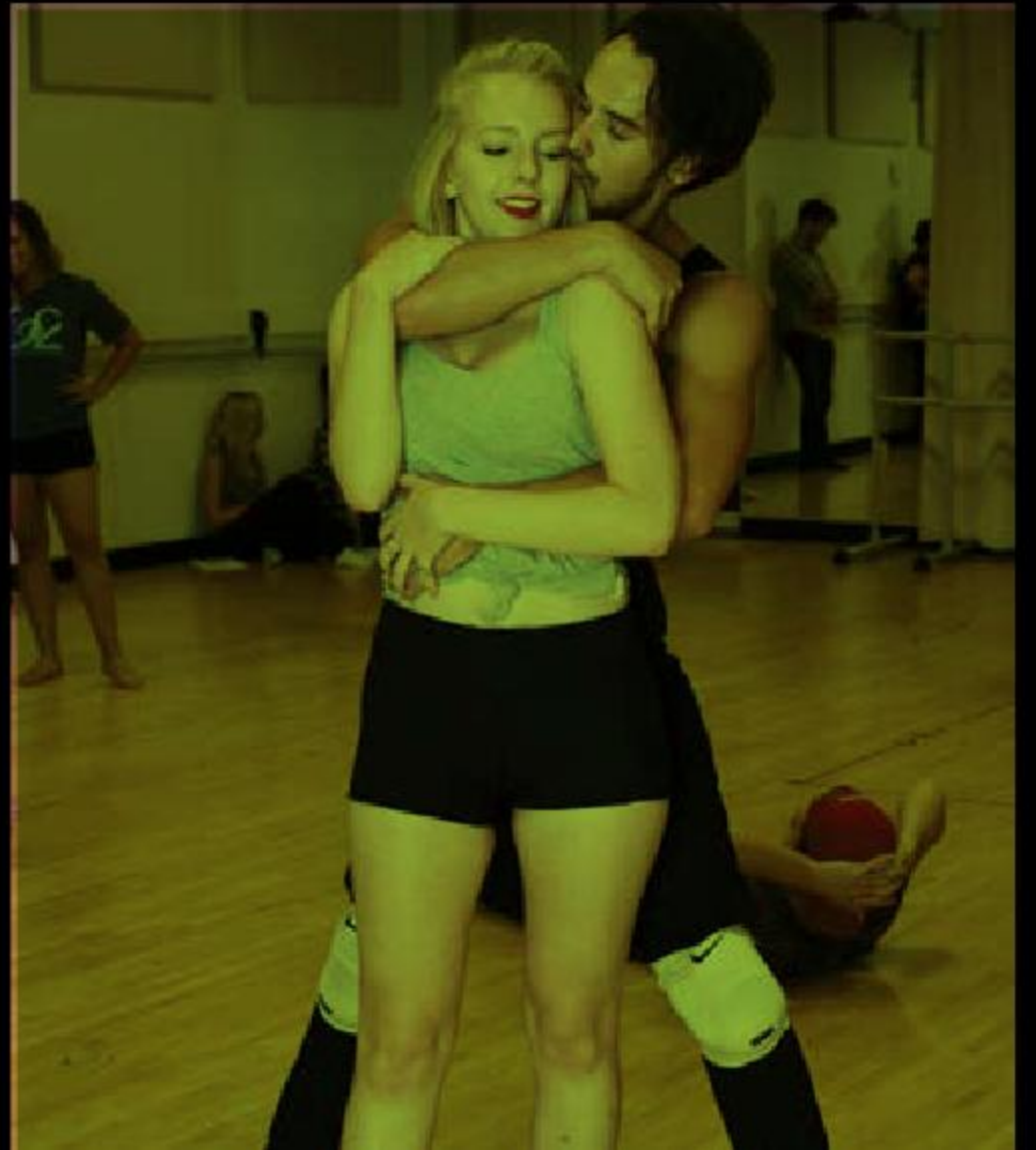




RENT



IT TOOK NEARLY 525,600 MINUTES FOR TEXAS STATE TO BRING, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE THEATER PRODUCTION OF "RENT" TO THE STAGE OF PATTI STRICKEL HARRISON THEATRE.

Peeking from the doorway into the rehearsal room, disembodied feet, some bare, others guarded in socks, could be seen moving from side-to-side in unison to "What You Own," one of the catchy tunes from the former, long-running and award-winning Broadway musical "Rent."

This rehearsal, and the ones prior and after, would help set the tone for the university's ambitious production.

The play follows the trials and tribulations of a group of Bohemian 20somethings in 1990s New York City.

Before auditions for the Texas State production of "Rent," hopefuls were asked to conduct and submit research to gain a better understanding of the play's characters and plot.

The hours'-long casting process, equated to a cattle call by some theater students, required to deliver memorable monologues of their choosing. Those who were called back then auditioned with show-specific material.

As auditions for the play's 26-stage member cast, including eight principle roles, proceeded, the stage manager continuously updated the call list that would let the actors know who made it to the next round.

On the final night of auditions actors were mixed and matched to see if they had chemistry together -- until their fates were sealed.

"Usually I hide the day after the cast list goes up," said the production director and head of Texas State's Musical Theatre Program Kaitlin Hopkins, "I really admire these students."

With the cast set, rehearsals for "Rent" followed throughout the summer and continued for four hours Mondays-Fridays. On opening night, the cast will have spent a year as these characters on stage.

"If you're not exhausted, you're not doing it right," said Hopkins, to cast members during a weeknight rehearsal.

One of those cast members is Helen Regula, Texas State musical theater junior, who plays Joanne, a lesbian lawyer.

She admitted she had never been involved with a musical theater production that had music and "intense storylines" like this.

It wasn't always easy for the cast to get into character during rehearsal.

This meant not only imagining, but embodying someone who either is HIV positive or whose close friend or lover has the virus; someone who's either breaking up with a lover or is on the receiving end; someone who's either being discriminated against or who has to watch this act.

Regula, as Joanne, maneuvers around a romantic minefield, deciding whether to leave her character's girlfriend, Maureen, played by Shelby Acosta, a musical theater senior.

"The music is phenomenal," said Acosta, who at the time was anxiously awaiting her fitting for Maureen's famous (infamous?) catsuit. "It hits kind of close to home: weird people rocking out."

Kissing a woman didn't bother her, Acosta explains. She was gunning for the role of Maureen because "she's so open and free. (Maureen's) kind of crazy, nutty. And I am too."

As a cast member continued to belt some of the lyrics of "What You Own," Hopkins kept rhythm by pounding a table with the palm of her hand.

Acosta really admires Hopkins, whose vision, she said, "sold her" on Texas State's musical theater program as a Michigan high school student in 2011. They met while attending the National Unified Auditions in Chicago.

"Rent" will be Acosta's first "leading" role in a Texas State production, if there are leading roles in the play's ensemble cast, she said.

Whether the cast and crew measured their year of preparation in minutes, hours or months, they were on borrowed time. When the curtains go up, it's time they pay the rent.



ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Kaitlin Hopkins, director of Texas State's production of "Rent," tells her students what it was like in early 1990s New York City, a time when most of the cast was busy being born.

Hopkins has been in the biz for more than 35 years, receiving awards and accolades that have garnered her national and international spotlight.

Her theater roots run deep: her mom is Tony-, Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning and Academy Award-nominated actress Shirley Knight; her dad was award-winning theater and film producer Gene Persson; and her stepfather was award-winning writer John R. Hopkins.

Hopkins is helping light the way for Texas State's Music Theatre program to become one of the best in the country by providing opportunities for students to work with some of the top Broadway teams.

SEE THE PULITZER PRIZE- AND TONY AWARD-WINNING MUSICAL

SHOW TIMES

October 7-12
@ 7:30p
Additional
2 p.m. matinee
on October 12.

TICKETS

Starting at \$15 for adults
and \$8 for students.
Purchased at (512) 245-6500
or txstatepresents.com

SPECIAL DINNER SHOW

The October 11 performance
features a 5:30p pre-show dinner in
the Performing Arts Center. Tickets
for this event are \$150 with a
limited number of seats available.

"RENT is one of those shows that, if encountered along one's life journey, changes you. The subject matter is challenging and controversial."