

For my show paper, I watched the musical “Hamilton,” which Lin-Manuel Miranda created. Miranda wrote the book, music, and lyrics for the show, a feat not shared by many playwrights. The theater used is known as the “Richard Rodgers Theatre”, which is located in Manhattan, NY.

The musical itself is about the life of Alexander Hamilton, who is known largely for being a founding father of the United States as well as being the first Secretary of the Treasury for the country. It displays his rise to power, his downfall, and everything in between. The major conflict is the struggle between Hamilton and Aaron Burr, who was at one point Hamilton’s friend but turned into his political enemy upon defeating his father-in-law, Philip Schuyler, in a Senate race. This struggle would eventually become Hamilton’s doom when Burr challenged him to a duel that ultimately killed him.

The director’s name is Thomas Kail, and I believe his interpretational approach was to make a show that had cultural relevance as well as a certain degree of historical accuracy. The way he incorporated cultural relevance into the show was by including R&B, rap, hip-hop, and other (relatively new) genres of music to portray events that happened around two hundred years before their inception. I’d say that most, if not all, elements of the show matched this interpretation rather well, and I’d say that it was easy to pinpoint. I think this is the case because when you see a historical character such as George Washington hosting a political rap battle, it becomes slightly obvious what the director was going for, that being representation as well as cultural relevance while also maintaining historical accuracy (hence the political part of the rap battle).

The play was well staged. I felt as if my vision was never really blocked off from the main event, that being the main character at any given moment. I do believe that the actors

moved around the space rather easily, probably because they are all top-of-the-line Broadway actors, but also due to the large amount of time they must have spent in rehearsal. This is also likely the reason why no noticeable mistakes or stumbles were made by the actors.

Speaking of actors, I noticed several that played their role(s) particularly well. The ones that I will spotlight in this paper are Daveed Diggs and Leslie Odom Jr.

Daveed Diggs actually played two roles in the show, those being the Marquis de Lafayette and then, later on, Thomas Jefferson. I really liked how Diggs was able to differentiate the two roles, whether that be through his performance style, costume, or even by adopting a French accent.

When he played the Marquis, he was noticeably more energetic on the stage, utilizing dance and somewhat frantic movement at times to display this trait. Also, to make it very obvious to the audience that the Marquis was french, and perhaps for historical accuracy, Diggs put on a believable French accent that he would even use in his fast-paced rap style. The accent was thankfully clear enough that one could still make out the lyrics to his raps.

On the other hand, when he played Thomas Jefferson, he was distinctly more reserved and far less animated. To accompany this reserved approach, he changed his rap style to something a tad bit slower but more methodical, perhaps going for a “cold and calculated” approach.

It’s also worth noting that Diggs wore two significantly different costumes depending on the role he was playing. For example, when he played the Marquis, he donned a blue uniform that really stood out from his fellow actors, who all wore tamer colors such as tan and brown. However, when he played Jefferson, his burgundy clothing was far more elegant and blended in better with everyone else.

As for Leslie Odom Jr., he played the role of Aaron Burr throughout the entirety of the musical and was one of the central characters who served as the show's main antagonist. He portrayed Burr as an ambitious yet envious man who was loyal to his friends and family and also jealous of Hamilton's success.

Both actors seemed well-rehearsed and spoke clearly. They did not display any signs of nervousness, which is typically the expectation of actors of this caliber. Both actors were required to rap at some point in the show, and they executed perfectly with clarity and precision.

The production of "Hamilton" that I watched took place in a proscenium theater. One aspect of this specific theater was the turntable, which I believe added greatly to the watching experience. I thought it made Alexander's son, Philip's death, far more dramatic, and in my opinion, it made the hurricane scene way more interesting than a standard stage could have ever pulled off.

In addition to the theater type and location, the lighting also made quite a contribution to the audience experience. The people in charge of the lights often would use a spotlight to divert the attention of the audience to a certain part of the stage, allowing background actors to reposition or move around props.

What lighting was also able to do for the musical was create illusions to an extent. For example, when Eliza was teaching Philip piano under one spotlight, and Hamilton was writing letters to Angelica under another, it conveyed the illusion that the two parties were not in the same room, even though they were clearly on the stage. Of course, in order to believe that, the audience would have to temporarily suspend their disbelief for a moment, but I would imagine an audience that paid top dollar to see this musical is already used to doing such a thing.

The costumes used in the play contributed primarily to the historical accuracy aspect, and it did this in a couple of ways.

One of the ways they did this was by utilizing clothing that would resemble the time period in which Hamilton lived, that being the later eighteenth century. Costume designers used stuff like tricorner hats for male actors and dresses that may look over the top for the modern-day era but perfectly appropriate for something in the year 1776.

Another way would be in any battle scene, but primarily the one that happened in Yorktown. In this scene, you could very easily tell who was on the British side by looking at the actor's red uniforms, while the Americans were distinguishable by their blue coats, much like the two sides were in real life.

Of course, one of the most aspects of a musical is sound. As I mentioned earlier, very modern genres were utilized, and it really brought a more "energetic" vibe to the show. By using Hip Hop along with R&B, "Hamilton" also served as a fantastic gateway musical to this generation that greatly enjoys these genres.

Sound also helped to create a sense of immersion for the audience. For instance, during the hurricane scene, while the actors were being moved by the turntable (to mimic the winds of a hurricane and the debris carried by it), a piano was playing light, soft notes in rapid succession along with sudden loud notes. This could be interpreted as the pitter-pattering of raindrops accompanied by lightning.

Overall, I found "Hamilton" to be a great, well-rounded play that is certainly deserving of the critical acclaim it has received over the years. The show uses a multitude of things to mix both cultural relevances as well as historical accuracy to deliver a very unique and even educational theater experience.

