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FIREWORKS AT OAK PARK'S IN THE HEIGHTS   
  
Musicals are most powerful when the people performing truly enjoy the story they are telling, and this passion clearly translates in Oak Park High School's production of IN THE HEIGHTS. The cast's familial presence onstage contributes to both their chemistry and captivating energy, moving viewers to both laughter and tears.   
  
IN THE HEIGHTS was the first musical written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, and is set closer to his roots in the largely Hispanic neighborhood of its namesake, Washington Heights, in New York City. Miranda later went on to write "Hamilton," which brought musical theatre into the lives of many previously unfamiliar with the art form. However, this first musical was still met with critical acclaim, being nominated for thirteen Tony Awards and winning four.   
  
The characters are introduced to us by Josiah Fahnestock, playing Usnavi, whose effortless rhythm opens the show in a refreshing way. Chloe Pelham, playing Nina Rosario, gives multiple astounding vocal performances that bring a more sentimental energy to the stage, through clear artistic tonality and characterization within songs. The heartwarming chemistry with Nina's love interest Benny (Peyton Cassity) is seen both in their singing and their scenes together.   
  
Emily Witter, playing Abuela Claudia, has a comforting stage presence coupled with warm, resonant vocals, which makes her character's death later, all the more impactful. In contrast, Daniela (Cierra Gonzales) provides much needed comic relief, commanding the stage with her spunky disposition.   
  
The ensemble adds a whole new vibrancy to each number they are included in, with impassioned vocals in big numbers such as "96,000" and "Alabanza," and sleek execution of choreography that fits the setting.   
  
Each technical aspect of the production adds something unique, adding depth when they all come together. The sets, designed by Joe Lunares, have realistic detail and dimension that can be utilized by the characters to create a more immersive setting. The props and special effects, designed by Nina Kutensky, Brenden Blue, and Tatiana Rizek, add a powerful emotional element to the production, particularly in the second act, through the candles and projections of photos, as the characters mourn Abuela's death. The Oak Park High School Pit Orchestra has precise timing and intonation, blending beautifully with the actors, and providing a solid foundation for the performance.   
  
Though there were some onstage relationships that fell short of evoking the emotions intended, the consistent energy and emotional range of the cast ensures this does not take away from the telling of the story.   
  
Oak Park High School's production of IN THE HEIGHTS offers a palpable energy from every performer. This passion is amplified by the hard work of the crew, bringing the story to life by sharing a piece of themselves through their performance.  
  
by Caitlin Crosby of Park Hill High School  
  
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METROPOLITAN MIDSUMMER MADNESS  
  
On a crowded street corner in the midst of a heat wave, inhabitants of Washington Heights go about their business, gossiping and consuming piragua with vigorous enthusiasm. Witness the tribulations and triumphs of an impoverished Hispanic neighborhood, in Oak Park High School's production of IN THE HEIGHTS.  
          
IN THE HEIGHTS, written and composed by Lin-Manuel Miranda, premiered in 2005 before going on to Broadway in 2008. The Tony Award winning story revolves around the neighborhood of Washington Heights, and follows the struggles of the various residents and shop owners of the area.  
  
Nina Rosario, played by Chloe Pelham, astounds with her pleasant and melodious tone, which also lends a degree of clarity and amiability to her character. Josiah Fahnestock, as Usnavi, is exceedingly expressive in both his body language and rapping, being able to portray the awkwardness of his character through the disjunction between his lively speech and quirky interactions.  
  
Cierra Gonzales, as Daniela, is absolutely delightful to watch on the stage, as she delivers her lines with zing and superb comedic timing. Daniela's assistant, Carla, played by Lindsey Jones, also delivers her comedic lines flawlessly, playing off of Gonzales' performance perfectly. Benny, played by Peyton Cassity, exudes an aura of confidence and charm, but shows extensive character depth throughout his songs, which he sings with impressive richness and resonance.  
  
The set of the show, designed by Joe Lunares, is extremely intricate. Multileveled platforms are hidden by brick framework, which has been graffitied to denote the squalid environment of the area. Additionally, the props of the show, designed by Nina Kutensky and Brenden Blue, have an impressive amount of forethought put into them, from the simplistic beverages and snack foods of Usnavi's bodega, to the flashing masks used in the song "Blackout." The Oak Park High School Pit Orchestra does an impressive job of keeping to the pace of the actors and never ends up overpowering them, thanks to the splendid work of the sound crew, led by Kaleighan Chastain and Maddie Webb.  
  
While the ensemble does seem to be somewhat at a loss for what to do in a few scenes, their overall energy is consistently fantastic throughout the whole show, (especially in regards to the choreography,) and they do a marvelous job of holding up the harmonies in the various songs. None of the performers appear to struggle with the vocals, as they belt them out with aplomb.   
  
With exciting choreography and engaging character development, Oak Park High School's production of IN THE HEIGHTS is thrilling from beginning to end. Each line is captivating and compelling, in such a fashion that the apparent strife and joy of the situations being portrayed inspire awe and empathy.  
  
by Cooper Sturm of Park Hill High School  
  
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WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH 96,000?    
  
Lights up on Oak Park High School, as they take the stage to show the audience what a day in the life of Washington Heights is like. Complete with love, loss, family, and a man just trying to sell some snow cones, this show is sure to send you on an exciting emotional rollercoaster. Oak Park High School proudly presents IN THE HEIGHTS.  
          
IN THE HEIGHTS (2008) is written by critically acclaimed playwright Lin Manuel Miranda. As his breakout effort, this show holds claim to four Tony Awards, out of a nominated thirteen, including a win for Best Musical. The story is centered around a Hispanic dominated province of New York City called "Washington Heights," and the day to day lives of those who live in it.  
          
First to take the stage is Josiah Fahnestock, portraying Usnavi, the hard working owner of a bodega on the corner just trying to make a living. Fahnestock fills the room with his impressively sharp rapping and larger than life presence, as he laments about his troubles and worries. Working in perfect dichotomy with his boldness is Chloe Pelham's Nina Rosario, whose soft and intense personality meets perfectly with her powerful and heartfelt vocals, creating a constantly warping atmosphere of emotion for the audience.  
          
Peyton Cassity portrays Benny, the cool and easygoing love interest of Nina. Cassity's smooth and loving singing pairs well with his suave mannerisms, making one believe every kind word he has to say, tugging at one's heartstrings with every admission of Benny's love for Nina. Providing comic relief to this romantic tension is Cierra Gonzales' Daniela, whose sassy and brassy characterization erupts the audience into a fit of laughter with every line delivered.  
          
Sarah Ealey orchestrates an exciting production as stage manager, keeping everything in line and providing for a wholly enjoyable experience, without any noticeable error. Under the design of Joe Lunares, the set is immersive, making one actually feel as if they are standing on a corner in Washington Heights. Complete with an array of special effects, under the management of Levi McKinney, the technical side works perfectly with the acting to create a show that is difficult to pull your attention away from.  
          
There are occasionally a couple of slightly delayed sound cues, but these are resolved with a haste and finesse that forgives any mistake made, and does not take away from the show overall. There are also times where the acting seems slightly tired, but these moments are few and far between, and the energy is always revamped by the start of the next exhilarating number.  
          
From heartwarming romance, to hilarious slapstick comedy, to the satisfaction of a happy ending, Oak Park High School's IN THE HEIGHTS has it all. This show is sure to have you feeling like "When You're Home," and it will no doubt leave you curious about, What would you do with $96,000?  
  
by Michael Schuhler of Harrisonville High School  
  
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OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL REACHES NEW HEIGHTS!   
  
Masked Robberies, a bankrupt Barrio, and just a little bit of cinnamon. Oak Park High School executes the musical flawlessly, making sure to keep you at the edge of your seats until the very end! Following the story of Vanessa (Dasharene Freeman,) Usnavi (Josiah Fahnestock,) Benny (Peyton Cassity,) Nina (Chloe Pelham,) and many more; everyone begins learning the struggles of living in the the Barrio of Washington Heights. Fun and fresh moves, along with snappy wit turns IN THE HEIGHTS "96,000" percent worth it!   
  
Blind makeup artist, (Lily Dickson) and difficult moves are no challenge for director Matthew Ashpaugh. This musical puts a spin on modern day Washington Heights in the Barrio and accomplishes every sense of an amazing and awe inspiring production.   
  
Forbidden love and heart wrenching tension continues to remind you to just "BREATHE," while following Nina Rosario (Chloe Pelham) and Benny's (Payton Cassity) story in the musical. Hearty fights and an undeniable connection compels you to stay and watch until "Sunrise!" Chloe and Payton dance to the beat of their own song that adds so much more to the enticing night. Both lead actors steal the spotlight a multitude of times during the show, and rightfully so.   
  
Cierra Gonzales provides the audience with a number of jaw dropping jokes and a spunk that is all her own. You are stuck singing "No Me Diga," every time Cierra steps foot on stage. Golden Girls better watch out, as Ciarra's character, Daniela, fills in the audience with head turning gossip, making sure you are left begging for more. You have got nothing on Ciarra's sassy supporting character.   
  
Live orchestra and vocalists with major pipes, put a trance on the audience as the cast waltzes across the stage. Spell binding highs and lows are represented with every note of music. Emotion (especially in "Alabanza") is strung heavy enough to put a few tears in your eyes. Choreography is designed to get you moving does just that with every song in IN THE HEIGHTS!   
  
Every actor's suburb facial expressions make it hard to look away, due to this you might be able to see some actors break character, but this is quickly overshadowed with the fun and exciting dance moves, and vocals that will make any music lover squeal.   
  
Until the very last minute, Oak Park High School's IN THE HEIGHTS will have you thinking it is not "Enough!" With hot moves, and hilarious commentary, every actor achieves a Broadway worthy performance. Coming to Abuela's death and how Nina is to solve her college issue, along with the bumpy relationship with Benny, all is resolved including Usnavi's business demise, and his crush on Vanessa being fruitful when she is to return the feelings. A fantastic orchestra and groovy songs appoint this school with an A+ for musical theatre. Colorful sets, and breathtaking art only adds to the impression of every viewer in the audience. You can go ahead and color everyone impressed. This show is an enjoyable and comedic experience that proves to be fun for everyone.  
  
by Brooklyn Fools of Harrisonville High School  
  
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SNAPS TO THE MUSICAL REACHING NEW HEIGHTS  
  
Most people have a better life than they think and do not normally worry about other cultures than their own. IN THE HEIGHTS presented by Oak Park High School shows how different cultures, that you may not be familiar with, live together and try to battle the high expenses and rare opportunities offered in New York City.   
  
The musical IN THE HEIGHTS was written by Lin-Manuel Miranda in college. Lin-Manuel wrote this musical as a way to represent the diversity he was shown on his college campus. He wanted this musical while showing respect for the Spanish language, to be quite culturally open and have a supportive environment. Miranda's inspiration for writing IN THE HEIGHTS came from growing up in a music heavy home, loving to perform and write from a young age, and from being in college around the "Latin boom"  when he felt he could freely write about different cultures together.  
  
The main character Usnavi, Josiah Fahnestock, is an expert at holding you on the edge of your seat throughout the musical. Keeping everyone in love with his boy next door attitude, heartwarming relationship with Abuela, and his fatherly presence toward Sonny he truly gave the audience "96,000" reasons to want to come back.   
  
Stealing the show is Cierra Gonzales as Daniela. With her sassy remarks, ferocity, and commanding presence on stage she is tearing everyone's eyes away from the rest of the cast to focus just on her. Adding so much depth and complexity to her character she is never keeping the audience anything but riveted and mesmerized.   
  
While the two-story stage is amazing and adds so much depth to the show the makeup crew is what is making this show technically superior. Lilyanna Law and Lily Dickson, the makeup co-heads, continue to impress everyone with the detail in each character's face. But, what is the cherry on top is that, while the detail is there up close, you could even see all of the makeup from far away and under the bright lights.   
  
The accents are amazing and almost never falter. There are some small problems where a character did not cheat out and we could not see their face but, it did not take away from the musical overall. There are timing and enthusiasm mishaps during some ensemble routines. One last thing to note is that not all of the costumes are consistent with the settings' time and place. None of the mistakes were truly extreme and all were simply minor errors.   
  
This show is sensational and truly leaves the audience in awe of how the characters have lived and survived through the many hoops New York threw their way. Oak Park High School's production of IN THE HEIGHTS is a remarkably eye-opening and touching play that deserves every bit of "Ateniï¿½n" it receives.  
  
by Caitlyn Costner of Harrisonville High School  
  
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Welcome Home   
  
As the lights come up on the stage at Oak Park High school, the scene is set with a rustic environment, talented actors, and bright colors. Oak Park High School's production of In The Heights takes you past the height you expected.  
  
In 1999 this spectacular musical performed its first production on Broadway. In The Heights was written by Quiara Alegrï¿½a Hudes and composed by Lin-Manuel Miranda.  
  
The story is centered around a small town full of people who want something better. Usanvi (Josiah Fahnestock) is the storekeeper who tell most of the story. He emotional sings "Alabanza". Usanvi (Josiah Fahnestock) brought emotion onto the stage every time he enters.  
  
No matter what it was there was always a strong connection with everyone that Usanvi (Josiah Fahnestock) interacted with. Another eye-catching lead actor is Nina Rosario (Chloe Pelham), she portrays this strong girl who is just trying to make everyone proud and not let her parents down, in such a charismatic way, it is almost impossible not to watch her. Not only is her acting the embodiment of Nina Rosario, but her voice fits the part perfectly, making this worried, independent character really come to life.  
  
What would IN THE HEIGHTS do without a charming man trying to get the daughter of his boss? Benny (Peyton Cassity) lights up the stage in every scene he was in. Even though this town was not his home-town he made the best of what he could get, even if that means to fight the father over his love for his daughter. Benny (Peyton Cassity) voice brings a new feeling in every time, whether its the Dispatch or welcoming home the love of his life there was always different emotions and feeling throughout the whole musical. Daniela (Cierra Gonzales) and Carla (Lindsey Jones) brought so much life into the musical. Although we did not see them in every scene it was a thrill to see those two work together. Not only was their acting enthusiastic, but their voices really contrasted well.  
  
Not only do the actors shine in their roles, but the set is absolutely amazing. It really shows that there wasn't only talent on the stage, but also a lot of talent behind the scenes. A beautiful rustic scenery was displayed, giving the contrast between the store, car service, and hair salon really brought the stage to life. The makeup lead by Lily Dickerson was tastefully done. All of the makeup from the aging to the tattoo was very believable.   
  
Though there are a few mic issues, and the Pit got a little excited and overpowered the vocalists at some points, it was quickly made up for with the insanely smooth scene changes that occur in the blink of an eye.  
  
Oak Park High School's production of IN THE HEIGHTS stays true to the culture of the show, and the true meaning of what it means to be a family. So catch a taxi and grab a cup of coffee and head on down to Washington Heights.  
  
by Danielle Lasure of Harrisonville High School  
  
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OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL SETS THE BAR HIGH  
  
Oak Park High School's performance of IN THE HEIGHTS is a thoroughly enjoyable experience. With engaging and emotional conduct throughout, it is easy to tell that the actors are talented. Elaborate sets, an extended stage, and a pit orchestra were just a few of the things that made this play so unique.  
  
A modern musical first performed on Broadway in 2008, IN THE HEIGHTS was written by Lin-Manuel Miranda who is well known for his involvement in writing and directing the musical Hamilton. IN THE HEIGHTS tells the story of Usnavi, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, as well as several other residents of a Latino neighborhood in New York City called Washington Heights. As the storyline follows the events of their daily lives, drama and tragedy unfold. In contrast to this, lighter moments, a few even comedic, are interspersed throughout.   
  
Josiah Fahnestock, who portrays Usnavi, is a talented vocalist with impressive acting skills. While his range and diction are impressive in themselves, one of his most admirable attributes is his ability to mix rapping into his singing. Add that to the fact that he is singing in a mix of Spanish and English and you have an amazing performance. The combination of these features serves to make a talented actor even better. Chloe Pelham, who portrays Nina, exudes an air of import and her personality is evident throughout her performance. Chloe is an extremely talented vocalist. Her impeccable clarity of tone are a pleasure to experience. In addition, her range as well as her dynamics make her vocals inspiring. Overall, the lead roles are portrayed extremely well by talented actors.  
  
There are many characters whose roles are intrinsic to the play yet they are not in lead roles. These include Cierra Gonzales, who plays Daniela, and Lindsey Jones, who plays Carla. Cierra and Lindsey stand out for several reasons. One is their conveyance of emotions. In addition, their performances are extremely animated and enthusiastic, making them a pleasure to watch.  
  
The technical aspects of the play run smoothly. The lighting on stage is very effective, reducing shadows while still creating contrast and dramatic effect.The set is also highly impressive, being creative and colorful as well as multi-story. Make-up is used very effectively, one example being Abuela Claudia, portrayed by Emily Witter. She is made to look much older, which is done masterfully. The Oak Park Pit Orchestra is truly exquisite. The wide variety of instruments adds to the rich effect of the orchestra. Their impressive dynamic contrast, as well as their crisp technique, is spot-on. The technical aspects of the musical are all up to par.  
  
While most everything about the musical is somewhere between really good and great, there is always room for improvement. One way in which the play might improve is talented vocalists paying more attention to their diction, so as to be easier to understand. Another thing would be, making sure to have the microphone timing be more precise. Lastly, more commitment to accents by some cast members would help quality of the play. That being said, it is still a very good play.  
  
IN THE HEIGHTS by Oak Park High School is a powerful performance by talented actors of high quality. Several elements of the play interact smoothly to weld it into a complete whole. Oak Park High School sets the bar high with their impressive performance of IN THE HEIGHTS.  
  
by George Frees of Harrisonville High School  
  
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EMOTIONAL BALANCE IS IN THE HEIGHTS!  
  
IN THE HEIGHTS is performed by Oak Grove High School and it leaves a lot of questions to be desired. Did they do the musical justice or does it need some more work? Well, without further ado, let's start the review!   
  
IN THE HEIGHTS is a musical, with lyrics and music by Lin-Manuel Miranda. You may remember him from the musical Hamilton, and the book written by Quiara Alegrï¿½a Hudes. The show opened on Broadway in March, 2008. In The Heights takes place over the course of 3 days, involving characters in the largely Hispanic American neighborhood of Washington Heights, in New York City. The play is about a bodega owner, named Usnavi (played by Josiah Fahnestock), who wants to date a beauty stylist, Vanessa (played by Dashrene Freeman). Usnavi, dreams of opening a bar in his home country, the Dominican Republic. Meanwhile Nina (played by Chloe Pelham) loves Benny (played by Peyton Cassity), a shy young man who has worked for Nina's parents for years, but her father, Kevin (played by Ashton Mychalczuk), opposes their union because he wants Nina to finish her education at Stanford University. She doesn't want her father to bankrupt himself paying for the expensive school, but her father is prep  
ared to sell his car-service business. Abuela Claudia (played by Emily Witter), who raised Usnavi after the death of his parents, wins $96,000 in a numbers game.   
  
Let's start with the music because this is probably the best part about this musical. The music is performed by the Oak Grove Orchestra Pit, and they do an amazing job in following the original soundtrack. The lyrics to all the songs are both emotional and energetic, and you can feel the energy in every part of the songs.   
  
The actors and the ensemble do an amazing job in the acting department. The actors get into their characters perfectly and the energy they give out is so spectacular. They even speak fluent Spanish both in songs and out of songs.   
  
The technicians and the set crew do an astounding job. The set has two story high buildings with functional floors and vibrant colors. The lights on the outside of the buildings work and the props are real, which pulls the audience even more. Even the bottles of soda are filled. There seem to be no mistakes or mess ups with the sets and props; they are just perfect.   
  
In some of the songs there seems to be an lack of emotion by a few, and the orchestra can sometimes outshine the lyrics to the point where you can't hear the lyrics to the songs. But overall the music is fantastic.  Also, at times the ensemble can be a bit distracting, and the acting a little lackluster, however, they do an amazing job at moving past that.  
  
This musical is a rollercoaster filled with emotions, energy and lots of fun. The songs are catchy, the acting is polished, the set is beautiful, and the techies do an outstanding job. IN THE HEIGHTS, delivers an emotional balance; one that captivates, pulling you in and making you feel like you just stepped off the subway in the upper-west side.  
  
by Jacob Miller of Harrisonville High School  
  
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OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL SHOWS THE WORLD WHAT LIVING IN A BARRIO IS LIKE  
  
What is life like in a low income area? OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL shows us just that with their performance of IN THE HEIGHTS a musical about love, pain, and finding your home.  
  
IN THE HEIGHTS is a musical written by Quiara Alegrï¿½a Hudes and includes lyrics and music from Lin-Manuel Miranda who is famously known for writing Hamilton. IN THE HEIGHTS takes place in Washington Heights, New York City over the course of three days and details what life is like in a barrio.  
  
The first thing that you see when you walk through the theatre doors is the set, which is floor to ceiling with two stories, windows, and more. The set crew has decided to use blinds as a metal gate for the convenience store creatively.   
  
The male lead in this musical is Usnavi, played by Josiah Fahnestock, who gives a stunning performance full of emotion and presence, one thing that really stuck out about Usnavi is his ability to rap in a similar cadence to Lin-Manuel Miranda. The female lead is named Nina Rosario played by Chloe Pelham one thing that stands out for this actor is her stunning vocal range and ability to inject genuine emotion into her songs.  
  
There are many supporting actors for IN THE HEIGHTS, however in this performance there is also a supporting character that sticks out, and that is Daniela. She takes to the stage, full of spunk and sass, commanding attention when need be and letting the leads shine while they were there. Throughout the entire performance every supporting character and ensemble character have tremendous energy and presence.  
  
The technical aspects for this musical are amazing, with smooth transitions on the lights and stunning sound work, thanks to the dedication of Levi McKinney, Kaleighan Chastain, and Madison Webb. Costumes, makeup, and props did an outstanding job bringing life to the stage, and thanks is owed to: Brooklynne Phillips, Nakiya Roe, Lily Dickson, Lilyanna Law, Nina Kutensky, Mia Lunares, Malachi Pingleton, Abbee Wilson, Ben Derry, Hayden Geary, Alexis Owens, Lauren Delacruz, Faith Lee, Kylie Valencia, Madison Wells, and Emily Morrison. The entire show runs as smooth as possible due to the stage manager, Sarah Ealey.  
  
There are mishaps on stage from time to time, which consist of people getting a squeaky voice, people pausing on lines, and some stumbling of lines, however this happens in nearly every high school performance and this cast does a stupendous job of recovering from those few minor hic-ups.  
  
IN THE HEIGHTS performed by Oak Park High School is a fantastic, attention grabbing, breathtaking example of high school theatre, and what it can accomplish by showing the world what struggles people like you and me go through in a barrio.  
  
by Max Allen of Harrisonville High School  
  
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TAKING THEATRE TO A WHOLE NEW HEIGHT  
  
Pride can cause people to do things that may be not always be right. A little white lie never hurt nobody right? Well that was not the case in this weekends jaw-dropping production of IN THE HEIGHTS by Oak Park High School.   
  
IN THE HEIGHTS is a musical written in 1999 by Lin-Manuel Miranda who also wrote the Broadway hit Hamilton. This theatrical work of art premiered on Broadway in 2008 and ran for 1,184 performances. A similarity of the stylized music composition can be noticed between IN THE HEIGHTS and Hamilton. The plot is driven by a small Latino community and their relationships with one another and their common desire to "make it out."   
  
It was a hot and heartwarming night when Nina (Chloe Pelham) returned home from her first year at Stanford University. Her family was ecstatic to see her but things did not end as well as they started. Nina rekindled a romance with her longtime friend Benny, (Peyton Cassity). These lovebirds displayed fantastic emotions and connections with their characters, while also maintaining energy and passion throughout the show.  
  
Cierra Gonzales, plays the role of Daniela, the salon owner and comical friend of Nina's. Her songs, "No Me Diga" and "Carnaval Del Barrio," had the audience captured, with Daniela and her intern Carla's, Lindsey Jones, impeccable attitudes and comedic timing.  
  
No show would be possible, and certainly not capable of such an astonishing performance, without the hard work of the technical crew. IN THE HEIGHTS features a large neighborhood corner set with multi-level buildings designed and constructed by Joe Lunares. The strikingly realistic details have the ability to send the theatre back in time ten years and 800 miles away to New York City.  
  
All of the performers in IN THE HEIGHTS displayed strong vocal abilities that helped carry the show to its success. Although at some times the performers were difficult to understand, they sang their notes with ease.   
  
Oak Park High school did great justice to the Broadway smash-hit IN THE HEIGHTS. They pursued and overcame much to put on a wonderful production that will not be forgotten soon.  
  
by Sydney Calvin of Oak Grove High School  
  
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FIND YOUR WAYï¿½  
  
Tragedy or triumph? That is ultimately for you to decide and IN THE HEIGHTS shows us a story of overcoming struggles. People who have less tend to hold onto family because that's all they have, but money can determine how distant they grow. Family is like a starfish, if you remove one of its arms it will grow back. Family cannot be destroyed no matter the size of the struggle, just stretched. Throughout the night we were shown many moments of heartfelt ballads, soulful swings, and spicy salsa dance numbers. Oak Park High School presents IN THE HEIGHTS.   
  
IN THE HEIGHTS was created by Lin Manuel Miranda his sophomore year in college. It premiered on the Eugene O'Neill Theater in Waterford, Connecticut. It was nominated for, and won multiple awards, in particular thirteen Tony nominations and four awards. It takes place over a time period of three days in a mainly Hispanic American neighborhood in Washington Heights, New York. It shows us the struggles of the tightly knit community and the obstacles they overcome. Between the many impressive dances and strong emotional vocal trances, lies a beneficial message.   
  
Leading the cast is Josiah Fahnestock as Usnavi and Chloe Pelham as Nina Rosario. Fahnestock and Pelham not only showed a very strong connection with the cast and each other, but deep within themselves. This connection is prominent and held up through all situations. They both expressed a deep understanding of their characters throughout and had extraordinary vocal performances. Both enhancing their vocals with actions that allowed the audience to deeply feel what they were going through, leaving them craving for more.   
  
Supporting the cast was Peyton Cassity as Benny and Dasharene Freeman as Vanessa. Cassity has a very strong vocalization and deep characterization that allows him to deeply connect and create an outstanding performance with others. Freeman stands firm within her character and never strays from what the character is truly feeling, portraying a consistent character throughout. The entire ensemble did an extraordinary job at pushing the plot along, as well as bringing the story to life with a multitude of energy-filled dance numbers. All of the characters did a exceptional job at helping move along the story.   
  
There were many spectacular technical aspects of the night, but in particular, the set was designed and executed impeccably, led by Joe Lunares. The cast was able to use the set to its full potential on and off the stage. The costume design, led by Brooklynne Phillips and Nakiya Roe, was outstanding, especially when the cast used it to push along the plot. It was well-executed and compliments the extravagant set. All tech was amazing and they did a stupendous job setting the mood for IN THE HEIGHTS.  
  
Although there may have been a few mishaps with the acting and technicalities, they pushed through them as if they were nothing and upheld their vast amount of energy on stage to create an outstanding interpretation of Miranda's IN THE HEIGHTS.    
  
Make sure you find your way down to Oak Park High School to see an exceptional theatrical production of IN THE HEIGHTS.  
  
by Zach Rainbolt of Oak Grove High School  
  
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ALABANZA A OAK PARK   
  
The lights flicker. The audience becomes silent. The steady beat of the percussion begins. The residents of Washington Heights prepare to open their shops for the day. This is Oak Park's production of IN THE HEIGHTS.   
  
IN THE HEIGHTS was written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, who is now famous for his smash-hit Hamilton, and follows the lives of multiple characters in the mainly Hispanic-American neighborhood of Washington Heights in New York. The relationships between all of the people living on this street are showcased in this rap-style musical.   
  
The show opens on Josiah Fahnestock (Usnavi) and his impeccable rhythm with the challenging rap beats, and his true vocal ability shining throughout the entire show. Another standout performer is Chloe Pelham (Nina Rosario) who's beautiful, balanced voice is always present in every song she sings. She portrays the daughter of the Rosario's with incredible skill and the chemistry between Peyton Cassity (Benny) and her feels electric and real every time they are on stage together, with their voices blending superbly in "When You're Home."  
  
Cierra Gonzales (Daniela) brings magnitudes of energy whenever she is present on stage. Her sassy and vibrant tone of voice and acting choices give the impression of years of experience with "No Me Diga" bringing the comedy to the first act, and "Carnaval Del Barrio" showcasing her particular character and the energy from the entire cast. Also, although not on stage for a very long period of time, Jacob Collier's (Piragï¿½ero) vocal ability shines through in his little scenes and his riffs and his Spanish both feel effortless and smooth.   
  
Joe Lunares does an impeccable job with the set. The different levels, including the windows, the depth, and the overall attention to the minute details is extremely impressive and helps bring the whole story to life, giving the actors a fantastic place to play these characters. With the addition of the projections during ""Everything I Know", Tatianna Rizek brings a whole new emotional level to the song, showing pictures from the characters' childhood and leaving not a single dry eye in the audience.   
  
Oak Park's production of IN THE HEIGHTS will make you laugh, will make you cry, and will leave you in shock of all of the incredible talent of the performers. The obvious passion for theatre and for being on the stage or working behind it makes the production a must-see.  
  
by Ashtin Umstattd of Park Hill High School  
  
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ALABANZA TO OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL'S PRODUCTION OF IN THE HEIGHTS  
  
The vibrant streets of Washington Heights are filled with many contrasting characters, such as Usnavi, the Rosarios, and their daughter Nina, who is carrying a secret and is trying to find a way to tell them and more, are living within this cultural enclave. IN THE HEIGHTS follows the different story lines of the characters, the woes of family, and how the community can come together and become one to support each other when things don't go their way. Oak Park High School portrays the unique Hispanic culture with intricate choreography, detailed sets, and strong vocalists in their production of IN THE HEIGHTS.   
  
IN THE HEIGHTS was written by the Broadway actor Lin-Manuel Miranda. Miranda started writing the musical his sophomore year of college. After his college performed the musical, he was asked if he would extend it to make it suitable for Broadway. After eight years of working on it, IN THE HEIGHTS premiered for the first time on Broadway in 2008.   
  
Josiah Fahnestock plays the character Usnavi. Fahnestock showcases his wide range and impressive articulation of lyrics during rapping songs such as "In the Heights" and "96,000." On the contrary, he is able to switch tones effortlessly and show his emotional side in the song "Alabanza."  Chloe Pelham portrays the character Nina Rosario. She depicts Nina's strong character with stellar acting and maintaining a natural stage presence. She forms realistic on-stage relationships with various characters, both platonically and romantically. Pelham shows off her pure and rich vocals in selections such as "Breathe" and "When the Sun Goes Down."   
  
Cierra Gonzales plays the comedic character of Daniela, the neighborhood hair stylist. Gonzales and Lindsey Jones, who plays Daniela's right hand girl, Carla, create a humorous dynamic duo. Peyton Cassity plays Benny, one of Mr. Rosario's workers and Nina's love interest in the musical. He creates a genuine relationship with Nina. Their on stage chemistry is impeccable and can be seen throughout the whole show. Together, their voices work incredibly well and match up perfectly with rich harmonies.  
  
The set encompasses what it felt like to live in a fast paced, ethnic community. The sets have many details, such as graffiti and includes moving pieces such as Usnavi's cart in his bodega. In addition to moving pieces, it is also visually pleasing and vibrant with bright colors. The depth of the buildings add to the perception of a city block. Lastly, the set also creatively, extended off of the stage and around the perimeter of the auditorium.  
  
The Oak Park High School Pit Orchestra plays the elaborate score without any noticeable error during the entirety of the production. Though at some times, the sound of the orchestra could overpower the vocalists and actors in act one, the sound was quickly remedied by the actors trying to project their voices over the sound, and in act two, the pit starts to balance out and the voices were more audible.  
  
Oak Park High School's production of IN THE HEIGHTS shows how people of a community can fuse together and support each other when nothing seems to be going their way. With superb vocalists, energetic ensembles, and an amazing supporting cast, this production shows the goodness of people and "Paciencia y Fe."  
  
by Justine Suba of Park Hill High School  
  
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WHEN YOU'RE HOME IN THE HEIGHTS  
  
There is truly nothing more breathtaking and heartwarming than when a theater family comes together on stage to share the stories of their characters and the lessons to be learned from their lives. Oak Park High School's theatre department gives the audience everything they have to offer together as they perform IN THE HEIGHTS, a story about family meant to be performed by family.     
  
IN THE HEIGHTS is a musical with music and lyrics written by the notable Lin-Manuel Miranda and book written by Quiara Alegria Hudes. The musical tackles the livelihoods of people living in the largely Hispanic-American neighborhood of Washington Heights, in New York City. Through the interconnected stories of the show, the characters explore friendship, family drama, and romance in this little neighborhood.  
  
Performing the main character Usnavi, Josiah Fahnestock takes the viewers on a wild ride through his small neighborhood with his amazingly masterful rapping as well as showing a beautiful chemistry between himself and all other actors on stage. Most notable of his connections is between himself and Emily Witter, performing Abuela Claudia. Every moment they are on stage together feels real and powerful, and when Josiah performs "Alabanza" you can hear the sincerity in his voice. During the song, sniffles can be heard throughout the theater as soft candle light and an emotional voices fill the air.    
  
Josiah isn't the only one fully embracing his character at Oak Park High School. Cierra Gonzales, performing Daniela, and Lindsey Jones, as Carla, bring a fast and fun energy to the stage as they strut their way around the neighborhood, spreading gossip and the good word of the Lord. The two show a masterful understanding of their characters and perform their comedic moments with quick wit. Two other spectacular performers would have to be Chloe Pelham, performing Nina Rosario, and Peyton Cassity, performing Benny. The chemistry between the two is hard to miss, and both show beautiful control over their vocal range.   
  
The set, designed by Joe Lunares, is also phenomenal. He shows us how warm a little neighborhood in the city can feel. Two stories high, the bottom halves give glances into the businesses of the area while the top halves show us the homes of the characters. The run-down feeling of the set helps solidify the story and the struggles each character faces, bringing the whole show together.      
  
The ensemble, as well, helps push the show forward with their constant upbeat personalities. While not always 100% together in their dancing, it is still enjoyable to see how they all energetically interact with each other character. Most impressive of all would be the bilingual experience demonstrated by the entire cast. The fluidity with which each actor speaks shows the true passion they all have for the show  
  
It is easy to see from miles away that Oak Park High School's theater department is a family. While performing IN THE HEIGHTS, together they take the audience on an emotional roller-coaster, making everyone laugh loudly and weep silently. They welcome the viewer into their home with open arms and it is impossible to leave without a different understanding of the world and the people around us.  
  
by Kaz Brandt of Park Hill High School  
  
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THE HEIGHTS ARE BRILLIANT TONIGHT  
  
Oak Park High School presents IN THE HEIGHTS, a piquant musical set to the fast paced beat of a harmonious blend of rap and Hispanic style music.  
   
IN THE HEIGHTS, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, is a story set in Washington Heights, a Hispanic district in New York City. It voices the struggles and unique culture experienced by many immigrants from Spanish speaking countries.  
   
Nina Rosario, played by Chloe Pelham, has a strong, euphonious voice that truly shines in the song "Breathe." Benny, played by Peyton Cassity, is also an entertaining character. He expresses the feel of a person in a mixed cultural setting quite well. The main star of the show is Usnavi, played by Josiah Fahnestock. He keeps up with the upbeat tempo of the music whilst also portraying an intricate character. He connects the different aspects of the show with his passion and enthusiasm.   
  
Camila Rosario, played by Leah Rios, sings with an emotional complexity unmatched by others in the song "Enough." The ensemble also moves much of the audience to tears in the song "Alabanza," creating an atmosphere in the theater that matches the mournful emotion of the loss of a loved one. Piraguero, played by Jacob Collier, also adds refreshing comical moments to the show in his songs "Piragua" and "Piragua (Reprise)."  
    
The set conveys the feel of a barrio (Hispanic district) very well. With its Spanish graffiti and two story design, it sets the story in an accurate depiction of Washington Heights. The orchestra is superb. They don't miss a single beat in the expeditious music of IN THE HEIGHTS. An extreme amount of detail also went into the makeup for the characters Abuela Claudia, played by Emily Witter, and Graffiti Pete, played by Christion Doan. They demonstrate very impressive work, especially given that one of the makeup managers, Lily Dickson, is blind.   
  
The show as a whole radiates the spirit of the Hispanic culture. While some individual relationships in the show seem awkward, the chemistry shared between the entire cast of the show is outstanding. It is apparent that they are a theatre family, which emphasizes the cultural idea of the "familia," which is essential to the show.   
  
Oak Park High School's IN THE HEIGHTS is a rhythmic event set to the inimitable vibe of the Hispanic culture.  
  
by Lauren Louk of Park Hill High School  
  
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ALABANZA PARA OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL  
  
The beauty of art is in its nature, as no matter how many times the same story may be told, the people who tell them can offer their own twists to make it their own. That is exactly what Oak Park High School does with their performance of IN THE HEIGHTS.  
  
IN THE HEIGHTS is Lin-Manuel Miranda's first smash hit, award winning rap Broadway musical featuring a stellar original cast. Many of whom went on to star in Lin's second rap musical, Hamilton. It's about Nina Rosario returning home to the Hispanic neighborhood Washington Heights, Manhattan after dropping out of college. It deals with themes of love and disappointment, but most importantly explores the familial bonds between an entire neighborhood.  
  
It is in the chemistry between Nina Rosario (Chloe Pelham) and Benny (Peyton Cassity) where the show shines. They give a convincing performance both while they are and aren't singing, their voices blending nicely during duets. Chloe in particular gives an excellent performance as Nina, and whose vocals and acting during the song, "Everything I Know," forced tears out of the audience.  
  
Cierra Gonzales fits her character Daniela like a glove, and there is not a dull moment when she struts on stage. Everything she did on stage, from her voice, to her behavior, and the dress on her back exudes character. Her performance in this musical causes a much-needed uproar of laughter from the audience in between moments of great drama.  
  
Levi McKinney's lighting in this show is nothing short of brilliant. It not only reflected the emotion and the events of the scene, the lively colors chosen pop out to the viewer. The stage is sometimes lit in brilliant shades of purple and pink, working both to illustrate the time of day the scene takes place in, but also the intensity of it through the colors' vibrancy. As contradictory as it may sound, the lighting also deserves praise in its absence, such as in the during the song "Blackout". The audience only gets a glimpse of the chaos ensuing on stage, as dancers in animated LED skull masks dance ominously.  
  
The set, designed by Joe Lunares, sold the atmosphere of this New York neighborhood, being used in a way that adds a verticality seldom seen at a high school level. The bodegas and lofts on stage presented a level of craftsmanship that went above and beyond what is expected and are used to amplify the emotion tenfold during the song "Everything I Know," with clever use of a projector.  
  
The orchestra plays its part nicely, giving the music a more Latin feel, in contrast to the European dominated influences of most high school productions. Unfortunately, its volume does get somewhat distracting. There are a couple of points where the musicians overpowered the singers, which would not have as much of a negative effect if Lin-Manuel Miranda's lyrics weren't so fast paced and precise. These moments, however, are few and far between, and the show succeeds despite this small problem.  
  
IN THE HEIGHTS is a unique musical in both its subject matter and presentation, thus is difficult to pull off at a non-professional level. Oak Park High School doesn't just pull it off, they add their own creative twists to the presentation that add so much emotion, it is hard to imagine it any other way. They offered an experience equally unique to Lin-Manuel Miranda's original vision that will have audiences raving about its brilliance far past its run time.  
  
by Reinart Realina of Park Hill High School  
  
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WELCOME TO THE HEIGHTS  
  
Theatre is something that welcomes all people, no matter how diverse. It also offers a chance for people to learn about varieties of communities, such as the one in Oak Park High School's IN THE HEIGHTS.  
  
IN THE HEIGHTS is a 2008 musical with music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda, and a book by Quiara Alegrï¿½a Hudes. Taking place around the Fourth of July, the story surrounds the Latino/Hispanic community in a section of Washington Heights, a neighborhood in New York City.  
  
Usnavi (Josiah Fahnestock) is the unspoken leader of the community, running the local bodega (corner/convenience store) that everyone comes to. The most prominent character and rapper, Fahnestock is clear and concise, and his developed and personal relationships with each character adds to the clear theme of unity within the show. The events within the show seem to start up when Nina Rosario (Chloe Pelham) returns home from Stanford University, who seems divided after her time at college, and worried about her family's and neighborhood's high opinion of her. In each song Pelham's in, the emotional distress is evident, and her strong vocals portray this very well.  
  
As Usnavi's best friend and Nina's love interest, Benny (Peyton Cassity) is a fun, light hearted, and strong performer. While he is quite comedic, Cassity portrays the dramatic side of his character quite well. When news comes up that Nina's father, Kevin (Ashton Muchalczuk) is selling his taxi business, Benny is clearly hurt, feeling betrayed by the Rosario family as he is about to lose his job. His chemistry with Nina is a prominent characteristic, especially within the songs "When You're Home," and "Sunrise." Along with Benny, is Vanessa (Dasharene Freeman), Usnavi's crush, and a worker in the local salon. She dreams of moving downtown and becoming an artist. Within Washington Heights, she is popular and is flirted with quite a bit. Her strong vocals add a special element within the show, as well as her hidden feelings for Usnavi.  
  
The tech in the show allows for emotional connections with the neighborhood and what they are experiencing. In the song "Blackout," fireworks are shown going off over the town, lighting up the night sky and the hundreds of emotions the characters are shown to be feeling- ranging from fear to love. One of the best and most heartwarming moments of the show is during Nina's song, "Everything I Know."   
  
When the matriarch of the neighborhood passes away, Nina looks through the scrapbooks and memorabilia showing the important events of people in the neighborhood. On the wall by Usnavi's bodega, pictures within the scrapbook are projected, such as, Usnavi as a child, the opening of the Rosario's taxi service, and Nina's high school graduation. As she cries and the neighborhood mourns her, the pictures do well to connect us with the characters.  
  
The singers, while beautiful, can be hard to hear sometimes, especially due to a strong orchestra and ensemble, and occasional missed mic cues. However, the actors do a great job of projecting their voices and making themselves heard beyond the use of microphones.   
  
IN THE HEIGHTS does a beautiful job of inviting everyone to learn about the experiences of the Latino/Hispanic community within Washington Heights. Oak Park High School is full of talented performers, and showcases them in the show. Every aspect is diverse and beautiful, showing that this show will definitely welcome you to the heights.  
  
by Trinity Christofferson of Park Hill High School