# AN INTERVIEW WITH THE *RENT* STAR.

# Adam Pascal's

## BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY

by tim parks

When *Rent*, The Broadway Tour pulls into its whistle stop at The San Diego Civic Theatre on March 10 - 15, it will have three very special guests onboard. Adam Pascal, Anthony Rapp and Gwen Stewart (the original "Seasons Of Love" soloist) will be reprising the roles that brought them acclaim during *Rent*'s original run on Broadway in 1996 and beyond.

*Rent* first emerged on the Broadway scene, chronicling artistic types who were struggling to balance their impoverished lives and creative endeavors. The show struck a giant chord with the theater-going populace. And, today its relevance can be seen in every headline dealing with the economy and on the face of every person who has to toil in order to survive.

Unfortunately Jonathan Larson, the man who penned the lyrics, music and book for *Rent*, would not be able to see how applicable the hopeful musical would be now. In fact, he never got to enjoy the fruits of his labor. He died suddenly the night prior to its off-Broadway debut in 1996.

The musical, based upon on the Puccini opera La Boheme, also dealt with the AIDS epidemic in New York's East Village, and went on to win both the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the 1996 Tony Award for Best Musical, Best Score and Best Book.

Among its other achievements were acting nods for Pascal, who received a Tony and a Drama Desk nomination, and two wins with an Obie and Theatre World award as best actor for his portrayal of Roger Davis; a rock musician coping with both being HIV-positive and the suicide of his girlfriend.

Pascal would go on to reprise the role in the London production of *Rent*, the 2005 film based upon the musical, as well as a 2007 touring production.

*The Rage Monthly* spoke with Pascal about the full circle world that *Rent* has become, and how his involvement with the show again has afforded him a happy musical homecoming.

"Well, Anthony [Rapp] and I had gone back to the Broadway production in the summer of 2007 – just to do a 12-week stint. And it went really well, and we had a wonderful time doing it," Pascal explained. "The show did really well; and there seemed to be a lot of excitement and interest around the two of us coming back to the show.

Photography by Joan Marcus

"I guess the producers thought that it would be a good idea to build a tour around the two of us, to see if that would continue throughout the country," he said. "It seemed like a great way to close that chapter of performing in the show for me; to take what it was, at least partially, when it was the original cast and take it out to the rest of the country."

For Pascal, the passage of time also helps in keeping the role of Roger fresh each time he takes to the stage, and he explained how the role is always evolving after playing him on and off for more than a decade.

"It's a very different experience this time," he stated. "There's not all of that emotional baggage that was there when we first performed the show on Broadway; the death of Jonathan Larson and all of the stuff that went on with the rapid success of the show.

The role is different because I'm a different person, and I also bring 12 years of age to the role that I didn't have before, and a lot of life experience. I think I've had more life experience in the 12 years since I did *Rent*, than in the 25 years I had lived up until that point. So, I think in subtle ways it all shows up in the performance."

Since Pascal has spent his time in the trenches with all aspects of *Rent*, he was quick to cite his favorite aspect of being associated with the phenomenon of the show's endurance.

"The effect that it has on the audience," Pascal answered. "Being involved in something, and first realizing that we were touching people so deeply – that's an incredible, incredible gift to be able to be a part of something that does that for people. It's the best part of this whole experience."

Another way that *Rent* has moved the masses was when it became a film in 2005. As directed by Chris Columbus (the first two *Harry Potter* films), many of the cast involved in the original stage production were invited back to reprise their roles on celluloid, Pascal included.

He saw the filmmaking process as a natural off-shoot of what he did come performance-time nightly.

"Once he [Columbus] called action and we were doing the scene – they were the same moments and the same words and the same intentions that I had when I was doing it on the stage," Pascal reflected. "So, it wasn't that different in that respect. But it was a great experience unto itself – it encapsulated something very important to me at a certain point in my life."

And, one might think that not having the immediacy of a live audience to feed off of would prove to be difficult during the filming - it was not the case, as Pascal detailed. "Interestingly enough, that wasn't really a problem," he relayed. "The atmosphere on the set of the film was so much fun, because of Chris Columbus and his generosity as a person and as a director.

"It was a great little family we formed, cast and crew. And again, there was a real sense of fun on the set; and also a sense of urgency that we do the best job we could do, because we were now committing it to film."

Pascal has also delved into *Rent*-free projects, with turns in other films, such as *School of Rock* with Jack Black, and on stage he starred as the original Radames in the Tim Rice and Elton John smash musical, *Aida*.

The actor said the project was "a great next step for me, in terms of a leading role on Broadway." And, as far as the reported movie version with Beyonce Knowles rumored to be involved in its production, Pascal has not been approached to don Radames' garb again, yet.

But that is fine with him, as his re-emergence into the world of *Rent* will be keeping him plenty busy for the next year.

This touring company of *Rent* features both seasoned veterans, as well as various members of the original Broadway production, which took its final curtain call on The Great White Way last year after 5,124 performances.

Pascal is glad to report that all of the actors get along famously and exclaimed that "It's just the greatest cast I could ever imagine!"

Photography by John Marcus

Since *Rent* has taken its Broadway bow, and is enjoying success with the national touring company – is there a bittersweet feeling for Pascal to be a part of the show in this stage of its history?

"It would have been nice if the show ran forever, but it ran for 13 years and that's amazing," he recanted about the seventh longest-running Broadway show. "It's historic at this point.

"And certainly at this point in my life, and today's economy with what's going on with jobs; there's a lot of my friends in the business who don't have jobs, I'm thrilled to have a job. As we tour, you see a lot of people are hurting, it's obvious."

As for Pascal's life after *Rent*, the married father of two has his fair share of gainful employment lined up for him and seems on par with the message of Rent to not let the tough times get the better of him.

"There are a couple of different musical theater projects on the horizon, one of which I'm putting together as a producer and to star in it," he revealed.

And in that same spirit of getting past adversity, a number of organizations are partnering up with Broadway San Diego in fundraising efforts through ticket sales of *Rent*.

They include: the LGBT Community Center, in support of The Center's Youth Housing Project, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of San Diego, the Skinny Gene Project – a non-profit devoted to prevention of diabetes. Among other organizations participating in this fundraising are: the Mt. Carmel Drama Boosters, the UCSD Staff Association, San Diego Hospice and Grossmont High School.

Fundraising tickets can be purchased through any of these organizations to support these worthwhile causes.

**For *Rent* showtimes and ticket information, log onto www.BroadwaySD.com.**