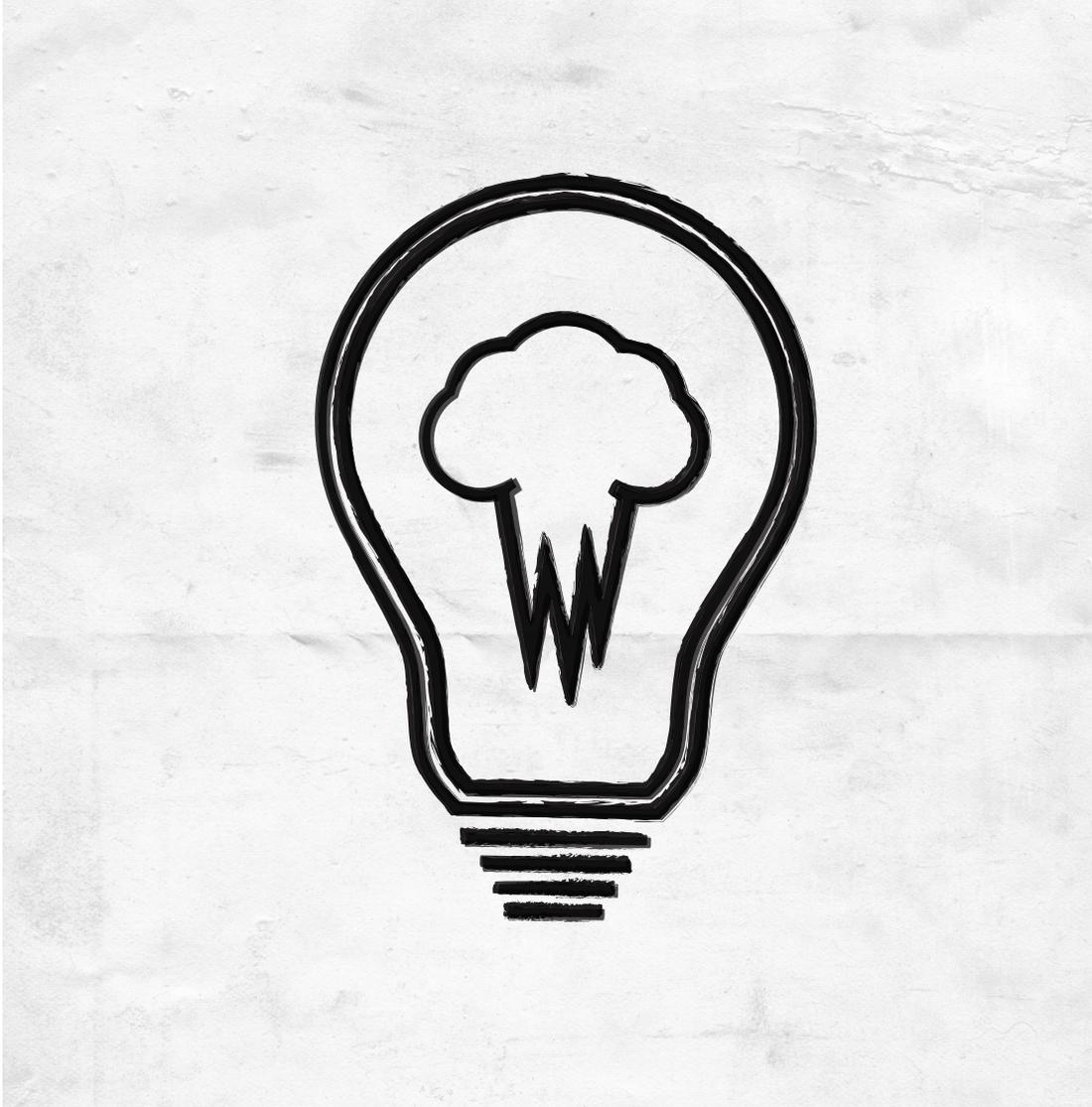


Burn All Night Electronic Press Kit



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American Repertory Theater

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americanrepertorytheater.org

For Immediate Release: July 28, 2017

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**American Repertory Theater
Announces Complete Casting for
Burn All Night
Book and Lyrics by Andy Mientus
Music by Van Hughes, Nick LaGrasta, and Brett Moses
Choreography by Sam Pinkleton
Directed by Jenny Koons
August 18 – September 8, 2017**

Cambridge, MA — The American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) at Harvard University, under the leadership of Artistic Director Diane Paulus and Executive Director Diane Quinn, is pleased to present ***Burn All Night***, with Book and Lyrics by **Andy Mientus**, Music by **Van Hughes, Nick LaGrasta**, and **Brett Moses**, Choreography by **Sam Pinkleton**, and Directed by **Jenny Koons**. Performances begin on Friday, August 18 and run through Friday, September 8 at OBERON, 2 Arrow Street, Cambridge.

Performance dates and times:

August 18 - 20, 22 - 25, 29 - 31; September 1, 5 - 6 at 7:30PM

August 26 - 27; September 2 - 3 at 4PM and 8PM

September 7 - 8 at 7PM and 10PM

Press opening: Wednesday, August 23 at 7:30PM

Press invitations will be sent out in early August.

Ticket prices from \$25. Now on sale by phone at 617.547.8300, in person at the Loeb Drama Center Ticket Services (64 Brattle Street) or online at americanrepertorytheater.org

In an age of uncertainty, four lost souls come to the city in search of themselves. An unflinching look at being young on the eve of global catastrophe, this world premiere musical directed by **Jenny Koons** (*A Sucker Emcee, In This Moment*) and choreographed by Tony nominee **Sam Pinkleton** (*Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*) features a synthpop score by Teen Commandments members **Van Hughes, Nick LaGrasta**, and **Brett Moses** with a book and lyrics by **Andy Mientus** (“SMASH”).

The cast includes **Krystina Alabado** (*Spring Awakening*) as Holly, **Ken Clark** (*Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*) as Zak, **Lincoln Clauss** as Bobby, and **Perry Sherman** (*Fun Home*) as Will with an ensemble including **Gabrielle Carrubba**, **Aurie Ceylon**, **Marquis Johnson** (*Disney's Beauty and the Beast*), **Ashley LaLonde** (*Violet*), **AJ Rafael**, **MJ Rodriguez** (*Trans Scripts, Part I: The Women*), and **Jamar Williams** (*Witness Uganda*). The band includes **Maddie Jay** on Bass, **Maxime Cholly** on Drums, **Claudio Rainó** on Guitar, and **Michael Mastroianni** on Keys. The creative team includes scenic design by **Sara Brown** (*The Shape She Makes*), costume design by **Evan Prizant** (*Sunday in the Park with George*, Associate Costume Designer, revival), lighting design by **Bradley King** (*Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*), sound design by **Jessica Paz** (*Dear Evan Hansen*), and music direction

by **Cian McCarthy** (*The Book of Mormon*).

ABOUT THE A.R.T.:

The **American Repertory Theater** (A.R.T.) at Harvard University is a leading force in the American theater, producing groundbreaking work in Cambridge and beyond. The A.R.T. was founded in 1980 by Robert Brustein, who served as Artistic Director until 2002, when he was succeeded by Robert Woodruff. Diane Paulus began her tenure as Artistic Director in 2008. Under the leadership of Paulus and Executive Director Diane Quinn, the A.R.T. seeks to expand the boundaries of theater by programming events that immerse audiences in transformative theatrical experiences.

Throughout its history, the A.R.T. has been honored with many distinguished awards, including the Tony Award for Best New Play for ***All the Way*** (2014); consecutive Tony Awards for Best Revival of a Musical for ***Pippin*** (2013) and ***The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*** (2012), both of which Paulus directed; a Pulitzer Prize; a Jujamcyn Prize for outstanding contribution to the development of creative talent; the Tony Award for Best Regional Theater; and numerous Elliot Norton and IRNE Awards.

The A.R.T. collaborates with artists around the world to develop and create work in new ways. It is currently engaged in a number of multi-year projects, including a new collaboration with Harvard's Center for the Environment that will result in the development of new work over several years. Under Paulus's leadership, the A.R.T.'s club theater, OBERON, has been an incubator for local and emerging artists and has attracted national attention for its innovative programming and business models.

As the professional theater on the campus of Harvard University, the A.R.T. catalyzes discourse, interdisciplinary collaboration, and creative exchange among a wide range of academic departments, institutions, students, and faculty members, acting as a conduit between its community of artists and the university. A.R.T. plays a central role in Harvard's newly launched undergraduate Theater, Dance, and Media concentration, teaching courses in directing, dramatic literature, acting, voice, design, and dramaturgy. The A.R.T. Institute for Advanced Theater Training, run in partnership with the Moscow Art Theatre School and the Harvard Extension School, offers graduate training in acting, dramaturgy, and voice.

Dedicated to making great theater accessible, the A.R.T. actively engages more than 5,000 community members and local students annually in project-based partnerships, workshops, conversations with artists, and other enrichment activities both at the theater and across the Greater Boston area.

Through all of these initiatives, the A.R.T. is dedicated to producing world-class performances in which the audience is central to the theatrical experience.

For further information visit americanrepertorytheater.org/BurnAllNight

@americanrep | #BurnAllNightART

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American Repertory Theater

presents

BURN ALL NIGHT

Book & Lyrics
ANDY MIENTUS

Music
VAN HUGHES
NICHOLAS LaGRASTA
BRETT MOSES

Scenic Design
SARA BROWN

Costume Design
EVAN PRIZANT

Lighting Design
BRADLEY KING

Sound Design
JESSICA PAZ

Casting
STEPHANIE YANKWITT

Associate Choreographer
ARI GROOVER

Production
Stage Manager
TAYLOR BRENNAN*

Music Supervision & Vocal Arrangements
CIAN MCCARTHY

Choreographer
SAM PINKLETON

Director
JENNY KOONS

First performance at OBERON on August 18, 2017.

A.R.T. SEASON SUPPORT



The A.R.T. 2017/18 Season is supported in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which receives support from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Bobby.....**LINCOLN CLAUSS***
Zak.....**KEN CLARK***
Holly.....**KRYSTINA ALABADO***
Will.....**PERRY SHERMAN***
The Kids.....**GABRIELLE CARRUBBA***,
AURIE CEYLON*, **MARQUIS JOHNSON***,
ASHLEY LaLONDE, **AJ RAFAEL***,
MJ RODRIGUEZ*, **JAMAR WILLIAMS***

DANCE CAPTAIN

GABRIELLE CARRUBBA*

BAND

Bandleader/Keyboards: **MICHAEL MASTROIANNI**

Drums: **MAXIME CHOLLEY**

Bass: **MADDIE JAY**

Guitar: **CLAUDIO RAINÒ**

(*) Member of Actors' Equity Association



PROCLAMATION

An after-school devised theater ensemble of high school juniors and seniors, who create and perform an original show inspired by the critical social issues of our day, mentored by A.R.T. artists and Harvard scholars.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: AUGUST 25, 2017

PERFORMANCES: EARLY NOVEMBER

AmericanRepertoryTheater.org/proclamation

ADDITIONAL STAFF

Assistant Stage Manager.....	ALYCIA MARUCCI*
Assistant Scenic Designer.....	MADIE HAYS
Costume Design Assistant.....	AISLINN BROPHY
Assistant Lighting Designer.....	BAILEY COSTA
Assistant Sound Designer.....	PETER GANGI
Voice and Text.....	ERIKA BAILEY
Assistant Director.....	THOMAS PETERSON
Script Consultant.....	TONY MENESES
Assistant Music Director.....	BRIAN GE
Keyboard & Computer Programmer.....	NICHOLAS LaGRASTA
Additional Programming.....	BRETT MOSES
Copyist.....	DANIEL GITTLER
A.R.T. Institute Production Dramaturg.....	YAN CHEN
Producing Assistant.....	EMILY BERGQUIST
Production Assistants.....	BECKETT MULLEN, CLAIRE RIVKIN

Additional equipment provided by ETC New York.

A.R.T. SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Tara Balan, Emerson College '19, Development
Finn Bamber, Maumee Valley Country Day School '18, Lighting
Hannah Berkowitz, New York University '21, Artistic
Lily Davis, The Brearly School '18, Artistic
Brian Ge, Harvard University '18, Artistic^
Holden Higgins, Stuyvesant High School '18, Artistic
David Lynch, Harvard University '20, Education & Community Programs^
Ashley LaLonde, Harvard University '20, Artistic^
Michelle LoRizzo, University of Central Florida MFA '18, Education & Community Programs
Beckett Mullen, Harvard University '18, Artistic^
Thomas Peterson, Harvard University '18, Artistic^
Allison Pichowicz, Carnegie Mellon University MAM '18, Marketing
Claire Rivkin, Harvard University '19, Artistic^
Zoë Sonnenberg, Stanford University '18, Education & Community Programs
Jamie Tippett, Stanford University '19, Sound

^With support from the Harvard University Office of Career Services

SPECIAL THANKS

Hunter Arnold, TBD Theatricals
MIT Music and Theater Arts

**The show runs approximately 90 minutes,
including one five-minute intermission.**

American Repertory Theater presents *Burn All Night*

Performed at OBERON (2 Arrow Street)

Press photos: Evgenia Eliseeva.



Lincoln Clauss (Bobby) arrives in New York City in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



Lincoln Clauss (Bobby) and Krystina Alabado (Holly) reunite in New York City in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



Ken Clark (Zak) reflects in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



Perry Sherman (Will) is ready to party in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



Krystina Alabado (Holly) and Perry Sherman (Will) share an intimate moment in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



Lincoln Clauss (Bobby) and the ensemble feel “Famous” tonight in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



(L-R) Aurie Ceylon, Marquis Johnson, Ashley LaLonde, and AJ Rafael dance to the synth-pop score of *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



MJ Rodriguez (Oona) takes the stage at the club in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



Ken Clark (Zak) and Krystina Alabado (Holly) discuss their relationship in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



Krystina Alabado (Holly) considers her options in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



Krystina Alabado (Holly), Lincoln Clauss (Bobby), Perry Sherman (Will), and Ken Clark (Zak) shut out the world in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.



MJ Rodriguez (Oona) and the ensemble burn all night in *Burn All Night*. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva.

A Note from Writer Andy Mientus

In the spring of 2008, a buddy of mine stopped a college house party cold when he announced casually that he'd be dead in four years. Alarmed, I pulled him aside and asked him if he was thinking of harming himself or hiding some illness or addiction. Calmly, he told me no, that we would all be dead, because the apocalypse was coming on December 21, 2012.

That fall, at my 22nd birthday party, I met Van Hughes in a bathtub as I went to make sure a friend was vomiting in the toilet rather than the bidet as instructed. (She failed the task.)

"A story about youth and nightlife should be told with the music of youth and nightlife."

In the time between that spring college party and my birthday in the fall, my father died suddenly, and I dropped out of school to go on the road with a musical. I wasn't making very much money, but it was just enough to afford my very worst behavior.

I know now that I was grieving, but at the time, I felt that I was making the most of the ticking time bomb I had inherited from generations past. Immediate pleasure was far more reliable than long-term goals because we could be gone at any moment. Friends and lovers seemed more appealing than family because you could always get more friends and lovers.

I put all of this anxiety and revelry into a collection of disparate scenes with some tuneless poems

purely to have some place to put it. Not much remains from those messy first sketches except an idea that a story about youth and nightlife should be told with the music of youth and nightlife—not a theatrical approximation of those sounds, but the real thing. It wasn't a revolutionary idea, but a return to form. In the Golden Age, you would hear "Hey There" in *The Pajama Game* onstage and then go home and hear it on the radio. When musicals were at the zenith of their popularity, there was no divide between "pop" and "show tunes." I thought of the boy in the bathtub.



I Facebooked Van, who happened to know and sometimes write with a synth-pop band, Teen Commandments. They agreed to try writing a couple of songs. It was the first instance of inexplicable serendipity that has led us here, tonight, to you.

Thankfully, December 2012 came and went without incident, but I wish I could say I felt more optimistic about what lies ahead for us all. Since then, the Earth has gotten warmer, the phones have gotten smarter, the bombs reach further, and our politics have gotten uglier. But tonight, in this space where theater and nightlife mesh (more serendipity), we have a show for you.

In its creation over many years, ***Burn All Night*** has brought me inspiring friends and collaborators, newfound passion for what has always made this genre magical, and best of all, forgiveness and even affection for that younger, messier me. People make mistakes when they are scared. It's not the end of the world.



A Note from Director Jenny Koons

In the summer of 2015, Van and I were working on a show together. He mentioned in passing that he was writing a musical with his friends and wondered if I might give it a read. Within the first pages, I recognized myself so clearly in the themes at the heart of the show. It echoed questions I was asking myself: how do I find the purpose to create when the world and its problems are overwhelming? Why do I feel isolated while living in a world with so much noise? In the years since that first read, the themes have only deepened for me.

Burn All Night is a story of creation in a world of uncertainty. Creation of art. Of adulthood. Of family. Of self. Creation of belonging when the world is telling you to shut up and grow up. Creation of purpose when the world you thought you knew suddenly shifts beneath you. It is the world we're living in now, of Hurricane Sandy, of political warfare, of Oklahoma earthquakes. We feel helpless in the face of challenges that feel too big to fix. And yet, we love and create and try and fail. We call out to be heard, to be seen, to be felt, even



Jenny Koons in a rehearsal with the cast of *Burn All Night*.

when everything around us says be quiet, be smaller, be less.

It is also the story of how a tiny spark can create something so much bigger than ourselves. While the ember of the story was kindled a decade ago at a house party, the fears and questions experienced by the characters feel stunningly relevant today. Over the years, these big questions at the heart of the story have brought more and more people to the fire. Not to find answers, but to find connection in the asking, in the unknown. And as more people gather to the flame, a new

community forms. And tonight, that community includes you.

And so, as humans always have, we gather around the light. We tell stories. We ask those unanswerable questions in the dark. We dance and sweat and make delicate peace with the uncertainty.

AUGUST 18 -
SEPTEMBER 8, 2017

AT OBERON

BURN ALL NIGHT

Book and Lyrics by
Andy Mientus

Music by
Van Hughes,
Nicholas LaGrasta,
and **Brett Moses**

Directed by
Jenny Koons

Choreographed by
Sam Pinkleton

In an age of uncertainty, four lost souls come to the city in search of themselves. An unflinching look at being young on the eve of global catastrophe, this world premiere musical directed by Jenny Koons (*A Sucker Emcee, In This Moment*) and choreographed by Tony nominee Sam Pinkleton (*Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*) features a synth-pop score by Teen Commandments members Van Hughes, Nicholas LaGrasta, and Brett Moses with a book and lyrics by Andy Mientus ("Smash").



WHEN THE WORLD ENDS, WE BURN ALL NIGHT

Actor Andy Mientus first met actor-musician Van Hughes nearly ten years ago. Now Mientus, debuting as writer of both book and lyrics, has joined forces with Teen Commandments, a Brooklyn-based synth-pop band made up of Hughes, Brett Moses, and Nicholas LaGrasta, to create ***Burn All Night***.

Interview by Yan Chen

YAN CHEN: How did you start working together on *Burn All Night*?

ANDY MIENTUS: We met at my twenty-second birthday party in Santa Monica, California, in a bathtub. For real. And we were friends for years. Van was a musician as well as an actor, and I had this idea—a very vague one—about kids going out, with music that really sounds like the music they would be listening to. I wrote a quick, short script and sent it to Van.

VAN HUGHES: I had definitely wanted to write a show—it was serendipitous, the way that it happened.

AM: I wanted to make a show about the kids who were like me, and the kids I was encountering. We were at this stage in our lives when we were going out all the time and staying out until dawn having all these crazy experiences against this backdrop of the end of the world. I was feeling a lot of anxiety about world events—and this was during the Obama years. This was when things were good. I was thinking, what if we made those feelings hyperliteral and immediate? How would my friends and I react if the world was ending on this day? And so we started.

How did you start building that world of the show and the music within it?

AM: At our first meetings, I had the characters more than I had a plot. So we talked about who they were

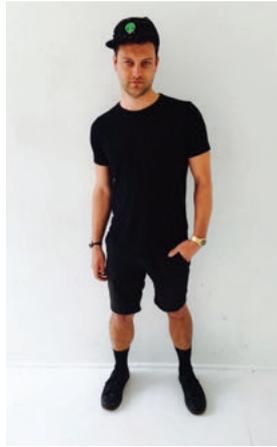
and who they would listen to. We literally made lists of bands: Holly listens to Sleigh Bells, Chvrches, and Charli XCX. We wanted the music to sound like those artists.

Van, what has writing songs for this musical been like compared to your songwriting process for Teen Commandments?

VH: In a way, my experience with Teen Commandments is parallel to what the characters in our show experience. I just met Brett at a party, and we became good friends and started writing together. Then he started this band with his roommate Nick, and we also became friends and started going out in Brooklyn and writing together. It was when they had already started helping me write the show that we thought, “Maybe we should all do this together,” and then it was a couple years later that I actually joined Teen Commandments.

And like Andy was saying earlier, we’d both been in the musical scene for a while. Especially when you’re doing workshops, you learn how they’re made. I thought: what if a show didn’t follow the standard theater form as much? I wondered if I could get away with lyrics like you would hear on an album, or the radio.

AM: Nick and Brett check us and keep us in the synth-pop world, which is great for us. Anything that’s too musical theater, they tell us so.



something public, texting “I am so sad, I am so anxious, I am so... whatever.”

That contrast is an interesting way to bring out the frustration and anxiety you were mentioning earlier. Could you talk about how the show developed out of those initial experiments?

VH: For a long while it was a back-burner project; I would say three or four years. The reason that Teen Commandments haven’t put out so much music is that we’ve been writing the show, and we have work in the can that we’re hoping to deliver soon.

AM: From start to finish it was close to ten years, but in actuality it was more like two years of hard, fast development. Then, when our director Jenny Koons came on two years ago, things really changed for me as a book writer. She gave me strong guidance in helping shape disparate ideas and characters into one streamlined whole.

So the show has been a long time in the making. Andy, what was it like for you making the transition from actor to writer of book and lyrics?

AM: It’s scary, because I’ve always written things for myself, but to take myself seriously enough as a writer is a big leap. I wish I could say that I’ve developed a great deal of confidence—I feel that I’ve developed a great deal of bravado, and I’ve realized that life is short. There’s no time to be scared of yourself and your abilities. I want to do this, and enough people on my team seem to believe in this thing, so why not put it out there and see what happens?

Jenny was really instrumental in giving me a process and telling me, “Normally, this is how this works.” She wrote out all the songs and scenes on notecards and laid them all out on the floor, which looked very similar to a scene that I had with Debra Messing in NBC’s “Smash” when she was teaching me how to write a musical by using notecards. I sent that screenshot to Jenny, and she said, “Oh my God, we look great.” So that’s a real thing that people do—I thought it was just made up for TV. It’s really useful to have everything laid out that way.

A driving factor for Teen Commandments’ music is dance, which will also feature prominently in the show. What role does dance play in the storytelling of *Burn All Night*?

VH: It’s a release in the same way that the songs function. The world is coming to an end, and I have to distract myself.

AM: Dance is so much a part of this world that we’re trying to invite the audience into, and I feel so lucky that we’ve got Sam Pinkleton as our choreographer. He is a big believer that everyone is a dancer. In the show, we have a diversity of body types and experience, of people who don’t look cool, but who dance with such abandon that they do look cool. He knows how to capture that and shape that.

What do you hope OBERON’s club-theater setting will contribute to audiences’ experience?

AM: I want them to feel that they’re in on something, the way you feel when you stumble into that after-hours party and something unbelievable is going on. You’ve been given a window into a world that you might not ever have gotten to see otherwise.

VH: It’s also an inclusive environment. Not necessarily that you’re a voyeur, but you’re a part of it.

What else would you like to express to audiences before the premiere?

AM: Even though we’ve talked about how different this musical is, it’s rooted in love for the genre. And although we’re writing about cool kids and cool scenes, there’s a lot of heart and humor in them. These people try to be cool, but they’re just lumpy, gross, normal humans trying to look out for each other.

VH: They’re just young, and everyone was young once. It’s like New York City in the seventies. Same thing. City going bankrupt. The world is ending. People were out at Studio 54 hitting it hard and blowing off steam. It’s a desperately universal thing.

Yan Chen is a second-year dramaturgy student at the A.R.T. Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University.

VH: We want it to be authentic—we’re just giving you a song the way you hear it. The way I imagine sound for the show, the music should be all around you, the way that you hear pop music in a club or party environment, not just coming at you from one side, like in a proscenium theater.

In what other ways does *Burn All Night* depart from traditional musicals?

AM: What’s funny is, Van and I are from this world—we’ve worked in theater for a lot of years, and we really love it. So we actually play by some pretty traditional rules, but we try to subvert them. In classic Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, characters sing when they can’t speak anymore, when words alone aren’t enough to convey what they’re feeling. So we thought, what if we take that same idea, but have them sing when they have to escape the scene, because what’s going on inside of them is too much to bring up?

VH: They break away to divert into their own mind, like a music video or a soliloquy, and then come back to the scene. It’s a common trend with people of our generation, with their phones. In a tricky situation, you might just be like, “Oh, I’ve got a text—”

AM: —and just look away. You’ve got a whole private thing going on while you’re doing

KICKING OUT THE CHORUS BOY

How choreographer Sam Pinkleton is breaking the mold

by Elizabeth Amos

Limbs flying, hips gyrating, and endless sequences of jumps, flips, and turns—if you've witnessed dancers close enough to sweat on you doing all the above, you may have choreographer Sam Pinkleton to thank. Pinkleton is known for shaking up the Broadway chorus with his unique choreographic vision focused on collaboration, athleticism, and a well-developed sense of play.

Pinkleton rejoins the A.R.T. this season following his success with the now Tony Award-winning *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*, for which he himself received a Tony nomination. Exuberant and expansive—in both the A.R.T.'s Loeb Drama Center, then in Broadway's massive Imperial Theater—the choreography for *The Great Comet* has signaled the arrival of a whole new generation of musicals, including Pinkleton's upcoming project, *Burn All Night*.

Open, engaged, and humming with energy—even after a long morning of meetings—Pinkleton embodies the intensity and quirkiness of his work. Perched at a cabaret-style table overlooking OBERON's dance floor, he animatedly expresses his excitement about the space and *Burn All Night's* team and score. "I heard this music and I lost my mind," he explains. "I thought, 'this can't possibly be from a musical. It's music I want to listen to on the subway and go out dancing to.' It's insane."

Pinkleton operates in a different way from most choreographers. His dancers must be armed with dynamism, drive, and a willingness to take risks, but technique is more of a bonus than a requirement. "I'm trying to bring the best and the weirdest thing out of every human, whether they're a technically trained dancer or not," he explains. "The thing I love about being a choreographer is the thing I love about people dancing at weddings—REAL dancing."

Pinkleton's dreams of becoming a Broadway chorus boy swiftly changed course when it became clear during his time at New York University that a directing track, rather than a dance major, would make better use of his abilities. "I love dance, but I never had the skill or the interest, honestly, in taking on the technical part of it," he says. Attending NYU allowed the young artist to become immersed in New York's downtown theater world, where opportunities began to greet him. "I found myself in a series of rooms that needed a person to make dance happen, and I was the one who jumped around the most, so I became that person."

Those chance opportunities have developed into an eclectic résumé of choreographic achievements involving events



Burn All Night choreographer Sam Pinkleton (below) returns to A.R.T. following his Tony-nominated work on A.R.T.'s 2015 production of *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*.

and productions on, off, and far away from Broadway. From Manhattan Theatre Club's *Heisenberg* and Roundabout Theatre Company's *Machinal*, to *Rimbaud in New York* at BAM and collaborations with dance companies like The Dance Cartel (*ONTHEFLOOR* at OBERON in spring 2017), Pinkleton's experience is multifaceted.

Across this range of subjects and venues, his choreography seeks opportunities for connection, for audience members to make eye contact with performers and be welcomed into a mutual experience through dance. The presence of the audience in his choreographic vision, including *Burn All Night's* invitation to audience members to mingle and dance with the performers, adds a thrilling element of unpredictability. "There are all these amazing variables. That, to me, is why live theater happens: there's an element of chance."

For the choreographer, these moments of connection are integral to a larger mission of making the arts a more inclusive experience: he seeks to create art that can be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of their education, occupation, or theatrical knowledge. "I not only believe in, but aggressively want to support populist theater because I think making something for as many people as possible without compromising the integrity of the work is a beautiful challenge," he says.

This challenge goes hand in hand with

another goal of his: cultivating diversity on stage as well as in the audience. "Representation is not just political. I believe that it holds profound emotional and narrative payoff," he emphatically asserts, going on to explain that he wants viewers to be able to recognize their communities in his casts and choreography. "The spectator's ability to say at any production: I can see my world there, I can see myself there, and there is an equality in the performer's movement that reminds me they are individuals rather than a beautiful cast of machines—that is the thing that I would say can unite all of my work."



Elizabeth Amos is a second-year dramaturgy student at the A.R.T. Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University.

THERE IS NO LINE

Director Jenny Koons on the politics of participation

by Robert Duffley

The room is the thing for *Burn All Night* director Jenny Koons. Grounding her directing work in experience as an educator and organizer, Koons sees rooms—rehearsal rooms, classrooms, and performance venues—as the spaces where we model, and redefine, the social patterns of oppression or liberation.

“I’ve been thinking about directing and theater, and the rooms that we’re forming, as a mode of community organizing,” said Koons in a June interview just before *Burn All Night* auditions at OBERON. “I wonder how we continue to create spaces in which we collide as a training for the unknown—and how do we take what we’ve learned in our little room where we’re making a play and magnify that?”

Koons’ recent productions pursue innovation by facilitating atypical encounters. “I’m really charged by the idea of what it means to bring a really diverse room together—in every sense of what those words mean—to make something that we, singularly, wouldn’t

be able to imagine,” she says. As a director of *Theatre for One*, Koons staged intimate yet public exchanges inside a mobile, miniature, state-of-the-art performance venue. “I’m most excited by projects involving a collision of some kind, whether that’s a DJ and a poet”—as in her 2014 *A Sucker Emcee*—“or, in the case of *Burn All Night*, a synth-pop band and two Broadway actors.”

Burn All Night draws inspiration from club culture on the eve of global catastrophe. “The show asks, ‘how do you grow and experiment and be young when your future is uncertain?’” Koons explains. “Is it better just to go hard, burn bright, and burn out?”

Developed for OBERON’s club-theater environment, the piece invites audience members to share the space with performers and dance along with the show’s live band. For Koons, dissolving spatial boundaries is a crucial step toward expressing the millennial sensibility at the heart of the new musical.

“*Burn All Night* uses millennials as a way for us all to think about ourselves,” she says. “There’s no line between ‘those crazy 20-year-olds’ and the 50-year-olds who after November 2016 were like, ‘This is not the country I thought I lived in.’ The show feels more real now than it did when we started.”

Since November, Koons’ own hybrid experience as a director, facilitator, and community organizer has mobilized action across the country. As a steering committee member for The Ghostlight Project, Koons is organizing actions by over 500 member theaters (including A.R.T.). Inspired by the tradition of a leaving a “ghost light” on in a darkened theater, the Project facilitated lamp-lighting events outside member theaters on the eve of Trump’s inauguration. Audiences, artists, and administrators gathered to lift lights in a public pledge to foster values of inclusion and compassion in the face of persistent exclusionary practices and rising instances of hate speech nationwide.

Koons’ methods as a director and organizer draw on

her experience as an educator and facilitator. While keeping active ties to the theater, Koons worked as a public school teacher in New York City then as a director of a literacy education initiative before returning to theater full-time in 2012. In that year, her *Odyssey Project* unfolded across twelve months and all five boroughs of New York City. Featuring performances on a commuter ferry, on soccer fields, and on Brighton Beach, the project was a turning point for Koons, proving that new types of performance could successfully reach beyond the walls of existing establishments.

In theater, education, and activism, Koons finds herself pursuing a unified goal: “How do I move a group of people towards something that is invisible, that we collectively have to imagine? And how do I access everyone’s connection to that invisible or imaginary thing so that we all move forward together?”

In these collective pursuits, Koons points out, form can be even more important than content. Referencing the work of emancipatory educator Paulo Freire, Koons emphasizes that participatory models of art can be incubators for social activation, even when their plotlines aren’t explicitly “political.” In *Burn All Night*’s invitation to dance, Koons finds a link to the courage required by other opportunities to participate. “I can sit in the dark and feel scared, and then get up and dance. Afterwards, I have the experience of pushing through that feeling of fear, so the next time I’m at a protest, and I think, ‘I don’t know if I can do this,’ I know that I can.”

Instead of rushing audience members into awkward encounters, Koons says, *Burn All Night* views them as core collaborators in the work—key components in the construction of the environments where the story takes place. “There is no line; there is no ‘us’ and ‘them,’” she says. “It is a collective experience. In a classroom setting and in a theater setting, I’m thinking, ‘How do we truly bring out the best of everyone so that it feels like a collective success?’”

In this respect, Koons offers an innovative model for directing itself: artistry not as a linear hierarchy of power, but a collaborative vision of artists and audiences moving, marching, and dancing in concert toward a more equitable ideal.

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