

# [There’s starring the marvelous young dancer savion](https://assignbuster.com/theres-starring-the-marvelous-young-dancer-savion/)

There’s a scene in the new musical “ RENT” that may be thequintessential romantic moment of the ’90s. Roger, astruggling rock musician, and Mimi, a junkie who’s adancer at an S/M club, are having a lovers’ quarrel whentheir beepers go off and each takes out a bottle of pills. It’sthe signal for an “ AZT break,” and suddenly they realizethat they’re both HIV-positive. Clinch.

Love duet. If youdon’t think this is romantic, consider that Jonathan Larson’ssensational musical is inspired by Puccini’s opera “ LaBoheme,” in which the lovers Mimi and Rodolfo aretragically separated by her death from tuberculosis. Different age, different plague. Larson has updatedPuccini’s end-of-19th-century Left Bank bohemians toend-of-20th-century struggling artists in New York’s EastVillage. His rousing, moving, scathingly funny show, performed by a cast of youthful unknowns with explosivetalent and staggering energy, has brought a shocking jolt ofcreative juice to Broadway. A far greater shock was thesudden death of 35-year-old Larson from an aorticaneurysm just before his show opened. His death justbefore the breakthrough success is the stuff of both tragedyand tabloids. Such is our culture.

Now Larson’s work, along with “ Bring in ‘ Da Noise, Bring in ‘ Da Funk,” thetap-dance musical starring the marvelous young dancerSavion Glover, is mounting a commando assault onBroadway from the downtown redoubts of off-Broadway. Both are now encamped amid the revivals (“ The King andI”) and movie adaptations (“ Big”) that have madeBroadway such a creatively fallow field in recent seasons. And both are oriented to an audience younger thanBroadway usually attracts. If both, or either, settle in for asuccessful run, the door may open for new talent toreinvigorate the once dominant American musical theater.

“ RENT” so far has the sweet smell of success, marked noonly by it’s $6 million advance sale (solid, but no guarantee)but also by the swarm of celebrities who have clamored fortickets: Michelle Pfeifer, Sylvester Stallone, Nicole Kidmanand Tom Cruise, Mel Gibson, Ralph Fiennes…name yourown biggie. Last week, on opening night, 21 TV crews, many from overseas, swarmed the Nederlander Theatre toshoot the 15 youthful cast members in euphoric shockunder salvos of cheers. Supermogul David Geffen of thenew DreamWorks team paid just under a million dollars torecord the original-cast album. Pop artitsts who’veexpressed interest in recording songs from the 33-numberscore include Whitney Houston, Toni Braxton and Boyz IIMen. A bidding scrimmage has started for the movie rightsamong such Hollywood heavies as Warner Brothers, Danny DeVito’s Jersey Films, Fox 2000 and Columbia.

The asking price is $3 million, but bonuses for length of run, the Pulitzer Prize (which “ RENT” has already won), variousTony and critics’ awards could jack the price up to $3. 75million. Despite these stupefying numbers, the youngproducers, Jeffrey Seller, 31, and Kevin McCollum, 34, and their associate, moneyman Allan S. Gordon, know thatthey’re not home free.

“ There’s no such thing in NewYork,” says Seller. “ Our company has mostly done tours. Ifyou sell 8, 000 seats a week in Cleveland, you did a greatjob. Never having done a Broadway show, the idea thatyou have to sell 450, 000 seats a year is daunting.

” MajorBroadway players like the Shubert Organization andJujamcyn Theaters, which lost out to the Nederlander in thefeverish grab for “ RENT,” would love to be daunted likethese Broadway tyros. Rocco Landesman, Jujamcyn’spresident, says he’s “ crushed” at not getting “ RENT.” Hepredicts the show will be a “ crossover success; it willattract an ethnically diverse audience, people who are notnormally theatergoers.” “ RENT” has a $67.

50 top ticketprice, but the producers have reserved the first two rows at$20 and are tagging mezzanine seats at a “ bargain” $30.”‘ RENT’ has a lot riding on its shoulders,” says producerJim Freydberg, whose “ Big” has just opened. “ I desperatelyhope it works. If it’s successful, we’re going to get moredaring shows on Broadway.

If it’s not, we’re going to getmore revivals.” This is interesting, coming from acompetitior whose own show, based on the popular TomHanks movie about a 13-year-old boy who wakes up onday in the body of a 30-year-old man, could be said torepresent the less daring sector of Broadway. “ If I reallywanted to make money I’d go to Wall Street and inventmoney,” says Seller.

“ I came to Broadway because I wasexcited by the question ‘ Can you challenge the mainstream? Can you reinvent the mainstream from inside themainstream?'” Says McCollum: “ It would be disingenuousto say we don’t hope to make money with ‘ RENT.’ But I’mhere