

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 252 TRANSCRIPT: JOSH TOWER PART 1

Lin- Manuel Miranda 0:00

Hi, I'm stage and stages Lin Manuel Miranda and you're listening to the

Gillian Pensavalle 0:19

Jumping in at the top real quick to let you know about something really cool that's going on. To coincide with Black History Month, Hamilton has launched a new social initiative called Ham4Change. The channel is gonna focus on highlighting the various social justice causes that the HamFam cares deeply about. And it's gonna be a place where topics can be discussed and meaningful progress can be achieved. So be sure to follow Ham4Change on Instagram for ways to take action in your local and national communities. Okay, on to the pod.

Gillian Pensavalle 0:47

Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the Hamilcast. My name is Gillian I am here tonight. with Josh Tower. The Angelica tour's Aaron Burr. Hey, Josh.

Josh Tower 0:57

Hi, G How you doing? I decided to call Gillian G you guys so and gals. So that's that's that's great. You know,

Gillian Pensavalle 1:04

That's great. G dot pen. It works for me. Josh, before we get started, can you tell the people listening your pronouns please?

Josh Tower 1:10

Me him it.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:14

Excellent.

Josh Tower 1:14

Yes. Yeah.

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Gillian Pensavalle 1:15

Great. I'm so I'm so excited to talk to you. You have like a ton of credits. I'm just gonna name a few of them because we have so much. Okay, so the Angelica company's Aaron Burr. You were in the Broadway and touring companies of Ragtime, The Lion King Motown, the Broadway company of School of Rock a ton of like regional and touring stuff. You're just like, I'm intimidated by you.

Josh Tower 1:36

I've been lucky. What can I say? You know, I've been lucky.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:38

Well, you're also an supremely talented person. So let's not forget

Josh Tower 1:42

Thank you.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:43

We have a cocktail here.

Josh Tower 1:44

We have one. Ooh, can you hear it? If I suppose Oh, listen. Oh, you can't hear it. I think the ice melted a little I was expecting a little clink clink instead of just spilled all over me everyone so good

Gillian Pensavalle 1:54

We're just getting started here.

Josh Tower 1:55

You know

Gillian Pensavalle 1:56

So you you like we talked about your Burr and and with the cocktail. And so we I there's so much to talk. Yeah. But our friend Alex Horwitz, put us in touch. He helped me out with the name. And he also conferred with your lovely wife Karen about

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this as well. Oh, okay. So we're drinking a vanilla old fashioned? Because you old fashioned? So your favorite drinks, right?

Josh Tower 2:17
Yeah, definitely.

Gillian Pensavalle 2:18
And you love vanilla stuff?

Josh Tower 2:19
Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle 2:19
And winters here. Happy December, everyone. It's December 1.

Josh Tower 2:22
It's yummy all year round. You know, so it's, it's, it's good.

Gillian Pensavalle 2:25
I don't really discriminate either. So Alex and I were talking because he put us in touch and I was like, Alex, you wanna help me with the name? So he was like, oh, hmm. A vanilla old fashion. That's a brown base with like the white vanilla. He's calling it. The Philly bald eagle.

Josh Tower 2:39
Ooh, I'm from Philly, and I haven't been mixed as well. So you know. It all works.

Gillian Pensavalle 2:44
Thank you so much. to Karen and our dear friend, Hamilton's America director. Alex Horwitz.

Josh Tower 2:50
Yes, Alex, we love you, Alex. Thank you.

Gillian Pensavalle 2:52
Yeah. Well, I'm excited to bust his chops a little bit. Yeah.

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Josh Tower 2:54
Come on. Let's do it.

Gillian Pensavalle 2:55
Well, I want to talk about you first. We can wait, this isn't the Alex Horwitz podcast. Come

Josh Tower 2:59
on. We don't need to talk about Alex that much.

Gillian Pensavalle 3:01
Not yet. Anyway. So I want to hear your entire story. I want to hear like how you got to New York City as a performer. I know you were in the army for a time

Josh Tower 3:12
right.

Gillian Pensavalle 3:12
I know, you were in like the really, really early workshops of Hamilton like the whole Josh tower story.

Josh Tower 3:20
I leave the story. You know, going back, I was born on a small... no. I'm adopted, first of all, for all those people out there who are adopted, you know, big whoopwhoop to adopt to people and to adopt, you know, parents who were adopting and it's a great, beautiful thing, especially on giving, giving Tuesday. So thanks for giving your lives to adopt a child. Yeah, thanks, mom. You know, it's it's been a it's been a really amazing journey. I like I said, I've been very lucky I went through I went to school right outside of Philadelphia High School, right outside of Philadelphia. I grew up in Ambler, Pennsylvania. So I grew up primarily, though I was born in North Dakota, but I was adopted out of North Dakota and then we ended up right outside of Philly. So I yeah, first of all, I grew up a Phillies fan and an Eagles fan. And that's just part of my soul.

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Now my baseball is kind of shifted to the you know, the Yankees a little bit.

Gillian Pensavalle 4:17

But you seem so nice.

Josh Tower 4:19

I'm still an Eagles guy at heart. And yeah, I so I went to high school at upper Dublin High School in Ambler, Pennsylvania, well, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania. And I after high school, I wanted to go to school to college, and we got the bill and it was kind of like, Oh, we can't afford that, you know, single mom with two kids. And my sister and I are both adopted biracial kids from different families, though, though, we look very, fairly similar, but and so it was kind of like, what what do I do? Okay, join the army, you know, do the GI Bill. And that was really the impetus for joining the army. And anyway, it's kind of jumping forward. I went through Community College Transfer to Temple University for my undergrad and then went on to get an MFA in acting at UNC Chapel Hill at playmakers Rep. And then from there, I went to New York and I was in New York for about three months. That's when a lot of open calls were happening. And open calls happen often times in New York and you know, LA and other, primarily LA, there's a lot of closed doors, you know, you've got to have an agent, you got to have a manager, but the theatrically, in New York, you can really get a lot done on your own. So though I did have an agent, I was like, I'm not gonna wait around for this agent to you know, call the shots and do stuff. So I was auditioning for I mean, everything and musicals though I was classically trained Shakespeare, Chekhov, and all that stuff. I have always been able to carry a tune for the most part. And so, so I audition and that's when you know, Lion King was happening. Chris Jackson was an original member of Lion King, Lion King was happening. The original RENT like all those shows were like new, and Ragtime was still around. In fact, I think Ragtime and Lion King came out the same year and Lion King basically took all the awards, different different shows, but thankfully I did was involved in both of them. So but I, I got Ragtime, but it was the Chicago company. So it was the

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original Chicago company. So they were starting a new company, the Broadway company was going to LA company had dispersed, and they were reforming in Chicago. And basically they said, you know, it's between I can't remember the guys last name is Randy something and and me. And they were like, so you too, who can move to Chicago? Wow. And I was like, I'm cool. Let's go, you know, and however it happened. I got the gig and I went to Chicago to do Ragtime with the Sean's and Joe Dellinger. And, you know, some really fantastic people. James Stovall, the late James Stovall, who was Booker T, Washington. And so that was my first thing. I went back to New York after that was about a year, I went back to New York, and I kept auditioning for Lion King, and it just never happened. Never happened. over and over and over, over and over and over. I even audition when I was in Chicago doing Lion King or doing Ragtime, because, you know, Lion King came around, and it just like, just didn't happen. So, you know, again, fast forwarding, my friend, Todd Pettiford, and at that time, Lion King was at the New Amsterdam, where Aladdin is now. And across the street was RENT. So our stage door was the front of the Nederlander theater. And, you know, so we would see all the people all the time, like, be original RENT people already

Gillian Pensavalle 7:31

Forty first and seventh, I know it well.

Josh Tower 7:33

Yeah, you know, that that block like drama bookshop was like, a block away. I mean, it was like, it was great. And my friend, Todd Pettiford, went across the street to do Rent. And he left his track like he was doing Lion King ran across the street to Rent to be like a Benny cover. And, you know, he was involved with the show for a while. And so his track opened up. And I was like, my agent got me in there. I went into the office into the music supervisors office at the New Amsterdam and sang and they were like, so when can you start rehearsals? Like, that's it? I've been auditioning. It was literally it was probably a dozen times over the years over, like the previous two years.

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Gillian Pensavalle 8:10

Wow.

Josh Tower 8:11

I mean, seriously, it was about 12 to 13 times. And every time was a no, no, no, it's not right. You're not right, you know. So I did it. And I went in as an understudy to Chris Jackson. And that's kind of where Chris and I work together. But that was not going to be long. You know, Chris just kind of got there before me. So, you know, I'm a little I'm a little older than Chris due to my time in the service. So I got to New York later than, than this kind of that that kind of generation of guys even though I'm older, but I would have been there already. But you know, it was great, because Chris is as he is now he's a really generous guy. He's always been a super old soul. Even when he was, you know, in his late 20s. He could he gave like advice that was so kind of fatherly. It's just in him, you know, and you're just like, that doesn't happen. A Tony. I'm older than you. Why are you my dad? Why would stop. But he's such a good man, you know, is a good person. And there are lots of good people in the company. But Chris was one of the ones that is the you know, Hamilton connection kind of follow through. And, yeah, and then going forward, you know, I got the workshop. Chris couldn't do the Hamilton workshop. Uh, well, I guess I should say Chris was Simba. I'll backtrack. I'm sorry. I'm digressing. Chris was Simba

Gillian Pensavalle 9:27

We've got plenty of time. We've only been recording for like five minutes.

Josh Tower 9:31

I was understudying Chris, and at that time, they didn't have first second and third, you know, some people may or may not know you have a first cover a second cover a third cover and it generally depends on their quality. So sometimes companies will not number so they don't offend people. You know, everyone's so PC now so they don't want to offend people. But people kind of recognize, Oh, that one guy is going on a lot. So one point

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chris chris was an original company member and he was and original understudy to Jason Reyes, who was the original Simba and rest his soul. And, you know, I think Chris and I really hit it off. And there's a bunch of people. I mean, it's such a small community, my best friend, Rick Wasserman, who's a big voiceover guy in LA now, but he was the standby at the time, we went to rival high schools, but grew up in the same town and went to the same undergrad at Temple University. So he was already in the show as a standby for timone pumba Zazu. And then I came in, and we were like, homegrown, like, in a Broadway show together, which was incredible, right. And then there came a point where Chris was getting a lot of injuries, you know, he's a, he's a big, muscular guy. And he was even bigger and more muscular than because we were younger and going to the gym every minute. We have more time to have kids. So he got injured. And they This is at the point where they're still casting the gazelle toward the original. Basically, they had the LA company of Lion King. And then they had the gazelle Tour, which was the first kind of mobile company of Lion King. And Chris was out for a week and I went on the entire week, and one of the producers really took a liking to me. So it kind of came down to like me and another guy Bret George for the tour for Simba. And, and this is after several auditions, you know, I was because at that point, I was like, Listen, I'm understudying Simba, I'm at home in New York City. I don't need to go on tour, you know, you kind of have the ball is in your court at that point. So it's kind of like, hey, if I get it, I get it. If I don't, I'm fine. I'm still gonna be playing the role almost, at least twice a week. I don't mind. And so it happened. And I originated that, that tour, the gazelle tour. And then now he comes, you know, after some other shows and coming full circle, I was able to be involved in one of the original workshops of Hamilton and Chris can do the workshop at that point, because I think he was doing the Tupac musical.

Gillian Pensavalle 11:56

Oh, yeah. Holla If You Hear Me

Josh Tower 11:57

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Yeah, that crashed and burned. And he couldn't do it. So I auditioned and got in. And I think I have a feeling Chris put in a good word for me. Among other things, I mean, I could really handle the material. And I just, you know, the the Hamilton material sits different ways, different roles. And it happens in every show. But music sits I think everybody who's listening to this will appreciate that. Your music, the music, and the artists that you really, like, just sit in you a certain way. Like you feel them, you feel them in your heart. You feel them, like, you know, sometimes the song makes you cry, like you're feeling the song, you know,

Gillian Pensavalle 12:36

like chills all over my arms, just you describing that feeling about, you know

Josh Tower 12:41

I mean, but everybody knows what that is whether you are professional or not like, you get that you're in your car and you're like, Oh my God, that's my jam, like that song. Or the song takes you to like, Oh my god, that was my first kiss. The song was playing or,

Gillian Pensavalle 12:54

Its like a time machine

Josh Tower 12:55

Yeah, I mean, the music does that. But Hamilton runs through so many genres of music within it, that it really hits all these different kind of, you know, it's primarily hip hop and r&b. But it really hits all kinds of different spots in you, you know, they've got kind of like the showing number and room where it happens. You know, they've got things like that. And then they've got like real rap battles, and they, you know, so, so I was able to get in there. And when Chris couldn't play George Washington, I was there with, you know, Daveed Diggs and Pippa, Leslie Odom, Ariana DeBose, who was the original bullet? Yeah. So you know, it was it was amazing. And at that point, Rebecca Naomi Jones was Angelica.

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Gillian Pensavalle 13:38

Yeah, so this is like, you know, one last ride time. This is early.

Josh Tower 13:42

Yeah. Yeah. Early, early. Yeah. How'd you know about that?

Gillian Pensavalle 13:45

This is episode like 200. If I didnt know One Last Time used to be One Last Ride.

Josh Tower 13:51

Yeah. You know, it's funny, like, I look back at the lyrics sometimes, and I'm like, one last ride. Wow. That's right. It was one last ride. But you know, the thing about Washington for me is that I, you know, for example, I sang Simba in the original key and, and Chris sang it down a little bit. I'm just a little bit more appointed of a, you know, tenor, and he's a bit more baritenor, you know, so. So we have different qualities of our voice. And he was already his, it's not like I was gonna steal the roll from him, like it was already his that's his, that's his crew. Those are his boys. I was happy to fill in and happy to be involved with those guys. And just be able to work with all those great people. And some of them I knew Leslie and I had tossed around a couple of roles. And, and he's a great guy that I knew, and he knew me and to get to know some of the other people was, was great, you know, really great. So yeah, I mean, you know, it's kind of like you go in knowing that there is going to be an end and at this moment and for this process for you, but just to be involved with it that early on was really, really exciting. And you could see the excitement in people's eyes and feel the vibe in the cast. Because, you know, we've all done workshops of new shows, and or, you know, remounts of shows that get reworked. And some of them, you just kind of you do it and you're kind of like, this is not going anywhere, you know, you just know, but this one had such a vibe about it Hamilton, Hamilton mixtape, which was what it was, at the time, had such a vibe about it, that you just you just felt like something was

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gonna happen, you know, and this is kind of right. Pre Public Theater run. Yeah, so it was cool. And so anyway, Chris was gonna play that, that George Washington, I knew that they still had me come in and audition. And it's funny, because it's really funny, Andy blankenbuehler. So I go in and audition, and I am not a dancer, by any stretch of the imagination, you give me movement you sent me on the movement set the movement on me, and I will try my best. It will not always look pretty, but you know, Andy's choreography is really good. Because it turns out that a lot of it is very pedestrian. And some of it is absolutely dynamic meant for a dancer dancer to do. But the intricacies of the show are really meant for that super strong ensemble, which are really like the star of the show. I mean, without that environment that they create, you know, you got a bunch of principals on stage walking around, singing at each other, you know, like, they really create the world, you know, to the point where when Yorktown happens, the end of Yorktown, you're just like, come on. That's it.

Gillian Pensavalle 16:29

They're superheroes and athletes.

Josh Tower 16:31

Yeah, I mean, it shows have numbers that are like, you know, the, the big smash hit numbers, the big ensemble numbers, but when that one happens, it almost feels like you're clapping for like one person rather than all of the people out there. It's just feels like a fit. Like, it's just, you know, you guys know, it's just so you get so impassioned. And, you know, so I couldn't do any of the stuff that the dancers did. That's, that's why I'm saying that because I absolutely, I'm not gonna offend any of you by saying I'm a dancer, because you some of you know, firsthand. But yeah, I had me audition. And then he said, You know, I met him in the bathroom. Afterwards, I was changing my clothes back. And it didn't wasn't the best audition I've done because we had to dance and his audition. choreography is like, insane. I'm not the kind of dancer what little dancer I have in my system, not the kind of dancer who can pick up like 16 counts, and then just spit them back out. I just cannot do

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that. I don't have the skill, don't have the talent don't have the, you know, I just don't have that training. And he was like, changing. He's like, Hey, you know, I'm glad to see you could move I really couldn't tell. You could move. You look so stiff in the workshop. And I said, Yeah, it was a workshop. And I don't think I don't think he remembers it. But, you know, he said, See me, you know, do Burr and do Room Where It Happens. And I was really concerned about room because there's like real choreography in there at least enough for Burr. And I was like, Is it okay? He was like, don't change a thing. It's great. Don't change anything.

Gillian Pensavalle 18:04

It's funny, because when he was over I asked him about this specifically because Burrs like Nick Walker, the burrs say Burr comes up a lot. But the Burrs always say like, I'm not a dancer, right?

Gillian Pensavalle 18:14

They're the first people to say it. So I'm like, how do you deal with people who say that they're not dancers? Or and he was like, well, because it would be ridiculous if Burr is doing like, what Eliza Omen can do or what like it just for the sake of the story. It makes no sense. So George Washington to like, it's just so he's like, you know, that's that to him. It doesn't matter.

Josh Tower 18:35

Yeah. And and, you know, I think the other thing was what I was really auditioning for was man five when I look back at it, which was his changes name. Sydney. harcourts? Yep. Sydney James Harcourt

Gillian Pensavalle 18:46

Sydney James Harcourt, yes.

Josh Tower 18:48

Okay. Sorry, Sydney. I've known him for a long time, but he's changed his name. And I love him. We did we did Lion King, kind

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of around each other as well. So he was part of that world. But he's awesome. And I think that was one of the roles that at least on the tour covers, you know, Burr Hamilton, you know, covers a whole bunch of stuff. So that made sense to me once I was like, Oh, that's what it was for. But there was still movement in there that I couldn't do like Sydney's can actually dance like he's a real cannot triple threat, you know?

Gillian Pensavalle 19:21

Yeah. Wait, let me just make sure I have the timeline. Right. So you were doing the workshop that they called you in? Because Cjack was coming to Washington for the moment and you knew going into that workshop that it was just they were clear about that but like once you jack comes back from the Tupac muse.

Josh Tower 19:39

No, no, I mean, you know, kind of we all know that Lin and Chris are thick as thieves. You know, they're good friends. That that was such a it's such a specific group that at that point from in the heights that Lin was kind of taking with him, it was the same, it was the crew, you know, all the same and originally, Angelica was supposed to be Karen Olivo. But however that happened, I you know, when I came into Lion King when I came back from the tour and took over on Broadway as Simba. Renee goldsberry was Nala. So we were opposite, right? And I can tell you that she is. And she has been working the hardest working actor around for a long time, the constantly working actor for the longest time, and the most beautiful and warm kind. I mean, I there's all the good, fuzzy, warm, cushy, like this drink so delicious, that you can, you know, say about a person. That's Renee, I mean, she is all those things. And super talented is just the icing. You know what I mean? Like, yeah, it's just, you know, so I knew as soon as Renee auditioned, I was like, this is, you know, come on. No, I don't care who it's written for it like you. You can't stop her. You know, you can't stop her. But anyway. Yeah. So I that was trajectory. I, I got in and it didn't happen. So I went on and and I ended up taking over for Brandon Dixon. In Motown is Barry Gordy. I did the Broadway company. And it was like for like, I don't know, six or eight

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months, something like that. And then the show closed, miraculously. Which was sad, because I really think it could have run for another year and a half, probably it was, you know, maybe not the best book but certainly the some of the best music to ever hit Broadway that was recreated in such a way that people could really like feel that music as well. You know, that was that's like, the moments in your life music as well, like, people had babies to that music, you know, I mean, like, there's no question, of course. Um, so that happened. And then I went on tour, when the show closed, I took some time at home, went on tour, and my wife was like, pregnant with our sec with Marlo at that point, my little one. And yeah, I just kind of continued on. And when I left the road, after about a year, I was like, I can't do anymore. Like I have a, at that point, a two year old and a four year old at home, like I just can't do this to my wife anymore. You know, I, my wife is she's now a judge, but she was in a court appointed attorney at that point.

Gillian Pensavalle 22:08

Cool.

Josh Tower 22:09

So so that was like, had had a little shelf life as well. And when I got home, the same music team was doing School of Rock. And my friend Alan green was was playing like the black guy in the show, but one black adult male, and he was leaving to do something. And it was for like, eight weeks, and they needed a replacement. So I call I called everybody you know, and I was like, please get me in. You know, I know, Sierra, Sierra Boggess and I go back a long way. And so I knew a bunch of people in there already. And so that worked out and I did that for almost two years in the Broadway company. And it was the like, it was one of the most enjoyable gigs I had, because there was a kid that it was all about the kids. So the adults literally other than all the all the dewy thins like they were the ones who were on stage, but the rest of the adults. Now other than Rosalie, like this era, like you just, you know, I went through Jenn Gambateses, and, you know, some other really, really fabulous people. And so, it really kind of sustained It was one of those

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like, Okay, so this is not gonna be you kind of got to, like, swallow your pride and be like, Oh, I was Barry Gordy, you know, I was Simba. You know, like, yeah, okay, I'm gonna do this. And but ultimately, ultimately, to me, working is working, you know, it doesn't matter. Whatever you think in your mind, as far as success, working is working and to be able to support my family, pay my mortgage, at you know, have a car be close to home. Yeah, exactly. You know, was super, super, super important. And that was kind of winning to me at that moment.

Josh Tower 23:53

And then Hamilton came back around, and they kept auditioning me for Washington, to the point where they thought and I and I know this because I asked Beth that at Telsy casting. I was like, What is the deal? Like, why is this not happening? I've been around long enough so that I can like, check in with casting people and say like, I always like feedback for all of you novices out there, get as much feedback as you can from an audition. Because those are things sometimes other things you can change if you need better vocals, if you you know, they can't understand you because of your diction, you know, your height, your weight, you can even, you know, deal with you can work out more go to the gym, diet to an extent don't kill yourself. But you know what I mean? Like things that, you know, you're acting below the things that you can fix, potentially. And, you know, so they were like, you know, they really thought you had a rhythmic problem. And I was like, That's the first time I've ever heard that. But every role in Hamilton has its own kind of pacing and rhythm, everything, you know, yeah. So they finally asked me to come in again, and I said, Listen, I did the workshop. I've been in I don't know Three times maybe at that point, I'm not going in again, they can either offer me the role, or that's it. And I don't know if that was actually communicated to the team, but that's where I stood. So that's what my agent told the casting people. And that's not necessarily they're not going to be like, Josh said that he's not coming in again, you know, it's not that type of thing. It's just, you know, very professionally, hey, we appreciate it. We thanks for the audition offer. But you know what he can do? So

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if you don't want him, it's okay. There's other there's other gigs. You know, this?

Gillian Pensavalle 25:27

Of course, okay. So it wasn't one of those things where, you know, you hear the stories of someone, you know, I got, I had the audition. And then I got the callback. And then I got the bootcamp. Yeah. And I got that. Yeah. So it was just every couple of months that they were saying, once you come in,

Josh Tower 25:40

yeah, I mean, and I swear, my career has never gone that way. I mean, I audition for Simba a dozen times. Okay. Yeah, what I mean, and so, Washington ended up being the same way. And I just couldn't like quite get it down. And then I started getting like, he's not really the role that I want. So I said, Listen, I'm not coming in for Washington again. But if Burr ever opens up, let me know. So my, you know, I had a bunch of friends playing burger at that point, you know, including Leslie. And I think he was still doing it at that moment. But it was Nik Walker, on the Philip tour. And then Nick Christopher, is who I took over for on the Angelica tour. And I know, you know, Nick, and I, Nick, well, I guess we all did Motown. We all it was, like all the various parties and all that, you know, like Motown people are doing, you know, Hamilton, right. Yeah. So I already knew all these guys. So there was a comfort level of going in and taking over and, and, you know, and Burr fit, you know, really fit me well fit me like a glove fit me. Like a lot. You know, probably my favorite roll that I've done, though. I've never done a Broadway as Judas, like, I've probably done Superstar, like five times. Yeah, and it's my favorite. And, and, and, and Burr feels very similar to Judas in a lot of ways. I think, you know, misunderstood and, you know, a whole bunch of things. And, yeah, so then it happened in there. I was like, going to Boston and and, you know, watching a whole bunch of people actually, there was Edred Utomi, who won our row on our road tour right now. Angelica Angelica plays Hamilton. He's taken over Alexander Ferguson, who just left the tour, but he was one of the standbys, as well, so he was doing Burr, all the

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Sons of Liberty, it was just good people. You know, I already knew Stephanie umo, who was there who was taking over for my good friend Sabrina Sloane, who I worked with a few times, including Motown. So it was, it was cool. I mean, it just was a flawless kind of transition. But I got to learn a whole bunch of different Burrs from lots of different energies. And so that was cool, because I could like, make my own recipe of like, Okay, this is me, and I definitely wouldn't do that. But I like this. And I like this. You know, it's that thing where, you know, actors take stuff and they steal it, or they just take a little bit, you know, it's like this delicious drink. Yeah, no, little dash of this or then you throw your vanilla and and bam, yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle 28:19

Did you ever find out what that rhythmic thing was all about?

Josh Tower 28:22

No, you know, I, from as best I can tell, and I listened to, you know, Paul Stovall, who plays Washington in our show, on the Angelica tour, who's, you know, like, six, five, or six, six, 240, whatever, he looks like a football player. But But position wise, I think Washington was shorter than that. But Paul has the gravitas for that. But anyway, he's great at the role, and finds his own things as well. But I listened to him and I'm like, I don't I don't know. I mean, I get all the rhythms I get it. But yeah, you know, I don't know what it what it was, but I you know, it's one of those things, like I said, where certain roles just kind of fit you and other ones like, you know, like you try to get that shoe to fit but your toes just crunch up just you're like no, my heels catching, you know, no, good.

Gillian Pensavalle 29:12

Yeah, it's uncomfortable. Yeah. Yeah. You can't fake it or force it. Yeah. What What was it about Burr? What is it about Burr? I should say,

Josh Tower 29:18

Well, I think

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Josh Tower 29:21

I mean, first of all, it's a Tony Award winning role. I mean, Leslie, like killed it. And when I did it with Leslie in the workshop, that really workshop you kind of knew then you're like, this guy just killed it. But I don't think I don't think they knew I think they brought him back at that point. I don't think they thought he could do it either. You know, I don't think you know, and I you know, and I don't know sorry, Leslie if I'm talking out of turn. You know, I I he's also a lot of the people that I know in the business are good people and I know there are Am I allowed to say asshole on this? I just did. Oh my god, you can edit it out. You know there are people who are You work with hear like, Oh, I definitely do not want to work with that person again. But I have had, for the most part really good fortune of working with great people, like just good people who are positive, who are supportive. And Leslie was one of those people who, you know, I mean, I think he knew the daunting task of like taking over for Chris at that point, because he was taking over for another guy. And I don't know, at that point how long he had kind of been back, but all the birds they were getting, basically, by the end of Act One were like, I can't I can't do this, like you don't I mean, and so Leslie kind of, I feel like, beat all odds, you know, and, and did it and he's, like, Renee, like, he's a nice man who's super super. In fact, I think they both went to Carnegie Mellon, but shout out to Carnegie Mellon. But they are good people. And they're so they're so intricate and what they do with their performances. And there's, they're fascinating to watch. But to watch in, you know, in that process that inspired me to be like, Okay, if I'm not Washington, which didn't really in my heart, do it for me. And Chris was fabulous. That's not to say anything like that. But But um, you know, Burr was the role that always spoke to me, you know, you're kind of watching someone do it. And you're like, Huh, I want that role. That juice that juicy, right? Yeah. I mean, and it's so in that regard. It's kind of like, what Judas is to Jesus in superstar, like the title of the show is Jesus Christ superstar. But Judas is almost like a more like juicy. I don't want to call him sinister, because I don't think there is that I think he's really he was misunderstood. They're

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both, you know, historic figures, Judas and Burr. But yeah, I mean, Burr really just really spoke to me and just really fit, you know, so

Gillian Pensavalle 31:54

yeah, it's interesting, because I'm having, I'm reminded so much of my conversation with Brandon Victor Dixon, who said, the same thing about Judas and Burr, and his feelings about loving playing Judas. And the similarities between Judas and Burr. And he also said, very strongly, was not a villain, no.

Unknown Speaker 32:27

The anger at Hamilton is because he loved this game. And it just but it just never, he was never able to feel what he wanted to feel from this person. He's not a villain. He chooses to commit to to an agreed upon event, you know, with Hamilton, and he, and that is his mistake. But he's not a villain. And he has to he has to live with having follow through with their duel. This is the thing that they engaged. There are many elements of Hamilton himself that I get sanitized in the show that make that kind of make our by help help our binary minds and help us fit the world. We're trying to come into where Hamilton is lionized and Burrs a villain already, right. But just like, just like in Jesus Christ superstar, you know, he seeks to create an arena in which you are forced to examine these ideas of these people on a wider spectrum.

Gillian Pensavalle 33:37

But you when we were talking about the cocktail, you said, I was like, yeah, you know, tell me what you like, and I'm not gonna give you homework. I have lying around. And you said that you think Burr is spicy, secretly sweet. Yeah. And I just really would love to hear your point of view, just like diving into that role, because you have it now. Right?

Josh Tower 33:58

Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle 33:59

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There's so much to bring to it, and what your life experience brought to it and just like everything

Josh Tower 34:06

Well, first of all, I love what you do when you come out from the show. And people are at the stage door, they see you somewhere. And they say, you know, I got Burr I did not think he was a bad guy. I felt I felt really bad for him by the end of the show. Sure. So that's always exciting for me, because so many people perceive him as a villain. And oftentimes, you know, because most First of all, because he shot somebody and he and he killed them basically across from where I'm sitting now. Just diagonally across the Hudson. And I'm sitting right on the Hudson.

Gillian Pensavalle 34:36

Wow.

Josh Tower 34:37

And yeah, so I'm I'm right by Fort Tryon, which was one of the last British strongholds uptown. So it's, yeah, it's people think he's the bad guy because he shot somebody in contemporary terms. When you shoot somebody. It's an awful thing. You know that we have all way too many guns and it's a whole other podcast, but, you know, that was a time when people were trying to make their own lives here. And there was another faction from another country coming in and trying to take that away, you know, in a sinister way, you know, burning their homes down and do it, you know, like they were invaded it was you know, so the duels and things like that that happened you know, and a lot of people don't know you know, I I'm always like, this is this wasn't a Hamilton's first duel. It wasn't my first duel, but most of the time it's literally like the show said they didn't end with gunfire. They ended with Oh, I see you're willing to die for what you what you're saying. And so am I so okay, we're good. Let's go home.

Gillian Pensavalle 35:38

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It was to get everyone Joanne Freeman badass historian said it was that code of honor you know, like exactly how let you know, it's 10 crack commandments, but 10 duel commandments, it's based it's based on not just Biggie, but it's also based on this actual code. Yeah, they had it it was basically like, if you have the guts to show up, then it's let's just call it off. Yeah, that's exactly what it was meant for.

Josh Tower 35:57

Exactly. Yeah. And so, you know, as far as the actual I'll bet I'll kind of start there and backtrack but as far as the actual gunshot I you know, I face We'll see let's see the sunrise in the East sets in the west. So I'm facing west so in the morning, the sun's the other way. And you know, does make me wonder if the sun was in Hamilton's eyes and he just missed you know what I mean? And that little literally Burr was a terrible shot. And just like that, just like it says like that is a fact he was not good. And that he like almost hit him by chance you know, and I mean, yeah, but he fired you know, but some people you know, in the show they he raises his gun into the sky and he shoots into the sky and somewhere that shot has to fall so maybe someone else got hit by Hamilton's piece of metal piece of lead but you know, it does make you wonder at least you know, gave me pause to go you know, and plus as a soldier for myself former soldier, you know, it made me wonder like, if you're if you're a good shot, there's only a couple ways you miss if you shoot at somebody and generally you you don't pull your trigger and aim in the air. You just don't do that. You like either you missed them, or you missed them on purpose or you wouldn't shoot you know what I mean? Like if you have drawn your gun and you're to the point where you're now gonna like fire so it like it just I'm not that I have dueled we don't do that anymore. But I mean, not even jersey thankfully. Yeah, not even jersey and he you know, he Hampton didn't die in Jersey so bird could not be brought up a murder charges. So it's perfect. Thanks.

Josh Tower 37:37

I say it all the time. Thank you. legal system. Thank you.

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Gillian Pensavalle 37:40

You know what the legal system

Josh Tower 37:41

Talk to my wife. She's written the other room. But, uh, but but, um, yeah, so I but I think Burr over time. Now we'll kind of go from the beginning towards the, towards the bullet. I think, you know, having the the status, having the family and the the owner say no notoriety, but I guess I guess it is the family status that he had, should have had everything, by the way that the kind of classes and system went back then. So then they have this other guy come in his head. Nothing comes from nowhere comes from nobody. And to get everything was, I think uber uber, uber frustrating for someone like Burr, who was, you know, super educated, and Hamilton really sought him out. I mean, these guys were not enemies, folks. Yes. You know, I mean, they were not enemies. They kind of spoken opposite terms. A lot of times they say that Burr was far more eloquent than Hamilton was very colorful, but he'd talked for two hours and Hamilton Hamilton or sorry, Burr could say the same thing. In 30 minutes. You know, he was clear and he was very concise. He was, you know, fastidious in the way that he dressed. He was eloquent in the way that he spoke. They say that he, you know, both men and women sometimes would cry at his kind of aerations or the way that he would deliver any any speech or information that he gave because it was so eloquent. Yet it was concise, you know, so it wasn't drawn out, you know, Hamilton, like the like, the colors and Burr like the, like the stripe of red, you know what I mean? Yeah, exactly. Yeah. So that, you know, the show does lay it out in in lots of ways like that, that are truly factual things. I mean, the show makes them colorful, but it is it is the case, you know, so I think it's just years of like frustration and mounting, mounting, mounting, mounting. And I talked to a historian in Philadelphia Civil War, the Revolutionary War Museum there that open, I think it was in 2017. And he said that Hamilton knew very well the way that he was pushing Burr. And the way that he was talking about Burr, that he would push Burr into a duel. Now, I don't know, what they thought what happened in the duel, but he said with the language that he was using,

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and the things that he said, he knew very well, that when it would come to, and in fact, he had already Hamilton had already made a will and all that stuff before the duel happened. He had done, you know, I mean, where their version of a will and, you know, tidying up his affairs, you know, and to keep his honor and all that stuff. So, he knew on some level that Burr would break at that point, you know, so it's, it's, um, this rising thing of, ultimately, I think, two guys that were really misunderstood each other, you know, that just kind of like, just kind of you can't see that, but you can't see that, Oh, I'm doing the kind of passing trains, like, your clothes. Yeah, but you just, at the end of the day, have not hit and their families were friends. I mean, they used to dine together, they, you know, they had all those moments together. And it's just, it's just interesting, because, you know, they're both fathers. They're, they've created this new nation, they hurt the same way. And they, they grieve the same way. They ultimately both carry lots of things close to their vests, you know, so I don't you know, I yeah, I mean, but but he's absolutely not a bad guy. You know, he reacted as probably anybody of that status at that time period. Would.

Gillian Pensavalle 41:34

Yeah, I'm fascinated by all the research you did.

Josh Tower 41:37

Yeah. You know, I, it's a combination of I love, you know, historic pieces where you have an opportunity, and there's way more information on Burr, I think then there is on Judas, but miraculously, when, when his daughter theodosia, passed away, burrs writings apparently went down with her, she kept his writings and they went down in the ship. And they of course, miraculous, they can't find Judas's gospel either. So it's interesting in that way that these guys had a lot to say. But their stories have been either lost or held under lock and key somewhere, you know what I mean? Like, they are just two pieces of history that you have everyone else's perspective, you have all those apostles, and you know, those, and then you've got all these other people giving their viewpoints and, you know, Eliza

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Hamilton does it for another, you know, 50 years, you know, what a man, but Burr and his daughter, his wife dies, his daughter died. I mean, it's just terrible. It's terrible. So they, they both face a lot of tragedy, but I feel like burrs word didn't really get out there. And Hamilton's well Hamilton's did and change the nation. I think people would be surprised. Not like, I know, people are like, you don't know, you don't know. I mean, I feel like, on some level that I just in my heart know that there was some miraculous stuff in there. And probably, you know, it's not like it's all journal entries. I mean, I think he wrote essays, and he wrote thoughts. And he wrote those things, the same type of things that that Hamilton wrote. I don't know if it was as many and maybe not on the same pertinent subjects that kind of shaped the nation, but I just feel that there's stuff in there that's, that would, that would have been amazing. And I don't know if that's a myth. Maybe it's a myth that his writings went down with his daughter. And you know, I don't know. for sure. Isn't it all kind of shrouded? You don't really know. They think she went down with the ship. But, you know,

Gillian Pensavalle 43:38

No, I hear what you're saying. I think it is interesting. I mean, I know that he was the loudest feminist of them. Yeah, yeah,

Josh Tower 43:44

Exactly. Yeah. Which is incredible. I mean, you can't you know, you can't call someone bad. And they're like, the, the feminist of the time. I mean, come on. I think that's cool. I mean, the whole coup attempt and taking over the nation, that notwithstanding, you know, trying to start a war, okay. That part No, good.

Gillian Pensavalle 44:03

Yeah, that's another thing that people are kind of like, wait, he did what? And it's like, yeah, there was this whole,

Josh Tower 44:08

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but also, he's in the because people think of the United States as it is right now. And it was not like that. And it just wasn't like that. It was very different. We didn't have all the 50 states. So to take over a territory is, I'm guessing that it happened a lot, maybe not by like, a faction that potentially, you know, helped to start the nation. But you know,

Gillian Pensavalle 44:31

Without not giving, I mean, without giving away like too much about your performance. I don't want to like pry too much, but based on your life, experience, all of the research that you did your strong, passionate feelings about the man himself and then for lack of a better term, stealing all the good stuff, stealing all the stuff that resonated with us, you know, just what resonated with you. How would you describe your Burr or can you kind of tell what you What you picked from other people?

Josh Tower 45:01

I think he sinks to the bottom and floats at the top a whole bunch of times throughout the show. But I think that, you know, Wait for It is kind of the moment where he kind of First lets people in, you know, these are my private thoughts. This is what I think. And it's such a gorgeous, gorgeous song. I mean, it's such an honor to sing it. I think it's one of Lin's favorite songs ever. Oh, he said that. Yeah. Thanks, Lin. Thanks. My daughter is gonna marry his son, by the way, they used to go to school together, so

Gillian Pensavalle 45:28

Oh, really?

Josh Tower 45:29

It's already it's already you know, it's it's happening. I mean, that they're only six but it's happening in another 20 years.

Gillian Pensavalle 45:37

Great. I love that. Great. Can't wait.

Josh Tower 45:44

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It's gonna be good.

Josh Tower 45:46

But, um, yeah, I think way forward is where he kind of first cracks, and we talk about it like with Andy Bankenbuehler. And even Tommy, you know, his kind of his mask, kind of shifts, and he puts it back, you know, by the end of the song. But it's interesting to me that he lets that little, you know, you can call it a percolation or the drip of you know, vote, you know, the of lava just be, like, start to blow, you know, or, like, when you see the coffee to like, in an old pot, where just the percolator just like you see the black flash just popping up. I love that, you know, he he puts the mask back on. And he continues on, both for the good of his family, his wife, his new daughter, you know, like he just continues on while he's watching Hamilton really works on antics, you know, has an affair does like all of this stuff, but still comes out on top, every single time. You know, it's like me auditioning for Lion King 12 times and auditioning for Hamilton, half a dozen times. But someone else like you said, it's like, no, I went in, I did it. They asked me to do the workshop, I got the role the next day. Or the next week, whatever it is, you know, like, you do all of this stuff. And someone else who you perceive as an asshole, you're like, that guy's such a jerk. Or you know, and there they go, they get the roll, they get it, you know, it's just no matter what they do, no matter how they act, they could misbehave, they could be rude, they could be late, they could do whatever they want. And they they are getting the role all the time. And you know, so I recognize those people in my life. In my career, I should say, and, and it's fine. It is it is what it is. But you know, at some point, you feel like, Okay, I'm a better person than that. And I want to, like, get ahead of that. And Burr can't do that. He just can't do it. It doesn't matter. his schooling, doesn't matter who his parents were Princeton, like all of it, it does not matter. And he was also a genius, too. I mean, he, you know, he would he left Princeton at like, 14 years old or something crazy, like, I mean, so he keeps pushing through the show. And then I think, where it really starts to go haywire is room where it happens. Like it is the

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where he sees, and he sees from the first cabinet battle, he sees how things are, and he sees them happening. And he's, you know, at first he's up on the, on the, the surround, and he's not in the room, then it gets in the room, and he's seeing how this happens. And but he's still not even in the room, he's in the room, and he's not even in the room. There's like a room within a room. You know, it's like one of those Russian dolls. It's like, there's this, he thinks he has it and then he does this, he still doesn't have it. And he just keeps pulling the boxes away, you know, the layers and keep finally his mask. I really think his brain like fractures in the show. And at that point in his life, really fractures in room where it happens where he's like, so I can do, I don't need to have done any of the things I did, and the positive way the right the quote unquote, right way. And he just cracks, like and that's when his mask shifts. And he's it's like, at any cost. He's gonna be in the room. He's gonna make it happen. However it however it happens, like he's gonna, you know, do whatever.

Gillian Pensavalle 49:06

Yeah, no, I was when I was talking to Jonah Moran, the editor of the Hamill film, and another good friend of Alex Horwitz, and don't worry Alex, we will get back to you. When he came over, he has an insight as an editor of the film. He's not a performer, but like the insight that he has, is really incredible. And he was saying, you know, you should play where's our mind? And there are certain moments and he's like, Look, watch Ferber and my shot huh? And this blew my mind and I still get emails about it and it's true like Burr will not participate in my shot and at one point he I made like a GIF of it but he walks by during the like everybody's saying when Lauren's is like getting everybody hyped up, he walks through them and up the stairs, right and doesn't sing at the end of my shot. He does. He's like marking it. He's doing The motions. Yeah, his mouth is not moving. And he's in the dark. Go and look, he's up on this around.

Josh Tower 50:04

He's up there

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Gillian Pensavalle 50:05

and you want if you look, you can see Leslie walk sort of through the chaos of everyone like falling in love with this new guy, the new guy in town. Yeah. But moments like that are ours. And that was so early where he was like, nope.

Josh Tower 50:20

Well, you know, it's, it's, you know, it's interesting because I, I played a little differently, like, I don't just walk through like, I don't give a damn, I kind of play it like, like Judas, like, they are getting much too loud. You know, frightened all the crowd, like, what do you guys do and like the Redcoats are gonna come and shoot all of us shut, you know, like, so he doesn't want to get involved in that regard. Because they're getting loud. And they're like, hey, look, dude. They'll send the guards over here. And we're all be hung. Like, shut up. So that's what that's how I play it. So I don't necessarily and I did actually notice that cuz I was like, Damn, he just walked straight on through he was like, Yeah, but um, at least in the film, in the Disney plus thing.

Gillian Pensavalle 51:00

Yeah, like that night. Yeah. Yeah. But still, the direction is like, for walks through and away and doesn't say

Josh Tower 51:07

yeah, and you're definitely not singing none of the Burrs sing. At that point, you're not instructed to sing, he doesn't sing. And he does the motions. So he's kind of that empty shell kind of like doing this but not necessarily agreeing and trying to you know, when they say, all the blood, we shed begin with that he leans in, he listens. So he's listening to Hamilton. But, you know, how is he processing it? Is it? Okay? Yeah, some of that I agree with some of it. I don't, but I'm going to listen. And he still doesn't, you know, then when Hamilton tries to step into the, you know, to hear yee to the to that dude, Samuel to Seabury. You know, bird tries to like, chill it out. Like again, like, calm down, dude, don't get too loud,

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Josh Tower 51:55

Know, and then sure enough, a message from a king and they all run you know what I mean? So, you know, it's interesting, but Burr is in damn near every scene, observing a very least, you know, he's watching. He's watching the whole time. And I think it is. All of those things we kind of talked about, they're like, you know, just incredulous. Like, what the hell? This guy did this. And he did that. Well, he did that. Okay, that's brilliant. That's good. That's terrible. What? Oh, my God, he had an affair. You know, let's get him on the affair. And then he gets out of that because he just, I mean, it's just, you know, it drives Burr crazy

Gillian Pensavalle 52:43

And that's the thing too. It's like I'm not gaslighting Burr to be like when Hamilton was so great. Yeah, no, he was. I can you imagine like being like, coming up with that guy. I mean, come on. Yeah.

Josh Tower 52:56

It couldn't have been easy. And again, the whole time remember that he knows you know, Eliza, their, their their wives or friends and their kids or friends and their friends and they've had dinner at each other's homes. And, you know, so he's saying this about not his best friend, you know, knowing that he's had an affair and I know your wife. So that's really really, really bad. You know, it's just, I mean, it's not it's not good at any time, but it's, uh, you know, huh. Damn, Hamilton.

Gillian Pensavalle 53:30

That damn Hamilton indeed. come on Ham. All right. Next week on the Hamilcast Josh and I finished up our conversation. You'll hear more about how his history in the military plays into his stage presence. We plan A Hamilton ghost tour. So get ready for that. And he talks about how his Burr is different night tonight and from Hamilton to Hamilton so Until then, stay safe. Stay healthy. Please wear that mask. I love you. I'm G dot Pen.

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Gillian Pensavalle 54:28

The Hamilcast is brought to you by my love of the thing (TM) My complete lack of chill Please join me in raising all the glasses to Sir Alex Lacamoire for generously making my intro music and this custom Yorktown arrangement that I will never ever get over. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. To become a Patreon Peep and join the best, kindness, and most welcoming corner of the internet go to patreon.com/thehamilcast. You can submit questions to guests, join Zoom hangouts, get behind the scenes access and of course my unending gratitude. I'm @thehamilcast on all social media and you can listen wherever you get your podcasts. Visit thehamilcast.com for transcripts, episodes and more. You can see what's going on with Mike, you know Mike, at MichaelPaulSmith.net. True Crime Obsessed is my true crime comedy podcast with my podcast soulmate Patrick Hinds of Theater People and Broadway Backstory fame. Thank you so much for listening. It means the world to me [with clip] To the Revolution!