

**This interview with
LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA
was conducted by Roswell Encina
of the Library of Congress on April 2, 2025**



Roswell Encina: The original cast album of “Hamilton” is being added to the National Recording Registry because of its cultural and historic historical impact. How does that make you feel?

Lin-Manuel Miranda: Very proud, very humbled. And thrilled. Thrilled, honestly. Those of us who were lucky enough to make music for the theater know that our albums are our ambassadors and our show ambassadors and watching this one travel around the world has been just surprising and thrilling at every turn.

RE: It's going to be the youngest, or newest, inductee into the Registry. There's a ten-year requirement and the musical only turns ten this year. Can you take us back to the beginning, when you started and conceived the musical? And how long did it take?

LMM: The genesis of the musical “Hamilton” really begins in 2008. I am performing in my Broadway debut, “In the Heights.” I take my first vacation, with my then girlfriend, now wife, and this is a pre, e-reader era. So I'm looking for one good book to read on vacation. I pick up Ron Chernow’s biography of Hamilton off the bookshelf and buy it, to take with me on vacation.

And by the end of the second chapter, I'm on my computer Googling “Alexander Hamilton movie,” “Alexander Hamilton play.” How has no one told this story yet? I'm completely hooked, and I'm only two chapters in! So, really, from 2008 to 2015, with lots of side jobs along the way, I'm working on what for many years was called “The Hamilton Mixtape” and that became “Hamilton.”

RE: You know, as you could imagine, working at a library, that's music to our ears: how you were inspired by Ron Chernow's book and all these primary sources that led to the musical. Opening night: that must have been very emotional, especially when it was at the Public Theater, when you finally saw it, when you heard it. You saw the audience's response to it. How did that make you feel? And what were you thinking at that moment?

LMM: Opening night, even that first preview, it always feels like an enormous weight off your chest. I remember the opening night of my first show, "In the Heights," and feeling like it's out of my head and on a stage at last. And when Jonathan Larson is one of your heroes, you're very suspicious about just making it to opening night, and so I remember just feeling an enormous weight off my chest, incredible pride in our unbelievable company, and the way in which they were telling the story and feeling like, "Okay, it's out of my head and on the stage now."

That first preview at the Public Theater clocked in at three hours and 12 minutes. So it was also a feeling of, "Okay, it's out of my head and I can look at it and we still have work to do."

RE: Millions of people probably have their favorite "Hamilton" song or "Hamilton" line from the musical. I know it's like asking you which one IS your favorite child here, but do you have a favorite song?

LMM: Well, it's funny. I mean because there are so many songs in "Hamilton." Each one has its own unique origin story, whether it's the year it took me to write Alexander Hamilton's verses in "My Shot" to the week in which I was writing "Dear Theodosia," which was a really emotional week in my own personal life when my wife's aunt was passing away. And that happened to be the same week that this puppy showed up on this beach in the house we were staying at. And we ended up taking her home and raising her for 13 and a half years. That's the maelstrom amidst which, "Dear Theodosia" was born.

One of the ones I think about a lot is "Wait for It," which-- the story of the song is in its title. I had a good beat on Hamilton because Ron Chernow writes about him so vividly, but Aaron Burr is a really mysterious character in Ron's book and in American history. If you read six different Aaron Burr biographies, you'll get six different people entirely. And I had to choose which was the Burr we were dramatizing on stage.

And it wasn't until I did a lot of research and did a lot of noodling at the piano that it then all came at once. I was writing it on the train as I was on my way to my friend, Jacob's, birthday party.

You know, death doesn't discriminate between the sinners and the saints. It takes and it takes and it takes. And we keep living anyway. We rise and we fall and we break and we make our mistakes. And if there's a reason I'm still alive? When everyone who loves me has died, I'm willing to wait for it. That all kind of landed on my head at once.

As a writer, you're grateful for those moments. A lot of the time, you're just trying to find two words you'd like to stick together. And every so often, the whole thing crash lands, and you're

trying to take dictation as quickly as it's coming to you. So I think about the creation, about that one a lot.

And I did go to my friend Jacob's birthday party, wished him happy birthday, had a beer, went back home and finished the song.

RE: I think at this point many people have seen the video of you at the White House when, I think, it was with when most people first heard or at least got a glimpse of what “Hamilton” was going to be. Did you ever dream it was going to be this mega-hit? You know, many people dream of writing the next Big Broadway Musical and you did.

LMM: I think I learned pretty early on that we can't control what the world does with what we make. In fact, that's even a theme in “Hamilton.” Washington says to Hamilton, “You have no control. Who lives, who dies, who tells your story.” I knew that it was pulling the best out of me, that telling Hamilton's story was forcing me to reach deeper, personally and reach wider musically than any other project I'd worked on.

So I thought, whether it had run of one night, or, you know, we're running up to its 10th anniversary, I was very proud of the work my collaborators and I had made together. And no one can dream the kind of success it's had.

RE: You've done so much for history and to civics in this country. What do you think was driving your dream and fulfilling and finishing “Hamilton”?

LMM: Telling this story. I just thought it was a really good story. And, you know, it's that thing that any writer needs when they're choosing something to write about. You read that book and you go, “I feel like I know this guy from the way he's being written about in this book” and harnessing that energy and trying to musicalize it to the best of my ability.

The fact that we now have this program called EduHam that really was born out of the fact that something was happening at the Public Theater. That's a thing that no marketing campaign can buy. It happens once in a very long while in the theater, where everyone who leaves the show tells everyone they know about the show. That's what was happening at The Public Theater. And we realized very quickly, if students can't have access to this show, we will have failed them. We will have done the show a disservice. So EduHam was born within that first year. We partnered with the Gilder Lehrman Institute, who specializes in American history, in creating the EduHam program that made history education accessible to students while also hosting dedicated performances of Hamilton for these students.

And I think that will be one of the legacies of this show that the students, while they might fall in love with these songs or this show, it also teaches them that history is incredibly subjective and is told by the winners and that every account is different and that then forces them to question what they think they've learned in their history books.

So I'm very proud of that.

RE: We often use many of the lines from the musical when we post on the Library’s social media, especially when it's the anniversary of when Hamilton died, or any anniversary when it comes to Alexander Hamilton's life. One of my favorite ones is, possibly the last letter that Alexander wrote to Eliza. And you actually quote it, when she sings it. How much inspiration did you get from the actual letters or the actual words that were used by both Eliza and Alexander when you were writing?

LMM: I used a fair amount of his actual words because my insight into Hamilton, as a possible musical, was that this guy's a good writer, and dramatically every time he puts pen to paper, he kind of changes his whole life. So it felt like going to those documents was really important. I was really helped out by a volume compiled by Joanne Freeman, who's a great historian, who had all of Hamilton's writings in one handy volume. I crashed her birthday party and got a copy from her. It was her birthday party; naturally, it was at the Grange where Hamilton lived towards the end of his life. But, yeah, everything from “I wish there was a war” which he writes in one of the first letters we have of him when he's still in Saint Croix, which I give to him while he's meeting Aaron Burr for the first time.

There are two sections of the farewell address which were delivered by Washington, but co-written with Hamilton. That's the fun stuff. It was the fun part, threading the needle, creating a stylized language that could allow for contemporary hip hop idioms and make space for writings of that era.

RE: Let's talk about the National Recording Registry with “Hamilton” being added to it. Why do you think there's a cultural and historical significance to adding “Hamilton” to the Registry?

LMM: It's hard to see the hurricane from the inside the hurricane. But, for me, I think that what's been extraordinary about the “Hamilton” journey, not just the six years writing it, but the ten years since, [to see] how pervasive it became, in our culture, from seeing news anchors reporting on whatever's happening in Congress and saying, “You don't have the votes, you don't have the votes” to people naming their books “The Room Where It Happens” to watching “the room where it happens” become an American idiom for where decisions are being made.

It's very rare that musical tools and lyrics from musicals become part of everyday conversation. We're seeing another moment of it right now, with “Wicked” and everyone is singing “Defying Gravity” and “Popular” and that's been in theater fans’ lives for 20 years. And it's now at another level of accessibility with Jon Chu's great film of “Wicked.” So, it's been remarkable in seeing how this--these 46 songs--get quoted a lot in pop culture and in everyday conversation.

RE: When it comes to the National Recording Registry, why do you think people should care about it? And why do you think people should value these recorded sounds or albums and music and why should they be preserved just like Alexander Hamilton story?

LMM: I think the Recording Registry is an artistic version of a night of a nation's conversation with itself. Every piece of art that is made is, both, deemed timeless by the Library of Congress and also a product of its time and so to listen to these recordings, to go back as far as the turn of

the century, to the beginning of recorded sound then to the present is to hear points in a timeline. It is to time travel.

And so, I feel incredibly honored that “Hamilton” is a point in that timeline and in that American conversation.