

Newsday

Llife



'Hamilton' high

BAY SHORE'S JUNIOR CLASS HEADS TO BROADWAY'S HOTTEST MUSICAL **E4**

BRUCE GILBERT

act2

Embracing Argentine tango

A TUESDAY TRADITION IN WESTBURY **E27**





BRUCE GILBERT

Preparation for Bay Shore students' visit to "Hamilton" included lessons in history and English, as well as a dance inspired by the musical.

That's the TICKET

History comes alive as Bay Shore High School's entire junior class heads to Broadway for the hip-hop sensation **'Hamilton'**



BRUCE GILBERT

Susan Barbash, head of the Bay Shore Schools Arts Education Fund, proposed sending the whole junior class to see "Hamilton."

BY JOHN HANC
Special to Newsday

Susan Barbash saw the smash-hit musical "Hamilton" more than a year ago, and now she's having trouble sleeping.

In February 2015, Barbash, head of the Bay Shore Schools Arts Education Fund, accepted a friend's invitation to see an Off-Broadway matinee of the new hip-hop musical at the Public Theater in Manhattan. She agreed, but reluctantly.

"I'm not your hip-hop audience; I'm old," joked Barbash, 61, a 1972 graduate of Bay Shore

High School.

Barbash watched the multiracial cast dance and rap its way through the life of Alexander Hamilton, the American Revolution and the founding of the United States.

"I was just blown away," she recalled recently. "Not only with the music, but the content."

As she watched, she began to draw a parallel between the cast and the students at her alma mater, about 60 percent of whom are African-American or Latino.

"The kids in Bay Shore look like the cast members of 'Hamilton,'" Barbash said. "It dawned on me how perfect this would

be for a young audience studying American history."

After attending the musical, Barbash, who lives in Bay Shore, contacted Joseph Lemke, director of social studies for the Bay Shore schools. "I received an email about this idea of taking students to see this musical," Lemke said. "The way we typically do a field trip is between 50

Lin-Manuel Miranda, center, performing the title role in "Hamilton" at the Public Theater before the musical moved to Broadway.

■ Video of Miranda's Grammy Award acceptance speech at newsday.com/lilife



STYLING: MARC W. NORTON

to 100 students. So I'm picturing we pick a select group of students, and what a great opportunity it is for them."

When he and Barbash subsequently spoke on the phone, Lemke realized she had something very different in mind. "She was talking about taking the entire 11th grade," he said. "That's over 500 students!"

On March 30, Bay Shore's Class of 2017 will join 60 chaperones and take 11 chartered buses into Manhattan to see "Hamilton," which opened on Broadway in August to rave reviews. Last month, the show won a Grammy for best musical theater album. The cast recently

performed its 250th show and, last week, took it on the road to the White House, performing some numbers and participating in an education program for students from local schools. First lady Michelle Obama, who saw the musical when it was Off-Broadway and again when it moved to Broadway, described "Hamilton" as "the best piece of art in any form I have ever seen in my life."

Meanwhile, Barbash said, "It's getting harder to sleep at night, because I'm so excited."

A family tradition

This is not the first time a Barbash and officials at Bay

Shore High School have collaborated on a trip of this scale. Barbash's parents, Lillian and Maurice, have long supported the arts and environmental causes. Maurice, a developer, died in March 2013, but in the 1960s he helped fend off construction of a highway on Fire Island and led efforts in the 1970s and '80s to halt completion of the Shoreham nuclear power plant. He and Lillian — a co-founder and former chairwoman of the Islip Arts Council — were among those who created the Long Island Philharmonic in 1979, and in 1995 they organized and funded a trip for the junior and senior

classes at Bay Shore High School to see a Broadway performance of "Having Our Say."

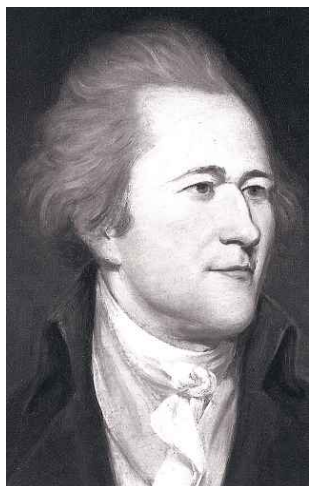
The "Hamilton" trip, however, involves a more rigorous attempt to integrate the material from the play into classroom lessons. Lemke began conferring on a plan with colleagues who included Terry Nigrelli, director of cultural arts, and Kristina Cope, director of English and language arts, both for the Bay Shore schools.

"If this was going to happen, of course we wanted Hamilton



ON THE COVER Enthusiasm for "Hamilton" the musical and interest in the historical Alexander Hamilton are sweeping Bay Shore High School.

See COVER STORY on E8



Alexander Hamilton, surprise subject of a hip-hop musical.



Lin-Manuel Miranda, creator and star of "Hamilton."

ALEXANDER HAMILTON: INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

INVISION/CHARLES SYKES

How great was Hamilton, really?

Nearly 212 years after he was killed in a duel with longtime rival Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton is a hot commodity.

Lin-Manuel Miranda's adaptation of Ron Chernow's biography, "Alexander Hamilton," has become the biggest Broadway smash in a generation; and the book — originally published in 2004 — is back on The New York Times best-seller list.

In it, Chernow makes a compelling case for Hamilton's place as the architect of much of modern America's economic system; as well as presenting him as the quintessential American immigrant success story, albeit with an untimely ending.

As part of its yearlong immersion in the reappraised Hamilton, the students of Bay Shore High School's junior class — who have read excerpts of Chernow's 832-page tome as part of their studies this year — will debate the question of whether he should be deemed the Founding Father.

One historian is willing to weigh in on the question now.

"I'm reluctant to cede that title to Hamilton," said Barnet Schecter, author of two acclaimed books on

that period, "The Battle for New York" and "George Washington's America."

Hamilton "was more of a Founding Son, generationally," Schecter points out, noting that at the time of the Declaration of Independence, Hamilton was in his early 20s — considerably younger than John Adams, George Washington and most of the other key players.

That said, the historian notes, through his contributions to the Federalist Papers, and his vision of an America built around trade and commerce, Hamilton was certainly "an intellectual pillar" of the country. Schecter — who said he has seen and enjoyed "Hamilton" the musical — also believes Hamilton's up-from-poverty story is inspiring, and particularly relevant to young people.

"He achieved what he did through sheer grit and determination," Schecter said, noting Hamilton's penchant for lugging around texts on economic theory during the Revolution that he would read after a hard day's work helping his boss, Washington, plan the next military campaign.

"Hamilton shows us that being a genius helps, but you still have to put in the hours."

— JOHN HANC

History, brought to stunning life

COVER STORY from E4

to play a central role in the curriculum," he said. "But we also had to be responsible for adhering to state curriculum."

Since Barbash first proposed the trip, "Hamilton" has exploded into a full-blown phenomenon. The show, now at the Richard Rodgers Theatre on West 46th Street, has been seen and praised by fans who include President Barack Obama, actress-singer Cher and actor Neil Patrick Harris. The cast — led by creator and star Lin-Manuel Miranda, 36, who based the show on Ron Chernow's acclaimed 2004 biography "Alexander Hamilton" — electrified the Grammy audience with a live performance of the show's opening scene.

Last July, Barbash called group sales for "Hamilton" and ordered 580 tickets — enough to accommodate the junior class, plus chaperones and a few other students. Now the wait is monthslong for tickets, which can cost several hundred dollars to more than \$1,000 each, depending on the ticket vendor. (When tickets are available at the box office, prices begin at \$139 each.) The cost of the Bay Shore trip is \$85,000.

"To be honest, I made the purchase before we had raised the amount needed to cover the trip," Barbash said. "It was a leap of faith."

Like "Hamilton" the show, Hamilton the field trip is a hot topic at Bay Shore High School, where there is even a blog that school officials use to solicit questions that students want to ask the cast after the show.

"It's a huge deal," said Tara O'Donovan, 18, a senior and editor of The Maroon Echo, the school newspaper. "It's definitely gotten kids excited."

Perhaps more importantly, it's gotten them thinking about the country's first Secretary of the Treasury — a man most knew only as the face on the \$10 bill.

"At some point you learned about Hamilton," said junior



Jasmine Cephas Jones, Renee Lise Goldsberry and Phillipa Soo in the Broadway production of "Hamilton" at the Richard Rodgers Theatre.

JOAN MARCUS



Joseph Lemke, Terry Nigrelli, Kristina Cope and Susan Barbash were all instrumental in the "Hamilton" project.

BRUCE GILBERT

Stephen Balsamo, 16, a member of the 13-student committee helping to coordinate the trip. "But it wasn't driven home how important he was."

While the students appreciate the 18th-century Hamilton, it's the talented young New Yorker — and recipient of a 2015 MacArthur Genius Grant — who plays him onstage who gets them most excited.

The students are tantalized by the possibility of meeting Miranda after the March 30 show. "I feel Lin-Manuel would be really impressed with everything we've done," said junior Cheyenne Arnold, 16. "I think

once he sees us out there in the audience, he's going to want to talk to us."

Show officials aren't guaranteeing a meeting, but "Hamilton" spokesman Sam Rudy said they are aware of the school's upcoming visit.

"We look forward to having the enterprising students and their teachers from Bay Shore at the show later this month," Rudy said. "It will be exciting to have them with us in 'The Room Where It Happens,'" alluding to one of the popular songs from the show.

While meeting the cast would be a thrill, a serious



Joy Norris, center, a 17-year-old senior, choreographed a dance to the "Hamilton" number "My Shot" for a fundraiser in January.

Jamar King sports a Hamilton hat during dance rehearsal.

BRUCE GILBERT

learning component of the trip will come in the days following, when students return to classes and debate the question: Was Hamilton *the* Founding Father?

While opinions differ, the man who authored the book upon which the musical is based is impressed that the students are even grappling with the question.

"Ever since the 'Hamilton' musical opened, I have been saying that this show represents the greatest opportunity in our lifetime to stimulate a love of American history in students," Ron Chernow wrote in an email. "I love the way that Bay Shore High School is blending classroom instruction with a trip to the theater to give students an ideal, rounded exposure to Alexander Hamilton and his era."

Energizing Bay Shore

Indeed, Hamilton fever has spread beyond social studies classes. Early on, the English department got involved in the project, developing an exten-

sive 11th-grade "Hamilton"-related curriculum that focuses on the power of the so-called "spoken word" genre. The Broadway trip even inspired stellar work through an extracurricular program. Last fall, Barbash approached Michelle Gordon, who teaches dance at the high school, about the possibility of having one of her best students, Joy Norris, 17, choreograph a dance number themed to the show that would be performed at a January benefit for the Bay Shore Schools Arts Education Fund.

"I knew nothing about the musical," admits Norris, a senior. She created the routine in about two weeks, and then taught it to a group of fellow students. When her teacher saw the finished product, she was thrilled.

"The energy in the room was amazing," said Gordon. "They were clapping, they were free-styling."

The routine, performed to the Hamilton song "My Shot," is electric; the controlled, loose-limbed abandon of the

young dancers syncs perfectly with the lyrics of the song, which is about raw, youthful ambition. The four-minute number was taped on a cell-phone, and the school is hoping to get it professionally produced.

"When I was first doing this, it was like, 'OK, I'm choreographing a dance, no biggie,'" said Norris, who will be one of 40 seniors attending the March 30 performance. "Then I'm hearing more about the show, hearing about what the school is doing, and I was, like, this is a big thing!"

That's almost an understatement when you consider how the Bay Shore Schools superintendent describes the Hamilton collaboration.

"Unprecedented and spectacular," said Joseph Bond.

The trip is being paid for by local businesses, organizations and individuals (a Go Fund Me campaign launched by the student coordinating committee also raised \$7,000).

One of the corporate donors is Suffolk Transportation Ser-



vice Inc., a Bay Shore-based school bus company.

"It was an easy thing to get behind," said John Corrado, president and chief executive of the company, which did not provide the coach buses for the trip. "This is what we need to do more of on Long Island. Support these programs, support creative educa-

tion, support the learning process, and not just through tax dollars."

Barbash appreciates that support and is counting down the days, and she's not the only one.

"I've never been into history," said 11th-grader Dejon Moore, 16. "But I'm looking forward to seeing 'Hamilton.'"