



Xanadu: Cult Classic to the Stage

Welcome to the world of *Xanadu*, where roller disco meets Greek mythology and dreams become reality. What started as a quirky cult movie from the 80's has now transformed into an entertaining and energetic stage musical.

Upon its release in 1980, *Xanadu* faced a less-than-stellar response at the box office. Critics dismissed it as a cheesy and confused mess, and audiences didn't exactly flock to see the film. However, something magical happened in the years that followed. *Xanadu* found a second life as a cult classic, gathering a dedicated fan base that embraced its over-the-top musical numbers, roller skating sequences, and unabashed romanticism. Its campy charm and catchy soundtrack, featuring songs by Olivia Newton-John and Electric Light Orchestra, helped secure its status as a beloved cult favorite.

Just like Kira inspires Sonny to embrace his artistic dreams, the idea to bring *Xanadu* to the stage was sparked by the passion of theater producers. Recognizing the untapped potential of this cult film, they saw an opportunity to translate its unique blend of love story, fantasy, and disco fever into a live theatrical experience.

With the decision to adapt *Xanadu* made, the creative team set to work on fleshing out the story, crafting memorable songs, and refining the dialogue. They faced the challenge of capturing the film's essence while also breathing new life into the material. Through collaboration, reimagining certain elements, and adding more depth to the characters, they transformed *Xanadu* into a theatrical experience that could stand on its own while paying homage to its cult classic roots.

One of the highlights of *Xanadu* is its unforgettable musical numbers and showstopping performances. From catchy pop tunes to soulful ballads, the soundtrack of *Xanadu* is a treasure trove of earworms that will have you tapping your feet and singing along.

Xanadu might have been a cult movie from the '80s, but its impact on pop culture didn't stop there. With the arrival of the musical adaptation, a new generation of theatergoers has fallen under the spell of this quirky and delightful story.

Xanadu the musical strikes a delicate balance between honoring the beloved movie and creating something fresh and unique. With clever nods to the movie, an injection of new humor, and a fresh interpretation of the characters, the stage adaptation of *Xanadu* managed to capture the spirit of the original while adding its own distinct flavor. This careful balancing act ensured that both fans of the film and newcomers could enjoy the show without feeling let down.



An Interview with *XANADU* Director Doug Clemons

Artistic Director Michael Unger sat down with *XANADU* director Doug Clemons to find out why he chose this show and its connection to Skylight Music Theatre and the Cabot Theatre.

MICHAEL UNGER: Why *Xanadu* and why *Xanadu* now?

DOUG CLEMONS: Well, first and foremost, it's winter. It's cold outside and it's hot in here. But I feel like now, especially in Wisconsin, is a time where things get a little dark. We haven't seen the sun in a little bit. It's just a time when people need to find pure joy and they need to block out all of the sources that stop them from pursuing that joy. So *Xanadu* is all about that. At the top of show we see an artist who is in the middle of that pursuit of joy. He's so excited about it. And then he notices a flaw and that flaw just starts to expand and suddenly he doesn't want to create the art anymore. And he literally runs out of the theater.

MU: He gives up on himself?

DC: He gives up on himself. He gives up on his artistic fulfillment. He says, "Why do I dream anyway?" But because his pursuit was so pure and he's painting a mural of the Greek mythological muses, that pure joy and pursuit of artistic fulfillment causes those muses in the mural to come alive and to start dancing through the aisles of the Cabot Theater. And then they say, "That was so pure, that was so exciting. We need to make sure he fulfills this pursuit." So that's what the show is all about.



Photo of Cabot Theatre ceiling

MU: Said Muses are painted on the ceiling of the Cabot Theatre, aren't they?

DC: They sure are. They're all painted on the ceiling of the Cabot. And they're not just any stock painted face. They're actually the faces of the artists that inspired this building to be built. So, Skylight, the building itself, is a product of people following their inspirations. And I, myself, am a product of following my own artistic inspirations. And so, it's the perfect show for me. And it's a perfect show for skylight.



Photo of Greek Muses



Photo: Kaleigh Rae Gamache

MU: You also have a very special connection to this building and to Skylight. Can you talk a little bit about your professional and personal connection to this place?

DC: Absolutely. My first audition here was when I was 19 years old. I was a freshman in college. And I came in and auditioned to be in *Barber of Seville*, and I ended up getting the gig. So, I had this little comprimario role at the start of the show. I was gone within the first ten minutes of the show. I was terrified the entire time. And then it wasn't until a few seasons later I auditioned for *Les Miserables* which was directed by Molly Rhode, who happens to be in the cast of *Xanadu*. So that's cool because the tables have turned. And then I got my first lead role in a rock musical, *Hair*. I met most of my friends in this building, who I'm still friends with to this day; my artistic friends and also artistic colleagues. I have even been in shows with my husband. My husband and I ended up getting married in The Salon here at The Broadway Theatre Center.



Photo: Juniper Ash Photography

MU: Can you tell me a little bit about the relationship between the film and the musical.

DC: The movie was never meant to be as big as it was. Which is hysterical. Because it got totally blown out of proportion. It was not originally trying to be a blockbuster hit. It was just meant to be this fabulous little roller disco film (the third roller disco film of the era). Once Olivia Newton-John and Gene Kelly signed on, they were like, "this is actually serious." Suddenly, because of the people involved, it got thrust into being something with much grander expectations. Even though the movie was not a critical success, it tapped into a certain demographic of people that just loved it and made it a cult classic. This very specific group of people love it more than anything because there's something in it that just hooks into their soul.

That's what the Broadway musical is playing off of - that it may not be for everybody, but it is so much for somebody, which is what art is all about. In turning it from a movie to a musical, they found a way to honor and spoof the movie all while truly finding the heart of the story.

MU: What do you hope the audience takes away from this experience?

DC: In a nutshell, everything about this production is meant to ooze joy to the people on the stage, to the people behind the scenes, and especially to the people in the audience. My goal is that people feel this infectious joy and realize that they don't just have to watch the muses. They can also be the muses. They can inspire others. They can be inspired by anybody. So, they can take some of that joy, put it in their pocket, and then eventually give it to somebody else.



Photo: Mark Frohna



Photo: Mark Frohna



Photo: Mark Frohna

Costuming *Xanadu*: Bringing Fantasy to the Stage

Costume Designer Jason Orlenko Reflects on Costuming the Iconic Show

I am so thrilled to be designing the costumes for *Xanadu* with my dear friend Doug Clemons! I am a big believer in finding the joy and humor in theatre and this show has that in spades. When Doug and I started talking about the production we knew we wanted it to be bright, colorful, funny and a little ridiculous. We took initial inspiration from the movie *Down To Earth* starring Rita Hayworth, which is what *Xanadu* is initially based on! The muses in that film have rich jewel tone chiffon gowns that feel Grecian, but by way of the 1940s. I decided to go that route but lean more into Grecian by way of the 1980s! I looked at a lot of images of Roller Disco, Venice Beach in the 1970s and 80s and took direct inspiration from the fashion designer Halston and seminal costume designer Bob Mackie, who is incredible at finding the humor in something beautiful.

Renderings Provided By: Jason Orlenko



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Milwaukee, WI 53202

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