



FILM: **TICK, TICK...BOOM!**

FDG RATING: 3.5 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Lin Manuel Miranda: *director*
Andrew Garfield: *actor, Jonathan Larsen*
Alexandra Shipp: *actress, Susan*

DATE: December 19, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **TICK, TICK...BOOM!**

Some musical productions seem to define a generation such as *West Side Story* in the late 50s, *Hair* in the late 60s, *Grease* in the late 70s, and *Rent* in the early 90s. *Rent*, a pioneering musical about struggling artists living in Manhattan's Alphabet City dealing with HIV/AIDS, homosexuality and drug use, won several awards including the Tony for Best Musical and was one of the longest-running shows on Broadway. Sadly, *Rent*'s exceptionally talented writer/composer, Johnathan Larson, died just before the opening night. The film, *tick, tick...Boom!*, (the precursor to his musical, *Rent*) is based on Larson's 1990 autobiographical one-man stand-up show of the same name, exposing his creative struggles.

The title refers to time ticking away as Larson is about to turn 30 and is still laboring with the ambitious space-age musical, *Superbia*, he has been working on for eight years. He's been waiting tables at a New York City diner while writing what he hopes will be the next great American musical. It is about to get its first workshop production, a make-or-break opportunity, which is thrilling and terrifying, especially because he has not yet written the crucial second-act solo for a character named Elizabeth that is the show's turning point. Also, he has no money, his best friend/ roommate, Michael, is moving out, his girlfriend, Susan, a dancer, needs to know if she should accept a job in the Berkshires, and his close friend is in the hospital with AIDS. He laments that Stephen Sondheim, his mentor, was in his early 20s when he wrote his first professional show.

The focus shifts between Larson's story and his one-man show telling the story. Andrew Garfield is outstanding as he brings Larson to life, capturing his manic, nervous creative energy and even sings. It's a musical about making a musical, a love letter to Broadway musicals and the artists who create them. In the deft hands of director Lin Manuel Miranda, his directorial debut, the film is imbued with extra love. Miranda reminisces that he saw "*Rent*" on his 17th birthday and it was a transformational experience. After Larson's death, producers restaged *tick, tick...Boom!* into a three-person chamber musical. Then, in a 2014, New York City revival of *tick, tick ... Boom!*, the hot young composer/actor, Lin-Manuel Miranda, starred on stage as Larson.

While songs in *Rent* are memorable, *Tick...Tick Boom!* has only two or three good ones. A few discussion participants absolutely loved the film and the colorful characters including Judith White as his agent, his best friend Michael, girlfriend Susan, and co-workers Carolyn and Freddy at the Moonlight Diner. Others thought it was a bit slow. As a niche film, it may appeal more to those who are fans of musicals. But one discussion participant who is not a fan of musicals thoroughly enjoyed the film and found Susan's voice enchanting.

We see an artist's passion, struggle, and unrelenting need to create all expressed through music and song. We can't help but imagine what other musicals Larson would have created. Perhaps not perfectly pitched for all of us, *tick...tick Boom!* sounded a softly melodious score of 3.5 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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