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MJ RODRIGUEZ OF RENT

WINS 2011 CLIVE BARNES AWARD

December 5, 2011 - MJ Rodriguez, who plays Angel in the current revival of Rent, has won the prestigious 2011 Clive Barnes Award, which celebrates the work of young actors and dancers. The award was presented today by 2010 Barnes Award winner Nina Arianda (Venus in Fur) at Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theatre.

The award is administered by the not-for-profit Clive Barnes Foundation, named after the late theatre and dance critic who died in 2008 at the age of 81. Barnes's work appeared in The New York Times, New York Post and many other publications. Barnes' widow, Valerie Taylor Barnes, oversees the awards. This is the second year of the honor. Two winners (one representing theatre; one from dance) were selected.

The nominees for this year's theatre award included Annaleigh Ashford and MJ Rodriguez of Rent, Jennifer Damiano of Spider-Man Turn Off the Dark and Josh Grisetti of Enter Laughing.

MJ Rodriguez is a graduate of Arts High School and is 20 years of age. He started pursuing his career at the age of 11 when he joined the Summer Youth Performance Workshop at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC). Since then MJ is an eight year veteran of NJPAC, and also participated in their program New Jersey Youth Theater (NJYT). He has performed in shows such as Dreamgirls, The Pajama Game, Once on This Island, and as well as given vocal performances for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, Camp Broadway, and for the Boston Celtics Gala. Michael attends Berklee College of Music, and is the 2009 Star-Ledger Scholarship recipient, and the 2009 Young Arts first level scholarship recipient.

Rent tells the story of a group of young artists struggling in New York's East Village in the early 1990's as they attempt to overcome and

understand various obstacles, including AIDS, homelessness, poverty, lack of healthcare and homophobia. Rent's most poignant tragedy of course, is that its young creator did not live to see the final product and lasting success of the show that he brought into being. Jonathan Larson's life was cut short after suffering an aortic aneurysm on the morning of January 25, following the show's final dress rehearsal the previous evening. Rent's enduring ability to engage and inform audiences serves as a living testament to an unfinished life of creative potential.

Rent is written by Jonathan Larson and directed by Michael Greif who directed the show's original award winning off-Broadway and Broadway productions.

Rent first opened February 13, 1996 at New York Theatre Workshop where it was hailed as a landmark in the history of the American musical. It transferred to Broadway's Nederlander Theatre on April 29, 1996, and enjoyed a remarkable 12 year run. The musical went on to win every major best musical award, including the Tony Award, New York Drama Critics Circle Award, Drama Desk Award, and the Outer Critics Circle Award. Additionally, Rent is one of only eight musicals to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama. In all Rent won four Tony Awards, six Drama Desk Awards, two Theatre World Awards, and Obie Awards for its creator, director, and entire cast. Rent closed at the Nederlander Theatre on Sunday, September 7, 2008, after playing 5,124 performances and 16 previews.

Rent plays Monday and Wednesday through Saturday at 8pm, Sundays at 7:30pm, with Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2pm, at New World Stages, 340 West 50 Street, between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. Tickets may be purchased by visiting siteforrent.com or telecharge.com; by phoning 212-947-8844; or by going to the New World Stages box office, 340 West 50 Street. For box office hours visit newworldstages.com/boxoffice.html. For more information about Rent, visit siteforrent.com.

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