Unearthing America’s hidden history, with humor, inclusion and high-voltage performance

Photo: Taylor Mac performing a 1770s portion of A 24-Decade History of Popular Music. Photo by Kevin Yatarola

HANOVER, NH, August 7, 2015—Taylor Mac, one of the nation’s most vivid and sought-after stage artists, aims an incomparable voice, insightful wit and high-voltage presence at our nation’s first three decades in A 24-Decade History of Popular Music: 1776-1806—a merry mash-up of music, history and performance that comes to the Hop on Thursday, September 17, at 7 pm in The Moore Theater.

This exhilarating three-hour show is one portion of what will be a marathon, 24-hour show by Mac covering 24 decades of American history, 1776 to the present. Sections of the show have been performed to sold-out houses at Lincoln Center, the Public Theater and Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, among many other high-profile venues. Mac plans to perform the full show in late 2016. The show is co-directed by Mac and Niegel Smith, Dartmouth Class of 2002, a theater director and performance artist whose original work has been produced at leading venues in New York and beyond. Smith also was associate director of the Tony Award-winning musical FELA!

Mac will also be a part of a panel of “Upper Valley rebels, artists and historians” at Nerd Night: Revolutions, on Wednesday, September 15, at 7 pm, at the Main Street Museum in White River Junction. Participants will answer the prompt, “What Revolution Means to Me.” 21+ to drink; BYOB.

Each portion of Mac’s stage show features popular shows of its period woven together by playful but trenchant commentary, a recurring theme being the experience of gay men and women in a time before homosexuality was acknowledged.

Dressed in glittering drag with over-the-top historical touches (the costumes, one for each decade, were designed by Machine Dazzle, Mac’s longtime collaborator) and accompanied by an on-stage band, Mac wields a multi-octave voice that can range from a silken croon to a blistering belt. A veteran of intimate cabaret venues, Mac has a genius for making people of all ages and backgrounds feel a part of the fun and willing to sing, play parts, dance, flirt and otherwise participate in the ongoing fun and spectacle.

Collective critical jaws have dropped at the portions presented thus far. Wrote the New York Times, “Imagine running a marathon in stilettos. While singing your heart out. That’s the kind of mad feat the singular
performer Taylor Mac has embarked upon in his magnum opus.” *Culturebot* called it, “like many things that spring from the mind of Taylor Mac, an absolute marvel.” Wrote *The New Yorker*, “Mac’s musical survey of the country...is offered in the spirit [Walt] Whitman had in mind when he said that he heard America singing.”

The show’s edgy historical interpretations and outrageous visuals are softened by Mac’s beguiling stage persona, playful humor and instinct for creating, in the performance hall, a spontaneous sense of community.

Mac started this project nearly three years ago, relying on digital libraries for much of the research. For the Hop portion, Mac also did research in Dartmouth and Upper Valley historical archives during a visit to the area earlier this year. But the extensive research blends with onstage frolicking and improvisation that take the show far away from a standard historical revue. “I describe him as [Shakespeare’s King] Lear’s fool: wiser than the wisest, most powerful human being,” actor Mandy Patinkin, a past Mac collaborator, told the *Wall Street Journal*. “That’s who the fool is, the bringer of wisdom. They know how to see the world more clearly.”

The 41-year-old Mac comes to this ambitious project with a résumé bulging with accolades and achievements. The author of 17 full-length plays and performance pieces, Mac received an Obie award for *The Lily’s Revenge*, and, in 2013, was named “The Best Theater Actor of New York” by *The Village Voice*.

Mac also has excelled in others’ plays and production, including a 2012 production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for the Classic Stage Company for which he was, said company artistic director Brian Kulick, “the definitive Puck.” Said Kulick, “The sense of anarchy he could get out of an audience, you can never quite control the energy. It spills out.” *TimeOut NY* has called Mac, “One of the most exciting theater artists of our time.” The *New York Times* wrote, “Fabulousness can come in many forms, and Taylor Mac seems intent on assuming every one of them.”

Mac was recognized in May as one of five “exceptional mid-career artists” awarded the 21st Annual Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, which praised Mac’s “fierce, disarming, beautiful, transgressive, emotionally vulnerable work; social critique disguised as glitter, ambitious scope, and effervescently rearranging audiences perceptions while creating a great time.”

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**CALENDAR LISTINGS:**

**Taylor Mac in A 24-Decade History of Popular Music: 1176-1806**

Taylor Mac aims an incomparable voice and high-voltage stage presence at our nation’s first three decades in this merry mash-up of music, history and performance that’s been playing to sold-out New York City venues. Clad in glittering, over-the-top drag, Mac unveils hidden histories through period songs and playful but trenchant commentary. Part of what will become an epic show covering 1776 to the present, it’s an exhilarating three-hour ride courtesy of a boundary-breaking, audience-enlisting, gleefully subversive theatrical imagination. Post-show discussion with the artist.

Thursday, September 17, 7 pm
The Moore Theater, Hopkins Center for the Arts, Hanover NH
$25, Dartmouth students $10, general admission
Information: hop.dartmouth.edu or 603.646.2422

**Nerd Night: Revolutions**

Nothing says the 1770s like revolution in New England! Join Taylor Mac and Upper Valley rebels, artists and historians as they answer the prompt, “What Revolution Means to Me.” 21+ to drink; BYOB.

Wednesday, September 16, 7 pm
Hand-Print a Broadsheet
Drop in and print a broadsheet of ‘Yankee Doodle Dandy’ using wood and metal type on an antique letterpress. No registration required; no experience necessary.
Thursday, September 17, 11:30 am-1:30 pm
Book Arts Workshop, Baker Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover NH
Free
Information: hop.dartmouth.edu or 603.646.2040

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Founded in 1962, the Hopkins Center for the Arts is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help Dartmouth and the surrounding Upper Valley community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. After a celebratory 50th-anniversary season in 2012-13, the Hop enters its second half-century with renewed passion for mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts.