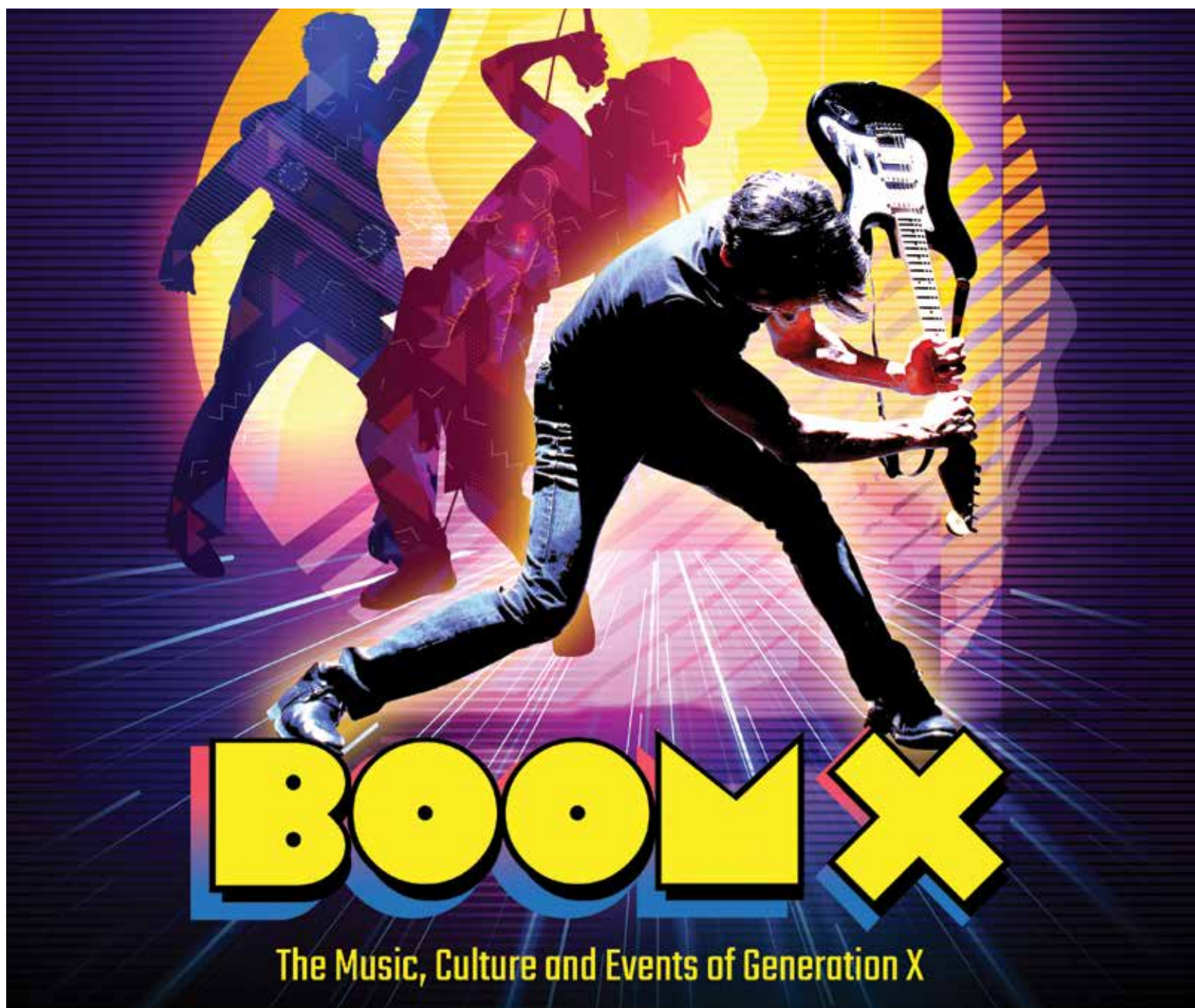




REVIEW: RICK MILLER’S “BOOM X” IS AN ESSENTIAL THEATRE-GOING EXPERIENCE



A world history lesson. A music history lesson. An interpersonal reflection of one artist’s life told through highly energetic impressions, flashy news reels and a wealth of pop culture that shaped a generation. Welcome to Rick Miller’s *BOOM X*.



Photo credit: Craig Francis

BOOM X is the middle part of Miller’s *BOOM* Trilogy. Part One, *BOOM*, deals with the Baby Boomers (Miller’s parents’ generation). *BOOM X*, this play, focuses on the GenXers (Miller’s own generation) and *BOOM YZ* is all about Miller’s daughter’s generation, the Millennials.

BOOM X centres around a group of generational representatives: Howard, a baseball-loving academic; East German immigrant Annika; Steph, a small-town Ontarian; and Brandon, born in the early ‘80’s and raised by free-spirited and diverse parents. Miller takes on the persona of each character as they relate fragments from their life stories, moving chronologically through the period of the X generation’s formative years from 1969 to 1995. We hear about their life and

times, and by the end of the show, we know how each of them is connected to Miller.

Miller rose to fame and is likely best remembered for playing the entire Simpsons cast in MacHomer, his Shakespeare/Simpsons mash-up. I remember being wowed by him then. He displays that jaw-dropping ability to great effect here too, nailing impressions of everyone from Pierre Trudeau to John Lennon to Axl Rose. His evocation of famous musicians is incredible and his stamina feels impossible to maintain. As the program says, Miller plays 100 characters in 100 minutes. Miller could also take a prize for being the fastest quick change artist on stage and audiences may spend many moments wondering just how he does it all. Impressive is an understatement.

There is a projection screen in the middle of the stage, upon which are lines of news items in ticker tape fashion. This keeps the audience on top of all the news that happened between 1969 and 1995. There’s snippets from Woodstock, the Vietnam War and its many protests, assassinations, The Cold War, Reaganomics, the AIDS crisis and the birth of the internet and MTV. Then, there are the abundance of videos and images, both personal and public, that also flash across the screen. Miller appears on either side of the screen to give ongoing narration, and behind the screen to evoke musicians of the day with snippets of songs by the likes of

Jimmy Hendrix, The Bee Gees, Alanis Morissette, Bob Marley, Devo, Kurt Cobain of Nirvana and Gord Downie of The Tragically Hip. For each iconic singer, he sports a wig and costume, as well as playing the appropriate guitar.

Miller also utilizes some audience engagement where they are invited to shout out the artists he speeds through in a “20 songs in 2.02 minutes” segment. If waiting for concessions aren’t in your plans, intermission can be spent answering Trivial Pursuit type questions projected on the screen.

BOOM X is a technologically stunning multimedia production that unfolds at breathtaking speed. It is equally thought-provoking because, while watching and listening, one can’t help thinking about how this history is a cautionary tale that provides the background for our present state of



Photo credit: Irina Litvinenko

chaos and uncertainty. For those of us older or the same age as Miller, we live again through the nostalgia he presents with all the good, the bad and the ugly of these years and the impact they had on this particular generation. For those younger than Miller, there are subtle but impactful lessons learned in the hope that history won’t repeat itself. It is a deeply meaningful piece of theatre for all ages and I consider it an essential theatre-going experience. Don’t miss it!