

Lin-Manuel Miranda and his father, Luis,  
on the steps of his childhood home



MONICA SHOES

## Like Father, Like Lin

Alexander Hamilton reminded Lin-Manuel Miranda of his father, and now his *Hamilton* hits Broadway—but where did he get his start?

by Michael Gioia

“Wait, I’m about to say a nice thing about you! Don’t interrupt me!” Lin-Manuel Miranda tells his father, Luis A. Miranda, Jr., before he could get another word in.

The two sit next to each other in the Miranda household living room. They’re reminiscing over cups of *café*, as they say in Luis’s home, located in Manhattan, far uptown in Inwood. Lin-Manuel buries his head in the couch every time his father gets off topic or spills a few embarrassing beans about his adolescence.

Lin-Manuel, who returned to his childhood home for the morning (just 20 blocks from where he lives with his wife, Vanessa Nadal, and newborn son, Sebastian), is the spitting image of his father. The two share the same

warm smile, tightly cropped goatee, and long hair that curls slightly at the bottom (Luis, however, is a shade of salt and pepper—25 years Lin-Manuel’s senior).

Lin-Manuel silences his father to speak about the time he felt most encouraged, at a crossroad in his early adulthood. Producer Kevin McCollum, who ushered Miranda’s *In the Heights* to Broadway, expressed interest in his writing, but Miranda was offered a job teaching English at his former high school, Hunter College High School.

After substitute teaching for some time, “Hunter had asked me to stay on to continue to teach part time,” Lin-Manuel explains. “And, I asked you, ‘Should I keep teaching or should

I just kind of sub and do gigs to pay the rent and really throw myself into writing full time?' And, you wrote me a very thoughtful letter, in which you said, 'I really want to tell you to keep the job—that's the smart 'parent thing' to do—but when I was 17, I was a manager at the Sears in Puerto Rico, and I basically threw it all away to go to New York, [and] I didn't speak a lot of English. It made no sense, but it was what I needed to do.' So you were like, 'It makes no sense to leave your job to be a writer, but I have to tell you to do it. You have to pursue that if you want.' That was very opposite advice from, 'Be a lawyer,' and I'm glad I took it."

lines of America's beginnings. He plays founding father Alexander Hamilton in his musical *Hamilton*, which transferred to Broadway following an acclaimed engagement at Off-Broadway's Public Theater—also where *A Chorus Line* was born in 1975.

Not only is he fathering a new musical, he is also the new father of Sebastian Miranda, born just two weeks before Off-Broadway rehearsals for *Hamilton* began.

"She's the superhero in all of this because she had to deal with a newborn kid during tech," says Lin-Manuel of his wife, Vanessa.

Luis adds, "It's the parallels of life. I remember when I worked for [Mayor Ed] Koch



Daveed Diggs, Okieriete Onaodowan, Anthony Ramos, and Lin-Manuel Miranda in *Hamilton*

JUAN MARCUS

Luis admits he was the "more realistic" one between him and his wife, Luz Towns-Miranda. He had hoped Lin-Manuel would become a lawyer, but ever since his *Pushcart War* video—a third-grade book report that also functioned as Lin-Manuel's first feature film (of sorts)—showbiz seemed the only option.

Then, of course, there was the time a young Lin-Manuel performed with the Hunter College chorus on *CBS This Morning* for Child Hunger Day. They were singing backup on David Pomeranz's "In Our Hands."

"There are 20 kids singing, all very shy, and there is Lin-Manuel," Luis recalls, arms flailing in the air, re-enacting his performance.

"Just *living!* I still remember the song..." Lin-Manuel interjects, offering a full-blown performance in the living room.

Luis continues, "I remember telling Luz, my wife, he can never be in *A Chorus Line!*"

Although *A Chorus Line* wasn't in store for Miranda, he now puts himself on the battle

for four years. Life in this house continued, and I sort of walked in, and my daughter went with me to a lot of affairs, and my wife made it very clear that she would only go to [the] important stuff... she's a very tough lady, and life continued, and she managed that life. When we lost the election in '89, I had some downtime for six months, and then I realized that she had painted things in colors that I didn't like!" He laughs. "But, it's the parallel with you and tech—you're being a parent at the same time that your life is going on, in a great way."

Lin-Manuel agrees, "Yes. You learn to balance things."

*Hamilton* opens Aug. 6 at the Richard Rodgers Theatre. An autographed photo of four revolutionaries from the Off-Broadway run is framed and displayed near the doorway. "I knew that it would be fantastic," he says. "I didn't realize it would change his life."

Lin-Manuel laughs and says, "We're still figuring out how that's going to happen." ◆