

'Hamilton' Helps Boost Minority Representation on Broadway

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The cast of 'Hamilton.' Photo: Joan Marcus

By

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New York City's theater community has made strides over the past decade in increasing opportunities for minority actors, according to a report released this week.

The report, prepared by the Asian American Performers Action Coalition, said minorities made up 35% of the casts of new shows on Broadway and at prominent non-profit theaters in the 2015-16 season. That is a marked increase from a decade earlier, when the figure was 15%.

"There's a move toward representing all people on New York City stages," said coalition steering-committee member Pun Bandhu.



Actors Alex Mandell, Jonathan Fielding, Clifton Duncan and Amelia McClain performing in 'The Play That Goes Wrong' at the Lyceum Theatre. Photo: Agaton Strom for The Wall Street Journal

To a great extent, the surge is because of a handful of shows with a large minority representation, such as the musicals “Hamilton” and the now-closed Gloria Estefan-inspired “On Your Feet!”

The coalition hasn’t released the results for 2016-2017, but Mr. Bandhu said the percentage is likely to decline since the season had fewer minority-dominated shows.

Mr. Bandhu also said producers of plays aren’t paying as much heed to racial diversity, and all-white casts for dramas and comedies are quite common across New York stages.

That could be changing. “The Play That Goes Wrong,” which has been running on Broadway for 10 months, has three African-American actors in its current cast. And Keegan-Michael Key, a biracial actor known for his work on television, is one of the stars of Steve Martin’s new Broadway comedy, “Meteor Shower.”

Stephen Kopel, casting director for “The Play That Goes Wrong,” says today’s audiences have a color-blind approach, so producers shouldn’t hesitate to follow suit.

“I have never heard a complaint,” he said of his decision to cast “Play” with minority actors. “If anything, it’s been the opposite reaction.”



Keegan-Michael Key, Jeremy Shamos, Amy Schumer, and Laura Benanti in 'Meteor Shower,'
Photo: Matthew Murphy