



**HOOPS & DREAMS:** (left to right) Francois Battiste, Kevin Daniels, Deirdre O'Connell, Peter Scolari & Tug Coker in *Magic/Bird*. Photo: Joan Marcus



*Theater Review*

***Magic/Bird:***

**Bio-drama about friendship  
& adversity between two  
basketball legends scores**

*Magic/Bird*

Written by Eric Simonson

Directed by Thomas Kail

Longacre Theatre

220 West 48th Street

New York, NY

(212-239-6200), [www.magicbirdbroadway.com](http://www.magicbirdbroadway.com)

**By David NouNou**

Here is a scoop for theatergoers: You don't have to be a jock, sports enthusiast or even like basketball to enjoy and appreciate an unexpected, beautifully realized play such as *Magic/Bird*. You just have to like interesting biographies.

Skillfully mounted and deftly directed by Thomas Kail, Eric Simonson's *Magic/Bird* is one of those shows that a theatre critic does not expect to like or enjoy because, by nature, very few sports-related themes translate as solid Broadway drama. However, Mr. Simonson has taken two diverse personalities from the same arena and placed them on opposing sides and built an arc between them to form a relationship ultimately out of mutual respect and admiration for each other.

The antagonists that are ultimately the protagonists are Earvin "Magic" Johnson (Kevin Daniels) and Larry Bird (Tug Coker). The story begins in 1979 when each is a rookie, drafted by major teams: Johnson by the L.A. Lakers and Bird by the Boston Celtics, all the way to where they play for the U.S. dream team in the 1992 Olympics, to the present. Everything about them is set out as a competition, whether it was salary, endorsements, fans or popularity. Their rivalry brought the fans to the stadiums and ultimately placed the sport in the prestigious stratosphere it currently enjoys.

Johnson is the outgoing, gregarious athlete, while Bird is the quiet, introverted, always-thinking-about-the-sport guy. Their opposing personalities bring them together due to their love of the sport. It is adversity, due to injury and health issues, which finally binds them together for life. There is a line in the show that says "they are like brothers from two different fathers," and indeed they are.

It is difficult to translate, to the stage, two legendary athletes of the likes of Johnson and Bird, both of whom are so renowned in the sport of basketball. However, thanks to some real life-footage of the athletes in their younger days and the expert performances by Kevin Daniels and Tug Coker, we do get a feel and understanding of these two men. Honorable mention must also be given to Peter Scolari as coaches, Pat Riley, Jerry Buss, and more, Deirdre O'Connell, Francois Battiste, and Robert Manning, Jr. all playing multiple roles

Eric Simonson, who in 2010 gave us *Lombardi* (about football coach Vince Lombardi), has returned this year even stronger with *Magic/Bird*. He is finding his voice on Broadway and it is a welcome one, with a lot to say in a unique, dramatic style.

***Edited by Scott Harrah***

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