

# Okieriete “Oak” Onaodowan Departs The Great Comet; Mandy Patinkin Will Replace

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Jamara Wakefield

You heard it here first, [Okieriete “Oak” Onaodowan](#), is leaving *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*. According to sources, the New Jersey born actor who is best known for the roles of Hercules Mulligan and James Madison in *Hamilton*, is being replaced by Mandy Patinkin in an effort to “boost ticket sales.” Oak’s relationship with *The Great Comet* has been rough from the start, as he was initially set to succeed Joshua Groban at the Imperial Theatre July 3 until delays caused him to start on July 11th. It was at the time that Onaodowan, [tweeted](#) in June that the show mysteriously needed another week to prepare for his arrival.

UPDATE: July 11th will be Oaks first show! DATE CHANGE! They need another week 2get ready for Oak! [#PierreOrPerish @GreatCometBway](#)

— *The Incredible Oak (@OakSmash)* June 30, 2017

Although this delay was not clarified by *The Great Comet*, it seems odd that Oak became responsible for communicating this information to fans as opposed to the show. The story of Onaodowan joining the cast with delays followed by the abrupt replacement of his role to boost ticket sales raises questions about how Black actors are valued and supported within Broadway. It is ironic when Black actors participate in narratives about colonial history, change present day history by adding to the diversity to Broadway, and then are easily replaced as if their only value to a production is based on ticket sales.

In 2016, Onaodowan won a Grammy award for his contributions to the *Hamilton* soundtrack. He is a talented actor with a rich stage resume on Broadway (*Hamilton & Rocky*), Off Broadway (*Langston in Harlem & Neighbors*) and on the small screen debuting as Afrika Bambaataa in three episodes of the Netflix original series *The Get Down*.

Critics agree that his performance in *The Great Comet* is stellar bringing a deeply moving energy to the character of Pierre. While it is a great loss to lose such a talented actor, it is clear *The Great Comet* will not be the last stop on his path of Black excellence. Onaodowan’s last performance as Pierre on Broadway is August 13th 2017.