Democracy in action has never looked cooler than in “Hamilton,” in which the fighting strength of people who changed the world comes through in the tension and bravado of the choreography.

Contemporary urgency is the great gift of this remarkable musical, which has begun its fourth year on Broadway and has spawned numerous touring productions, including one now at the Kennedy Center. Credit the fiery magnetism of its key performers (I’ve recently seen both the New York and Washington casts, and they’re equally strong), as well as creator Lin-Manuel Miranda’s Pulitzer Prize-winning rap lyrics and compositional mastery.

But there’s another, relatively unsung hero, and his name is Andy Blankenbuehler. He’s the one who makes the revolution sexy. And not just because the dancers are, pretty much, wearing underwear. (And boots.) Blankenbuehler won a Tony for his “Hamilton” choreography and has two others, for Miranda’s earlier musical “In the Heights” and, more recently, “Bandstand.” Yet the intricacy and impact of his work hasn’t been adequately acknowledged; people watching while she runs her daily errands, “When the ordinary is already extraordinary, the music is all around us.”

Lori McKenna can mint country hits out of everyday talk, just not every day. On a recent visit to the hair salon, with her head thrown back in the sink, she was listening for lyrics over a rush of warm water, hoping that the talky woman in the next chair might volunteer a few magic words.

Slosh-slosh-slosh. Blah-blah-blah. And . . . nope. Instead of going home with a new hook in her head, McKenna had to settle for some new color in her hair.

But this is how her songwriting often begins — eavesdropping and people-watching while she runs her daily errands. “We’re all people-watchers in some way,” McKenna says over the telephone from her living room in Massachusetts. “We see a person, and we make a story up in our head. . . . I don’t know if empathy is the right word, but we develop some curiosity in one another.”

McKenna’s exquisite new album, “The Tree,” directs that curiosity toward families — her family, other people’s families, imagined families, families where the kids grow up too fast, and the parents grow old too soon, families that make her new songs feel as mundane and urgent as life and death. And while many have praised McKenna for her ability to elevate our most piddling pedestrian life-stuff to profound heights, for her, there’s no heavy lifting involved.

Escaping into “The West Wing”
To distract from the drama of the real-life White House, some turn to a fictional one

Paul and Shirley Attryde drove from Durham, N.C., to Washington this spring for a live taping of “The West Wing Weekly,” a podcast about a TV series that ended 12 years ago. They stood on the Lincoln Theatre stairs before the show, watching audience members file up to meet the hosts and former cast members who trade witticisms about the show every week during a single episode.

“The Attrydes, both in their 40s, are apolitical, but still — these days, rewatching a show about idealistic wonks working for a Nobel Prize-winning economist president is “a little slice of heaven,” said Paul, wearing a gray “West Wing Weekly” sweatshirt. “It’s the president we all want but don’t have.”

“When you see so much partisanship and so much anger and hatred of politics right now,” Shirley added, “it’s refreshing to remember that maybe there are people behind the scenes that really are trying their best to work for the greater good.”

On the podcast, Hirway brings a fan’s passion and a critic’s rigor, while Malina, who played deputy communications director Will Bailey on “The West Wing,” is the comic relief. At the Lincoln Theatre, Malina trades insults with fellow former cast member (and frequent guest) Julia Louis-Dreyfus in a rollicking bit about the president’s 11-person entourage.

Julia K. Hartman, Sabrina Sloan and Lisa Reines in the Kennedy Center production of “Hamilton.” The show’s dancing is primarily hip-hop, but it’s deeply dramatic.
In 2018, "The West Wing" still resonates

**NEWSWEEK FOCUS**

Bradley Whitford as longtime political spectrum.
In 2018, "The West Wing" ran from 1999 to 2006, predating TV's full pivot toward anti-heroes, as po-

cifically chronicled the Monica Lewinsky scandal in

"The West Wing" was a monumental

All your news,
no interruptions, but a commitment of automatic payments with

The Monica Lewinsky scandal

The podcast, he said, "lets them

Obama, binged the first five
seasons with his wife after the

The show was a real

"Our presses don't stop."

Richard Schiff, who played

The show's fictional world. Attie

"The West Wing" was a

"I now find myself rethinking all

If you know, just plainly lying."

But it was possible," he said, and "not

And "Seventy percent of my tweets

political rise,

"The Shawshank Redemption"

But Whitmore, communications
director to Toby Ziegler, said that since 2016, he's
written an essay in October saying, I now find myself rethinking all those

"The West Wing" was a monumental

"The West Wing" was a monumental

I recognize that the gap

The Monica Lewinsky scandal

Sorkin’s lawyer, who had

"I now find myself rethinking all

Henry Giroux contributed to this

The Monica Lewinsky scandal

I recognize that the gap

The Monica Lewinsky scandal

It was always a phenomenon, but

"I now find myself rethinking all

It was always a phenomenon, but

I recognize that the gap

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