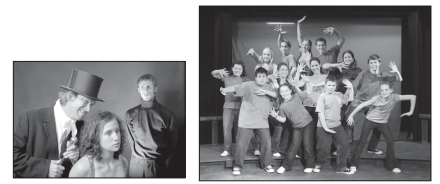


Chronicle Theater Review



Cape Playhouse Kicks Off 2023 Season With 'Ain't Misbehavin'

by Melissa De La Vega

Cape Playhouse, entering its 97th year, did not disappoint Wednesday night with the 2023 season opener "Ain't Misbehavin'."

Set in Harlem in New York City in the 1930s, the swing and jazz infused show is a magnificent tribute to legendary pianist Thomas "Fats" Waller. This stellar show proved to hold up wonderfully over the years since winning three Tony Awards when it first debuted on Broadway in 1978. The ambiance, the set, the costumes, and all of the songs flawlessly capture the culture of life in the Harlem Renaissance, and every scene is saturated with pure joy and fun. "Ain't Misbehavin'" will have you dancing and bopping around in your seat for the entire show. As one of the main songs says: the joint was jumpin'!

Directed and choreographed by award-winning Lacy Darryl Phillips, "Ain't Misbehavin'" is a musical revue without a traditional plot line. The show is jam-packed with 30 soulful and inspiring songs that truly make you feel alive. Standout songs like "T'aint Nobody's Biz-ness If I Do," "The Jitterbug Waltz," "The Viper's Drag," and "Fat and Greasy" all deliver unforgettable vibes from the first-class cast.

The energy in the room of this production was electric. Each of the five actors in "Ain't Misbehavin'" brought



From left, Ashanti J'Aria, Juson Williams, Ciara Elyse Harris, Anthony Wayne, and Tarra Conner Jones in "Ain't Misbehavin'."

NILE SCOTT STUDIOS PHOTOS

their own uniquely rich and elevated performances. Ciara Alyse Harris (Charlaine), Ashanti J'Aria (Armelia), and Tarra Conner Jones (Nell) play the three leading ladies who bring powerhouse voices, sass and no-nonsense spunk to the show. Juson Williams (Ken) and Anthony Wayne (Andre) both give remarkably entertaining and intoxicating performances. These two gentlemen mesmerize the audience with their cool charisma on stage.

The focal point of the set features the show's seven-piece band which brings the house down song after song: Gary Mitchell, Jr. on the keyboard, David Moore on drums, Ron Mahdi on bass, Arthur Bakopolus on alto sax/clarinet,

Jared Holaday on tenor sax/clarinet, Seelan Manickam on trumpet, and Jeff Hoyer on trombone. The band, along with the onstage pianist (and conductor) Kenny Smith are in essence characters themselves in the show.

In his 10th summer at the Playhouse, Hunter Foster, a well-renowned Broadway actor, director, playwright and singer, is back this season in his new role as guest artistic director. In seasons past, Foster has acted and directed several shows at the theater. With his breakout Broadway debut in "Urinetown" and appearances in "The Producers" and "Mister Roberts," Foster was also nominated for a Tony Award in 2003 for his role as Seymour in the revival of "Little Shop of Horrors."

Foster's move to kick off the season with "Ain't Misbehavin'" makes it very clear that the bar has been set high for a fabulous summer of fun at the Cape Playhouse.



Anthony Wayne and Ciara Elyse Harris in "Ain't Misbehavin'."

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