Study Guide

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The videotaping or other video or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.

March 1 - 26, 2017
As you take your students on the exciting journey into the world of live theatre we hope that you’ll take a moment to help prepare them to make the most of their experience. Unlike movies or television, live theatre offers the thrill of unpredictability.

With the actors present on stage, the audience response becomes an integral part of the performance and the overall experience: the more involved and attentive the audience, the better the show. Please remind your students that they play an important part in the success of the performance.

A FEW REMINDERS...

**BE PROMPT**
Give your students plenty of time to arrive, find their seats, and get situated. Have them visit the restrooms before the show begins.

**RESPECT OTHERS**
Please remind your students that their behavior and responses affect the quality of the performance and the enjoyment of the production for the entire audience. Live theatre means the actors and the audience are in the same room, and just as the audience can see and hear the performers, the performers can see and hear the audience. Please ask your students to avoid disturbing those around them. Please no talking or unnecessary or disruptive movement during the performance. Also, please remind students that cellphones should be switched off completely. No texting or tweeting, please. When students give their full attention to the action on the stage, they will be rewarded with the best performance possible.

**GOOD NOISE, BAD NOISE**
Instead of instructing students to remain totally silent, please discuss the difference between appropriate responses (laughter, applause, participation when requested) and inappropriate noise (talking, cell phones, etc).

**STAY WITH US**
Please do not leave or allow students to leave during the performance except in absolute emergencies. Again, reminding them to use the restrooms before the performance will help eliminate unnecessary disruption.
Dear Educator,

Live theatre is a place for people to gather and experience the joys, triumphs, and sorrows life has to offer.

The Syracuse Stage education department is committed to providing the tools to make learning in and through the arts possible to address varied learning styles and to make connections to curricula and life itself. It is our goal in the education department to maximize the theatre experience for our education partners with experiential learning and in-depth arts programming. Thank you for your interest and support.

Sincerely,

Lauren Unbekant
Director of Educational Outreach

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Syracuse Stage is committed to providing students with rich theatre experiences that explore and examine what it is to be human. Research shows that children who participate in or are exposed to the arts show higher academic achievement, stronger self-esteem, and improved ability to plan and work toward a future goal.

Many students in our community have their first taste of live theatre through Syracuse Stage’s outreach programs. Last season more than 15,500 students from across New York State attended or participated in the Bank of America Children’s Tour, artsEmerging, the Young Playwrights Festival, the Franklin Project, Young Adult Council, and our Student Matinee Program.

We gratefully acknowledge the corporations and foundations who support our commitment to in-depth arts education for our community.
Conceived by Murray Horwitz and Richard Maltby, Jr. and directed by Maltby, *Ain’t Misbehavin’* was first produced by Manhattan Theatre Club’s cabaret space in 1978. It quickly moved to Broadway where it opened on May 9, 1978, and ran for 1604 performances. It won that year’s Tony Award, Outer Critics’ Circle Award and Drama Desk Award, all for Best Musical. The 1982 television version of *Ain’t Misbehavin’* won an Emmy. *Ain’t Misbehavin’* is a revue celebrating the work of composer and pianist Fats Waller. Revues and their contemporary cousin, the jukebox show, exist to present songs organized around the work of a particular performer, time period or style. A revue has very little dialogue and no story with a beginning, middle and end. This show doesn’t have a plot, and we learn very little about the details of Waller’s life. Some of its thirty songs are familiar and others are obscure, but through these tunes he wrote or recorded, Fats Waller and the Harlem Renaissance come to life onstage in *Ain’t Misbehavin’*. 

Photo: *Ain’t Misbehavin’ on Broadway*
Picking up the nickname Fats because of his girth, Waller became well-known for his piano work in the Harlem slide style. Waller, who made his first recording in 1922, was a prolific songwriter, composing many familiar songs such as “Honeysuckle Rose” and “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” both with his most frequent lyricist Andy Razaf.

By 1926, he was so popular that while at an engagement in Chicago he was kidnapped to appear at Capone’s birthday party. He was often featured in revues, starting with Keep Shufflin’ in 1927. Waller headlined several radio shows, most notably “Rhythm Club,” which featured Fats Waller and his Rhythm sextet. In 1935, he appeared in two films, Hooray for Love and The King of Burlesque. By then, he was growing tired of his comedic persona and wanted to be taken seriously as an artist. Inspired by a 1938 trip to England, he composed the ambitious London Suite.

His last film appearance was in Stormy Weather, released just months before his death. Thomas “Fats” Waller died of bronchial pneumonia on December 15, 1943 in Kansas City. He was returning home via train from a west coast tour after filming.
Harlem Stride Piano

Fats Waller played Harlem stride style of piano, a style popularized by his piano teacher, James P. Johnson. Stride is a jazz style which took the basic left hand rhythms of ragtime, but played them with swing and complexity. The right hand played melody, often with improvisation. With stride, unlike ragtime and a lot of early jazz, the left hand moved long distances at great speed on the keyboard and required a musician with large hands. Fats Waller had enormous hands. The blind jazz pianist George Shearing said that shaking hands with him was “Like grabbing a bunch of bananas.” (Machlin)

For ‘Ain’t Misbehavin’, Richard Maltby Jr. and Murray Horwitz wrote lyrics to Waller’s “Handful of Keys” to describe the stride style:

“When my left hand thumps out bass notes
I’m halfway to playin’ that stride piano.
Then right there in between those base notes
I play chords for that stride piano sound.”

Rent Parties

In the Twenties, African American migration from the South flooded New York, with Harlem as a final destination. Landlords seized the opportunity and the rents in Harlem soared, often forcing more than one family to move into a two bedroom apartment. The Saturday night rent party became a common way to raise money to pay the rent. The admission was generally twenty-five cents, and for that price there was food, live music and dancing. Home brewed liquor would flow freely, and by the end of the evening, enough would be earned to pay the rent. A feature of the rent party was the cutting contest in which jazz musicians competed with each other, taking turns playing stride piano and cutting in on each other’s performances, adding complexities to the music and generally trying to outplay the others. Fats Waller played at rent parties throughout the Twenties. Sometimes, mobsters would hold rent parties of their own, although their concerns were not altruistic. When Prohibition ended, so did rent parties.
Tin Pan Alley was the name given to the area around 28th Street and Fifth Avenue in New York, where publishers of popular music had their offices. In the first half of the twentieth century, professional song pluggers and eager song writers trying to sell their music could be heard pounding away on pianos, and the sounds were compared to banging on tin pans. Eventually, the name came to signify the then thriving American music publishing industry. Rock and Roll killed Tin Pan Alley and the business moved over to the Brill Building.

“Fats and his buddies used to go own town to Tin Pan Alley and try to sell some of their songs. They’d play eight bars and get fifty dollars. Sometimes, they’d go from publisher to publisher, play the same eight bars, and get fifty dollars from each of them. That’s right. Although Fats and his buddies did write and perform one type of song for Tin Pan Alley, sweetheart, when they went uptown to Harlem it was a completely different story.”

—Ain’t Misbehavin’

Beginning in 1932, Waller recorded many Tin Pan Alley songs for RCA Victor. Although he sometimes recorded his own work, some songs were written by others and were often not very good on their own. Given the Fats Waller stride piano treatment and his buoyant vocals, these records rose way above the level of the original material. Waller’s output was massive. He wrote songs for revues, song recording, and performed on a punctual schedule. He claimed to have written the music for popular songs such as “On the Sunny Side of the Street” and “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love, Baby,” but they were sold to other songwriters who claimed them for themselves.
Harlem clubs became an important part of New York nightlife during the period known as the Harlem Renaissance. While these clubs were the artistic home to countless African American performers and gave employment to many more, they were owned by wealthy whites, some with criminal history. Their clientele were white. The titles and content of the shows and revues they featured as entertainment reflect the racism of the day, but the clubs were an important artistic venue for African American entertainers.

The most famous of these night spots was the Cotton Club, which catered to generally white audiences. Opening in 1920 as the Club De Luxe, it became the Cotton Club in 1923. Operated by gangster Owney Madden, the club was an outlet to sell his beer during prohibition. Fats Waller, Billie Holliday, Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald all entertained there. It was famous for its Sunday celebrity nights when Broadway and movie stars might be part of the audience. Although it was closed several times for violating liquor laws, it re-opened very swiftly. The Cotton Club closed for good in 1940.

The Savoy Ballroom, which opened in 1926, was famous for its integrated dance floor. African American and whites would dance in the same space. However, at the tables racial lines were reestablished, and revelers were strictly segregated. Celebrities were also likely to show up on Sundays at the Savoy. It closed in 1958.

Connie’s Inn at 131st St & 7th Avenue was situated in a basement at “The Corner,” a Harlem cultural hotspot. It was started by speakeasy owner Connie Immerman, and there were often mobsters in the house. Again, it catered to a whites only audience. Waller, Louis Armstrong, comedian Moms Mabley, and Fletcher Henderson were among the performers. Hot Chocolates, one of Fats Waller’s shows for Connie’s was so popular it transferred to Broadway, making “Ain’t Misbehavin” a hit. “Honeysuckle Rose” was later introduced as a soft shoe number in a revue called Load of Coal.

The Apollo Theater opened as a burlesque house in 1913, but in 1934, under new ownership, it became the 125th St Apollo Theater. It was famous for its boisterous amateur nights of which Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holliday are two illustrious alumnae. Falling into disrepair, it became a movie house in 1975. In 1983 the Apollo was restored as a music venue worthy of its history. Even today, it is still thriving.
The premise of *Ain’t Misbehavin’* is the recording of a V-Disc of Fats Waller’s music. V discs, recordings made for the armed forces during WWII, brought the sounds of popular singers, big bands and orchestras to our troops overseas on 12-inch 78 RPM phonograph recordings. The “V” is for Victory. In the show, we’re reminded of life at home during World War II with the song “When the Nylons Bloom Again,” which bemoans the shortage of wartime shortage of nylon for women’s stockings.
Harlem Renaissance

With the Great Migration to Northern cities, African American intellectuals and artists were especially attracted to Harlem, which soon became a major cultural center. A strong underpinning to what we call the Harlem Renaissance was the struggle for self-determination and civil rights. In fact, many important literary pieces appeared in The Crisis, the NAACP journal edited by W.E.B. Du Bois. Important writers of the movement include Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson and Zora Neale Hurston. Artists like Augusta Savage, Lois Mallou Jones and Aaron Douglas visually expressed their cultural heritage. Jazz musicians such as Cab Calloway, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington and Fats Waller brought their music to a crossover audience in the Harlem clubs. In 1921, the musical Shuffle Along with songs by Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle were the first show both written and performed by African Americans on Broadway. With the Great Depression, the Harlem Renaissance faded, but a door to recognition of African American artists had been opened.
A revue spotlights a central theme, time period, style, or the work of a particular artist.

- In a group or alone create a concept for a revue you would like to see
- What or who would you center a revue around?
- Create a song list and a dream list of performers
- How important are a set and costumes to your concept?
- If they are important, create a model and do costume sketches, which can be done with drawings or collage from magazines
- Present your idea to a producer (the teacher or the class)

After seeing Ain’t Misbehavin’,

- Discuss what it says about the time in which the music was originally written and performed.
- What do they say about relationships between men and women, about social conditions, economics and race relations?
- Consider specific songs or bits of dialogue in your discussion
- Create a visual response using collages, Romare Bearden style
The movement known as the Harlem Renaissance was also called the New Negro movement by many of its leading figures, and the fight for civil rights was part of its foundation. Research two artists associated with the Harlem Renaissance and discuss their contribution to the struggle for rights and the development of a distinct African American voice. You may choose writers, musicians, or visual artists.
elements of drama

PLOT
What is the story line? What happened before the play started? What do the characters want? What do they do to achieve their goals? What do they stand to gain/lose?

THEME
What ideas are wrestled with in the play? What questions does the play pose? Does it present an opinion?

CHARACTER
Who are the people in the story? What are their relationships? Why do they do what they do? How does age/status/etc. affect them?

LANGUAGE
What do the characters say? How do they say it? When do they say it?

MUSIC
How do music and sound help to tell the story?

SPECTACLE
How do the elements come together to create the whole performance?

Other Elements: Conflict/Resolution, Action, Improvisation, Non-verbal communication, Staging, Humor, Realism and other styles, Metaphor, Language, Tone, Pattern & Repetition, Emotion, Point of view.

Any piece of theatre comprises multiple art forms. As you explore this production with your students, examine the use of:

WRITING
VISUAL ART/DESIGN
MUSIC/SOUND
DANCE/MOVEMENT

ACTIVITY
At its core, drama is about characters working toward goals and overcoming obstacles. Ask students to use their bodies and voices to create characters who are: very old, very young, very strong, very weak, very tired, very energetic, very cold, very warm. Have their characters interact with others. Give them an objective to fulfill despite environmental obstacles. Later, recap by asking how these obstacles affected their characters and the pursuit of their objectives.

INQUIRY
How are each of these art forms used in this production? Why are they used? How do they help to tell the story?
elements of design

LINE can have length, width, texture, direction, and curve. There are five basic varieties: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, and zig-zag.

SHAPE is two-dimensional and encloses space. It can be geometric (e.g. squares and circles), man-made, or free-form.

FORM is three-dimensional. It encloses space and fills space. It can be geometric (e.g. cubes and cylinders), man-made, or free-form.

COLOR has three basic properties: HUE is the name of the color (e.g. red, blue, green), INTENSITY is the strength of the color (bright or dull), VALUE is the range of lightness to darkness.

TEXTURE refers to the “feel” of an object’s surface. It can be smooth, rough, soft, etc. Textures may be ACTUAL (able to be felt) or IMPLIED (suggested visually through the artist’s technique).

SPACE is defined and determined by shapes and forms. Positive space is enclosed by shapes and forms, while negative space exists around them.
Sources and Resources:


blackpast.org. “Cotton Club of Harlem.”  

boweryboyshistory.com. “Jungle Alley and Wild Nights at Connie’s”  

https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-Renaissance-American-literature-and-art

http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/harlem-renaissance.


Machlin, Paul. “The Life and times of Fats Waller.”  

Morrison, Nick. “Stride Piano: Bottom End Jazz.”  
http://www.npr.org/2010/04/12/125689840/stride-piano-bottom-end-jazz

“V-disc.”  
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V-Disc
**Video Resources**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSNPpssruFY

Fats Waller performs “Your Feet’s Too Big.”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=in1eK3x1PBI

“Fats Waller” a documentary in four parts featuring a long interview with his son.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwxWYyTlmIo
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91kj5zp5IrA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSZUZ6rpleA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stHswJ3L98U

“Mother Goose Goes Hollywood,” a Disney cartoon from the Thirties. The caricatures of Cab Calloway, Fats Waller, and Stepin Fetchit are racist, but it places them as Hollywood celebrities, with the cartoon versions of Calloway and Waller briefly performing. It may stimulate conversation about racism.
youtube.com/watch?v=F2LkRqhp4Zc

“Jazztime Tale” animation for television about a young Fats Waller  26 minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZB_vvJdQ0is

“The Harlem Renaissance,” a History Channel video  3 minutes.
http://www.history.com/topics/roaring-twenties/videos/the-harlem-renaissance

**Picture resources**

http://www.fatswaller.org/music.html
https://news.uns.purdue.edu/x/2009a/090403EddyAint.html
http://ccriderblues.com/fats-waller/
http://www.biography.com/people/fats-waller-9522591
http://www.longwharf.org/aint-misbehavin-hot-spots-harlem
https://www.pinterest.com/pin/374432156491764642/
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
OCTOBER 19 – NOVEMBER 6

DISNEY AND CAMERON MACKINTOSH’S MARY POPPINS
NOVEMBER 26 – JANUARY 8

DISGRACED
JANUARY 25 – FEBRUARY 12

AIN’T MISBEHAVIN’
THE FATS WALLER MUSICAL SHOW
MARCH 1 – 26

HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE
APRIL 5 – 23

DEATHTRAP
MAY 10 – 28

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