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## Weston's "Ain't Misbehavin'" gets the joint jumping

By WILLIAM MENEZES

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WESTON

Weston Playhouse Theatre Company opened its 75th season with a joyful and jazzy production of "Ain't Misbehavin'" guaranteed to have audiences "foot stompin' and hand clappin'" through its run. This high-voltage, handsome musical revue of Fats Waller's greatest hits certainly had the "Joint Jumping" last Saturday afternoon.

Conceived by Richard Maltby Jr. and Murray Horowitz, "Misbehavin'" opened to great success on Broadway in 1978. It garnered just about every award available for a musical, including Drama Desk and Tony awards for Best Musical and a Tony for featured actress in a musical for Nell Carter.

The five talented actors assembled by Weston and Director/Choreographer Jim Weaver bring a lot of bounce and sizzle to this tribute to the music of the legendary Waller and all the great Black musicians during the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance. This was in the 1920s and '30s when creativity was blossoming, ethnic pride was on the rise and cultural identity developed.

The revue takes its title from Waller's 1929 tune "Ain't Misbehavin' (savin' all my love for you)." Nightclubs like the Cotton Club and the Savoy Ballroom were being packed by all the elite of high society, and speakeasies like Connie's Inn hosted the likes of Duke Ellington, Waller, Fletcher Henderson and Ethel Waters.

Weaver artfully turns on the heat to display all the

humor, liveliness and pacing you might wish for in this rambunctious, raunchy tribute to one of this country's great jazz musicians. Each performer when given the opportunity to shine individually, does so with gusto and passion.

Dennis Stowe turns Waller's "Viper's Drag" into a sensual loose-limbed daydream on the pleasures of smoking a five-foot joint. It is a classic showstopper. D'Ambrose Boyd is a big man with a big voice and a stage presence to match. He captures Waller's spirit when he sits down and growls into his whisky glass, "Your Feet Too Big," and displays his versatility when he and Jiolet F. Harris steam up the stage with a lively double entendre-loaded "Honey Suckle Rose." Harris later delivers a moody and thoughtfully understated "Mean to Me."

Joy Lynn Matthews-Jacobs punctuates "Squeeze Me" with a goodly share of delicious hot-blooded purrs.

Tracey Conyer Lee renders "Yacht Club Swing" with a lively bounce, while delivering a sweet and elegant

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version of "Keepin' Out of Mischeif Now."

Waller could also bring a lump to your throat with songs like "Black and Blue," made famous by Louis Armstrong. The ensemble brings a hush to the merriment with a poignantly rendered choral indictment of racism that can break your heart.

Music Director and Keyboardist Darryl G. Ivey can play a mean stride piano while leading Louis Farm, bass, and Bomi Choi, percussion, in a faithful reading of Luther Henderson's musical adaptations, orchestrations and arrangements.

Walking into the theater prepares you for the mood and feel of the performance with Russell Parkman's elegant set that is highlighted by outstanding upstage murals depicting visions of the Cotton Club. It is a fitting tribute evocative of the Harlem Renaissance. Karen Ann Ledger's costumes faithfully capture the period and Jack Mehler's lighting moves seamlessly from song to song.

"Ain't Misbehavin'" is one of those feel-good musicals that should be a must see for everyone who loves summer theater. It runs through July 16. For tickets and information, call 802-824-5288 or [www.westonplayhouse.org](http://www.westonplayhouse.org).

*William Menezes writes about theater and dance for Ovation.*

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