



## Permission to 'Misbehave' being given at San Jose Rep

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Oakland native Ken Robinson and co-star Rebecca Covington get the joint jumpin' in San Jose Rep's "Ain't Misbehavin'." Photo by Tim Fuller

The Harlem Renaissance can and should be considered one of the most important epochs in the history of the United States. Taking place roughly between 1920 and 1940, this era was truly momentous. After the nation spent the previous 100 or so years thinking that African-Americans came in forms only as the dandy, the Sambo or the mammy via the minstrel show, a new vanguard showcased the greatness of the Black man and the Black woman in the form of great thoughts, jazz, literature, poetry and art.

This intellectual, spiritual and artistic collective spawned such luminaries as poet Langston Hughes, actor and singer Paul Robeson, and dancer Josephine Baker. Other great novelists such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison have often been considered children of the Renaissance as well.

And when it comes to the music that filled ballrooms such as the Savoy, the Cotton Club and Small's Paradise, leading the way was a slide piano man that went by the name of "Fats."

Thomas "Fats" Waller might have passed away in 1943 at the age of 39. But his legacy has carried on in the form of a revue that has been in the musical theatre canon for more than 30 years. The sultry, sexy and

swingin' "*Ain't Misbehavin'*," featuring the music of Waller, makes the third and final stop of a national tour at the San Jose Repertory Theatre. Featuring 32 Waller hits such as the title number, "Your Feet's Too Big," and "Honeysuckle Rose," the show opens on Friday, March 19th and runs through April 18th.

"*Ain't Misbehavin'*" nailed down four Tony awards in 1978, including best musical and a best actress award for Nell Carter. The show continues to be a piece that reinforces the American fascination with jazz music, a piece that reveals the depth and soul of Waller and his genius.

"His music was his life," said cast member Rebecca Covington. "He was not trying to impress anyone, not trying to please anyone. He did what he wanted to do, he did what he needed to do, and he did it unapologetically."

Covington marvels at the self-assured nature of Waller, someone who did not back down to any establishment, someone that continued to make music that he cared about, music that inspired him. Waller may have taken cues from others musically, but that sound belonged only to him.

"Other music people influenced him, but he didn't try to transform his music to be like anyone else's," said Covington. "He was just himself to the core. Even in today's music, so many are trying to be someone else."

The show is a homecoming of sorts for actor Ken Robinson, who was born and raised in Oakland. Robinson got his start at Lakeview Elementary playing the title role in "Oliver." A singer in church from a very young age, Robinson fell in love with performing and participated in the high school drama program at Skyline High School. The notion of performing for a living was way too scary, so Robinson majored in economics at Morehouse College.

After an eight-year stint in the finance world, Robinson returned to follow the passion that was stoked as a small child. This past May, Robinson earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Yale School of Drama.

He has needed every ounce of training to keep up with the sublime demands of performing in this show.

"Because Fats Waller is so full of life, we can't rest on our laurels and just ride it out" said Robinson. "We are always trying to be better, trying to bring more of ourselves to the show, while having enough energy to not kill ourselves every time we do it."



Rebecca Covington, Aurelia Williams and Ken Robinson. Photo by Tim Fuller



Aurelia Williams, Christopher L. Morgan, Angela Grovey, Rebecca Covington and Ken Robinson. Photo by Tim Fuller

Covington agrees on many levels. She said that everyone in the show sings from the top to the bottom of their range. And a show that only has a cast of five that has to recreate the energy of an entire movement is daunting.

“Since there’s no room for slack, we have to do the job 150 percent, when we are on stage and when we are not,” said Covington. “We’re breathing and putting it back together again. You realize how much you want to hold your own weight, and by the end of the show I’m spent.”

Robinson considers the show a part of him. As he has journeyed through the past seven years performing the show in various venues and productions, living with his role and the music has all but swallowed him whole. In the best way possible, of course.

“The show allows a performer to bring all of him or herself to their role,” said Robinson. “The love for music, the love for performing, passion, intensity, and the freedom that Waller embodied in his music, I think that’s what each performer has to bring to a show. For that reason, it has to become a part of you.”



What may become a part of each performer when it comes to finding the core of each song is not necessarily pretty. Consider the lyrics from the song “Black and Blue,” a racially charged number that is one of the show’s signature moments – “I’m so forlorn/Life’s just a thorn/My heart is torn/Why was I born/What did I do to be so Black and blue?” While the challenges in the show are immense, there are others that might manifest themselves in other ways, contributing to the truth of the music. “The challenges are different depending on what I encounter during the day,” said Covington. “You may go to a store and no one talks to you, and then you sing “Black and Blue” and it changes the meaning. It’s amazing and the payoff is wonderful. I am so honored to be doing this show. The challenges are completely different every single day.”

## EXAMINE IT FOR YOURSELF

***"Ain't Misbehavin'"*** – The music of Thomas “Fats” Waller

Directed by Kent Gash

Starring Aurelia Williams, Christopher L. Morgan, Angela Grovey, Rebecca Covington and Ken Robinson

March 19th – April 18th

San Jose Repertory Theatre

101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose

Tickets range from \$35 to \$74

For more information or to purchase tickets, call 408-367-7255 or visit the Rep online at [www.sirep.com](http://www.sirep.com)

Email David John Chavez at [dchavez04@att.net](mailto:dchavez04@att.net)

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