



San Jose Rep's 'Misbehavin' a delicious slice of Americana through the Harlem Renaissance

April 2, 8:54 AM • [San Jose Theater Arts Examiner](#) • David John Chavez



Angela Grovey and Ken Robinson get movin' in Thomas "Fats" Waller's musical revue "Ain't Misbehavin'," playing through April 18th at the San Jose Repertory Theatre. Photo by Tim Fuller

Christopher L. Morgan was the predator at this rent party. And he was looking for prey.

As he slinkily careened over to a precious young thing in the front row, he used every ounce of his pelvic passion to give some lucky lady one hell of a story to share. Soft on voice, heavy on grind, and big on blush for that "mama," it was a moment that made the audience seem to say "Lord, have mercy."

A single moment, one moment light in mood, heavy on sex appeal. It was one of many moments that made San Jose Repertory Theatre's "Ain't Misbehavin'" a deliciously delectable romp through the music of Harlem Renaissance stride piano pioneer Thomas "Fats" Waller.

The musical revue of Waller's music, deftly directed by Kent Gash, was tightly performed by a cast of five. Morgan, Aurelia Williams, Angela Grovey, Rebecca Covington and Ken Robinson each brought plenty of fun and folly to the shindig, brilliantly mixing in a heaping of pathos at key moments in the show. Add in the absolutely brilliant musical director Darryl G. Ivey leading the seven piece band while manning the ivories, and you got yourself one jumpin' joint. Plenty of highlights accentuated a wonderful first act. "T Ain't Nobody's Biz-ness If I Do," the first song ever recorded by Fats Waller, featured some great belting, getting the show to a strong early start. Act I continued effectively with an innuendo laced "Honeysuckle Rose," the wonderfully annoying "Yacht Club Swing" by Covington, and a brilliantly belted "Cash for Trash" by Grovey. Bringing the act to a close was the ubiquitous "The Joint is Jumpin'."

While Act I was splendidly swell, Act II simply soared. The aforementioned Morgan made quite the entrance in his sexy and sultry "Viper's Drag" and "The Reefer Song," plenty of hilarity and comic timing ruled the moment in Robinson's "Your Feet's Too Big," and the audience got it's chance to shine during the melodic "Fat and Greasy."

No comic timing was necessary for the seriousness of the signature number in the show, "Black and Blue." Each cast member sat immobile in their chairs, providing beautiful tension, the ear-pleasing harmonies of the tune with lyrics that are purely painful. "I'm white inside/but that don't help my case/that's life, can't hide what's in my face." Contributing to the aura of the tune was the lighting that was soft and gently, smartly designed by William H. Grant, III.

"Misbehavin'" captures the essence of one of the most important time periods of Americana. Throw in the music of Waller that embodies the Harlem Renaissance, put it on a set with some cabaret tables and curtains that are heavy on mauve and the piece coheres marvelously. Or to put it the way someone might have said it back then, "That was killer diller!"

EXAMINE IT FOR YOURSELF

San Jose Repertory Theatre presents Ain't Misbehavin'"

The Word: The Rep's theatre turns into a splendid Tin Pan Alley filled with Waller's tunes.

Directed by Kent Gash

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

Through 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.sjrep.com