ON AND OFF STAGE

'Guys and Dolls' Singing Star Keeps Hectic Schedule

Take a glance at the Broadway musical lineup on New York City's entertainment strip and you will find black theatrical productions have scored large successes. The trend has produced larger numbers of blacks to theatre audiences and to the stage as performers. Young talent is making significant inroads in an area where blacks were once only chorus line members.

Musicals are by far the most popular segment of modern black theatre for both black and white audiences. Among the musicals winning rave notices on Broadway are "Guys and Dolls," "Bubbling Brown Sugar," "Porgy and Bess" and "Wiz." DAWN herewith presents data on several of these musicals and the stars in them.

By J. Wilfrid Gagin

"My time is scrambled," says Ernestine Jackson, star of Broadway's smash hit revival, "Guys and Dolls."

Besides playing the heroine Sister Sarah nightly, Miss Jackson takes voice lessons, exercises enthusiastically, bicycles during breaks, keeps up a hectic schedule of promotional appearances and often meets with producers offering challenging roles in films and television.

Somehow Ernestine juggles the minutes, always seems serene and finds time to greet her many admirers who come backstage at the Broadway Theatre. Her fans include young people who want a career in the theatre. Her advice to them? "Work, work, work. Talent isn't everything. If it's what you really want, make up your mind that you can get it and you can if you have the tenacity."

This slim and vivacious star has a lot of tenacity and guts, besides. "My mother gave me guts," she says, reminiscing about her happy childhood in Corpus Christi where she sang in a church choir. After working towards a degree at Delmar College she came to New York to study at Juilliard.

Since appearing in the chorus of "Showboat," her star has been on the rise. Ernestine has won coveted roles ever since. But is wasn't easy. Her boundless energy helped as she studied diligently and worked long hours. She also believes in a healthy diet, eats mostly protein and avoids heavy starches.

As for exercise, she lifts weights every morning, bicycles around the city and tries sport after sport. Right now the sport is tennis.

As for her beauty routine, she uses a night cream and makes ugly faces to exercise her muscles. Because she is only 5' 6" and slender, she likes her hair pulled back and often wears a sophisticated chignon low at the neck. As for wigs, she prefers curls close to the head framing the face.

DAWN asked both Ernestine and James Randolph, who plays Sky Masterson in "Guys and Dolls" if the audience affected their performance. They certainly do. Mr. Randolph pointed out that if the laughs aren't coming, then things get difficult but the audience always seems to respond to the songs they sing.

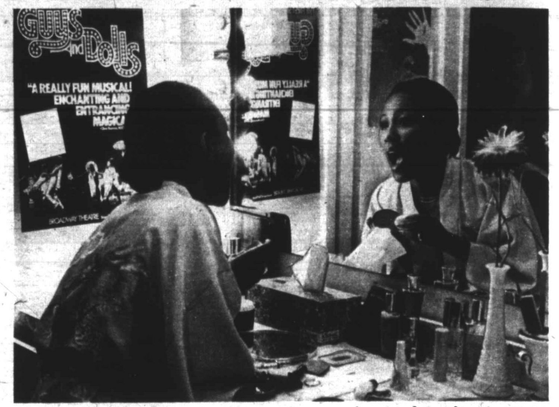
They also respond warmly to this attractive couple. As Randolph pointed out, black people are not often portrayed on the stage as having tender affection for one another.

"Guys and Dolls" is the exception and the audience loves it. The stars often receive fan mail apologizing for not applauding. The reason? Couples in the audience were holding hands and reminiscing about their own love affairs.

Ms. Jackson and Randolph have often been asked, "Why a black 'Guys and Dolls'?" Randolph feels black people should have heroes, too, rather than "Superfly. Ernestine pointed out that this production also broadens the repertoire of drama students in black schools.

As for the future, Ernestine Jackson and James Randolph are extremely optimistic. A black "Guys and Dolls" did make a difference. It proved that a black cast can be believable in non-color defined roles and that the production can be a financial success, besides.

Also, the musical, its leading lady and gentleman have given great pleasure to thousands and thousands of theatre-goers in Washington, New York and Philadelphia.



Ernestine Jackson works on her makeup for the evening performance. The star who likes to wear her hair back off the face is wearing an Elura braid by Helen of Troy. She found her Oriental kimona in a small boutique in Washington.

Ernestine heads for a fast spin after a matinee. Her sporty hair cut is a Naomi Sims wig made of Monsanto modacrylic fiber; the warmup by Loomtogs.

"Guys and Dolls" stars Ernestine Jackson and James Randolf discuss the evening's performance during dinner at Sardi's. Ernestine's torsade by Buchheit is twisted with rhinestones to create a flattering sculptured effect.

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