ON STAGE

Last times for 'Ain't Misbehavin'

By Robyn-Denise Yourse

Hopefully by this time, you've already seen "Ain't Misbehavin" — that little gem of a musical with its original cast now playing through Sunday at the National Theatre.

If not, catch it if you can before it leaves town and heads back to Broadway.

Although a decade has passed since it burst full throttle on the Great White Way, its initial message of "let the good times roll," and entertaining for the sheer joy of it remain intact.

No taxing or complicated plot is hatched here, but before you know it, the five superbly talented performers have seduced you from beginning to end in this 90-minute musical romp.

It showcases and celebrates the life and time of the late composer Thomas "Fats" Waller — who died at age 39 in 1943.

For "Fats," life was a celebration, a heady romance, despite his love of alcohol and food; his bouts with alimony payments and royalties that were reaped by others from the songs he wrote.

Sadly, however, the majority of his 500 or more compositions were lost — some of them his best works, according to music historians.

Still, his legacy is preserved, and featured with the three lusty ladies and saucy gents who comprise "Ain't Misbehavin's" cast.

In "Handful of Keys" — no doubt Fats' most skillful use of piano mastery — Charlain Woodard leads the ensemble in a clever play on rapid pace speed and lush harmonies.

Later in act one, Nell Carter sings "Cash For Your Trash," an uptempo number which suggests that more than just rubbage was given in exchange for money during the Second World War.

Baltimore-born Andre DeShields really comes into his own with some slinky and spineless gyrations in "The Viper's Drag," an ode to marijuana use.

While his performance here is as flawless as it was 10 years earlier, he manages to insert today's rallying cry against drugs "Just Say No" at the song's midpoint.

Armeilia McQueen sings "That Ain't Right," a heavy bluesy ballad in the style of Bessie Smith to her two-timing gigolo love interest, while Ken Page's tipsy character plays the dozens with some imaginary drinking cronies in "Your Feet's Too Big."

But the fun comes to a brief, temporary halt when the cast sings "Black and Blue," Fats' only serious song at the evening and ironically, the one that draws continual snickers.

I haven't quite been able to figure this one out, folks. The song deals in a very poignant way with the injustices of racism so my only explanation for the audience is perhaps it's easier to laugh than cry.

To coin another Fats phrase, "One never knows, do one?"

The evning ends on an uptempo note, however, as the cast performs some of his best known works "It's A Sin To Tell A Lie" and "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself A Letter" — sort of a medley of Fats' greatest hits.

At its conclusion, there's little wonder why the show snared a lion's share of Tony's during its initial run. Pianist Luther Henderson and director Richard Maltby, Jr., have gone to great lengths to introduce us to Fats.

And they do succeed.

Abyssinia come to Arena Stage

WASHINGTON, DC — Summer fun at Arena Stage continues with the production of the new pop-gospel musica, "Abyssinia," to play in the Arena from August 5 through September 4.

The title character, Abyssinia, is a young girl who is born in a field and grows up with the gift of song.

Throughout her life, she touches those around her with her mellifluous voice and healing powers, until one afternoon when her faith and musical inspiration are tragically shattered.

This touching gospel - music folk tale, set in an Oklahoma church community around 1900, reveals the circumstances by which Abyssinia regains her faith and her precious voice.

"Abyssinia" is based on a novel by Joyce Carol Thomas, directed by Tazewell Thompson, with music by Ted Kociolek, lyrics by James Racheff, and book by both Kociolek and Racheff.

The production comes to Arena from the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, Connecticut.

"Abyssinia" was conceived in 1982 when Kociolek discovered Ms. Thomas' novel, "Marked by Fire."

Kociolek was taken by the novel's "musical and lyrical promise" and found that it "struck something central" in him.

"Our musical is not a black documentary.

"It's a story that I believe is universal . . . Its theme of suffering and oppression overcome by faith and song has universal appeal at a primeval level."

Director Tazewell Thompson was awarded the 1987 Audelco Award for Directing for his work on "Abyssinia."

He staged the critically - acclaimed production of Aaron Copland's "The Second Hurricane" at SoHo Rep and was nominated for an Audelco Award for "Almos' A Man" and "One Fine Day."

He has worked as a director at the Actors Studio, Perry Street Theatre and Gateway Playhouse.

As an actor, he appeared on Broadway in the award-winning plays "The National Health," and "Checking Out," and regionally at Long Wharf Theatre and Syracuse Stage.

Tickets for "Abyssinia" are available with discounts available for senior citizens, groups and students.

For tickets and information call the Arena Stage box office at (202) 488-3300. Deaf Patrons may call the TDD line at (202) 484-0247.

In Baltimore...

HARBOR THEATRE PRESENTS "GAMES"

Baltimore — Harbour Theatre, Inc., in conjunction with the Lutherville-Timonium Recreation Council, presents "Games," a production in cooperation with the Baltimore Playwrights Festival.

The production will run each Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening from August 11 through August 27, at 8:30 p.m.

The performance will take place in the courtyard at the theatre located in the Lutherville Recreation Center at 1700 York Road (next to Chieftain Pontiac).

In inclement weather, the performances will be in the theatre.

Ticket information may be obtained by calling 728-1275.

All facilities accessible to the handicapped.

RAPP presents rotating plays

Continuing to stretch its horizons, the RAPP Resident Theater Company has temporarily moved out of New York's gritty, eclectic East Village and onto the tranquil campus of Baltimore's Loyola College for what will become an annual summer residency program.

Now through August 14, the RAPP Resident Theater Company will produce in rotating repertory Moliere's TARTUFFE and Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET in Loyola's new multi-million dollar, state-of-the-art MacManus Theater.

In addition, RAPP's artistic director R. Jeffrey Cohen is conducting an intensive Theater Conservatory Workshop for four weeks.

Loyola, one of Maryland's oldest and most respected colleges, aims to broaden its Fine Arts Department by incorporating RAPP's fresh and iconoclastic approach to classic theater over the coming years.

TARTUFFE is a revival from RAPP's 1986/87 New York season. ROMEO AND JULIET will be a premiere that interprets the play not as a romantic tragedy, but as a gothic horror story in which the young lovers are sacrificed to end the strife between their feuding families.

The plays run now through August 13 at the McManus Theater, Loyola College located at 4501 N. Charles Street.

For tickets call (301) 532-5024 and for further information call (301) 547-2424.

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ABOUT TV

By Deborah Quinerly

WETA/TV 26 will begin airing courses in economics, business, health, writing, French, history and psychology in conjunction with participating area colleges, on September 12.

A unique and convenient way to earn college credit, WETA telecourses will offer adults the opportunity to pursue a college degree in the convenience of their own homes.

Residents of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia may earn college credit from local colleges by registering with a participating college and enrolling in the WETA telecourses.

Telecourse students will receive all the benefits of a fully accredited college level course without the complictions of travelling to campus or juggling work and class.

Each course includes a series of television programs and is accompanied by a textbook, study guide, and other materials. WETA telecourses will provide local residents with the opportunity to continue their education as well as offer the general television audience provocative and informative programming.

This fall, courses will be offered under the supervision of faculty from Prince George's Community College, Montgomery College and Northern Virginia Community College. Telecourse programs to be broadcast beginning September 12 will include:

THE BUSINESS FILE, which delves into the complex functions of a business, including management, marketing, and accounting and looks at the challenges of high technology and international competition (Thursdays at noon);

ECONOMICS USA, which introduces macro and micro economics and examines major historic and contemporary events that have shaped 20th century American economics (Tuesdays at noon);

FRENCH IN ACTION, which uses proven "immersion" techniques, exciting cultural images and innovative exercises and drills to develop proficiency in French (Mondays at noon);

HERE'S TO YOUR HEALTH, which explores today's health issues and presents contemporary approaches to maintaining good health (Fridays at noon);

THE WRITE COURSE, which teaches academic and business writing from a "process" point of view, focusing on purpose and audience, with specific techniques for getting started and revision (Wednesdays at noon);

THE AFRICANS, produced by WETA, which examines the history and contemporary life of Africa through its triple heritage: what is indigenous, what was contributed by Islam, and what was acquired from the West (date and time to be announced);

THE MIND, which takes a comprehensive look at the mind and its behavior by examining, through case studies and research, the relationship between neuroscience and psychology (date and time to be announced).

For information on fall registration contact: Montgomery College (301) 587-9216; Prince George's Community College (301) 322-0785; and Northern Virginia Community College (703) 323-3368.

For further information on accompanying textbooks and study guides, contact WETA/TV 26, Department of Educational Activities, Box 2626, Washington, D.C. 20013 or call (703) 998-2709.

Have a good week!

TV Capsules

Saturday, August 6
"CLUB DATE: The Peter Sprague Trip" (10:30-11:00 p.m.) Critically acclaimed young jazz guitarist Peter Sprague, who has played alongside the likes of Chick Corea and Hubert Laws, is accompanied by Bob Magnusson, bass; Tripp Sprague, flute and saxophone; and Duncan Moore, drums. The program features several of Sprague's own compositions, including "Ensenada," "Seattle Stomp," "Maya," and "Musica Del Mar," as well as the standard ballad "It Could Happen To You." Channel 32.

Tuesday, August 9
"TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN AFRICA: Healing and Scientific Evaluation")8-8:30 p.m.) Scientists in Ghana and Mali show how traditional medicinal plants can be made into modern drugs — and the properties of these drugs can then be proved by scientific tests. Channel 32.

Wednesday, August 10
"OPEN FORUM" (8-9:00 p.m.) Area residents — in the studio and via telephone — join activist Dick Gregory and Kojo Nnamdi ("Evening Exchange") as they express their opinions on various topics. Channel 32.
"BROTHER JOHN" (8-10:00 p.m.) Sydney Poitier and Will Geer star. Channel 45.

COMING SOON

COLUMBIA, MD

The **Merriweather Post Pavilion** has some soulful entertainers coming to town on these hot summer nights.

On August 14th, there will be an evening of flashiness and fun when the **Jets, Jermaine Stewart,** and **Stacey Q** perform.

On August 27, there will be the soulful sax sounds of **Kenny G. Stanley Jordan** will also perform, fantastical fete with his nimble fingers on the guitar strings.

At the end of the month, the blue-eyed soul singers **Steve Winwood,** (30th), and **Boz Scaggs** (31st), will dazzle their audiences on their respective nights.

For tickets and showtime information, call 202-982-1800 in D.C., 301-730-2424 in Baltimore, and 1-800-233-4050.

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