

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse Opens 2023 Season with Tony Award® Winner “Ain’t Misbehavin’: The Fats Waller Musical”

Five actors and an on-stage seven-piece band offer dazzling music and dance.

Westport Country Playhouse will kick off its 93rd season with the sassy and sultry musical celebration, “Ain’t Misbehavin’: The Fats Waller Musical,” winner of the 1978 Tony Award® for Best Musical, from April 11 through April 29. The five-member cast features a contestant from “X Factor” and “The Voice” and two finalists from “American Idol.”

Longstanding supporter of Westport Country Playhouse and the arts throughout Southern Connecticut, Bank of America, is the Corporate Production Partner of “Ain’t Misbehavin’.”

Recipient of a 2022 “Critic’s Pick” in *The New York Times*, this exciting new vision of “Ain’t Misbehavin’” is directed and choreographed by Jeffrey L. Page. “Fats Waller was not only a musical genius—he also deployed humor to covertly speak truth to power structures,” said Page, an Emmy-nominated director and choreographer. “A 1978 *New York Times* article called Mr. Waller ‘the Clown Prince of Jazz.’ Beyond the racist implication of calling a Black man a ‘clown,’ the ‘clown’ is often the one person who can give the King the hard truth, through riddles, without being beheaded. Like the court jester, Waller packs the voice and celebration of Black people, as protest, within the intricacies of his music.”

In his revival of “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” Page stated that he is “interested in the celebration of Blackness as well as examining the hard truth: the fetishization of Blackness.

“I am also interested in looking at this collection of Waller’s works as one would a finely curated art exhibit,” Page said. “The curated musical pieces artfully tell a story of Waller’s protest through his mask of humor.”

Page cites the poem, ‘We Wear the Mask,’ written by Paul Laurence Dunbar in 1885, about the mask worn to hide torn hearts and the burden of wearing such a mask. “Perhaps ‘Ain’t Misbehavin’” is more than just the name for a catchy tune,” noted Page. “Perhaps ‘Ain’t Misbehavin’” is also a pronouncement that there is nothing lamentable nor nefarious about what is beneath the mask.”

Featuring the toe-tapping tunes of Thomas “Fats” Waller, “Ain’t Misbehavin’” tells how Waller rose to international fame during the Golden Age of legendary nightspots like the Cotton Club and the Savoy Ballroom, with his jazz, blues, and swing music of the 1920s. Although not quite a biography, “Ain’t Misbehavin’” evokes the delightful humor and infectious energy of this American original as a versatile cast dances and sings the songs that Waller made famous in a career that ranged from uptown clubs to Tin Pan Alley to Hollywood and concert stages in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. The repertoire will

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energize, enlighten, and entertain as well as provide insight into a vibrant time in American history and music.

With a score of 30 songs, including “Honeysuckle Rose,” “T’ain’t Nobody’s Business If I Do,” “This Joint Is Jumpin’,” “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love,” “It’s a Sin to Tell a Lie,” “I’m Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter,” and the title theme, “Ain’t Misbehavin,” the musical anthology is a tribute to the Harlem Renaissance.

The five-member cast includes Miya Bass (contestant on “The Voice,” “X Factor,” and Steve Harvey’s radio star competition; leading roles in “Aida,” “Sister Act,” “Lion King,” “Rent,” “Moana,” “The Wiz”); Paris Bennett (Broadway and Off-Broadway’s “Rent,” “The Rocky Horror Show,” Dorothy in “The Wiz”; top-five finalist on season five of “American Idol”); Jay Copeland (top-seven finalist and first-ever Platinum Ticket recipient on last year’s “American Idol”; stage credits “Hairspray,” “Jesus Christ Superstar” as Judas); Judith Franklin (Broadway’s “Summer: The Donna Summer Musical” and “Tina: The Tina Turner Musical”; National Broadway Company of “Motown The Musical”); and Will Stone (Off-Broadway’s “Plays for the Plague Year”; regional theater’s “Man of La Mancha”; television’s “Pose”; “Patti LuPone’s 70th Birthday Concert,” “Broadway Backwards”). A live, on-stage band of seven musicians will be led by Terry Bogart, music director.

Director and choreographer is Jeffrey Page. An Emmy Award-nominated director and choreographer, he spearheaded the 2015 and 2018 Tokyo productions of the musical “Memphis,” which received four Yomiuri Award nominations, including Best Musical. Page was the first African American to be named the Marcus Institute Fellow for Opera Directing at The Juilliard School. He won an MTV Video Music Award for his work with Beyoncé, whose creative team have included him for more than 12 years. His work was featured on Beyoncé’s “The Formation World Tour,” in her historic Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival performance, and in two of her HBO specials. Page was the associate creative director for Mariah Carey’s “Sweet, Sweet Fantasy European Tour,” and has been a featured choreographer on Fox Television’s “So You Think You Can Dance.” He currently is the creative director for singer-songwriter Jazmine Sullivan, most recently working with her on the 2020 BET Soul Train Music Awards. Page was in the original, award-winning Broadway cast of “Fela!” He worked alongside Tony Award-winning composer Jeanine Tesori to choreograph the hit Broadway musical “Violet” starring Sutton Foster (Roundabout Theatre Company). Page was acknowledged by the Berkshire Theatre Awards for his work on Barrington Stage Company’s “Company” and “Broadway Bounty Hunter.” In 2016, he established Movin’ Legacy as an Indianapolis-based nonprofit organization dedicated to the ethnology and documentation of contemporary and traditional dance from Africa and the African diaspora. Page holds an MFA degree, with a concentration in theatre directing from Columbia University, and serves as a lecturer at Harvard University and The Juilliard School. In 2019 he was awarded the Chuck Davis Emerging Choreographer Fellowship from the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Page is the co-director and choreographer of the recent Broadway revival “1776,” with Diane Paulus, at the America Airlines Theatre.

The creative team includes Raul Abrego, scenic design; Oana Botez, costume design; Philip Rosenberg, lighting design; Leon Rothenberg, sound design; Alexis Nalbandian, production stage manager; and Tré Wheeler, assistant stage manager.

“Ain’t Misbehavin’” is conceived by Murray Horwitz and Richard Maltby, Jr. Co-producers are Barrington Stage Company in Pittsfield, MA, and Geva Theatre Center in Rochester, NY.

Production Partners are Athena and Daniel Adamson. 2023 Media Sponsors are Mofly Media and WSHU Public Radio. 2023 Marketing Sponsor is Haddad & Partners.

Performance schedule is Tuesday at 7 p.m., Wednesday at 2 and 7 p.m., Thursday at 7 p.m., and Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 3 and 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. (No Wed. or Sat. matinees during preview week). Special series include Taste and Chat (April 11), Black Excellence Night (April 12), Pride Night (April 13), Opening Night (April 15), Sunday Symposium (April 16), Post-Play Dialogue (April 20), Open Captions (April 23), Backstage Pass (April 26), and Thursday TalkBack (April 27). The play is recommended for age 12 and up. Running time is approximately two hours with one intermission.

Single tickets for “Ain’t Misbehavin’” start at \$40 during preview performances (April 11 - 14), and beginning April 15 Opening Night, tickets start at \$55 and are subject to change based upon availability. Buy early for best prices. For information on special offers, including discounts for students, senior citizens, educators, military and first responders, Indigenous peoples, professional playwrights, and groups, as well as options for pay-what-you-will and library passes visit www.westportplayhouse.org/visit/box-office/.

More info on “Ain’t Misbehavin’” at <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/aintmisbehavin/>
Show trailer at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0DyGs3cqU0>

The Playhouse’s three-production, 2023 season continues with a reimagining of “Dial ‘M’ for Murder,” the suspenseful thriller of blackmail and revenge, running from July 11 through July 29; and “School Girls; or, The African Mean Girls Play,” a buoyant and biting comedy exploring the universal similarities and glaring differences facing teenage girls across the globe, playing from October 24 through November 11. The complete schedule is available at westportplayhouse.org.

All play titles, artists, dates, and times are subject to change.

For updates on Covid-19 health and safety protocols at the Playhouse, visit <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/visit/covid19safety/>

For more information and to buy tickets, visit www.westportplayhouse.org, or call the box office at (203) 227-4177, toll-free at 1-888-927-7529, or visit Westport Country Playhouse, 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport. Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse) and on YouTube (WestportPlayhouse).

ABOUT WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

Founded in 1931, the mission of Westport Country Playhouse is to enrich, enlighten, and engage the community through the power of professionally produced theater of the highest caliber and the welcoming experience of the Playhouse campus. The not-for-profit Playhouse provides this experience in multiple ways by offering live theater experiences of the highest quality, under the artistic direction of Mark Lamos; educational and community engagement events to further explore the work on stage; the New Works Initiative, a program dedicated to the discovery, development, and production of new live theatrical works; special performances and programs for students and teachers with extensive curriculum support material; Script in Hand play readings to deepen relationships with audiences and artists; the renowned Woodward Internship Program during the summer months for aspiring theater professionals; Family Festivities presentations to delight young and old alike and to promote reading through live theater; and the beautiful and historic Playhouse campus open for enjoyment and community events year-round.

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