



Good Time, Bad Time, *RAGTIME*!
Circle Players Presents the Epic Tony-Winning Musical January 15-25, 2015

The sweeping musical *RAGTIME* requires a large cast, strong vocal talent and a creative team willing to tackle the challenges of mounting such an epic stage work for community theatre. Circle Players has all those requirements in its upcoming production, which runs January 15-25, 2015, at Tennessee State University Performing Arts Center.

RAGTIME the Musical highlights Circle's 65th season of shows and continues its relationship with TSU Theatre Program. The two institutions have collaborated for three previous productions, including last season's successful mega-hit, *DREAMGIRLS*.

This time, Circle presents a work rooted in early 20th century America—the Gilded Age of innovation and technology, wealth and prosperity—a bittersweet time that was also marked by blatant social injustices, devastating racial prejudice and shameless bigotry. It was all underscored with the new music of the era—ragtime.

"I love the period of time it is set in and how relevant the story is today," says Tim Larson, the director of Circle's production. "It is an epic tale put to a rich and beautiful score that weaves the audience through history, reminding us of what has occurred—both good and bad and leaving us with hope for a better future."

RAGTIME shines a light on American society in the early 1900s-- a bittersweet time in history known as the Gilded Age. It was marked by innovation, prosperity and great wealth—for some. But it was notoriously divisive time marked by social injustice, racial prejudice and immigrant oppression. All the turmoil was underscored by a new form of music with a syncopated rhythm called ragtime, created as dance music by African-Americans in the late 1800s.

On stage, that story is represented by characters in Harlem and the talented, ambitious ragtime musician named *Coalhouse Walker, Jr.*, portrayed by David Ridley.

"The music really captured me. It's a great well-written play musically," says Ridley. "And Coalhouse goes through some powerful emotions that I really hope to convey on stage. It's a story that needs to be told today even though it was written years ago."

In the story, Coalhouse – a musician who has traveled the country—comes to Harlem where he hopes to settle down and marry his girlfriend and the mother of his child. That never happens due to a series of tumultuous events that reflect the racial bigotry and injustice of the era.

"Some events happen in Coalhouse's life and he's trying to get justice. And the way that Coalhouse goes about getting justice is in a violent way. Whoever he can hurt, whatever he can do—he does it for justice for his vehicle, justice for Sarah," Ridley explains. "At the end of the story he realizes that the correct way to get justice is not through violence but through letting people see how you live and having positive influences in creating a better life for the generation coming up—which includes his son."

OUR MISSION STATEMENT: Circle Players' aim is to promote public education appreciation and enjoyment of dramatic literature, stagecraft, fine arts and the theatre through the production of plays and by conducting other related activities.



While much of the story revolves around Coalhouse and his fiancée, *Sarah* (performed by Erica Patterson), *RAGTIME* skillfully incorporates other subplots, weaving a stage work that seamlessly intertwines the stories of the three major groups: the People of Harlem, the Immigrants, and the wealthy suburban family. Although set in an era more than 100 years ago, many of the performers say the story of *RAGTIME* could not be more relevant to current events, ranging from immigrant rights to protests against racism. The story includes immigrant oppression, a racially-motivated murder and public protests against social injustices.

“We are constantly still dealing with social injustice and immigration and racial turmoil in this country that was present back then and is still present today. We may have evolved technologically but we are still fighting these fights,” says Joshua Waldrep, who plays the role of *Tateh*, a Jewish immigrant from Latvia.

“The audience definitely will have to have open minds to this show because a lot of people may not expect some of the things that are going to be said,” says Ridley.” It’s a show that really hits home for many. Hopefully this will be an eye opener and will reach a lot of people with that message—and just how deep and long issues like racism are in this country,”

The ongoing relevance of the themes in *RAGTIME* are emphasized by the deliberate omission of first names for several central characters, relying instead on their iconic references, among them *Father* (David Arnold), *Younger Brother* (Tyler Osborne), *Little Girl/Tateh’s* daughter (Rowan McCoy) and *Mother* (Janet Holeman).

“The writers chose to name Coalhouse, Sarah and Tateh—the representatives from Harlem and the immigrants, those who step out and start to mix classes and integrate society,” says Holeman. “Mother doesn’t have a name and I really love that, because Mother represents the type of person who loves heart-to-heart and doesn’t care what you look like and what you’ve done or how negative your past or present. She chooses to love you. That is such an incredible opportunity to be able to embody that person and to extend that love on stage to other characters.”

RAGTIME the Musical also includes many characters drawn directly from history, notably *Booker T. Washington* (Phillip Miller), *Henry Ford* (Brian Best), *J.P. Morgan* (Ben Gregory), *Emma Goldman*, a social and political activist (Taylor Simon) and *Evelyn Nesbit*, a vaudeville star (Leslie Thompson) and *Harry Houdini* (Austin Olive).

Named or not, all the roles in *RAGTIME the Musical* require strong and confident vocal ability— and there is an impressive amount of that among the cast of 45-plus performers, a mixture of experienced, developing and recreational performers.

“I am always impressed with the talent in Nashville and I think this show has some of the best,” says Larson. “It is truly a balance where you have to find the common ground and ensure you direct to everyone’s talent and capability and not just a few.

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RAGTIME the Musical also features Connor Richardson as *Little Boy/Edgar*, the child of Mother and Father and Brooke Davis as *Sarah's Friend*.

The music direction is by William "Bill" Crimm, choreography is by Tosha Pendergrast. The live orchestra is conducted by Jason Tucker, who is also assistant music director. LaTonya Turner is producer of Circle's production of *RAGTIME the Musical*, which is based on the book by E.L. Doctorow. The book for the musical is by Terrence McNally, music by Stephen Flaherty and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens.

RAGTIME (Version 1) is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance materials are also supplied by MTI, 421 West 54th Street, New York, NY 10019 Tel.: (212) 541-4684 Fax: (212) 397-4684 www.MTIShows.com

Circle Players' production of *RAGTIME the Musical* runs from January 15-25, 2015, at The Tennessee State University Performing Arts Center; Nashville, TN. Performance times are Thursdays – Saturdays, 7:30 pm; Sunday matinees (January 18th and 25th), 3:00 pm.; Saturday matinee January 24th, 2:00 pm.

Ticket prices online are \$18 for adults, \$15 for students and seniors 60 and older. (Tickets cost more at the door before show time). Group rates available for 10 or more by emailing boxoffice@circleplayers.net or calling (615) 332-7529. Special discount available for TSU students and faculty at the box office with campus ID.

Tickets are available online via www.circleplayers.net. Reservations can be made by emailing boxoffice@circleplayers.net or (615) 332-7529. Tickets are also on sale at the box office at TSU Performing Arts Center one hour before each performance.

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