Blues in the Night

BY CREATOR AND DIRECTOR
SHELDON EPPS

Blues In The Night uses the great blues and jazz songs of the 1920’s and 30’s to explore the lives of three women and a saloon singer in a cheap hotel during the course of a long, memory-filled evening. The songs have been specifically chosen to accomplish several things, but their most important function is to celebrate a great period and style of American music and to explore the influences and the roots of the jazz idiom as they grew from blues music. It was once said, “Blues is to jazz what yeast is to bread.” And so in this celebration, the blues melodies of Bessie Smith, Jimmy Cox, Alberta Hunter and others are mixed and contrasted with the songs of Harold Arlen, Andy Razaf, Johnny Mercer and other legends of the jazz world to paint the full spectrum of this great musical form.

The blues is the music of strength. These songs give the characters a means of survival. It is the very glory of this music that has caused the blues itself to be an ever stronger and exciting survivor in the world’s musical life.
About the Artists

CRICKET S. MYERS (Sound Design) On Broadway, Cricket earned a Tony Nomination and a Drama Desk Award for her design of Bengt for the Baghdad Zoo. Her designs OFF Broadway include the 16-month run of The Woolly Wolfdog (Westside Arts, Upstart). She has also designed regionally at the Geffen Playhouse, The Mark Taper Forum (including Bent, with Maureen Kaufman), La Jolla Playhouse and the El Portal, Pasadena Playhouse, Berkeley Rep, and Arena Stage. Other selected L.A. theaters include The Rubicon, Gross Road Theater Company, The MiraCosta Montebello Playhouse (I Only Have Eyes for You), and The Celebration Theater. Cricket has earned 20 Outstanding Nomination, as well as winning The League of Professional Women Theater’s Ruth Morley Medal and the Kinetic Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatrical Design, an ADRC and a Garland Award in Los Angeles.cricketmyers.com

DANIELLE RICHTER (Wig & Wig Design) is thrilled and blessed to be working on her third show with The Wallis. Her previous productions at The Wallis have been Bugsy and Guys and the City of Conversation. Other Los Angeles designs include the Utah Shakespeare Festival, Ensemble Studio Theater, and the University of Washington. Regionally she has worked with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Seattle Repertory Theatre and the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre.

JEFFREY POLK (Associate Director) is honored to work with The Spectacular Spectroscopic Eggs who composed and created this fabulous show and also the amazing Abdul Hamid Royal’s musical direction on this exciting production and this stellar family! team here at The Wallis. Some of his credits include: Artistic Director (La Mirada); Denograph (T.U.S.), Perry @ Illo (STC, Santa Barbara); Kiss Me, Kate (Pasadena Playhouse); Polk directed and co-designed the Off-Off-Broadway production at La Jolla Playhouse and the El Portal, and choreographed the production at La Mirada. He has been the Guest Director with The Young Americans. Outstanding World Tours for the past 5 years. A grateful thank you, Sheldon. Thank you Mother, Sister, Family, friends and Philip, Member of LOC. #thegirlstheartierthereveryone

ABDUL HAMID ROYAL (Music Director) received the Ovation Award, Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award and SAG Award as Best Music Director for The Gospel of Colonus. He received the NAACP Image Award for the Tony-nominated Broadway musical Satchmo Named Me, and the NAACP Image Award and Stage Scene LA Award for Outstanding Musical Direction on the Los Angeles production of Recorded in Hollywood. Broadway/ International National: Music Director. For Guys Named Mike, Twist, Sophisticated Ladies, Ain’t Misbehavin’, Jelly 1919, To Be or Not To Be, Songs for a New World, Rawhide, Sweet Charity, Cotton Club Parade. He has choreographed the production at La Mirada. He has been the resident stage manager for the Pacific Festival Ballet Company at the Kirk Theater overseeing several original ballets each year as well as their annual Nutcracker Ballet (2012/2017). Other production credits include I Only Have Eyes for You at the Montanell Theater (2016), the Jenny Herman Awards at the Pantages Theater (2013, 2015), Les Misérables for the Chicago Sinfonietta, and the Ed Mirvish Theatre for the Starlight Express. Other credits include: Ain’t Misbehavin’ on Broadway, Ain’t Misbehavin’ on the road, Ain’t Misbehavin’ in Chicago, Ain’t Misbehavin’ on a national tour, Ain’t Misbehavin’ in Las Vegas, Ain’t Misbehavin’ in Las Vegas and Ain’t Misbehavin’ on a national tour.

TARAS SITSER (Assistant Stage Manager) has a twenty-year career as a production manager in the musical theater while working at the Huntington Hartford Theater in 1983 on an original musical starring Faith Prince. For the past five years he has been the resident stage manager for the Pacific Festival Ballet Company at the Kirk Theater while overseeing several original ballets each year. In addition, he has served as the Production Stage Manager for the touring production of Dreamgirls. Other credits include: A Chorus Line, The Lion King, The Color Purple, Chicago, and countless national tours.


THE WALLIS (Producer) is located within the historic Beverly Hills Post Office, an award winning architectural gem designed by Ralph C. Frewelling in 1935. The Wallis opened its doors in October 2013, The Wallis has become a cultural hub for the city of Beverly Hills.

ADDITIONAL STAFF

COSTUME SUPERVISOR

Deborah Hartwell

PROPERTIES SUPERVISOR

Carissa Huizenga

LIGHTING PROGRAMMER

Jon Finstad

MUSIC COORDINATOR

Dan Savant

SCENERY CONSTRUCTION

Seth Caiozzo

ADDITIONAL LIGHTING EQUIPMENT

FTime Lighting

Los Angeles theater luminary Sheldon Epps sat down with The Wallis Post to discuss his break-out hit Blues in the Night, which is being revived later this month in the Lovelace Studio Theater.

Q: What was the genesis of Blues in the Night?

EPPS: The show started way back in my Off-Off-Broadway theater days. I worked for the production company at Playhouse 46 in the late ’70s. One of our ideas was to do late night cabaret shows on the weekend that reflected whatever play we were doing at the time. In the spring of 1980, we were doing a play about a blind jazz musician on the mainstage. I had the thought of doing something about jazz. In my research, I came upon a Billie Holiday quote in which she said, “Blues is to jazz what yeast is to bread.” I then became excited about exploring the influence the blues had on jazz writers, and Blues in the Night was born.

Q: What did that production look like?

EPPS: The show was always a revue, not a book musical. But I never wanted singers just standing at a microphone in a club. We always had four actors who performed from a sense of character. The songs were chosen to not only entertain and explore the music, but to reveal specific characters in a particular place and time. That specificity was recognized in an early review from The New York Times, and the show was produced on Broadway, where it won Tony Awards for Best Revue and Best Musical in 1981.

Q: How was Blues then produced all over the country, with tours that starred Della Reese and Eartha Kitt. There was also an acclaimed London production. That’s where Wallis Artistic Director Paul Crowfrew first experienced your work.

EPPS: Yes, there was a West End production in 1987 at the Donmar Warehouse, which then moved to the Piccadilly Theatre for nearly a year. I’ve just found out that it will be revived in London next year.

Q: How are you approaching this new production in the Lovelace?

EPPS: On the theatrical side, I’m intrigued by returning the show to its roots in a smaller space. I love intimate theater experiences, where the cast and the audience are really sharing the same room together. Although I’ve done this show several times, it’s always new and different with each cast.

Q: And you have a great cast at The Wallis: Yvette Gason, Bryce Charles, Paulette Ivory and Chestney Gregory.

EPPS: We have a tremendous cast, many of whom I’ve worked with and know their strengths. I’ve never wanted to tell any actor, “This is how and-so did this before,” even though I’ve worked with many great actors in the past. It’s always a creative show with the new people.

Q: How do you feel Blues in the Night speaks to audiences in 2018?

EPPS: It’s always been a show about female empowerment. Many people think the blues is about lying down on the bed and complaining about how badly you feel, but it’s really about survival and fighting back. The show itself is chiefly authored by women, and serves as a showcase for lyricists such as Bessie Smith, Ida Cox and Alberta Hunter. A number of the songs have transpired in our culture since Paul and I first discussed this revival, and it’s an opportune time to hear from these women and their stories.

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