



Run to 'RAGTIME' at the Kennedy Center

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by Charles Shubow



The

Baltimore/Washington theater public has been the recipient of great musicals recently. The [Arena Stage](#) presented *Next to Normal* which could conceivably win the Tony Award for Best Musical, the [Signature Theatre](#) (which IS receiving the 2009 Tony Award for Best Regional Theater) had *Les Miserables*, [Center Stage](#) featured [E. Faye Butler](#) in *Caroline or Change*, Metro Stage had success with *Doors* (which made it to Off-Broadway), and now the Kennedy Center is presenting its very own production of the masterpiece *Ragtime* through May 17.

Thanks to the generosity of the Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation Series for Artistic Excellence, the Kennedy Center is presenting one of the most beautiful musicals ever to hit the Broadway stage. One of my favorite songs by lyricist [Lynn Ahrens](#) is called "Back to Before". Sung by Mother (the impeccable Chistine Noll), she sings "You Can Never go Back to Before". I thought of that lyric relating to going back in time to the Broadway season in 1998 when *Ragtime* opened the beautifully restored Ford Center for the Performing Arts.

I also recall watching the Tony Awards that year and saw *Ragtime* win the Tony for Best Book, Score and Orchestration. . Then [Audra McDonald](#) (who played Sarah) got the Tony for Best Featured Actress in a Musical. Non-singer [Alan Cumming](#) (Cabaret) won for Best Actor in a Musical over the incredible [Brian Stokes Mitchell](#). Even so, I still was convinced *Ragtime* would get the Tony but as we all know *The Lion King* prevailed.

Had *Ragtime* prevailed, I'm confident it would have run for more than the 834 performances it presented. For those unable to have seen that production, we can "go back to before" and witness a gem of a musical thanks to this wonderful Kennedy Center production which I predict will eventually make its way to Broadway

You can see the wonderful rave reviews in the Washington Post and the Baltimore Sun. Even the national publication "The Week" just gave it "Four Stars".

Director/Choreographer [Marcia Milgrom Dodge](#) (remember that name) has assembled a top-rate cast and thankfully, there is a lush sound emanating from a 28 piece orchestra under the

capable hands of music director Jams Moore so [Stephen Flaherty](#)'s music can heard loud and clear.

Leading the cast in the pivotal role of Coalhouse Walker, Jr. is [Quentin Earl Darrington](#) whose powerful yet sensuous voice is fit for the task. I thoroughly enjoyed Jennlee Shallow as Sarah. The Caribbean born actress coincidentally has played the role of Nala in *The Lion King*.

Playing the tough role of Tateh, the Jewish immigrant, is [Manoel Felciano](#), who is best known for his Tony-nominated role of Toby in *Sweeney Todd*. Felciano shines in this challenging part. Playing Tateh's young daughter is [Sarah Rose](#)enthal. The Baltimore native, 13, is making her professional debut and what a way to start.

[Ron Bohmer](#) tackles the obnoxious role of Father.

I thoroughly enjoyed [Bobby Steggert](#) as Mother's Younger Brother. He reminds me of a young [Robert Morse](#) and look for him in a revival of *How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. He has that cute charisma about him.

Other standouts are [Eric Jordan Young](#), who plays a powerful Booker T. Washington, [Jonathan Hammond](#) as [Harry Houdini](#), [David Garry](#) as J.P. Morgan, and [Donna Migliaccio](#) as Emma Goldman. (You can see the original Emma Goldman, [Judy Kaye](#), starring in the hilarious *Souvenir* at [Center Stage](#) through May 24.)

A local favorite of mine [Dan Manning](#) (I've seen him at the Round House, Everyman,, and [Center Stage](#)) is terrific as Grandfather, Judge, and in [The Ensemble](#).

This \$4.4 million revival features a cast of 37 and an 8 ton steel erector set-style design by [Derek McLane](#), lighting by [Donald Holder](#), sound by [Jonathan Deans](#) and Garth Helm and the original costume design by [Santo Loquasto](#). It also helps that the production is performed in the more intimate Kennedy Center Eisenhower Theater than the larger Opera House

The writers of *Ragtime* certainly seem prescient in the anthem "The Wheels of a Dream". Living a few short blocks away from the theater in the White House is President [Barack Obama](#). Coalhouse sings to Sarah holding his baby son "...Any man can get where he wants to if he's got some fire in his soul". They later both sing:

"Beyond that road,

Beyond this lifetime

That care full of hope

Will always gleam!

With the promise of happiness

And the freedom he'll live to know.

He'll travel with head held high,

Just as far as his heart can go

And he will ride-

Our son will ride-

On the wheels of a dream."

Visit this dream of a musical at the Kennedy Center until May 17. Call 800-444-1324 or visit www.kennedy-center.org.

For comments, write to cgshubow@broadwayworld.com.

For a nice interview with [Christiane Noll](#) and Bobby Steffart, see my good friend Joel Markowitz' interview at <http://dctheatrescene.com/2009/05/07/ragtimes-christiane-noll-and-bobby-steggart/>

Photo Credit: [Joan Marcus](#)

Originally from Boston, Charles' first college show was "Barefoot in the Park," he played the role of the telephone repairman. Next came "How to Succeed..." in which he played in the ensemble and then Chairman of the Board. He appeared in "Fiddler on the Roof" at the White Marsh Dinner Theatre as Lazar Wolf. Charles' daughter Britt played one of Tevye's younger daughters. Britt later completed a five year stint in Broadway's "Mamma Mia!" as the Sophie understudy. Charles conducts theatre trips to Broadway shows as the "Shubow Shuttle."