By CLIVE BARNES New York Times (1857-Current file); Oct 19, 1973; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2001) pg. 59

## Theater: 'Raisin' in Musical Form

Adaptation of Lorraine Hansberry Play Here

## By CLIVE BARNES

Broadway last night got its first new musical of the season. It is a strange one but a good one, it warms the heart and touches the soul. The musical is "Raisin," and it has come to Broadway via Washington's Arena Stage. It is based on the late Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 watershed of a play "A Raisin in the Sun."

Miss Hansberry's play about a working-class black family in Chicago aspiring to move into a white suburb was full of guts and sentiment. It was an immeasurably moving if occasionally diffuse play. Why then make it into a musical?

Well, one good reason might be that the present book by Robert Nemiroff and Charlotte Zaltzberg is perhaps even better than the play. It retains all of Miss Hansberry's finest dramatic encounters, with the dialogue, as cutting and as honest as ever, intact. But the shaping of the piece is slightly firmer and better. The characters are still as large and as likely as life.

The play has an oddly period flavor now. Racial situations have perhaps not changed as much as we would like to think. One wonders how welcome a black family would find itself on Park Avenue—or, nowadays, a nowadays, white family in better-class white family in better-class black neighborhoods. But "Raisin" is early Martin Luther King, when the N.A.A.C.P. was a growing force in the land. Indeed a time when black mere either time when blacks were either Negro, colored or ignored.

Today it is not the color of the piece that overwhelms one but its tremendous story, and its touching picture of a family fighting for life. The big momma, the wayward son and his loving wife, the pert kid sister and unconcerned little grandchild, this is a family that could be almost anywhere at any time. You only need oppression to bring out the tragedy and heroism in people.

In a sense the score (music by Judd Wolden and lyrics by Robert Brittan) for "Raisin" is not the most important aspect of the show.

Staging Seen Doing Justice to Original and gospel numbers, a strik-ing revival meeting scene, an African love song and some lively dance numbers, a strik-is not a score of any con-people of Southside. You hardly notice this—or at least you only notice it possing—not only because but also the enormousWalter Lee Younger Straging of the staging and Beneatha Younger Staging the Area Staging and Beneatha Younger Staging the staging and Seneatha Younger Staging the Staging Staging the Staging Stage Stag

Herh When "Raisin" was firstPastor's Wite given by the Arena Stage in Karl Lindner. ..... Marenda Perry .....Richard Sanders

Washington this spring I was

most enthusiastic about Don'sister, and Robert Jackson McKayle's fluent andcharmed as her Nigerian boyald simple staging and the tough-friend.

ly personal performances of Finally, there is that mighty the cast. Yet, I was a shaddittle atom of a child star, dubious about its BroadwayRalph Carter, who gives cuteproduction. The Arena Stageness a new dimension of de-

production. The Arena Stageness a new dimension of de-is comparatively small and Icency, and might well be the feared some loss of intimacykind of child actor even Moreover, the Arena Stage isW. C. Fields could grow to a theater completely in theove. round, and Mr. McKayle's The chorus was outstand-dazzling production made theing and the dancing had an most of it, as did Robert Uenergy and grace rarely seen Taylor's purposely bland yebon Broadway these days. subtly evocative settings. "Raisin" is one of those un-Well the have pulled itusual musicals that should not

best inis a show with a heartbeat rank among the Like Jerome Robbins, very much of its own. vears.

Mr. McKayle comes to the musical theater as a ranking choreographer, but also like Mr. Robbins his skill with actors must now be unquestioned.

Imaginatively and meaningful, this brings the pure magic of calculated simplicity to the musical theater, and Mr. Taylor's tenement townscape serves eually well as a background for ghetto, bar, chapel or house, while Bernard Johnson's costumes had a neatly nineteen-fifties look to them.

The performances blazenot just one, or two, but every single one of them. As the Mama, Virginia Capers, a vast and loving Gibraltar of a woman, was tremendous in just about every sense you can use the word. But her almost overpowering matriarch was matched by the rest.

The son, Joe Morton, sang with passion and had just the right mixture of foolishness, ambition and decency; Ernes-tine Jackson was beautiful, womanly and appealing as the wife; Helen Martin made an attractively acidulated neigh-bor; Deborah Allen proved spirited and witty as the kid

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.