

Eubie!

In 1976, *Bubbling Brown Sugar*, an African-American musical revue, opened on Broadway and was a surprise hit. Two years later, two more African-American musicals opened on Broadway within months of each other – the first, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, was a tribute to the songs of Fats Waller. The second, *Eubie!*, was a tribute to the songs of the great Eubie Blake.

Eubie Blake was born in 1887 and began composing at an early age (*Eubie!*'s opening number "Charleston Rag" was written when he was twelve). His landmark 1921 musical, *Shuffle Along*, was the first Broadway musical to be written, directed by, and starring African-Americans. Over the years he wrote many, many classic hit songs.

Eubie! was conceived and directed by Julianne Boyd, with choreography by Billy Wilson and Henry LeTang. Boyd assembled a great cast, which included the Hines brothers, Gregory and Maurice, Alaina Reed, Linnie Godfrey, Terry Burrell, and other terrific singers and dancers. The show opened on September 20, 1978 at the Ambassador Theater, where it would run for 439 performances. It was nominated for three Tony Awards – Gregory Hines for Best Performance by

a Featured Actor in a Musical, Billy Wilson and Henry LeTang for Best Choreography, and, most interestingly, for Best Original Score (that probably couldn't happen these days).

The show had incredible energy, and the musical arrangements by musical supervisor Danny Holgate were and are incredible. The musical director, Vicki Carter, led what can only be called a totally kick-ass band. But the star of the show, always front and center, was Eubie Blake and his songs. His amazing melodies are tuneful and infectious, and the lyrics of Noble Sissle and Andy Razaf (the two main lyricists of the show) are sassy and clever. When *Eubie!* opened on Broadway, Mr. Blake was ninety-one years young and how wonderful that he was alive to hear the cheers that his songs received nightly at the Ambassador. The show was filmed for television in 1981, with most of its original cast. And in a lovely bit of serendipity to the release of this wonderful cast album making its CD debut, a show about the making of Blake's groundbreaking musical, *Shuffle Along*, is about to open.

—Bruce Kimmel