

ENTERTAINMENT

HAPPENINGS

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After paying a visit to Clifford L. Alexander, Jr., Secretary of the Army at the Pentagon, internationally renowned composer-pianist Eubie Blake is presented the Army's Civilian Meritorious Award by Alexander during a resounding special concert Blake performed with the U.S. Army Band on the steps of the Nation's Capitol. An enthusiastic audience of thousands was on hand. Blake, 97, who has been an important contributor to American music for more than 90 years, creating more than 3,500 tunes, and several Broadway plays, thrilled the huge throng with his songs, "I'm Just Wild About Harry," "Memories of You," and others. The Army Award was presented for Blake's unselfish and distinguished contributions to troop entertainment during World War II.



Special Things, the just-released Fantasy album by Pleasure, was previewed at a listening party recently held at Fantasy Studios, Berkeley.

Martha Wash of the Two Ton "o" Fun, who was a guest at the event, voices her whole-hearted approval of the new LP to Pleasure's bassist, Nathaniel Phillips.

Fats Waller

"Ain't Misbehavin'"

Gargantuan is the word that most precisely describes Fats Waller. He was in every way immense and prodigious. His appetites and his talents were large and inexhaustible. His friend and teacher, James P. Johnson, once said, "Some little people have music in them, but Fats, he was all music, and you know how big he was." He was 5 feet 10½ inches tall and weighed 285 pounds.

He was all laughter too - or almost all - and the most persistent image of Fats is the picture of him settled down at the piano with a bottle of gin nearby, his eyebrows raised, his derby askew and a cigarette dangling from his wide, cockeyed smile. He always let you know that there was at least one more joke inside the one he had just told.

Thomas Wright Waller grew up in the exciting musical atmosphere of Harlem in the teens and 20s. His parents were deeply religious and Fats started out playing the organ in the Abyssinian Baptist Church and studying classical piano technique. He also began working with Harlem stride-piano masters like James P. Johnson and Willie "The Lion" Smith, although his father insisted that jazz was "music from the devil's workshop." Soon he was accompanying the silent pictures at the Lincoln Theater on 135th street and making his reputation at uptown rent parties - those all-night affairs so fondly remembered in *The Joint is Jumpin*.

When he was still in his early 20s Fats began his collaboration with lyricist Andy Razaf; they scored their first success in 1928 with "Keep Shufflin'." The next year was miraculous: Fats - only 25 years old - and Razaf wrote the score for the Broadway hit "Hot Chocolates" (which included *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Black and Blue*) as well as *Honeysuckle Rose*, *I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling* (lyric credited to Billy Rose) and a host of other distinguished tunes.



"AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'," the Tony Award-winning musical smash hit, returns by popular demand to the Portland Auditorium for eight performances July 15-20. Showtime is 8:00 PM each evening with 2:30 matinees scheduled for Saturday and Sunday.

The show - which is nearly devoid of dialogue and centered around the life, times and music of the famous jazz pianist - is an energetic, joyous, irresistible evocation of Waller and his era.

Tickets for the Northwest Releasing event are on sale at the Ticket Place at Frederick & Nelson (downtown) and the usual outlets.

It was in that same year that Fats signed a contract with Victor, the company for whom he performed until the recording ban of World War II. Fats records, which began with "T Ain't Nobody's Biz-ness If I Do in 1922, spread his fame across the United States and around the world. It seemed that he could make any tune sound entertaining. The finale of "Ain't Misbehavin'," in fact, is made up of some of the songs written by others that Fats Waller made hits.

Fats also widened his audience by appearing regularly on WLW in Cincinnati, a radio station which at that time could be heard throughout the county. It was there, in 1932 and 1933, that he formed the band known simply as Rhythm, with which he achieved his greatest success. With some changes in personnel, the group appeared in three feature films - "Hooray for Love," "The King of Burlesque" and "Stormy Weather" - and numerous short subjects. Fats' musicianship was highly regarded, especially in Europe, where jazz was probably taken more seriously than in the United States. His overseas tours in 1938 and 1939 were triumphs, and in 1942 he gave a jazz concert at Carnegie Hall. And he never lost love for the classics - his organ performances of Bach are legendary. The success of Fats Waller's records, movies, radio appearances and tours made him one of the first American superstars.

Fats was as generous as he was overindulging, and stories of his bigheartedness and high-living abound. He consumed enormous quantities of food and liquor. He bought instruments for down-and-out musicians, loaned money to friends without being asked and treated himself to a \$10,000 Lincoln automobile. Often, however, his alimony troubles would leave him broke and in jail, writing songs for Tin Pan Alley publishers in exchange for bail money. The party that was Fats Waller's life ended suddenly, when he died of pneumonia aboard the Sante Fe Chied in 1943.

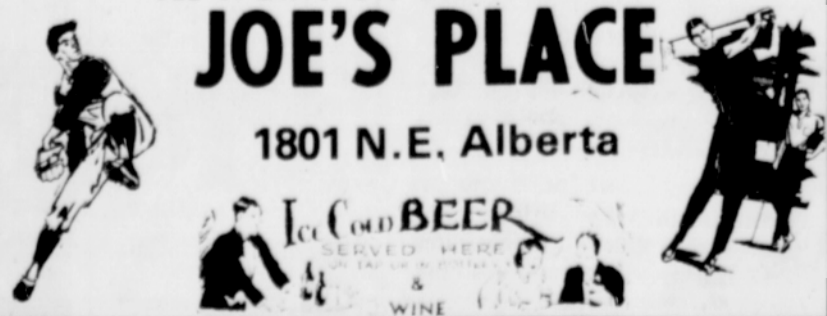
As a musician, Fats raised the art of stride piano to its highest level and in so doing became one of the originators of swing music. He was probably the greatest combination of musician and comedian that America has ever produced. As a composer, pianist and singer he wove comedy and music together so well that his songs are as fresh and funny today as they were 50 years ago.

In another time and place Fats Waller might never have become a comedian and might have been the classical artist his parents - and perhaps he himself - wanted him to be. Listening to the joy and laughter of "Ain't Misbehavin'," though, we can revel in his genius and say right along with him, "One never knows, do one?"

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