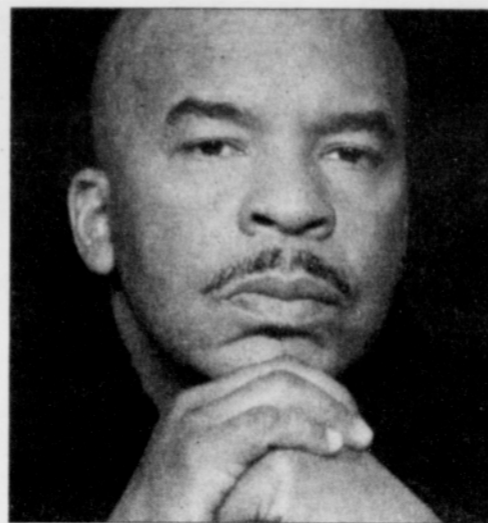


# Arts & ENTERTAINMENT



David Alan Grier

NaTasha Yvette Williams (left) and David Alan Grier in a scene from "The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess" in New York. (AP photo)

## New Spin for Classic 'Porgy and Bess'

### Actor relishes role on Broadway

(AP) — David Alan Grier has a gentle message for anyone who is getting all hot and bothered thinking that he's helping ruin an American masterpiece.

"Relax. Let it go," he says. "We're not killing it. We're just doing our version."

The actor and comedian is currently starring as Sporting Life in a reworked version of the Gershwins' "Porgy and Bess" on Broadway.

The creative team, with the blessing of the creators' estates, condensed the four-hour opera into a two-and-one-half-hour musical, eliminated a lot of the repetitiveness and tried to deepen the characters.

Their effort generated headlines when purists complained that a musical treasure was being corrupted.

It's the fifth time on Broadway for this Yale School of Drama graduate best known for his scathing wit and his four seasons aboard the groundbreaking sketch comedy TV show "In Living Color."

The 55-year-old wanted to play Sporting Life, the drug-pusher and pimp portrayed in the original Broadway production by Cab Calloway and in the film version by Sammy Davis Jr.

To get into character, Grier learned all he could about the 1930s in South Carolina, went back to the original notes left by the show's creators, listened to Ella Fitzgerald scat and watched documentaries of pimps. He also drew on his roots growing up in Detroit and watching

pimps decked out in colorful clothes stroll down 12th Street.

The controversy over the show didn't scare him off: It made him even more excited. The show moved over the winter from the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Mass., to Broadway's Richard Rogers Theatre, opening in January to generally positive reviews.

Grier laughs that when "Porgy and Bess" first opened in 1935, opera buffs were incensed by what some considered a crass monstrosity: George Gershwin wasn't considered a bona fide opera writer, the show's melting of jazz and blues into a classical European art form was highly unusual, and few thought black singers could fully succeed at singing opera. Over the years, though, it became an opera masterpiece.



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