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The Portland Observer 45

'City of Roses'



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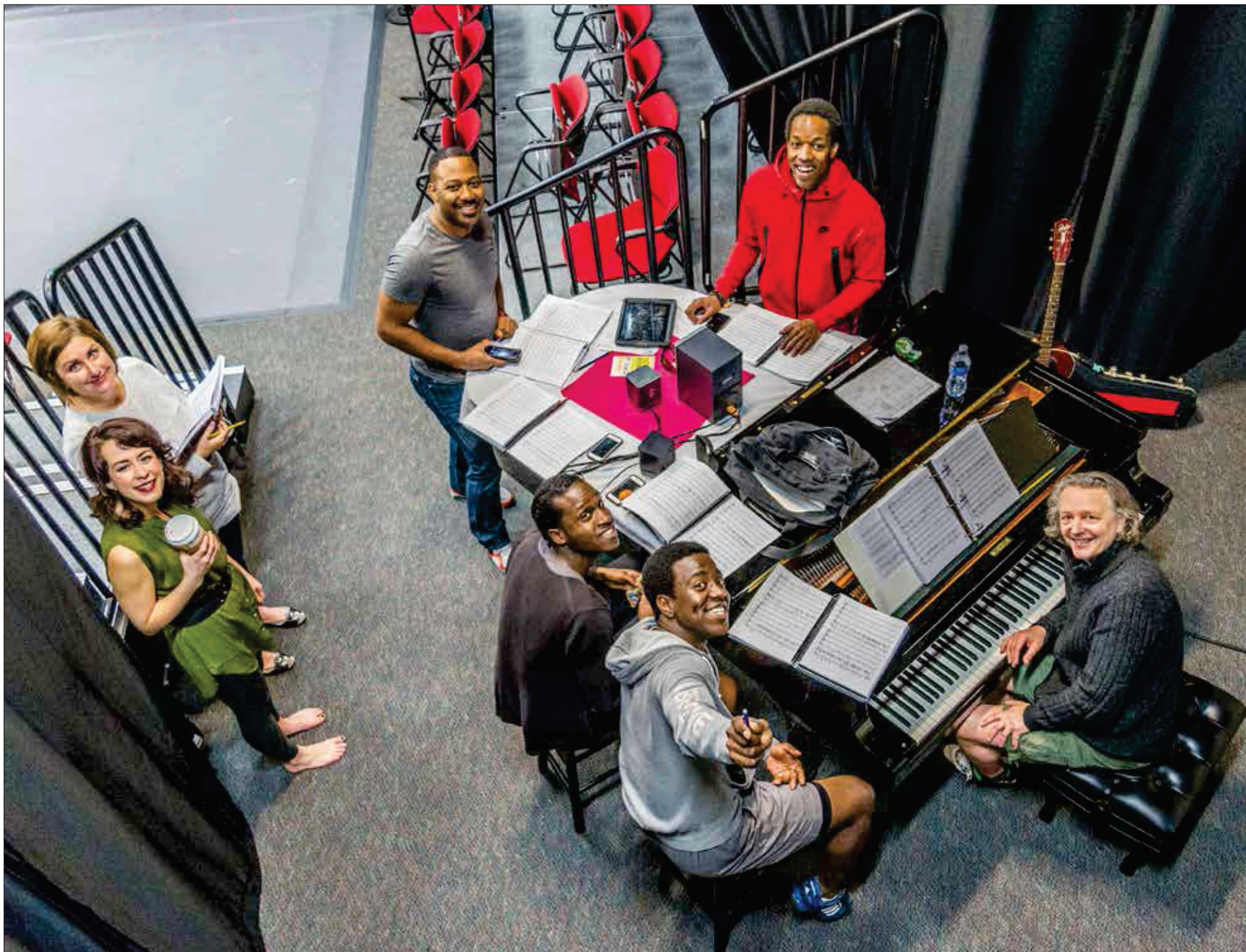


PHOTO BY PAUL FARDIG/COURTESY STUMPTOWN STAGES

Pianist and composer Michael Allen Harrison sits at the piano surrounded by the cast of 'Soul Harmony,' an original musical produced by Portland's Stumptown Stages and based on the birth of R&B with the unlikely partnership between Deborah Chessler, a young Jewish woman, and Sonny Til and the Orioles, a dynamic black male vocal group.

BY OLIVIA OLIVIA

THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Stumptown Stages, a Portland theater production company with an acumen for embracing diversity, gears up this week for the world premiere of its all-original musical, *Soul Harmony*, based on the real life history of the birth of R&B, American soul music, and specifically the unlikely partnership between a young Jewish woman, Deborah Chessler, and the dynamic black male vocal group, Sonny Til and the Orioles. In fact, the main character, Sonny Til, is played by his own grandson, De'Sean Dooley.

Til was known for putting heroic anguish in de-

Soul Harmony

*Portland theater group
tackles birth of R&B*

mure ballads about loneliness, pushing his sleepy, wounded voice and inflating a single word into a sunrise. Sonny Til and the Orioles did serious business in the late 1940s in Harlem, essentially replacing jazz as youth music, and creating fan hysteria at the famous Apollo Theater.

Soul Harmony reveals their rise to music nobility and the role they played in challenging segregation in the south. The production is co-directed by Stumptown Stages founder Kirk Mouser and Julianne R. Johnson-Weiss, one of Portland's premier vocalists

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