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PHOTO BY OWEN CAREY

Portland actor La'Tevin Alexander takes on the role of a lifetime, as a young Cassius Clay, the legendary boxer who became Muhammad Ali, in "And In This Corner: Cassius Clay." The Oregon Children's Theater production tackles issues of racial inequality and bullying during segregated Jim Crow-era Louisville, Ky. Opens Saturday and runs through March 25.

And ⁱⁿ This Corner

Portland actor helms role of boxing legend

BY DANNY PETERSON
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Themes of racial injustice and childhood bullying come to life in a new Oregon Children's Theater play about a young Cassius Clay set in segregated Louisville, Ky. before he changed his name to Muhammad Ali and won a series of heavyweight boxing championships.

"And in This Corner: Cassius Clay," opening Saturday, March 3 is written by award-winning playwright, rapper and essayist Idris Goodwin and stars Portland actor La'Tevin Alexander.

Known for his bravado persona once he found his way into the public spotlight, Ali often spoke in rhymes or witty aphorisms, saying his style in the ring was to "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee."

In the play, audiences get treated to a glimpse of the young fighter as an unknown up and comer.

"You get to see how all the fundamentals and all the forces in his life are set in motion," Alexander said. "He starts to see the world as it was and how it is for a black man in America. You get to see the caterpillar of the butterfly."

Stan Foote, the Oregon Children's Theater artistic director who co-directs the play, compared the tale to the origins of a super hero story, but in this case the beginnings of a sports and civil rights hero.

The play incorporates historically accurate language of 1950s Kentucky with mediations on race relations and humor to bring "so many great points of intersection for adults and kids," Foote said.

Alexander, 26, will helm the role of the young Clay, whose boxing origins began at age 12 when his bike got stolen. Clay reported the theft to a police officer who then offered to teach him how to box and defend himself.

The young Clay took a knack to the sport immediately.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7