

"Storyville" to open

March 25, 1977

The world premiere production of "Storyville," a musical re-creation of the rough, romantic and syncopated early days of jazz, will open Wednesday, May 18, for six performances in the Mandeville Auditorium at the University of California, San Diego.

The musical play, scheduled eventually for the New York stage, was commissioned by the UC San Diego Department of Drama and co-sponsored by the Department of Music. It will be presented at 8 p.m. May 18 through 22 and for one matinee performance at 2 p.m. on May 21 in the 800-seat auditorium.

"Storyville" is based on the life and times of the jazz musicians who lived in the "Back O' Town" section of New Orleans at the turn of the century. Strolling through its streets are such characters as Tigre Savoy and her young son Punchy, trumpeters Hot Licks Sam and Butch Brown, voodoo woman Mama Stringbean, bon vivant Baron de Fontbleu, transvestite Dolly Danger and rackets boss Mickey Mulligan.

According to the musical's artistic director Floyd Gaffney, professor of drama at UC San Diego, the production will draw upon the finest possible theater artists available. It will include local cast members as well as theatrical talent from Los Angeles and the East Coast.

The script was written by award-winning playwright Ed Bullins, who has received drama awards for several of his plays including "The Taking of Miss Janie." Composer/lyricist of "Storyville" is Mildred Kayden, a New York-based musician who has written scores for a number of on- and off Broadway stage productions including "Vanity Fair," "Pequod," "Ionescopade" and "The Riddle of Sheba."

Co-artistic director with Gaffney is Jaime Rogers who has choreographed and directed performers from Andy Williams to Sonny & Cher. He has danced with such ballet companies as Jerome Robbins, Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham and his television credits include "The Ed Sullivan Show" and "Wow."

Musical director Cecil Lytle, assistant professor of music at UC San Diego, has founded several jazz ensembles and a gospel choir of 32 singers which has toured California and the Southwest. Costume designer Elan, a designer to many entertainment personalities in the 1950s, has designed costumes for the Entertainment Troupe, Los Angeles' First Watts Festival and for several film and television productions.

"Storyville" spins off from the events just preceding the shutting down of Storyville, New Orleans' famed "Back O' Town" section that was the home of New Orleans jazz and America's first experiment with legalized vice.

According to Kayden, "Storyville" is a panorama of such jazz stories and jazz characters as "the old-time jazzman with his head turned back, eyes closed, wailing the blues; the Holy Rollers clapping the beat in church, dancing at the pulpit; the waltzes of elegant Frenchmen around the gazebo in the park; the gorgeous sexy coonshouters in Funky Butt Hall; the whorehouse pianist at his upright; the gaudy Grand Marshal at the funeral and his spasm band second line following along; the little boy at the dock learning to play the trumpet from an old man . . .

"Certainly," adds Kayden, "New Orleans was not the only American city where jazz grew up, but Storyville was the most colorful background for a musical."

Kayden explains she intended the life and times of Storyville to be "an original re-creation, for that is the essence of a musical - to see and hear these people not as historical characters, but as living people with the same ghetto problems we still have today."

Kayden said she suggested that playwright Ed Bullins write the book of "Storyville" because this well-known and well-respected writer "had a first-hand knowledge of the musicians, singers, dancers and denizens of our world of 'Storyville.'"

A New York director, according to Kayden, heard of the project and suggested Gaffney as "the man who could bring this to life because of his wonderful work in theater and dance and his understanding of our characters."

"Professor Gaffney has pulled together a fine group of professional creative artists to begin the production," Kayden said. "From here on I hope 'Storyville' will be launched as an important step in the continuing growth of American musical theater."

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE MUSICAL COMEDY "STORYVILLE"

by Mildred Kayden

Growing up in America, we usually take the wonderful soul excitement of jazz for granted. It was at Vassar College that my curiosity deepened when I began to study composition with the renowned Czechoslovakian composer Ernst Krenek, whose jazz-influenced opera, *Jonny Spielt Auf*, had created a sensation at its debut in Vienna. What was jazz, this American-born music that spread around the world?

Later on, I conducted a musical interview show on Radio station WEVD in New York where I had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing jazz greats like Cannonball Adderly, Clark Terry and I began to search for that time and place where African soul and European discipline intermingled, and I had to go back to the beginnings to some very real and some very legendary musicians, dancers, singers, whose struggles to "if make it" are a familiar tragi-comedy.

My own experiments with jazz styles began when I was commissioned to write a film score about an American city-- and how could you catch the soul of any American city without the wailing trumpets, trombones and horns...Then I wrote a short musical, *Mardi Gras*, which the New York Times critic called "an engaging piece in which jazz motifs are handled freely and spontaneously." During a performance of this show, a Broadway producer suggested that I write a full scale jazz musical.

Certainly New Orleans was not the only American city where jazz grew up, but STORYVILLE, that unique district in the French Quarter where America's first experiment with legalized vice flourished, was the most colorful background for a musical. One had only to look at Morton Roberts' fabulous series in Life Magazine: the old time jazzman with his head turned back, eyes closed, wailing the blues, the Holy Rollers clapping the beat in church, dancing at the pulpit, the waltzes of the elegant Frenchmen around the gazebo in the park, the gorgeous and sexy coonshouters in Funky Butt Hall, the whorehouse pianist at his upright, the gaudy Grand Marshal at the funeral and his Spasm band Second line following along, the little boy at the dock learning to play a trumpet from an old man...

Once I had chosen Storyville as the basis for my musical comedy, I set about writing songs and production numbers for these fabulous characters based upon a recreation of that time and place and those people-- but an original recreation, for that is the essence of a musical, to see and bear these people not as historical characters, but as living people with the same ghetto problems we still have today.

To write the book of Storyville, I went to Ed Bullins, one of America's best known playwrights, who has a first hand knowledge of the musicians, singers, dancers, the denizens of our world of STORYVILLE.

Here in New York a director heard of the project and suggested that for the world premier, the man who could bring this to life would be Floyd Gaffney because of his wonderful work in theater and dance, and his understanding of our characters, and the spectacular production numbers needed to make Storyville live on the stage. Professor Gaffney marshalled the support of the University of California, San Diego and pulled together a fine group of professional creative artists to begin production. From here on I hope Storyville 'will be launched as an important step in the continuing growth of American musical theater.