

Advertisement

- NEWS
- POLITICS
- OPINIONS
- BUSINESS
- LOCAL
- SPORTS
- ARTS & LIVING
- GOING OUT GUIDE
- JOB
- CARS
- REAL ESTATE
- RENTALS
- CLASSIFIEDS

SEARCH: go [washingtonpost.com](#) Web : Results by [Google™](#) | [Search Archives](#)

[washingtonpost.com](#) > [Arts & Living](#) > [Theater](#)

Reduced 'Ragtime,' More in Rhythm With the Age

Advertisement » [Your Ad Here](#)

By *Nelson Pressley*
Special to The Washington Post
Sunday, April 19, 2009

If Broadway had a production "bubble" -- that is, fat times funded by shady bookkeeping and too much debt -- it was a decade ago, and its poster child was "Ragtime."



From left, "Ragtime" composer Stephen Flaherty, librettist Terrence McNally, director and choreographer Marcia Milgrom Dodge, music director and conductor James Moore and lyricist Lynn Ahrens. The scaled-down version of the once-bloated musical is at the Kennedy Center through May 17. (By Richard A. Lipski -- The Washington Post)

[Buy Photo](#)

The musical was an ambitious adaptation of E.L. Doctorow's acclaimed 1975 novel, a saga of turn-of-the-20th-century cultural upheaval that focused on fictional immigrants, a generically WASPish American family and such historical figures as Henry Ford and Harry Houdini. The production was widely acclaimed, but the financing by the Canadian production company Livent was corrupt. Livent went bust, and last month Garth Drabinsky, the hands-on entrepreneur at its head, was convicted of fraud in Canada.

Drabinsky's product, however, lives on.

For the next four weeks, the Kennedy Center stages its own version in the Eisenhower Theater. "Ragtime" clearly has its fans: Sales have been so brisk that the run has already been extended by a week.

The Kennedy Center production won't look like the \$12 million version that opened on Broadway in 1998, receiving 13 Tony nominations as it extravagantly showcased such emerging stars as Brian Stokes Mitchell and Audra McDonald. (As big as "Ragtime" was, "The Lion King" was bigger that year, and took most of the awards.) Yet this "Ragtime" won't be as stripped-down as it was subsequently in London, either, in what was practically a concert version. Composer Stephen Flaherty calls that London edition "minimalist," while the Broadway staging was " 'Ragtime' at its most opulent."

"I think we wanted something in between those two," says Flaherty, in town recently for a look at rehearsals with lyricist Lynn Ahrens and librettist Terrence McNally.

Advertisement

Enter Marcia Milgrom Dodge, the director-choreographer who had managed the downsizing of "Seussical," another overproduced Flaherty-Ahrens show from the Livent days. "Seussical" followed "Ragtime" as another Drabinsky brainchild and ended up as a \$10.5 million Broadway flop. Major

TOOLBOX

[Resize](#) [Print](#) [E-mail](#)
[Yahoo! Buzz](#) [Save/Share +](#)

COMMENT

No comments have been posted yet about this item. Be the first!

POST A COMMENT
 You must be logged in to leave a comment.
[Log in](#) | [Register](#)
[Why Do I Have to Log In Again?](#)

[Discussion Policy](#)

WHO'S BLOGGING powered by [sphere](#)

[Links to this article](#)

Find Your Dream Job Now!

FEATURED ADVERTISER LINKS

- [Asbestos Lung Cancer Lawyer, Zimmer, MRI Dye, Raptiva Mesothelioma Lawyer, Construction, High Risk Jobs, Vets](#)
- [Save Up To 75% On Cruises at Vacations To Go](#)
- [\\$147 & up - Fly to Europe in Spring](#)
- [Get your complete credit history from all three major credit agencies](#)

Ads by Google

- [Broadway on Ice](#)
The beauty of ice skating embraced by the magic of Broadway
[www.BroadwayOnIce.com](#)
- [Buy Broadway Tickets](#)
Why Gamble? 21 Years In Business. Online 24/7 or Call 1-800-243-8849
[www.PrestigeEntertainment.com](#)
- [Broadway Show Tickets](#)
Looking For New York Show Tickets? Find Broadway Ticket Deals & More
[BroadwayShowTicketsToday.info](#)

revisions ensued, and after Dodge pulled it down to kids'-theater dimensions for a national tour, "Seussical" succeeded well enough for a redemptive return to New York. A touring version of that show is playing today at the Alden Theatre in McLean.

For "Ragtime," then, Dodge again is thinking lean.

"I'm a choreographer first," says Dodge, whose dance experience includes being punched in the stomach by Martha Graham as part of a class exercise.

("That was a day I'll never forget," Dodge says with a grin.) Although the anthem-heavy show doesn't require much dancing, Dodge is planning to use far less machinery and fewer performers by doing a lot more moving and doubling up on roles.

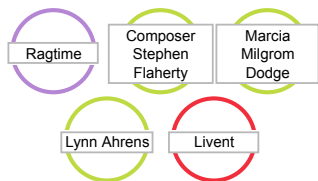
McNally says, "The cast was too big in New York anyway -- all these people who would do one scene and vanish for hours."

Not that the Kennedy Center production will qualify as "Skinny Ragtime." The cast will number nearly three dozen -- a lot of actors, even if it's markedly fewer than the onstage total of 50 used on Broadway.

Visually, too, it still might have heft: Derek McLane's set features soaring pavilion-style architecture (sketches suggest Eugene Lee's rendition of Penn Station for the original staging), but it won't rely on the kinds of heavy elements that made the original an eye-popping experience. Ahrens recalls watching the scene with J.P. Morgan astride a catwalk that lowered hydraulically toward a line of workers, threatening to press them like grapes -- an elaborately engineered, heavy-looking spectacle that the lyricist feared might disastrously collapse on the actors.

CONTINUED 1 2 [Next >](#)

Understand more about:



Articles

washingtonpost.com | [The web](#)

[Where Are the Next Sondheims? This Week...](#)

...Mitchell brought the crowd to its feet with the "Ragtime" ...

February 2, 2009 | washingtonpost.com

[On Stage in April](#)

...of Broadway hits with a brand new production of "Ragtime" ...

March 26, 2009 | washingtonpost.com

[Who's in the Running To Be Power Players](#)

...arena, a new production of the epic American

powered by

Web-Wide News Alerts

[Get MyWebpost](#)

Get The Post's take on whatever you're reading -- anywhere on the Web.

[Sign Up](#) | [Learn More](#)

powered by 

People who read this also read...

[Postseason NHL Schedule](#)

[U.S.-Iranian reporter on trial in Iran, verdict expected soon](#)

[The Week That Was](#)

[Theater Review: Family Grief Laid Bare in Rep Stage's Bright, Taut 'God's Ear'](#)

discovery by 

Most Viewed Arts & Living Articles

[A Fairy Tale Beginning](#)

[Secret Accidents and Lost Bombs](#)

['I've Been Just the Ordinary Chap for 30-Odd Years'](#)

[US-ENTERTAINMENT Summary](#)

» [Top 35 Arts & Living Articles](#)
» [Most Popular on washingtonpost.com](#)

© 2009 The Washington Post Company

Ads by Google

[Washington DC Apartments](#)

Jefferson at Capitol Yards Models Now Open
[JeffersonCapitolYards.com](#)

[See "Hair" on Broadway](#)

Broadway NYC Hotel & Show Package Great Seats to the Musical Hit Hair
[nyctrip.com/BroadwayHairNYC](#)

[Buy Broadway Tickets](#)

Why Gamble? 21 Years In Business. Online 24/7 or Call 1-800-243-8849
[www.PrestigeEntertainment.com](#)


[NEWS](#) | [POLITICS](#) | [OPINIONS](#) | [BUSINESS](#) | [LOCAL](#) | [SPORTS](#) | [ARTS & LIVING](#) | [GOING OUT GUIDE](#) | [JOBS](#) | [CARS](#) | [REAL ESTATE](#) | [RENTALS](#) | [CLASSIFIEDS](#)

SEARCH:



washingtonpost.com



Web: Results by 

[Search Archives](#)

washingtonpost.com: [About Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Advertisers](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Search Terms](#) | [Topics Index](#) | [Make Us Your Home Page](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS](#) | [Widgets](#)
The Washington Post: [Subscribe](#) | [Home Delivery Service](#) | [Advertisers](#) | [PostPoints](#) | [e-Replica](#) | [Online Photo Store](#) | [The Washington Post Store](#) | [About The Post](#) | [National Weekly](#)
The Washington Post Company: [Information and Other Post Co. Websites](#)

© Copyright 1996-2009 The Washington Post Company | [User Agreement and Privacy Policy](#) | [Rights and Permissions](#)

[Help](#) | [Contact Us](#)