

# Emmys cite Robinson's choreography

The television broadcast of the Houston Grand Opera's production of Scott Joplin's "Treemonisha," choreographed by Mabel Robinson of the North Carolina School of the Arts, has been nominated for an Emmy.

Ms. Robinson, a renowned choreographer, director, dancer and actress, was notified of the Emmy nomination recently by mail by the staff of the Houston Grand Opera. Ms. Robinson joined the NCSA modern dance faculty in 1984.

The broadcast was nominated by the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in the category of "Outstanding Special Class Programming Area," according to Eric Skelly, associate publicist for the Houston Grand Opera. The awards ceremony for what is known as the "daytime Emmys" was held July 12 in Los Angeles.

The show was produced by Boston station WGBH for its "America's Musical Theater" series and aired nationally for the first time earlier this year on the stations of the Public Broadcasting System.

Telecasts were made possible by grants from the Roy M. Hofheinz Charitable Trust and the AT&T Foundation, Skelly said.

The broadcast consisted of actual footage of "Treemonisha" taped during the Houston Grand Opera's 1981 Spring Opera Festival in Houston, as well as narration by Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee.

The performance starred Obba Babatundé as Zdzetrick, Deloris Ivory as Monisha, Dorcel Duckens as Ned, Carmen Balthrop as Treemonisha and Curtis Rayam as Remus.

"Treemonisha," called "an opera, plus" by critics, is set in a settlement of ex-slaves in the early 1800s in Texarkana, Texas. It focuses on the lives of Ned and Monisha, their founding daughter, Treemonisha, and the evil con artist, Zdzetrick.

Joplin, the great black ragtime composer, was said to have spent his last years trying to have "Treemonisha" produced and hoping to be recognized as a serious composer.

It was only when the Houston Grand Opera brought a fully staged production of "Treemonisha" to New York and Washington in 1975 did critics recognize the opera's worth.

Interestingly, Mabel Robinson was in the Houston Grand Opera production that went to Broadway. Louis Johnson was the choreographer at that time.

The version of "Treemonisha" that Ms. Robinson choreographed is a "fantasy kind of production," she said. It also is "more like an operetta" than an opera. "The music certainly dominated the style," which is elegant and full-quality, she said. The production also uses a lot of movement and dancing.

Ms. Robinson was invited to choreograph "Treemonisha," having worked with the Houston Grand Opera previously on "Porgy and Bess," which went to Broadway. She also had worked with the Texas Opera Theatre, a subsidiary of the Houston Grand Opera, on "Starbird," a new opera that went to the Kennedy Center in New York.

Ms. Robinson recently directed and choreographed "Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope," presented in February and brought back in April for encore performances in Winston-Salem. The production by the N.C. Black Repertory Company received much critical acclaim.

Beginning in August, the state of North Carolina will send the musical on a statewide tour.

Ms. Robinson also had performed in "Cope" on Broadway prior to choreographing the musical. "It's been really kind of funny that's the way things happened," she said, referring to the performance/choreography trend.

A native of Savannah, Ga., Ms. Robinson graduated from the High School of Performing Arts and the Juilliard School of



Mabel Robinson

Music, both in New York. She has performed as a member of such dance companies as those of Alvin Ailey, Martha Graham and May O'Donnell.

In addition to "Treemonisha" and "Cope," she has performed in the Broadway shows "Black

Nativity," "Golden Boy," "Murderous Angels," "Comin' Uptown" and "Your Arms Too Short to Box with God."

Ms. Robinson has appeared in the movies "Funny Lady," "Stand Up and Be Counted," "Cotton Comes to Harlem" and "The Wiz," for which she also contributed choreography and editing.

She has made guest appearances on television on "The Bill Cosby Show," "The Sammy Davis Show," "The Carol Burnett Show" and "The Tonight Show," among others. She also was a guest on Liza Minelli's show at the Olympia Theatre in Paris.

The North Carolina School of the Arts is a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina. It was established in 1963 to train students of exceptional ability for careers in the

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## People On The Move

### Davis named branch manager

Charles L. Davis has been named manager of the Wake Forest University office of Wachovia Bank and Trust Co.

Announcement of his position was made by Perry A. Turner, retail banking manager for Wachovia's Northwest Region.

Davis joined Wachovia as a retail management trainee in 1982 and was elected banking officer in 1985. He has served as a personal banker at the East office.

A native of New York City, Davis is a graduate of Wake Forest, where he was a member of the school's basketball team.



Charles Davis

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