

THE SHOWS



The Players.

File Photos

Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope



Mabel Robinson

To the theater world, Mabel Robinson is a remarkable quintuple-threat – an actress, dancer, choreographer, director and playwright. To those who live in and around Winston-Salem, where Robinson makes her home, she is “Mama Mabel” – a grand matriarch of the city’s ever-burgeoning arts scene.

Robinson and her many talents have been tied to the N.C. Black Repertory Company for more than 25 years. Her collaborations with the late Larry Leon Hamlin – the founder of the Black Rep and the National Black Theatre Festival – are legendary. One of the productions that the pair took to new heights is making a triumphant return to this year’s NBTF.

Twenty years ago, “Don’t Bother Me, I Can’t Cope” opened the very first National Black Theatre Festival. It will get the honor of opening this year’s Festival as well.

“It was a special show for Larry and myself,” Robinson said. “It was loved (at the 1989 festival)... It was perfect for the whole concept of the festival, which was a reunion ... of theatrical, black people.”

Written by Micki Grant, “Don’t Bother Me, I Can’t Cope” was a smash as soon as it hit the stage in the early 1970s. It garnered a bevy of Tony nominations and two Drama Desk Awards during its original Broadway run. A musical revue that features a variety of genres, “Cope” tells the story of a people struggling to make it to better days.

“‘Don’t Bother Me, I Can’t Cope’ is basically a musical that deals with the everyday African American experience,” said Robinson. “It does so by inspiring and uplifting songs and dances and spoken word. It’s a show that I always felt was inspiring and satisfying as a theatrical piece.”

The show features some of the Triad’s most talented dancers, singers and musicians. As director and choreographer, Robinson has taken each performer under her wing in order to bring out their very best. It’s her style to have warm, motherly relationships with her casts, and it has paid off in a big way.

Robinson’s “Mahalia: Queen of Gospel” was the breakout hit of the 2007 National Black Theatre Festival. The musical production, which chronicles the life of gospel legend Mahalia Jackson, quickly sold-out the Stevens Center and brought audiences to their feet.

Robinson’s other directing and choreographing credits for the N.C. Black Rep include “And Still I Rise” and “For Colored Girls ...”. Robinson’s artistic career began in Harlem. She has worked as an actress in films like “The Wiz” (where she also served as an assistant choreographer), “Funny Lady” and “Cotton Comes to Harlem.” She has also danced with the Alvin Ailey and Martha Graham dance companies.

**Aug. 4, Aug. 5
& Aug. 6 at 8 p.m.
each night
at the
Stevens Center**

Ticket Price: \$42

– The Chronicle