

The life of the extraordinary Ethel Waters is examined in glorious fashion in "Sweet Mama Stringbean," the acclaimed New Federal Theatre's contribution to this year's NBTF.

Waters' ascension to super-stardom began around 1919 when she moved to Harlem to hone her stellar singing and acting abilities. She wasn't yet 25, but the Chester, Pa., native had already lived quite a life. Born in poverty to a 12-year-old rape victim, Waters struggled to find acceptance, love and affection, even from her own mother. She had a short-lived marriage to an abusive man when she was just 13. Singing became her escape.

Written by Beth Turner, "Sweet Mama Stringbean" gives audiences a unique look at Waters' life by employing two actresses (one a young Ethel and the other the more senior Waters) to play the legend. Stage veteran Sandra Reaves-Phillips and her real-life daughter, Marishka Shanice Phillips, took the theater world by storm last year when the musical made its debut in New York.

Sweet Mama Stringbean

"Sandra Reaves-Phillips is a potent powerhouse of a performer; she twinkles and shimmers knowingly with every note she sings ...

Marishka Shanice Phillips is likewise talented, and gorgeous to boot," one reviewer wrote.

Several other talents help director Elizabeth Van Dyke bring this musical to life. The music and singing are amazing. The duo of Reaves-Phillips and Phillips deliver classic Waters hits with power, style and grace. They even duet on tunes such as "Stormy Weather" and "Am I Blue?"

Waters was given the nickname "Sweet Mama Stringbean" as a young woman because of her slim figure. The musical shows Waters' inner turmoil as her stringbean shape became potato-like.

Marishka Shanice Phillips has shown her

talents on stage, television and the big screen. On stage, she's played roles such as Mabel Washington in a national tour of "Fame: The Musical" and Young Irene in "Bubblin' Brown Sugar." She's had role on television shows like "A Different World," and "The Cosby Show" and sung back-up for people like Diddy and Cece Winans on BET and MTV. Her silver-screen credits include "Out of Sync," "Do the Right Thing" and director John Singleton's remake of "Shaft."

Sandra Reaves-Phillips is probably familiar to most for her role as music teacher Mrs. Powers in the film "Lean on Me." The Mullins, S.C., native also had a memorable role in the film "Round Midnight." The stage, though, is where she became a star. Reaves-Phillips recently received a Drama League Recognition Award for Outstanding Performer for the Broadway show "Rollin' on the T.O.B.A." Other stage credits include the Tony-winning "Raisin," "Stompin' at the Savoy" and "The Best Little Whore House in Texas." NBTF audiences should get more than their fill of Reaves-Phillips this year. She is also slated to star in "It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues."



Phillips



Sandra Reaves-Phillips

Aug. 4 at 8 p.m.
Aug. 5 at 3 & 8 p.m.
at UNCSA's Catawba

Ticket Price: \$37

- The Chronicle

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