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FELA! BACK ON BROADWAY: (top to bottom) Paulette Ivory & Sahr Ngaujah in *Fela!*

Photo: Tristram Kenton

Theater Review

Vibrant return of truly good *Fela!*



FELA!

Book by Jim Lewis & Bill T. Jones

Music & lyrics by Fela Anikulapo Kuti

Directed & choreographed by Bill T. Jones

Through August 4, 2012

Al Hirschfeld Theatre

302 West 45th Street

(212-239-6200), <http://www.felaaonbroadway.com>

By David NouNou

Seldom does one use the words powerful, thought-provoking, moving, and haunting as adjectives to describe a musical. Throw in pulsating, rhythmic, buoyant, and colorful, and one has just described *Fela!* The Tony-nominated musical is back on Broadway for a brief summer run.

Based on the life of Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the Nigerian musician and activist who was also the creator of a new kind of music, Afrobeat, it traces the journey traveled by connecting his love of the music, his relationship and his spirituality with his mother, nine wives, and love and betterment of a corrupt Nigeria.

Sahr Ngaujah's portrayal of Fela is nothing short of incredible. He is the heart and soul of this musical. He acts, sings, dances, and plays multiple musical instruments. The man is a human dynamo. He infuses the whole show with his energy, charm, and talent. I was stunned when he lost the Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical in 2010, and now upon a second viewing two years later, I am absolutely dumbfounded how he didn't win this much-deserved award.

The energy from the rest of the cast and musicians on stage, as well as the music and rhythms, all make for an intense and mesmerizing evening. The entertainment here is done with passion and humanity. In large part the magic created on stage is due to Bill T. Jones. He co-conceived, co-wrote the book, directed, and choreographed this spectacle. His choreography is bewitching; however, his direction still needs editing. As exciting as Act I is, Act II leaves one "wanting less." It runs into self-indulgence. It is often repetitive, and the middle runs amok into the spiritual, and the narrative is a bit hard to follow.

Fela! is a unique theatrical venture. It might seem long and repetitive and may not appeal to everyone. Nonetheless, it is still an experience for any theater aficionado.

Edited by Scott Harrah

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