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**'THE SCOTSBORO BOYS': (left to right) Jeremy Gumbs, Rodney Hicks, Josh Breckenridge, Derrick Cobey, Kendrick Jones, Julius Thomas III, Joshua Henry, Christian Dante White, James T. Lane in Kander & Ebb musical, *The Scottsboro Boys*. Photo: Paul Kolnik**

## *Theater Review*

# *The Scottsboro Boys* is musical account of racism & injustice in 1930s

*The Scottsboro Boys*

Book by David Thompson

Music & lyrics by John Kander & Fred Ebb

Directed & Choreographed by Susan Stroman

Lyceum Theatre

149 West 45th Street

(212-239-6200), [www.ScottsboroMusical.com](http://www.ScottsboroMusical.com)

**By David NouNou**

Never ones to shy away from controversial subjects, starting in 1965 dealing with communism in the musical *Flora the Red Menace*, to Nazi Germany in 1967's *Cabaret*, or murder and tabloid journalism in 1976's *Chicago*, Kander and Ebb have always pushed the proverbial envelope. They have done so again in *The Scottsboro Boys*, a musical account of one of this country's most heinous injustices known to mankind: The conviction of nine innocent black men falsely accused of raping two white women on a train traveling through Alabama.

Starting in the spring of 1931, the accused were not even men yet. They ranged from ages 13 to 19, which makes the accusations even more unbelievable and unbearable. They were on a freight train, traveling to find themselves jobs, when the arrests were made. They were tried and found guilty in their first trial and through countless trials that ensued, with the verdict always being guilty. The men were in prison and released on parole at separate times. The four youngest were released in 1937, and the last not until the 1950s. Alabama Governor George Wallace pardoned the last living Scottsboro Boy in 1976.

Travesty and injustice done as a minstrel show is the basis of *The Scottsboro Boys*. Finding minstrel shows totally repellent, due to the subject matter being racial stereotyping and bigotry, is not comfortable to sit through. However, credit must be given to the brilliance of cast and creators. Taking an unsavory topic and infusing it with music and dancing does take creativity to new forms. The credit here goes to David Thompson for his highly insightful book, and director Susan Stroman for constantly

having the stage brimming with vitality. The score by Kander and Ebb is sheer delight, and it is steeped with melodies reminiscent of *Chicago* and *Cabaret*, both energetic and haunting.

The cast is peerless. Starting with Joshua Henry as Haywood Patterson, who wrote his autobiography while in prison and who never strayed from telling the truth (even if he had to spend the rest of his life in jail) is sensational, with a beautiful, mellifluous voice. John Cullum, as the Interlocutor or master of ceremonies, is his usual steadfast self. The rest of the cast, playing various roles, are all perfection but four names do stand out due to their comic performances: They are Colman Domingo as Sheriff Bones, and Forrest McClendon as Deputy Tambo, among their other roles, as well as the two young convicts Christian Dante White and James T. Lane, both of whom also play the two white women that accuse these men of rape.

*The Scottsboro Boys* is a great theatrical experience and will stay with you for a long time, but be prepared for a jolt and some discomfort. Like Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret* and *Chicago* before it, both of which left audiences bewildered in their day but now are theater staples, this show may shock modern sensibilities. In time, however, *The Scottsboro Boys* might join the ranks of the aforementioned shows, thanks to a sensitive and insightful book and a memorable score.

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## Broadway Listings

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**GREAT 'SCOTTSBORO': Joshua Henry (standing) & company in Kander & Ebb musical, *The Scottsboro Boys*. Photo: Paul Kolnik**



**THE SCOTTSBORO BOYS**

The conviction of nine innocent black men falsely accused of raping two white women on a train traveling through Alabama is the basis for Kander and Ebb's last musical. Starting in the spring of 1931, the accused weren't even men yet. They ranged from ages 13 to 19, which makes the accusations even more unbelievable and unbearable. They were on a freight train traveling to find themselves jobs when the arrests were made. Tried and found guilty in their first trial and through countless trials that ensued, with the verdict always being guilty.

Taking an unsavory topic and infusing it with music and dancing does take creativity to new forms. The credit here goes to David Thompson for his highly insightful book, and Susan Stroman for constantly having the stage brimming with vitality. The score by Kander and Ebb is sheer delight, but is steeped with melodies from *Chicago* and *Cabaret*, both energetic and haunting. Yes, *The Scottsboro Boys*, is a great theatrical experience and will stay with you for a long time, but be prepared for a jolt and some discomfort. Like Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret* and *Chicago* before it, they left audiences bewildered in their day but now are theater staples. In time, *The Scottsboro Boys* might join their ranks, thanks to a sensitive and insightful book and a memorable score.

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