# **Cast performs 'Porgy** and Bess' as it should be

Generations of music lovers aren't familiar with the story, haunting melodies and lytics of Popy and Bess, George Gershwin's musical that premiered in 1923.

That can be remedied soon. All music lovers – whether they love hip-hop, rap or rock—hare an opportunity to see the treasured folk-open that grasps the variety of musical idioms popular then and now – from jazz to gospel to classical – now that Popy and Beas is in Detroit through Sunday, March 30.

Samuel Stevenson said the-

30. Samuel Stevenson said the-ater patrons will have a rare opportunity to experience Porgy and Bess sung as it should be.

and Bess sung as it should be. "Gershwin wrote Porys and Bess for classically trained, African-American voices," Stevenson said. "At the time the musical opened, African-Americans were overlooked for the roles because people didn't think they could sing anything but jazz or gospel," But this cust proves "them"

but jazz or gospel.

But this cast proves 'them'
wrote.

The average age of the cast is
40-ish, according to Stevenson,
who is one of two professional
singers who perform the lead
rule of Porgo. Some in our cast
are in their 20s, but none are in
their 20s, 'he added.

Stevenson is among the older
group. He's been involved in
Porgy and Bees since the 1970s,
when he became a member of
the chorus in his hometown of
Charlotte, NC. He's since moved
up the ranks in terms of the
star-quality of his roles.

He's performed on the tour on
and off since 1995. He joined the
international tour in Hawaii
that year. In 1997, he was part of
a five-country tour, which
proved to him that the music of
Porgy and Bees transcends language barriers around the
world.

"It's amazing to me how well
people in different countries are

guage barriers around the world.

"It's amazing to me how well people in different countries are familiar with George Gershwin's music, Tstevenon said.

Porgy and Bess is based on a movel by Dullose Heyward. The story is set in Charleston, in South Carollina's famed Cattish Row, where a crippled man, Purgy, witnesses a murder during a dies game and later gives helter to the muderer's woman, Bess. The story revolves around Purgy's love for the beautiful Bess, and life in Cattish Row.

Gershwin's transformation of the novel into a musical stage production resulted in such



Brian Gibson as Porgy and Ia Rose Saxon as Bess star in the musical now playing at the Fisher Theatre.

famous songs as Summertime, A Woman is a Sometime Thing, I Got Plenty of Nintini) Bess, You is My Woman is a Sometime Thing, I Got Plenty of Nintini, Bess, You is My Woman Naw and It Ain't Necessarily sold the crippled longs, who spends his time on stage on his knees. He moves around the stage on a goat eart. That's one reason why there are two men sharing the lead role of Porgo. The other performer is Brian Gibson. The trief amay different methods of padding my knees over the years? Stevenson admitted. The used soccer and baseball knee guards, regular knee pads, Egyptian cotton, Juct tape wrapped around regular pants. None of these are really sufficient. It's just not natural to be on my knees. There are so many performances on these road tours. There are too many for one singer to handle.

There also are two stars for the nels of Bess. They are Elizabeth Grahum and Jerris Cates.

The roles are tough on our

Elizabeth Graham and Jeris Cates. "The roles are tough on our voices, too hard to perform night after night," Stevenson said. When Stevenson has an

When Stevenson has an opportunity to go home to Charlotte, he resumes his role as word teacher and student. He's a graduate from the University of Cincinnati and Manhatan School of Music.

"I didn't start out to be a classical singer. I did summer stock, musical theater, rhythm and blues bands and sang in church,"

## AT A GLARCE

What: Porgy & Bess When: Continues through Sunday, March 30. Curtain 8 p.m. Tuesday Saturday, 2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, and 7:30 p.m. Sunday.

Where: The Fisher Theater, 3011 W. Grand Boulevard, Detroit. For directions go to

www.nederlanderdetroit.com Tickets: \$30-\$65, available at the Fisher Theatre box office and at all Ticketmaster outlets. To charge tickets by phone, call (248) 645-6666. For more information call, (313) 872-1000.

he said. A mentor led him to

expand his voice to open and he's never left the classical field. "I have 12 students, I believe it is my obligation to pass on to my students what I've learned and what I know, Stevenson said.

He also continues to study voice with his teacher, Frances

Shaster.
And what does Stevenson hope to do while he's with the show in Detroit?

"I want to visit Hitsville. I'm a real Motown fan," Stevenson added.

## Authors set stage for 'A Hot and Sultry Night For Crime'

A HOT AND SULTRY NIGHT FOR CRIME, EDITED BY JEFFERY DEAVER (BERKLEY PRIME CRIME,) \$23.95.



PRIME CRIME.) \$23.95.

Id man winter might still be hanging around our neck of the woods, but this anthology of crime fiction may make you sweat, nevertheless - and in more ways than one.

In his introduction to these and the second of the woods was than one.

In his introduction to these 20 about stories, editor second of the woods with the some collector writes, There might be some collector writes, There might be some collector winter and riven to murder by anowflakes, but I sure can't think of and. ... And so we asked a number of Mystery Writers of America authors to come up with some original stories whose theme is hot and sultry crime. ... The genters ... are as varied as stilling rain forests differ from sizzling deserts.

He's certainly correct on that point. In the lead-off four.

sain torests differ from aizzing deserta.

He's certainly correct on that point. In the lead-off story, Ninety-eight Point Six Deaver immed introduces us to a lone motorist named Sloan, navigating a humid Michigan byway in the dead of summer. As the story unfolds, we learn there's been a power outage at an area prison (too many air conditioners turned way too high), mabling one of the most dangerous inmates to escape. As you might expect, Sloan encounters the escapec. But he encounters

him in a way you may not antici-pate.

Deaver is a marvel at bringing

Deaver is a marve at orninging readers into this steamy milieu. One of his key players, for instance, gets up to answer the door, and leaves behind "an overstuffed Naugahyde armelair that still glistened with the sweat that'd leached from his skin."

that'd leached from his skin. Michiganis own Loren D. Estleman takes a typically satisfying turn here with a sucinct story titled. Lady on Ice. "Outside, it was eighty-nine degrees at 10 p.m., with percentage of humidity to match, and I was experiencing the early stages of frostbite," the tale begins.

was experiencing the early stages of frostbite, the tale begins.

Turns out, Extleman's famous fictional PI, Amos Walker, is filtring with frostbite because he's investigating a case involving a figure skater and a second-rate Detroit bockey player. Snooping around in their world, of course, involves some time spent in ice arenas, which can be pretty frosty places when you're seated rink-side and not properly attired for the occasion.

Though John Lutz's EJ Palacio is set in a tiny oven of a town in Mexico, it also comes up with a Motor City connection, when one fust-talking type named Martin tells another that he "used to play minor league ball for the Detroit Tigers." El Palacio is the name of a washed-up place called Port Lios, peopled by shadowy characters like Martin, his friend, Graham Firling, and a "big man in (a)...cream-colored nuit" who calls himself Rondo (and who has perhaps seen too many

movies). The people are sweatly here, the drinks are sweatly here, the drinks are sweatly, even the pesso are sweatly. The insects they are a-buzzin' in the heat, as are the overswrited electrical transformers in this remote spot at the edge of the jungle. If you're in the right career field, it could be a propitious night for offing sometody via the weapon at hand – a machiete.

G. Mikl Hayden's War Crimes to perhaps the most thought-provoking story in this collection. Played out mainly within the confines of a sweltering Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in the Phillipplines, this layered tale examines the essence of guilt, and how a sense of guilt imposed on the very young might become a twisting – and twisted – "primary foundation, leating forever.

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nearly as dumb as he thinks they are. For an intriguing change of pace, Suzanne C. Johnson's Body in the Pond illustrates how feverish passions run deep on muggy summer nights in 'ole Virginny.

Victoria Disz is a Livonia resident and writes about books, movies, theater and travel for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

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