

Orange County Calendar

Fats' Role Expands in 'Ain't Misbehavin'' Revival

■ **Theater:** The Orange County Black Actors Theater hopes to put its mark on the story of the jazz great. The play opens tonight at Saddleback College.

By MALAIKA BROWN
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

MISSION VIEJO—Anyone familiar with the original production of "Ain't Misbehavin'" may notice that the cast has been expanded a bit for the revival opening tonight at Saddleback College.

Director Adleane Hunter, founder of the Orange County Black Actors Theater, has added a sixth character—a youthful incarnation of Thomas (Fats) Waller, the jazzman whose accomplishments as an adult form the basis of the play.

"When you take on a musical like this, you need to put your mark on it," Hunter explained. The young Waller (played by Michael K. Larche, a member of OCBAT since 1988) spends his time on stage "discovering the cabarets, the clubs and the night life," said Hunter, who directed the Orange County debut of "Ain't Misbehavin'" at South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa in 1989, 11 years after the show premiered on Broadway.

A hand-clappin' musical full of racy



GLENN KOENIG / Los Angeles Times

"Ain't Misbehavin'" features Tina Jackson, left, Michael K. Larche and Debbi Ebert.

tunes that recapture the aura of Harlem in the '30s. "Ain't Misbehavin'" is the final show in Saddleback's 15th annual Summer Stock series. It features 30 pieces written

or made famous by Waller, a musical legend whose style continues to influence jazz. He composed more than 500 melodies (others wrote the lyrics). Combined with

his flamboyant lifestyle, his music earned him status as the first black superstar.

The cast at Saddleback combines veteran local actors and newcomers with backgrounds that include opera, blues and cameo shots on TV and in feature films. Jeff Coopwood, who will be making his county debut, has appeared on ABC's "Brewster Place" with Oprah Winfrey and NBC's "Reasonable Doubts." Debbi Ebert, who doubles as musical director, sings jazz and country music in area nightclubs.

The production includes a honey-sweet rendition of "Squeeze Me" from Tina Jackson, who has been a member of Opera Pacific for five seasons. Pamela J. Ross, who was in the 1989 Saddleback Summer Stock production of "Little Shop of Horrors," is a studio vocalist and writes comedy bits for radio. Henry L. Weaver was in the earlier OCBAT production of "Ain't Misbehavin'." Larche has appeared in the PBS film "Family Reunion" and in the motion picture "Cane River."

■ "Ain't Misbehavin'" opens tonight at 8 in the Doyle G. McKinney Theatre at Saddleback College, 28000 Marguerite Parkway, Mission Viejo. Continues Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays at 3 p.m. through Aug. 16. This Sunday's matinee will benefit the Adleane Hunter Scholarship Fund. \$11 to \$15. (714) 582-4656 between noon and 4 p.m.