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BWW Review: The New Musical, TILL by American Theater Group Enthralls at St. Andrew's Church in South Orange

by Marina Kennedy Mar. 4, 2020

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"The world is going to remember you, Emmett Till, because I will make them."

By Mamie Till in *TILL*

An extraordinary setting for an extraordinary show! The American Theater Group (ATG) is currently presenting the New Jersey premiere of a new musical, *Till* staged at the historic St. Andrew's Church in South Orange. Directed by [Cezar Williams](#), written by Leo Schwartz and DC Cathro, *Till* will be performed through March 8. The show is based on the story of 14 year-old Emmett Till, whose tragic murder in Mississippi in 1955 contributed to the civil rights movement. ATG has selected the ideal time to produce this show as the United States Congress has just enacted the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act.

Till tells of a rambunctious teen who lives with his dedicated, loving mother, Mamie Till on the South Side of Chicago. Even with the support of her own mother, Alma Till and her church community, Mamie struggles as a single mom. There's real promise for her future as she has a budding romance with the kind, local barber, Gene Mobley. The family's situation changes rapidly when relatives from Mississippi want Till to come for a two week visit. Mamie is reluctant to let him go and fears for his safety because of the Jim Crow laws that rule the south. After much coaxing, Till embarks on his great adventure but loses his life to a lynching when he is accused of whistling at a white woman, Carolyn Bryant. Through well-crafted, thoughtful dialogue and captivating music, the show places a great deal of focus on the backstory of its characters.



ATG's cast of six actors is ideal to bring this important and gripping musical production to life. Leading the cast is **Marcus Beckett** at Emmett Till and **Daisy Hobbs** as Mamie Till. The other company members assume multiple roles to fully develop the narrative. They include **Dwayne Clark** as Reverend Davis/Johnny B. Washington/Mose Wright/Maurice Wright; Vanessa A. Jones as Alma Till/Juanita Milam/Simeon Wright/Lizzy Wright; D'Nasya Jordan as Carolyn Bryant/Thelma Wright; and **Clyde Voce** as Gene Mobley/ Roy Bryant/Wheeler Parker. There are quick scene changes, well executed by this talented cast.

The musical score has just the right variety with heartfelt ballads and snappy numbers complemented by excellent singing and dancing. Some of our favorites include "I'm Gonna Build a House" by Emmett & Mamie; "Maxwell Street" by the Company; "Jim Crow" by Thelma; "Coming Home to You" by Emmett, Alma, Mamie & Company; "At the Top of the World" by Mamie; "Bless this House" by Mose & Lizzy and the final song, "Follow Me" by Mamie and Company.

The Creative Team has done a top job of bringing *Till* to South Orange. The church setting, staging, and the real-life portrait of Emmett and Mamie Till that looms in the background are exquisite touches for the musical. The Team includes choreography by **Tiffany Rea**-Fisher with assistance by Kat Files; musical direction by Emily Cohn; Production Stage Manager, **Jack Cummins**; ATG Production Manager, Nan Mandes; Assistant Stage Manager, Melissa Shawcross; Scenic and Lighting design, **David Goldstein**; Sound Design, Kimberly S. O'Laughlin; Costume Design, **Kara Branch**; Associate Costume Design, Somie Park; Prop Design, Alexis Krayniak; Wardrobe Supervisor, Liza Alexis; Stage Crew, Danny Zirkel; and Technical Supervisor Consultant, **Chris Smith**. The Casting Director is **Michael Cassara**, CSA. ATG's Producing Artistic Director is **Jim Vagias**.

There's only one weekend left for metro audiences to experience *Till*. Don't miss the opportunity to see this enthralling, relevant, and moving show that encourages people to better understand the history and hopes of African American people in our country.

ATG is a professional member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance that produces musicals, plays, offers a new reading series, and arts-in-education programming. They focus on producing new and classical works primarily by **American Playwrights**.

Till will be performed through Sunday, March 8 at The Episcopal Church of St. Andrew & Holy Communion, 160 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079. The show runs 90 minutes with no intermission. For ticketing and more information, please visit American Theater Group at <https://www.americantheatergroup.org/>.

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