



## THEATER BITS: Musicals offered about Sally Hemings and Ethel Waters.

October 11, 2005

\*"Sally and Tom (The American Way)," a new musical about Thomas Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemings, opened Off-Broadway Friday at the Castillo Theatre on West 42nd Street, New York.

Fred Newman and Annie Roboff's show follows "the 35-year love affair between Sally Hemings, a slave, and Thomas Jefferson - the author of the Declaration of Independence, third president of the United States and, as the master of Monticello, Sally's owner."

According to production notes, Sally and Tom is not about slavery but is set against the backdrop of slavery in the earliest years of the Republic. Newman said it was "an opportunity to explore our country's uniquely conflicted and contradictory history of intimacy and separatism - America's love/hate relationship with itself."

"For generations, many people have known that Jefferson fathered children by Sally Hemings," Newman said in notes. "The much publicized results of DNA tests several years ago simply corroborate what had been common knowledge. Over the years, certain highly regarded scholars defended Jefferson's 'purity,' categorically denying claims that there had been a sexual relationship between master and slave. Since those 'revelations,' some of them have retreated from their former position of 'It didn't happen' only to insist that the affair between Hemings and Jefferson was an exception. But in fact such affairs, far from being exceptional, were fairly commonplace. That's part of what I wanted to convey by 'the American way' of the title."

"Sally and Tom (The American Way)" runs through Dec. 4. Performances are Thursday, Friday, Saturday evenings at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$40. For more information, call (212) 941-1234. Tickets are also available online at [www.theatermania.com](http://www.theatermania.com).

\*Also on Friday, the musical "Ethel Waters: His Eye is on the Sparrow" opened in Sarasota, Florida at Florida Studio Theatre. The new "musical biography" is a solo show about the late actress and singer, portrayed by one of two actresses at each performance - Jannie Jones or Chaundra Cameron.

"Born in 1896 to a teenage rape victim, Ethel Waters began her life in abject poverty, growing up in the slums of Philadelphia and the surrounding area," according to production notes. "She never lived in one place for more than a few weeks at a time."

Blessed with the ability to "sang," Waters jumped on the black vaudeville circuit and eventually rode onto Broadway and into Hollywood. She was known as a singer of jazz, blues and show music, but also for her strong Christian faith - she sang spirituals and gospel on tour with Billy Graham.

Waters is most famous for her songs "Taking a Chance on Love," "Stormy Weather," "Harlem on My Mind," "Dinah," "Heat Wave," "Sweet Georgia Brown," and "St. Louis Blues." Her Broadway credits included *As Thousands Cheer*, *At Home Abroad*, *Cabin in the Sky* and the Carson McCullers play, *The Member of the Wedding*. She was in the film versions of both *Cabin in the Sky* and *The*

Member of the Wedding. She was Academy Award nominated for her work in the 1949 film "Pinky."

Performances continue to Dec. 3. For more information, call (941) 366-9000 or visit [www.fst2000.org](http://www.fst2000.org).