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## **Reunion: A Musical Epic in Miniature**

**by Nancy Nichols Jagelka**  
**Pentagram staff writer**

Civil War actor Harry Hawk had the distinction of being onstage the night President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., April 14, 1865.

"Reunion, A Musical Epic in Miniature" takes place 25 years after the event as Hawk and his vaudeville troupe are performing throughout America.

"Reunion" is now playing at Ford's Theater, which sets the stage for a dramatic rendition of the events of the Civil War and post-war years. A play within a play, "Reunion" returns to the scene of the crime, so to speak, and pays tribute to Lincoln and the union of the states he fostered. In this ironic setting, today's audience is the audience of the Civil War yesteryear, reliving the legacy of Lincoln and the Civil War.

Written by local playwright Jack Kyrieleison of Kensington, Md., "Reunion" is a grand production featuring local talent on a national level. The production stars James Judy as Harry Hawk; Harriet D. Foy a Howard University graduate, as Mrs. Cassie Dumwright; Ric Ryder, a Baltimore/Washington native, as Mr. Tom Trudgett; James Stovall, also a Baltimore native, as Cassie's husband, Hannibal, Joe Cassidy as Mr. Augustin Lovecraft; and Whitney Webster as Miss Cordelia Hopewell.

Judy, Lovecraft and Webster have played Broadway in New York. "Reunion's" director, Ron Holgate, is a Tony Award-winning actor currently on Broadway and co-writer of the story with Kyrieleison.

Despite the Civil War setting, the play has contemporary themes and raises issues pertinent to war in any era the cost of human suffering and the price of freedom in a democratic society.

"I'm good enough to fight for Washington's army," laments African-American Hannibal, "but I'm not good enough to fight for General McClellan."

"This is the dawn of that long day that knows no night," cries a Civil War nurse on the battlefield, as she watches a young soldier die. "I shall not be horrified by anything of mine hereafter."

The antics of Tom Trudgett, a Union soldier trying to find his way during the Civil War and in society, provide an icebreaker, offsetting these serious moments, as does a running commentary regarding Lincoln by the secretary, Augustin Lovecraft. Lovecraft's claim to fame with Lincoln is that his uncle practiced law next door to the future president.

In a remarkable feat of research, "Reunion" uses the words of Lincoln, Louisa May Alcott, McClellan, Frederick Douglass and letters, diaries, books and memoirs of other men and women who were part of the Civil War legacy.

The accompanying music is all traditional works of the Civil War era and a particularly poignant piece is "Beautiful Dreamer", words and music by Stephen Foster, sung by Cordelia to a dying Trudgett. The set is simple for moments such as this nothing to take away from the poignancy of the history and era.

We all know the ending to Lincoln's story and it's almost chilling to relive his final moments in the same theater as the actual occurrence. It is though, a match made in heaven, among other places.

As Harry Hawk explains in one of his various monologues, due to downsizing, each of the troupe members must take on additional roles. The additional work in no way impairs the quality of the play, in both real and vaudevillian life. The cast is so talented that their skills are highlighted, not diminished, by the extra work.

"Reunion" is a homecoming of sorts for the local cast, but references to New York's Broadway weren't far behind during a recent performance.

"She's as good as Broadway," said one audience member after a solo by Harriet D. Foy (Mrs. Drumright). "So is the musical," said another. "But it still belongs at Ford's Theater."

"Reunion" runs through June 18, at Ford's Theater, 511 Tenth St., N.W.

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