



The cast of "The Scottsboro Boys"

# Let's hear it for the 'Boys'

## The Scottsboro Boys



BY MATT WINDMAN  
amNewYork theater critic

"The Scottsboro Boys," a dangerously brilliant new musical by the legendary team of composer John Kander and lyricist Fred Ebb, recounts the true story of nine black young men who were falsely accused of raping two white women in 1930s Alabama.

Instead of presenting the musical as a straightforward narrative, it is ominously framed as a burlesque minstrel show. It is

similar in structure to other Kander & Ebb musicals, such as "Cabaret," which contrasts Hitler's rise to power with nightclub acts, and "Chicago," which presents a murder trial as a vaudeville show.

But unlike "Chicago," in "The Scottsboro Boys" the accused are innocent and Billy Flynn never comes to the rescue.

Except for John Cullum, who plays the minstrel ringleader,

the cast consists entirely of black performers. Colman Domingo and Forrest McClendon play several roles including prison guards, attorneys and even the two

white women who accuse the boys of rape.

The minstrel show concept is justified by the ironic notion that the only way these characters can share their story is through an inherently prejudiced form of entertainment. The legal system is being parodied as a cruel joke. Even the electric chair is turned into a tap number.

Contrasting the wisecracks, slapstick, ragtime music and cakewalk dance steps with the gravity of the plot is extremely chilling.

While the book hits awkward patches in its attempt to connect the trial with the civil rights movement, Susan Stroman's production is well-staged, her

## DID YOU KNOW?

• John Kander and Fred Ebb, who wrote "Cabaret" and "Chicago," were working on several musicals, including "The Scottsboro Boys" and "Curtains," when Ebb passed away in 2004.

• Colman Domingo received rave reviews for his one-man show "A Boy and His Soul" in the fall.

choreography is inventive, and the score is first-rate. Cullum displays incredible presence and Southern authenticity, and Brandon Victor Dixon stands out among the boys for his heartfelt performance.

Here's hoping "The Scottsboro Boys" receives the Broadway transfer it deserves.

## On stage

"The Scottsboro Boys" is running at the Vineyard Theatre through April 18. 108 E. 15th St., 212-353-0303, vineyardtheatre.org



Gregg Allman  
(GETTY)

## Thursday MUSIC

**Allman Brothers Band:** United Palace, 8 p.m., \$70. Through Saturday. This classic-rock band plays hit songs such as

"Whipping Post" during its traditional March shows in New York City. 4140 Broadway, at 175th St. (A to 175th St.), 212-568-6703

**The August Infinity:** Southern Hospitality, 8 p.m., FREE. This pop-rock

band boasts raw vocals and catchy electric melodies. 1460 Second Ave., btwn E. 76th and E. 77th sts. (6 to 77th st.), 212-249-1001

**W.A.S.P.:** Blender Theater at Gramercy, 7 p.m., \$28. This old-school '80s hair

metal band, with songs such as "Wild Child," still impresses fans with powerful guitar riffs. 127 E. 23rd St., btwn Park Ave. S. and Lexington Ave. (6 to 23rd St.), 212-777-6800

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