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A GREAT DAY IN HARLEM

Jasmine Guy brings

Renaissance to the Apollo

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

For actress Jasmine Guy, her new play "Raisin' Cane" — coming to the Apollo Theater for one day only, Sunday, Feb. 18 at 4 p.m. — fills in the blanks.

"Our history is so spotty," says the 42-year-old actress who danced with Alvin Ailey and then shot to fame on the "Cosby Show" spinoff sitcom "A Different World" in the late '80s and early '90s.

"It seems like we go from slavery to the '60s, from the Civil War to the revolution. This is one of my attempts to fill in the gaps. The Harlem Renaissance had such a rich historical and political history. To go from Harriet Tubman to Martin Luther King is fine, but there was an evolution."

"Raisin' Cane," which tours through mid-March, captures the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance by drawing on the words and poems and songs and speeches of people like Countee Cullen and Zora Neale Hurston, Father Divine and Claude McKay. Combined with photos and paintings of and by the artists, with a jazz score by Avery Sharpe (who performs live with his trio), the play by Harry Clarke strives to capture that vi-



ENTERING A DIFFERENT WORLD
Jasmine Guy stars in a play set in the 1920s. Photo by WENN

brant time between World War I and the Depression when Harlem was in full bloom.

Its bold, unconventional structure, as well as its title, is inspired in part by Jean Toomer's 1923 novel, "Cane."

"My mother is an English lit teacher and my father [a pastor] is also a professor," says Guy. "I ran it by her and she said, 'Oh, "Cane" — your father's favorite novel.' I said, 'It is?'"

"It almost changed the way we wrote, the way Marlon Brando changed the way we acted. Jean Toomer has a weird history because he wrote this novel and then went into obscurity —

and then, for years, he passed as white."

That sad fact is the sort of humanizing detail that can bring these historical figures to life, says the actress.

"It's very hard to just memorize facts," says Guy, who, in October, brings a film festival to the Caribbean that focuses on music-oriented features. "But when we see somebody as a mother, when we see somebody as a lover or we realize that secrets were kept, they become real to us. I want to picture the artists of the Harlem Renaissance all hanging out. I love that. These people were all friends." ♦