



*Fela!* at The Al Hirschfeld Theatre Marquee

**THEATER** with Second Night Reviewer Audrey J. Bernard

# *FELA!* is just as powerful the second time around

Two years ago, there was a big robbery on Broadway that was the best kept secret around town. That is 'til now! Back in 2010, the innovative play, *Fela!*, based on the life of Nigerian musician, composer and political activist **Fela Anikulapo Kuti** topped the 2010 Tony Awards nominations receiving 11 award nominations including Best Musical. *Fela!* won three 2010 Tony Awards for Best Choreography, Best Costume Design and Best Sound Design; but lost the crown jewel, Best Musical, to *Memphis*.

After seeing the play during its second reincarnation, I must unequivocally admit, *Fela!* was robbed. You don't have to take my word for it. Let your feet lead you to the pulsating Afrobeat music at **The Al Hirschfeld Theatre**, 302 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street, NYC where you will be thoroughly entertained.

Once again **Shawn 'JAYZ' Carter**, **Will & Jada Pinkett Smith**, **Ruth & Stephen Hendel**, **Ahmir 'Questlove' Thompson** and **The National Theatre of Great Britain** are on board for the return of the critically acclaimed, award-winning Broadway and National Theatre of Great Britain production of *Fela!*

The newest version opened on Thursday, July 12, 2012 for a limited run of 32 performances to August 4, 2012 to a star-studded Opening Night audience and received a thunderous standing ovation in which the play's director and choreographer **Bill T. Jones** joined **Sahr Ngaujah** on stage for a stunning curtain call and broke out in an Afrobeat dance to the delight of the crowd.

Exploring the extravagant world of Afrobeat legend Fela Kuti, this "provocative hybrid of dance, theatre, music, biography and a party like no other" is directed and choreographed by Tony Award-winner **Bill T. Jones**, with a book by **Jones**, **Jim Lewis** and **Stephen Hendel**, featuring lyrics by **Fela Anikulapo-Kuti**, with additional lyrics by **Lewis** and additional music by **AaRon Johnson** and **Jordan McLean**.

The world renowned **Antibalas** and other members of the NYC Afrobeat community are directed by **AaRon Johnson** and **Jordan McLean**. The musical is inspired by the authorized biography *Fela: This Bitch of a Life* by **Carlos Moore**.

**Olivier** and Tony Award-nominated actor **Sahr Ngaujah** leads the cast of *Fela!* He is joined by **Melanie Marshall** and **Paulette Ivory**, the two female stars of the Olivier-nominated National Theatre of Great Britain production. At certain performances, the title role will be played by **Adesola Osakalumi** and **Duan Martyn**.

The design team behind *Fela!* include Tony Award-winning costumes by **Marina Draghici**, Tony Award-winning sound design by **Robert Kaplowitz**, lighting design by **Robert Wierzel** and make-up & hair design by **Cookie Jordan**. Following the performance, guests beat it over to **B. Smith's** for a fabulous celebration. Like love, most guests loved this production even more – the second time around! (Photos by **Walter McBride / Rena Ltd.**)



*Fela!* Opening Night Curtain Call featuring Sahr Ngaujah, Paulette Ivory, Melanie Marshall & Company



Sahr Ngaujah and Bill T. Jones perform live onstage during Opening Night Curtain Call



Zoe Kravitz



Saycon Sengbloh



Miss Universe Leila Lopes



Liliash White



Amel Larrieux



J.L. Williams



Belinda Baidoo



Bill T. Jones



Zap Mama



Michael K. Williams



DJ Jazzy Jeff & wife Lynette Townes



The Roots' Questlove



Tonya Pinkins



Martha Plimpton