



PLAY LENS

BILLY STRAYHORN: Something to Live For

OVERVIEW: Featuring a stunning score, Billy Strayhorn: Something to Live For brings to life the remarkable true story of one of the greatest composers of all time. From his impoverished beginnings in Pittsburgh to his lifelong collaboration with Duke Ellington, this world-premiere new musical follows the highs and lows of Billy Strayhorn's career, the joys and heartbreak of his personal life, and the challenges he faced living as an openly gay Black man in mid-20th century America at the dawn of the civil rights movement. Through his collaborations with Lena Horne, Billie Holiday, and the greatest jazz orchestra of all time, Billy Strayhorn transcended racial and sexual barriers and brought a unique fusion of jazz and classical music to the world.

HISTORY & FIGURES

- Duke Ellington and professional partnerships
- Civil Rights Movement & Activism: NAACP, MLK, Duke's Presidential Medal of Freedom
- **MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS:**
 - "Something to Live For"
 - "Take the 'A' Train"
 - "Such Sweet Thunder"
 - "Blue Cloud"/"Blood Count"
- **Personal Relationships:**
 - Aaron Bridgers
 - Billie Holiday
 - Lena Horne

THEMES

- Mentorship and collaboration
- Identity and pride in an unjust society
- Racism and homophobia
- Alcoholism
- Triumph and genius
- Love, romantic and platonic
- Appearance vs. Reality
- Trust and betrayal

BRAINSTORM

- If you were famous, would you use your platform to uplift messages seeking change in society?
 - If so, what messages? If not, Why?
- What are some jazz songs or artists that you can name off the top of your head? What story does their persona and/or song tell?
 - Create your own Jazz persona: what's your instrument? Most famous song title?

SUPPLEMENTAL VIEWING

- Ever Up and Onward: A Tribute to Billy Strayhorn
- 22-year-old pianist leads musical direction for Billy Strayhorn: STLF
- Matthew Whitaker: About Tomorrow