

Oldies but goodies

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Leonard Raybon, center, plays the title role in *L'il Abner*, staged by Summer Lyric Theatre at Tulane in 2008. Raybon, chair of the Newcomb Department of Music, has acted in 15 Summer Lyric productions and served as conductor/musical director for many more. The Virginia Beer Professor in Singing and chair of the Newcomb Department of Music, Raybon is interim artistic director for this season. (Photo by Michael Palumbo)

[Summer Lyric Theatre](#) at Tulane University is staging three musical theater treasures about trickery, truthfulness and true love from the 1950s and '60s in its 48th season: *Damn Yankees*, *Once Upon a Mattress* and *Hello, Dolly!*

"For me, it's all about the songs," says C. Leonard Raybon, interim artistic director for this season of Summer Lyric Theatre, after the retirement of [B. Michael Howard](#) from the company's helm.

[Raybon](#) has served in many roles with Summer Lyric Theatre, beginning as an actor in 1996. He is well known in the community as musical director/conductor for many of the Summer Lyric Theatre productions.

The season opens with *Damn Yankees* from June 18-21, followed by *Once Upon a Mattress* July 9-12 and concluding with *Hello, Dolly!* July 30-Aug. 2. *Once Upon a Mattress* will be directed by local comic icon Ricky Graham, while Diane Lala will direct the other two shows.

"*Damn Yankees* is near and dear to my heart," says Raybon, who played the lead role of Young Joe Hardy when Summer Lyric Theatre last staged the show in 1999.

"I became a fan of musical theater, particularly the golden age, when songs were songs and had real meaning."

Set in the 1950s, when the New York Yankees dominated Major League Baseball, it was contemporary when it first opened on Broadway in 1955. Now, the musical comedy is a classic. Big musical numbers include "You Gotta Have Heart" and "Those Were the Good Old Days."

Raybon says the themes of these oldies but goodies continue to resonate with audiences.

"Through the magic of musical theater, it all comes out in the end," Raybon says of *Damn Yankees*. "All these shows have universal truths in them. They're universal, redemptive."

Call the box office at 504-865-5269 Monday through Friday from noon until 5 p.m. to purchase tickets.

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