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National Museum of African American History and Culture

Playbill for Ma Rainey's Black Bottom on Broadway

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PLAY BALL

[[image - color photograph of a baseball player wearing black helmet, white uniform with black stripes, white and black gloves. Player is holding silver and black bat above his head with his right hand just after hitting a ball - credited: MARK DOUET]]

Playwright Richard Greenberg has fashioned his late-blooming love of the great American pastime into riveting theatre with *Take Me Out*

by Jerry Tallmer

Richard Greenberg, a nice, sensitive, rotund sort who wouldn't swat a fly - and couldn't swat a fly, even if you lobbed the ball up to him at 10 mph - has been unkind to a woman named Janet Kain. How? Well, at the age of 38 or so, he discovered baseball. Discovered it? He plunged into it.

"Janet Kain is my sister-in-law, my brother Edward's wife. I've known her since I was 11," says playwright Greenberg. "The males in my family" - a Long Island family - "are fanatical baseball fans, and have been all their lives. I was the one guy who was interested in other things, and the only one Janet could talk to in baseball season. So when I came over and joined the club, she was the only person in the family who was not happy."

It was during the 1998 World Series, when the New York Yankees were sweeping the San Diego Padres in four straight, that Greenberg joined the club. "One day I happened to turn on the television, and it was the World Series, and it was" - he searches for the exact word - "riveting. I couldn't understand what it was I didn't like about baseball, hadn't liked about it."

That was then, this is now. Greenberg's always precise and fresh-peeled use of words, spliced to what for him is a whole new language - the living, breathing vernacular of baseball, heightened here and

[[caption]] Above: Daniel Sunjata in a scene from *Take Me Out* [[/caption]]

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again by Greenberg with words one might not normally expect from baseball players (synthesize, extrapolate, congeries, paradigm, austere) - is one of the lovely strengths of *Take Me Out*, the baseball drama that after batting .407 in (yes!) London, England, and then Off-Broadway's Joseph Papp Public Theater, has now reached the big leagues, the playoffs, at the Walter Kerr on West 48th Street.

"Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America," critic and teacher Jacques Barzun wrote nearly 50 years ago, "had better learn baseball, the rules and realities of the game."



Whether Mason Marzac has ever read Barzun is not known, any more than we may know if Jacques Barzun could ever have imagined a great baseball player (let's say New York Empires all-star center fielder Darren Lemming) who's also an out-of-the-closet homosexual, but here, in Take Me Out, is Mason Marzac - a discreetly gay, sensitive resident of New York's Chelsea district - talking to us about what has brought him, Mason, "with no little excitement,"

[[image - color photograph of man wearing glasses, purple shirt with blue stripes, with left hand on his right shoulder. In top right corner of image are the words "Richard Greenberg"]]
[[photograph credit]] CHRISTINE COTTER

to realize that "the perfect metaphor for hope in a Democratic society" is baseball:

First, it's the remarkable symmetry of everything. All these threes and multiples of threes [three strikes, nine innings, nine players, etc.], calling attention to...the game's noble equality... Everyone is given exactly the same chance...

There's none of that scurry [of other sports]... In baseball there's no clock... Another thing

[[advertisement]]

[[image - black & white photograph of a woman wearing a feather mask]]

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