

# Julius Monk presents PIECES-OF-EIGHT

37 West 56th Street.

An address that in-the-know sophisticated New Yorkers knew very well in the mid-1950s – the resplendent reconverted townhouse of one John Wanamaker that served as the home to a delectably delicious series of cabaret entertainments presented at the Upstairs at the Downstairs by Julius Monk.

Julius Withers Monk was born in 1912 in North Carolina. He began his career as a pianist in nightclubs in New York and Europe. Then in 1941, the tall, lean, elegantly mustached Monk managed Le Ruban Bleu, a supper club in Manhattan. He was there until he went to San Francisco in 1956 to become master of ceremonies at the club the hungry i.

But New York beckoned almost immediately and back he went to become the new manager of the Downstairs Room on Sixth Avenue, which had formerly been called the Purple Onion. He opened his first revue there in 1956. *Four Below* was the title and it was a smash. After its successful run, *Four Below* was followed by *Son of Four Below* and *Take Five*.

Then came the move to 56th Street and the Upstairs at the Downstairs. That room opened with *Demi-Dozen* (1958), followed by *Four Below Strikes Back* (1959), and the revue whose cast recording you now hold in your hands, *Pieces of Eight* (also 1959).

Tim Taylor of *Cue* magazine, who did the liner notes for the cast album, wrote, “The epitome of iconoclastic intimacy in two acts, with time out in between for refreshment and intellectual disagreement, *Pieces of Eight* is all that a revue should be... It is topical, satirical and, wonder of wonders, original. This delightful spoof, subtitled ‘A Piratic Parodic’ by its inventor, opened officially on September 24, 1959.” The show, like its predecessors, was a hit and played two shows a night (except Sundays).

Many up-and-comers either performed or wrote for the Monk revues, including Michael Brown, Ceil Cabot, Tammy Grimes, Rex Robbins, Gordon Connell, Jane Connell, Ronny Graham, Nancy Dussault, Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt, Mary Louise Wilson, William Roy, George Furth and many others.

Due to some friction between Monk and the owner of Upstairs at the

Downstairs, Monk left and in 1962 opened a new room at the Plaza Hotel, the Rendezvous Room (aka Plaza 9). There he continued on with his series of entertainments, *Dime A Dozen* (1962), *Baker’s Dozen* (1964), and *Bits & Pieces XIV* (1964). His final revue at the Plaza was *Four in Hand*, which closed in June 1968, after which Monk retired.

The entertainments were topical, satirical, tuneful, sophisticated, and filled with some wonderful numbers. As the 1960s were heading toward their end this kind of satirical, sophisticated and tuneful entertainment was disappearing. It would have a comeback of sorts in the 1980s with various revues in New York and elsewhere, including the long-running series, *Forbidden Broadway*. But Monk’s shows were completely unique, and he was at the forefront of it all. His shows were very special and beloved by all who were lucky enough to see them. Their popularity happily produced many cast recordings of his shows so their legacy lives on and we’re pleased to give *Pieces of Eight* its first CD release, and there will be others to follow.