

## [Scottsdale](#)

### 'Ragtime' gets a new twist at Scottsdale Desert Stages

by **Tyler Lockman** - Oct. 14, 2009 11:25 AM  
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Since its 1998 Broadway debut, Tony Award-winning musical "Ragtime" has been seen by millions worldwide.

The musical gets a new twist in [Scottsdale](#) Desert Stages' "theater in the round" setting. A rectangular stage with rotating sets is surrounded by seating on all four sides, creating entrances and exits in all corners of the [theater](#).

"The simple fact that we are doing it in this venue changes it so dramatically that it can't be anything but new and fresh," said [director](#) Terry Helland. "The challenge is to include 360 degrees of people."

Based on E.L. Doctorow's 1975 novel of the same name, "Ragtime" tells the stories of three families and their oddly intertwined lives at the turn-of-the-century.

After an upper-class housewife takes in a struggling young mother and her newborn baby, the infant's father, [Harlem](#) musician Coalhouse Walker Jr., fights to win her back and survive in a changing world. Also chronicled is the struggle of a Jewish immigrant and his daughter to find a place in a strange new land. The three paths are all connected by dreams of a brighter future.

Filled with themes of hope and love in the face of social injustice and economic hardship, "Ragtime" has remained relevant.

"We've all been in situations where we've felt the whole world was against us," said Miguel Jackson, who plays Coalhouse.

Handling difficult matters such as racism and hate, "Ragtime" forces audiences to evaluate themselves and the world they live in.

"It deals with the human condition," said Elizabeth Reeves, who plays the part of Mother. "It deals with, unfortunately, things that will probably never go away."

Helland said that with the 360-degree format, the fast-paced action and quick scene transitions made the production particularly challenging. Helland said it's the hardest show he has ever directed.

"I strive to bring a level of energy from beginning to end that suspends the show in an unwavering state of believability," he said.

With a [Broadway](#) revival of "Ragtime" opening in mid-November, Desert Stages' production will be one of the last regional productions of the show for a few years. While a show is on Broadway, it cannot be produced nationally.