

## Carol Woods to Reprise Role in National Theatre's 'Chicago'

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Actress Carol Woods will take on the role of Mama Morton in "Chicago: The Musical" at the National Theatre later this month. **Courtesy Photo.**

Reprising her role as Mama Morton in "Chicago: The Musical," actress Carol Woods will again take on the role as the reigning cell block matron of the Cook County Jail when the production comes to the National Theatre, March 31 to April 12.

But ask the New York native if she is anything like the character that she has played off and on since 1997, Woods, 65, will laughingly say no.

"Mama Morton is a taker, and I am, a giver. She gives to get something, and I give unconditionally," Woods said.

Interviewed while backstage at the Ambassador Theater in New York, Woods was literally living up to her words as she provided lunch for her fellow cast members in the Tony Award-winning musical, having cooked up a sumptuous New Orleans-style meal.

"I cooked some pork shoulder, some rice and beans, and some spicy sausage," said Woods, pausing to direct a cast member to a bowl of gravy. "I decided to treat today."

The stage veteran said she is delighted to be returning to the National Theatre again to play the role.

"I was in the production at the National some years ago that starred singer and dancer Jasmine Guy," she said.

A gospel singer for years, Woods grew up singing in her grandfather's church in Queens and turned to theater in her 20s when she auditioned for "Young, Gifted and Broke" at the Billie Holliday Theatre in New York. Woods easily snared a role, and the rest is history.

Woods has carved out a niche for herself in the smash hit that is the second longest running production on Broadway, and which won six 1997 Tony Awards, including Best Musical Revival.

Still, she takes time to pursue other projects, including recently recording a CD, "America," written by Grammy-Award winner Julie Gold that was inspired by President Barack Obama.

"It's very uplifting, with very inspiring lyrics and a great melody," Woods said. "I wanted to sing it for the Obamas during the Inauguration, but it didn't happen. Still, I was able to get 400 copies into a gift bag at one of the Inaugural balls."

Regarding the president, Woods said, "[Having a president of color] was something that was long overdue. It is such a breath of fresh air, and I finally feel that I belong."

For young people seeking an acting or stage career, Woods pointed to Obama, Oprah Winfrey and Tyler Perry as role models.

"Tune into them. You can't sit back and expect people to give it to you. If you want to be a singer, tune into [M.C.] Hammer who sold CDs out of the back of his car. He was hustling. He wasn't selling drugs or bootleg liquor."

The musical "Chicago" is set amidst the razzle dazzle decadence of the 1920s, and murder, corruption and greed abound.

"Chicago" stars John Hurley as Billy Flynn, Charlotte d'Amboise as Roxie Hart, Terra C. MacLeod as Velma Kelly and Kevin Chamberlin as Amos Hart.