

Thursday March 27, 2008

NEWS
SPORTS
ENTERTAINMENT
MULTIMEDIA
LIFESTYLES
ABOUT US
SUBSCRIBE

SPECIAL SECTIONS



Sun Publishing E-Papers

Your world is just a click away!

Westerly Sun

FREE PUBLICATIONS

Mystic River Press
 Charlestown Press
 Wood River Press
 Westerly - Pawcatuck Press
 The Guide
 Places



Search Go



marketplace
[mysunclassifieds](#)
[mysunautos](#)
[mysunyellowpages](#)
[Restaurant Guide](#)
[RI jobs](#)
[CT jobs](#)
[Places real estate](#)

The Guide

Thursday, March 13, 2008 12:11 PM EDT

Life should be more like "Hairspray," opening at the Garde

By Marshall Williams

[Email this story](#) | [Print this story](#)

If life were everything it could be, it would be more like "Hairspray," said the critics when this cheerfully demented musical opened six years ago in New York and London. Based on the cheerfully demented film by the cheerfully demented John Waters, "Hairspray" finds moral strength among cross-dressing parents and image-conscious fat teenagers who somehow know how to do the right thing when hefty push comes to triple-step shove.



Brooklyn Pulver stars as Tracy Turnblad.

"Hairspray" is set in a decidedly different Oz, the Baltimore, Md., of the 1960s — that's "Bawlmer, Merlun" to anyone who's never been to the southern side of the Mason Dixon line. Local TV stations host on-the-air teen dances with nerdy white kids dancing to jazzy black music, and city matrons are just breaking out of their scrubbed white-marble-stoooped rowhouses.

Tracy Turnblad is a plump and happy teenager who's ready to rock her world with an appearance on the Corny Collins Show, Baltimore's down-home version of American Bandstand. All is well until Tracy decides to beat another drum as well — by bringing some jivin' black friends — led by the queen of the hip-hop predecessors, Motormouth Maybelle — on the show and integrating this white-glove city like it hasn't been integrated before.

Showing some real curves and some high hair is one thing, but acting like a cute young Freedom Rider is something else. The confounded TV host Corny Collins, Tracy's strait-laced parents Edna and Wilbur Turnblad, and the rest of Baltimore's old-fashioned adults are thrown for a pastel-colored candy fruit loop.

As Corny Collins might say, "You can't do that on television!"

But Tracy has the spunk to survive, and once she's landed on the show she can boast that "I'm a Big Girl Now," and like her new friend Motormouth Maybelle, testify that "I Know Where I've Been." Exuberance wins the day, and Tracy even wins the heart of the luscious young TV star Link Larkin.

"It is just a really fun show," says actress Sharon Malane, who's playing Tracy's good friend Penny Pingleton in the touring production coming to the Garde Arts Center in New London. "We always get people on their feet, laughing, clapping, and having fun, by the finale of the show, 'You Can't Stop the Beat.'"

"It's just a happy show about teenagers growing up, wanting to be on their own," Malane adds. "I get to sing this wonderful number, 'Without Love,' a quartet about the great things love brings you."

Malane is a Connecticut native who grew up in New Canaan, and graduated three years ago from the Boston Conservatory. "This is my first national tour," she says. "I spent about a year in New York and started this tour in October 2006. At first I was playing Tammy, the 'nice girl' on the Corny Collins Show, and understudying some of the other roles. In January, I started this new role, and I love it."

Speaking last week from the Midwest, Malane described the arduous but exciting "life on the road." "We're doing what we call 'one-nighters' right now, where we perform each night in a different town. In the past three days we've been in Colorado, Texas, and now Oklahoma. This week we have to make our way through Pennsylvania to get to Connecticut."

Last year, Malane says, the company performed at the Providence Performing Arts Center, to rave reviews. But her favorite visit so far has been to another country.

"Last year we went to Japan," Malane says with obvious enthusiasm. "They really loved it there. The people there



are, you know, sort of reserved, sort of timid maybe, and we weren't sure what to expect. But we had the opportunity to teach them the Tracy dance during intermission, and they came right up on stage and danced with us. They just loved it. They came right out of themselves. The presenters there said that they'd never seen a reaction like that, to any other show they'd ever seen."

This summer, the troupe goes overseas once again, to Shanghai, China. "I'm hoping we might get the same reaction," Malane says. "That may be a sort of finale for us. After Shanghai I'll have to see what comes next for me. But for right now, as we like to say in the show, 'Spray the love!'"

"Hairspray" at the Garde will also star a young actress with the apt but unlikely name of Brooklynn Pulver as Tracy Turnblad, and "she gives the show great energy and projects a vulnerability that gives the show its depth," according to critic Bruce Fessier of the Desert Sun.

"This show features some fun and skillful dancing, but what's most impressive is the way it makes you appreciate the songwriting of Marc Shaiman. Shaiman brilliantly captures the feel of a half-dozen musical genres from the early '60s."

Chicago comic Jerry O'Boyle co-stars as Tracy's dynamic but eccentric mother, Edna Turnblad. That's the role made famous in the original film by Baltimore drag queen Divine, and on Broadway by Harvey Fierstein. More recently, John Travolta played Edna in the film version of the musical. ("Hairspray" has had an evolution similar to another popular Broadway musical, "The Producers," with an original film followed by a musical, followed by a musical remake of the movie.)

"Hairspray" is an odd cap to the career of Baltimore bad boy John Waters, who got his start in the 60s with "Mondo Trasho" and other primitively made movies that set out to break records in bad taste and revolting humor. But while Waters always claims that his films have no social value, they all carry a message of tolerance and empathy for the outcasts of society and people on the margins.

After a string of independent, low-budget films ending with the scatological masterpiece "Pink Flamingos," Waters went more Hollywood mainstream with "Polyester," "Serial Mom" (starring Kathleen Turner and Sam Waterston), and especially "Hairspray."

Waters is happy to appeal to both the young and the young at heart. "When I go to signings for DVDs of my movies, the audience has always been young," he says. "Now, when I have old people coming up to me and saying, 'Oh, I love your movies,' I tell them, 'Uh, you loved "Hairspray," but I don't think you'd love "Female Trouble."' I think there is an audience that only knows me through 'Hairspray,' and then they go and find my other movies, and then they call the police."

"Hairspray" will be staged at 8 p.m. Saturday, March 15, and 2 and 7 p.m. Sunday, March 16, at the Garde Arts Center, 325 State St., New London. Tickets are \$47 to \$66. Go to the web site www.gardearts.org or call (860) 444-7373.

For more entertainment news, click here for The Guide e-paper



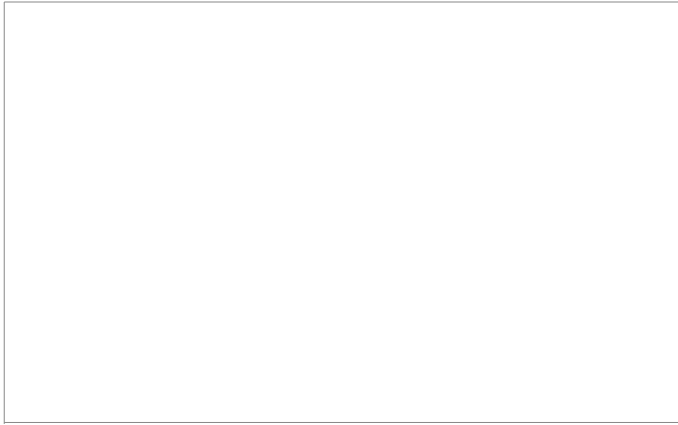
Share your thoughts....

TalkBack is an opportunity for viewers to exchange comments regarding online content. Comments are moderated. Please allow time for posting. Comments are not edited. They are either approved or they are not. Comments should be void of personal attacks, foul language, advertisements, impersonations, etc. Please limit your comments to 200 words or less.

Name:

Email: (optional)

Comments:



Current Word Count:



Image Verification:

Copyright © 2007 The Westerly Sun
For help with our website: Webmaster@thewesterlysun.com