

## **Sister Act @ The Muny**

Music by Alan Menken

Lyrics by Glenn Slater

Book by Cheri and Bill Steinkellner

Additional Material by Douglas Carter Beane

Based on the Touchstone Pictures film

Ran August 14 - 20, 2023 @ The Muny

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It's 1977 Philadelphia, and Deloris Van Cartier has aspirations to be the next great Disco Queen. Despite her boyfriend Curtis Jackson owning a nightclub, which is really a front for his underground crime ring, Curtis refuses to let her perform. Tired of always being told to shut up and sit down, Deloris runs up to Curtis and breaks up with him...just in time to see Curtis executing a gang member who turned out to be an informant. Curtis and the rest of his gang pursue Deloris to take her out as well, but she manages to outrun them. She goes to the police where she discovers that one of the officers was one of her friends from Catholic school, "Sweaty Eddie" Souther. After hearing out Deloris, Eddie puts her in witness protection, hiding her in a struggling convent and disguising her as a nun. Of course, Deloris hates the idea because she has to leave behind the earthly pleasures that define her. Even the Mother Superior is disgusted that she has to shelter such a freewheeling woman within her walls, given how much financial trouble the convent is in. Realizing her background as a singer, the Mother Superior assigns Deloris to be the director of the convent's choir to give her something to do. The choir is, to put it in the nicest of ways, godawful. So, over time, Deloris teaches the nuns to "Raise Your Voice" and gain confidence in their singing abilities. Soon enough, the soulfulness of their performances bring more people to the convent, gaining notoriety for the extravagance of their shows. Now, we have a dilemma: Deloris has to choose between staying with the choir and achieving her dreams of fame and fortune, or keeping herself out of the spotlight so Curtis doesn't find and kill her.

*Sister Act* has to be one of the most fun musical comedies to come out of the 2000s. I do have to be honest, though, and say that the writing is not that great. The story is formulaic, the dialogue is kind of cheesy, and the lyrics are not really all that inspired. If you were to just read the script on its own, you probably wouldn't laugh all that much, which is kind of weird given the potential of this concept. However, what sells *Sister Act* for me is the characters, the pacing, and the music, all of which are done excellently in the Muny's production.

The characters all have distinct personalities that allow the actors to really test their comedy chops, and everyone does a fantastic job. The Muny Players are Bryonha Marie as Deloris; Mamie Parris as the Mother Superior; James T. Lane as Eddie; Alan H. Green as Curtis; Thom Sesma as the laid-back Monsignor O'Hara; Meredith Aleigha Wells as the shy postulant Sister Mary Robert; Madeleine Doherty as the sarcastic Sister Mary Lazarus; Katy Geraghty as the

overly happy Sister Mary Patrick; not to mention the great comedic turns from Curtis's gang – Rob Colletti as Joey, Brandon Espinoza as Pablo, and Darron Hayes as TJ.

The staging and choreography by director Denis Jones is snappy and energized, never slowing down for a second. Musical director Michael Horsley and the Muny Orchestra bring Alan Menken's toe-tapping disco score to fabulous life. The set by Edward E. Haynes, Jr., the video design by Kevan Loney, and the lights by Shelby Loera cleverly delineate between the bright, colorful world of the city and the strict, orderly world of the convent. The costumes by Leon Dobkowski and the hair design by Kelley Jordan are special highlights, with hilarious evocations of the late 1970s, including the first time I've ever seen an actor wearing two tear-away suits on stage.

*Sister Act* is a fun, heartfelt, and incredibly tuneful musical that I wouldn't mind seeing again. This show really is a testament to the caliber of talent the Muny works with to make their productions as good as they can. The Muny's 105th year in Forest Park has been hailed as their best ever in terms of consistency of quality throughout every show. Personally, my perspective is that this Muny season is a representation of everything that makes musical theatre one of the highest forms of art: the thoughtfulness of *Beautiful*, the extravagance of *Beauty and the Beast*, the thrilling experimentation of *Chess*, the dramatic intensity of *West Side Story*, the creativity and imagination of *Little Shop of Horrors*, the risk of producing material as challenging as *Rent*, and finally the energy and heart of *Sister Act*. The Muny's 105th Season has been an absolute banger, a lineup that makes me proud to be a part of the St. Louis theatre community. I eagerly await the announcement of the Muny's 106th!