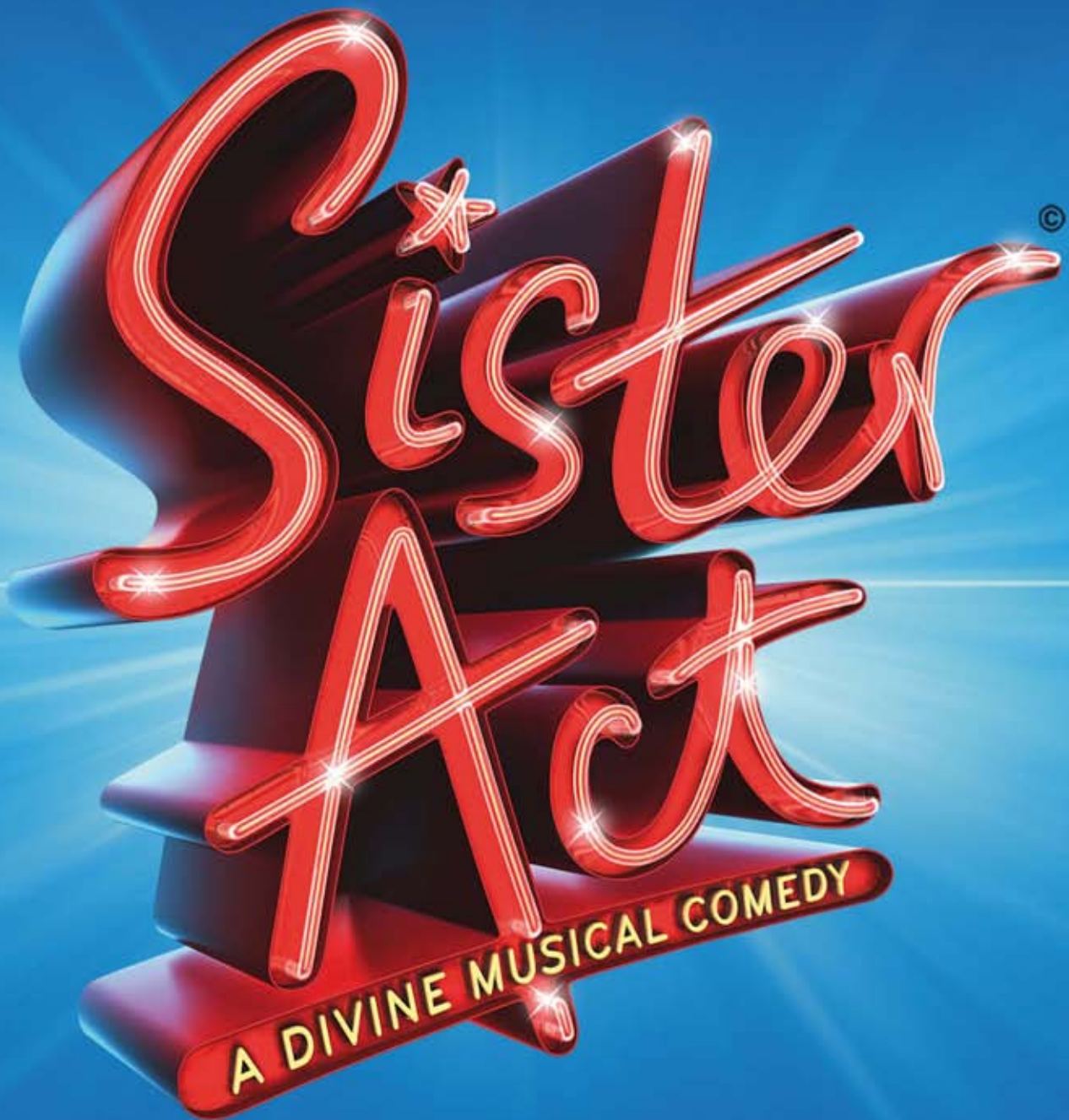


**WHOOPI GOLDBERG & STAGE ENTERTAINMENT
PRESENT**



**Sister
Act** ©

A DIVINE MUSICAL COMEDY

**EDUCATION
RESOURCE PACK**

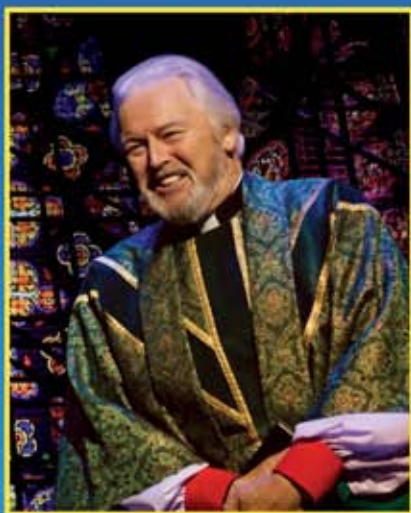
Written by **Helen Cadbury**
For **Mousetrap Theatre Projects**

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Sister Act Education Resource Pack where you'll find unique behind the scenes material and invaluable resources to help you get the best out of your visit to the show. Find out more about the performing arts business and about how this amazing production came together. Follow up your visit with classroom activities, discussions and worksheets. Before you come to the

show, you may wish to use some of the resources pages as preparation. We also suggest you ask your students to come up with a **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR A GOOD AUDIENCE**.

Ask them to think about turning off their mobile phones, eating, talking and what sort of responses are helpful or unhelpful to the performers. It may help them to remember that the performers can hear them too!



"Sister Act is a wonderful story and it really is a very moral show: it's about redemption and it's about change. Everybody changes somewhere. It's about compromise and compromise is about living with people and learning about how you've changed."

Ian Lavender, played Monsignor O'Hara in the original London Production

Photography by Catherine Ashmore, except where indicated.

Disclaimer: any websites, books or publications indicated in this pack are not specifically endorsed by Stage Entertainment or their employees, but are included simply as a guide for further research or study.

This pack was produced as an education resource for schools visiting the Original London Production of Sister Act The Musical. Any reference to cast, creative team and sets are from London, and may not necessarily be identical on the UK Tour, however the story, context and background remain the same.



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SYNOPSIS

Deloris Van Cartier is a night club singer in South Philadelphia struggling to get her big break. On the day she decides to walk away she comes across her boyfriend, Curtis, murdering one of his associates. Now she is a witness to Curtis' crime and next on his list. As part of the witness protection scheme, Sgt Eddie Souther places her in a convent until they bring Curtis to trial. Neither Deloris or the convent's Mother Superior are pleased with this arrangement and the stage is set for a battle of wills between these two strong women. As Deloris struggles with convent rules, Curtis and his sidekicks are still plotting to do away with her. She is feeling trapped inside the convent walls and sneaks out to a bar followed by three sisters, who mistake her bid for freedom for a community outreach project. When Shank's heavies turn up, the bikers in the bar protect the nuns.

Mother Superior enlists Deloris in the choir, which soon flourishes, leading to renewed interest from the community. News spreads and the local newspaper covers the story, putting Mary Clarence on the front page. The success of the choir has raised funds for the Queen of Angels Church, the whole community is pulling together like never before, and the nuns are even invited to perform for the Pope. As they prepare for their performance, the goons come looking for Deloris. She decides to make a run for it, although she knows the nuns will be devastated not to have her with them. Eddie lets her stay at his place but she soon comes to the decision that her new sisters need her. The goons follow her in to the convent and a chase ensues. Curtis threatens Deloris at gun point but the nuns and Mother Superior step in to protect her before Eddie appears and saves the day. Deloris has learned what it is to be part of a great team.



FROM SCREEN TO STAGE

Sister Act started life as a movie in 1992. Written by **Joseph Howard** and directed by Emile Ardolino, It starred **Whoopi Goldberg** as Deloris Van Cartier and **Maggie Smith** (the veteran British actress who played Minerva McGonagall in the Harry Potter films) as the Mother Superior. It was nominated for two Golden Globes and won **Whoopi Goldberg** an American Comedy Award for Funniest Actress in a Motion Picture

The musical arrangements in the movie were by **Marc Shaiman** and drew from the Motown sound of stars such as **Smokey Robinson** and **The Isley Brothers**.

The film became a massive box office success. Making \$12,000,000 on the first weekend, it finally grossed \$139,605,150 in the USA and \$192,000,000 worldwide. Sales of the video and then the DVD (released in 2001) ensured the longevity of the movie, which continues to entertain audiences around the world.

An initial production of *Sister Act* as a stage musical was performed in the USA in 2006. A new score was

commissioned from Academy Award-winning composer, Alan Menken before *Sister Act* opened in the West End of London in May 2009, it followed in a long line of films which have become stage musicals, a testament to people's love of the live theatre experience.

"People are looking for interesting stuff. Expectations have changed. They want extravaganzas."

Whoopi Goldberg

The show was re-worked for Broadway and is now rolling out worldwide. When asked what to expect from the musical, Whoopi Goldberg makes it clear that a stage musical should never try to re-create a film: 'You can't recreate me. I'm the only one! If you want to see the movie, you have the DVD, if you want to come and be entertained, come and see the show.'



Susan Hanover

Activity (written or discussion)

Watch the movie on DVD either before or after you see the stage show. What are the key differences?

- Music
- Casting
- Story-line
- Set and costume design

Why do you think these different artistic decisions were made?

What are the challenges for a creative team bringing a well known story from the screen to the stage?

FROM SCREEN TO STAGE



Name: Whoopi Goldberg

Job title: Producer

Career: Whoopi Goldberg grew up in a poor area of New York, raised by a single mother. She suffered from dyslexia and dropped out of school. Taking many different jobs and working in several US cities, she worked hard to establish a career in show-business. In San Francisco, she won a Bay Area Theatre Award for a one-woman show and then went on to perform as a comic and actress in New York before being noticed by the film industry. She was cast in the lead role in *The Color Purple* (1985), adapted from the novel by Alice Walker, then went on to star in several films including *Ghost* (1990), with Patrick Swayze, which won her an Oscar. In 1992 she starred as Deloris Van Cartier in *Sister Act* and then in 1993, she appeared in *Sister Act Two: Back in the Habit*. As well as numerous films, Whoopi has been a talk show host, appeared in an award winning TV game show and received accolades as a stage actress. Nine years ago she announced she would not act in any more films and has turned her enormous talents to a range of projects, including producing *Sister Act The Musical*.



Name: Alan Menken

Job title: Composer

Career: Alan was born in Manhattan to a family of dentists and assumed that he would follow in their footsteps. He had piano lessons as a child, but hated practising. When no-one was listening, he'd stop playing what he was supposed to be learning, and make up his own tunes. That was how he began composing. He went on to take a degree in music at New York University and began working in theatre. He supported himself by writing jingles and accompanying ballet. He began to see how he could compose for musical theatre:

'I realised that I really liked the challenge of writing for characters, adapting stories, being able to write an entire song score. I discovered I had a gift for writing accessible theatrical material that also had some kind of contemporary thing to it.'

He went on to create the hit musical, *Little Shop of Horrors* and has composed many hit film scores including several which have made the transition from film to musical theatre, including: *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* and *The Little Mermaid*.

WHO'S WHO WORKSHEET



Research Activity: How can you find out more about who does what behind the scenes? When you come to the theatre, buy a programme or before your visit, look on the Sister Act website and then search the web for other interesting facts...

Here's one to start you off...

Name: Anthony Van Laast MBE

Job title: Choreographer

Career: _____

WHO'S WHO WORKSHEET



Now choose someone else who is essential to the production...

Name: _____

Job title: _____

Career: _____



BACKSTAGE PASS

Backstage at rehearsals for the Original London Production, it feels as if the whole building has become a *Sister Act* production factory. The floor in the large rehearsal room has been rebuilt especially to accommodate two revolves, so the stage will function exactly as it will in the theatre. The floor is taped out in different colours to show the positions for furniture and scenery.

In a smaller room members of the cast are running through the last song of the show *Spread the Love Around*. The sound is fantastic and the ability of the actors to experiment with different styles is truly wonderful.

It is week three of rehearsal. Alan Menken, the composer, has spent the morning with the cast and musical director Nick Skillbeck, making sure the songs are coming across the way he envisaged them, and the men have a new challenge, to put some falsetto into the harmonies. Much laughter follows when the guys give it the Bee-Gees treatment, but they finally settle for a tone they agree is 'light' rather than full falsetto. 'Somewhere between Barry Gibb and a hairy biker' quips the pianist.



BACKSTAGE PASS

Meanwhile, in the production office, Joe Chadwick, assistant to the music department, types in any musical changes to scenes. He then uploads these to a programme called iDisk, so that the whole company can access the latest version of the score. Joe trained as a classical trumpeter at the Royal Academy of Music and never imagined he would be working in musical theatre, but he loves his job. It certainly needs someone with his excellent musical skills. In the main rehearsal room, the stage is set with long wooden tables and populated by the seventeen women of all ages, shapes and sizes who are playing the nuns. Patina Miller, playing Deloris, is testing out her fabulous purple platform boots. Musical director, Nick Skilbeck is on the piano, and choreographer, Anthony Van Laast, is rehearsing with the nuns.

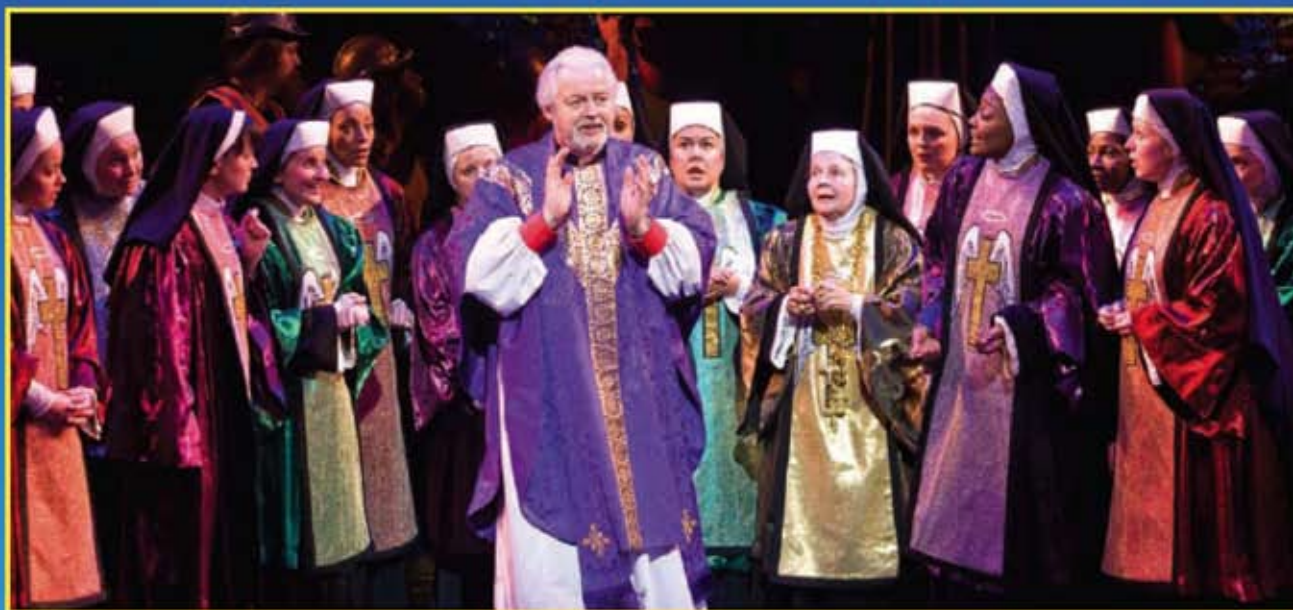
With a large cast, it is essential to get the logistics of Deloris' entrance exactly right. The director tries out different configurations, to get the best effect. Sheila Hancock, playing the Mother Superior, suggests that she keep singing and cut the note as soon as she spots Deloris. The nuns are all working on their own reactions to the newcomer, and are encouraged to develop individual responses: 'the most important thing is that you make choices.'



BACKSTAGE PASS

M eet **Ian Lavender**, played Monsignor O'Hara in the Original London Production.

Ian grew up in Birmingham and was the star of many school plays at Bourneville Technical College, before joining Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. He was soon cast as Private Pike in the famous TV comedy, *Dad's Army*, which ran for ten series. Since then he has had a varied career in theatre, radio and television, including playing the role of Derek Harkinson for three years in *EastEnders*.



What do you enjoy about being in the cast of *Sister Act*?

It's great fun to do, but I'm glad the Monsignor is not an exhausting part. I just don't know how these young people keep going through a rehearsal day, let alone through a long run of the show. Even though I used to play rugby, cricket and do athletics, I'm exhausted by the warm up! It's quite nice playing a man at the heart of an all female community, in fact I wonder if the Monsignor doesn't leave the Church afterwards. He's surrounded by all these lovely ladies who dance and sing. It's glorious! At my time of life, as an actor, I want to do things I enjoy, and I'm enjoying this.

If a young person had never been to the theatre, would *Sister Act* be a good place to start?

Young people deserve the best, not necessarily anything lavish but good quality work. No cutting corners because it's "only for kids" – I hate that phrase, as soon as you start thinking like that, you're lost. There's a lot of different work on in London, excellent work in serious theatre but we also have wonderful musicals. I see nothing wrong in someone coming to a musical, the important thing is that it's live – it's the experience of seeing live theatre that matters, like seeing a live band or a live singer: you can't beat it.

BACKSTAGE PASS

The first things I went to as a kid were pantomimes and the wonderful variety shows at the Hippodrome in Birmingham. Whether it's the worthiest piece of theatre or the wackiest piece of musical comedy, we're talking about live entertainment. If young people come and see this show and it entuses them to go and see live performance, then I'll be happy. If you compare going to see a band in concert with seeing a video, what fourteen, fifteen-year-old wouldn't rather see the live experience? It's always better! It's live and it's special. That's what I want people to enjoy, whether it's straight plays, pantomime or the most light-hearted musical comedy, it's the live experience that counts.

What advice would you give to a young person who wanted to start out in the theatre?

Don't! Because it gets harder and harder, the places to work get fewer and fewer, so I would always say don't and therefore if you really want to, you won't take any notice of me, and you'll do it anyway and if you work hard and get lucky you might just make it. You can only do it if you are going to commit yourself to making a living from it. You can't do it half-heartedly, because that's what it is, it's a living. You can't play at it. If you are the person who can say, 'I don't care what anyone

else says, I'm going to do it,' then fair enough. I often say to parents, do not encourage your children to want to work in theatre, but if they are determined to go ahead and do it anyway, then you must support them every step of the way. There are so many performing arts courses in school and it's a fun thing to do and a legitimate thing to do, because you're getting so many other things out of it, but I don't think it necessarily follows that you should become a performer. If kids are being encouraged to go into an industry where the places don't exist for people to work, then this is a very unkind sort of encouragement. There are so many other ways for creative people to make a living.

Does *Sister Act* have a message?

Sister Act is a wonderful story and it really is a very moral show. It's about redemption and it's about change. Everybody changes somewhere. It's about compromise and compromise is about living with people and learning about how you've changed. It's not about giving up what you believe in, (it's not about giving up at all). It is about coming together and seeing how things work. I hope young people will go away singing the songs, remembering the dancing, the lights, the costumes and above all, the story.



If young people come and see this show and it entuses them to go and see live performance, then I'll be happy. That's what I want people to enjoy, whether it's straight plays, pantomime or the most light-hearted musical comedy, it's the live experience that counts.



BACKSTAGE PASS

M EET **MICHAEL WATSON** Swing and understudy for TJ in the Original London Production: 20 years old and one of the youngest members of the cast.



What does your role in *Sister Act* involve?

Being a swing involves learning all the male ensemble tracks. Whenever they're ill, I go on for them and keep the show running. If someone's off, I cover the role. One of the things about being a swing is you're always doing something different so it keeps the show interesting for you. Sometimes you even have to do two tracks in one scene because in a year's contract there are going to be times when there's more people off than the amount of swings you have. It's just part of the job.

How did you train?

I trained as a kid in an after school activity club, a youth theatre and a place called Tiffany Stage Academy. They then opened up as a college and I did a two year Musical Theatre course there.

Do you continue to train when you're working?

Yes, I go to Pineapple to do dance classes and I get

singing lessons with a teacher. It's good to keep everything going, because if you're doing the same thing every night, you can get used to it. Also, between jobs, you need to keep your training going so that you're ready for the next audition. It's all about being prepared and training as hard as possible really.

What would your ideal role be?

That's a really good question. I think the ideal role, that I'd love to play one day, would be Galileo in *We Will Rock You* or Marius in *Les Miserables*. I'd love to play either of those.

Do you think it's important to learn about the performing arts in school?

Yes, definitely, even if you're not going to make it your profession, everyone can benefit from learning to stand up and speak to an audience and to work together as a team like we do on this show.

BACKSTAGE PASS

M **EET JULIA SUTTON & EMMA WOODS** Two nuns from the Original London Cast: Julia Sutton played Sister Mary Lazarus, and Emma Woods, nun and dance captain, after the rehearsal of the scene where Sister Mary Clarence (Deloris) first appears in the convent.

How many times had you worked on that section?

EW A bit, but not in so much detail.

JS Yes, this was a more thorough rehearsal, I think. It was very good for us.

EW The first time we've had in-depth work on it.

Previously we had blocked it through fairly quickly, so it was good to put in the detail.

Is it fun?

JS It will be fun, once we've got it rooted in our boots, so to speak.

EW It's a very complicated learning process, and at this stage we're carried along by it.

JS I think, once we get the habits on, that will give us another dimension, a new thought, as it were.

EW It will change everything.

JS Yes. It will frame our faces and draw attention to facial expressions.

EW And it will be very exposing, even though you're covered. You've got to be really on top of what you're doing.

What's the best thing for you about *Sister Act*?

JS There's a couple of things for me: to be working, at my age, is a joy. I'm seventy! And it's a wonderful experience for me to be working with these young talented kids. It's a joy for me, but God knows what they think.

EW We think you're amazing!

Emma, you cover all the nuns, that must be a challenge!



BACKSTAGE PASS

EW Yes, I'm Swing/Dance Captain so I'm understudying fourteen of the ensemble nuns and learning the whole show choreographically so I can look after it. Between myself and Ben, who is the male Dance Captain, we do the job of keeping it in shape and helping the understudies, making sure they know what they are doing. When they go on, it all slots up and I go to perform myself, so it's a big job and I daren't get ill or even take a holiday.

When did you decide you wanted to work in theatre?

EW When I was kid, it's always been the thing. I wanted to be a ballerina but at sixteen I changed tack quite quickly when I realised I wouldn't be able to do it to the level that I wanted to do. But I did train as a dancer and as a musical theatre actress, and I've been doing it professionally for ten years.

What about you Julia, have you done this all your life?

JS Yes, sixty years professionally. I was on the road at ten, left home, left Mum and Dad. I went to Eastbourne, to the Devonshire Park Theatre, which is still there, and I was in a troupe called the Corona Babes. Between chaperones and a bit of schooling here and there, I'm sad to say I didn't get a lot of education. But from there I've worked professionally ever since. There have been gaps out, but I never had any regrets. It was hard, bridging that gap from forty, when the parts weren't there. If they were, then they were picked by named artists of that era, which was the end of the sixties and seventies. But I did a lot of first time shows like *Oliver!* in 1961 and then *Half a Sixpence* in 1967, and all those shows like *Company*, the Sondheim's that Hal Price did. It was a wonderful time to be there.



BACKSTAGE PASS



There's a real range of actors working on this show...

EW Yes, it's hugely diverse, and yet, strangely this is the third time Julia and I have worked together. It's like family! We worked on *Mary Poppins* and *Dirty Dancing* together.

JS She looks after me.

EW We look after each other.

JS It's not easy for the young kids coming up, the young girls and boys that I'm working with have learnt everything. They can play the piano, they can read music, they can dance well and sing well. I didn't have that in my day. I never learnt to play the piano or read music so it was all by ear. I was not a dancer, but I had to move to survive. I haven't got a dancer's brain. If you've got a dancer's brain you can do anything, they really are the cream.

EW You have to be able to do lots of things. It's true, you can't be a one-trick pony these days...

JS ...and they jump into anything, they say, 'I'll do

that!' It's an eye opener for me to see this whole new generation of talent coming up. There's a lot of children, my own grandchildren included, who play music and do shows at school and I would never say to them - don't do it, but you must make sure you have a damn good education before you go into it.

EW Yes, I agree, I started one year of an A level when I was training at ballet school and I dropped it after a year. That's my biggest regret that I didn't pursue that at the time, then I could have had a bit more under my belt.

JS Yes, but I'm glad I stuck with my work and I do like live theatre. Although eight times a week is going to be tough.

We can't wait to see you on stage! Thank you for giving up your time!

BACKSTAGE PASS

MET JACQUELINE MORGAN Company Manager, Original London Production.

What does being a company manager involve?

The company manager is a generic term for a person who looks after the producer's best interests on site. I represent the producers to the company and the company to the producers. I am stationed wherever the performance and the company are.

How many people do you have to manage?

Between 50 in the rehearsal room going up to 75 or 80 in the theatre, where we have the addition of dressers, band and crew.

What skills does a company manager need?

Everything! Chief cook and bottle-washer. Everything!

What was your route into becoming company manager?

Stage management. I started as an usher at the Royal Exchange in Manchester, that was my Saturday job when I was at school. Then I got a job on the crew at The Royal Exchange. In those days you had to have an Equity Card, it was a closed shop, the Royal Exchange theatre gave me my Equity Card and when one of their shows transferred to the Donmar Warehouse in London, I came down with that and I've stayed ever since.

What's the best thing about working on *Sister Act*?

Working on completely new production, is always thrilling. You get to go through the whole rehearsal process, through the technical process up to putting it on. It's exciting, it's changeable and you get to meet a whole new load of people, on this show. There's never any time that nothing's going on. I'm the point of call for everyone. The company come to me for their calls for tomorrow, if they've stubbed their toes, if they don't understand something, if they need a bit of TLC, even if they need a plumber!

It sounds exhausting, how do you keep going?

Actually this job keeps me young because it's different every day. It's like HR (Human Resources) for the company, and that means it's always varied, even if you're dealing with similar problems – different people need different things. I like people and I'd much rather be working with people than things, although I do have to work with paper as well and it is becoming far more administrative.

Is Health and Safety an important part of your job?

Yes. As lots of new legislation is brought in by the government, you have to know more, learn more, there is a paper trail for everything! I'm currently doing a Health and Safety course which is actually a lot better than I was expecting it to be. I was convinced it was going to be the most utterly boring thing in the world but it's not, it's actually quite interesting. The stage is a potential death trap, so you do need to understand how it works.

Do you ever envisage doing anything else or do you think you will work in theatre all your life?

I think this is it. Apart from reception work and bar work from back when times were thin, I actually don't know how to do anything else!



BACKSTAGE PASS

M EET HELEN KING Stage Manager, Original London Production.

Tell us about a typical day in rehearsal for *Sister Act*

I'm one of four stage managers, one of whom is technical ASM. I have to set up for each scene, making sure the right furniture is there, set pieces such as the bowls, spoons and glasses and important costume pieces. At this stage, if a costume piece is ready and it's not going to get ruined, it's used in rehearsal. It's especially important if it affects someone's performance as it can really throw the actors if they don't get everything until the technical rehearsal: Patino's platform heels for example!

...and in performance?

Once the show is running, my job begins with getting the actors in the right places at the top of the show. Once everyone is happy and ready, I give clearance to the DSM who liaises with Front of House. When the show is going, I make sure that furniture and props are correctly set. In this show there are no live scene changes, so you won't see me on stage moving props. Everything is set up and then revealed. I also look after the props tables and check the setting list to make sure everything is where it should be. I torch the actors on and off if it's dark backstage and get things out of the way so that it is safe for people moving around. Basically, I try to anticipate problems before they arise and deal with them calmly if they do.



What was your route into Stage Management?

My degree is in English but I wasn't sure what I wanted to do at the end of it. The two most obvious careers, teaching or journalism, didn't appeal to me. I like creative things and I like organising and I knew I didn't want a desk job in an office. I saw a very good careers advisor who put me in touch with a lecturer who happened to be a lighting designer. From there, I did two days work experience at Leicester Haymarket Theatre, one day in the office and one day backstage, followed by a week as a runner during tech week. There was a job going and they offered me an interview, it was a case of being in the right place at the right time. I started as Assistant Stage Manager on *The Crucible*, after that I stayed for three years. I worked with a company manager who believed that having the right personality for the job was more important than formal training. She taught me as I went along. As well as practical and organisational skills, you need to be a good negotiator, especially in a rep theatre when you want to get props for free. My advice for anyone wanting to be a stage manager is: don't do it if you really want to act, they are totally different jobs, and do work experience if you want to understand the process. I love the job although I wouldn't mind taking my skills into TV or film.

What's the best thing about working on *Sister Act*?

I absolutely love the music, the fact that they couldn't use the music from the film is not a problem, if anything it's an advantage because you couldn't make a facsimile of the film. The new music really supports the story and is great in its own right.

CONTEXT

THE POWER OF SONG Body And Soul

Body

HEART – Singing improves the circulation of the blood around the body. It is an aerobic activity that increases the oxygenation of the blood, by exercising the lungs to make a sound.

IMMUNE SYSTEM – Research in Frankfurt, Germany, has shown that singing strengthens the immune system. Members of a choir rehearsing Mozart's Requiem were shown to have significantly increased levels of immunoglobulin A (a protein which works as an anti-body) and hydrocortisone (an anti-stress hormone) after a sixty minute singing rehearsal.

MUSCLE GROUPS– Singing exercises major muscle groups in the body, even if you are sitting down.

Soul

HAPPINESS – Singing reduces stress. It has been proven that it increases endocrine activity – the hormonal reactions that impact on our brains and make us feel happy.

TEAM WORK – Singing in a choir is a great way to experience working as a team. Everyone has to work together, turn up on time, rehearse and perform, without the fear of being up on stage on your own.

SMILING – Smiling while you are singing improves the quality of the sound you make, because it opens the throat in a non-damaging way, allowing a fuller sound to escape. Many un-confident singers suddenly find they can sing in tune when they smile. Smiling makes us happy because it sets off a reaction of muscles and hormones which tell our brain we are happy. So it can really cheer you up!

ACHIEVEMENT – Singing in a choir or in a show is enormously rewarding. You are giving something to your audience and they will thank you with their applause. ...And if that doesn't convince you, singing also promotes numeracy, by stimulating the maths side of the brain with musical patterns and literacy, by introducing learners to new vocabulary, poetry and rhyme. Songs are also a great tool for memory!



FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES:

- Join a choir
- Set up a choir
- Run a Last Choir Standing type competition in your school
- Sing to yourself in the shower or the bath, especially if you are feeling stressed.
- Sing to any babies or toddlers you know, it helps to sooth them but it also teaches them important early language skills.

CONTEXT

Real Life Sisters Act All about nuns



FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Find out about women in other faiths (for example Buddhist nuns)
- Find out about modern nuns and community outreach
- In the Catholic Church, what's the difference between a nun and a religious sister?

When the Mother Superior reluctantly gives Deloris a place to hide, she is acting in accordance with a duty felt by many people of different faiths to make the world a better, kinder, more forgiving place. Since early Christianity, unmarried or widowed women have lived in communities and given service in a simple life of prayer and work. Sometimes these were closed communities devoted to contemplation and study, others were involved in work in the community such as nursing, teaching or missionary work. Often nuns were socially engaged women, able to achieve things that secular women were prevented from doing. Nuns embrace poverty and a simple lifestyle (naturally, this is a real struggle for Deloris) and different orders fulfil different roles. The majority of nuns are from the Roman Catholic Church but there are also Anglican, Orthodox, Jain, Buddhist and Taoist nuns.

Some nuns who made a difference...

400 years ago, a nun from Yorkshire, called Mary Ward, lived according to her belief that women could work outside the cloisters of the Convent and serve God in the world. She said: 'there is no such difference between men and women that women may not do great things.'

She promoted the education of women and her followers founded convents and schools. The Bar Convent in York is the oldest living convent in Britain and was established according to her tradition.

Mother Mary Richard, a little known English nun who saved up to 60 Jews in wartime Rome, is currently being put forward for sainthood.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, (1910-1997) born in Albania, became the twentieth century's most famous nun for her humanitarian work in Calcutta, India.

Dorothy Stang, a 73 year old nun who campaigned to save the rainforests of Brazil. She was shot dead by a rancher in 2005.

Modern Convents the numbers of women becoming nuns has seen a sharp decline over recent decades. Many Convents struggle to survive financially and are forced to close. However many nuns are still engaged in important social work in prisons, in communities and in a wide range of social care settings.

CONTEXT

SINGING NUNS Fact and Fiction

Raise your voice!

Lift it up to heaven!

Raise your voice!

Spread it 'cross the sky!

Sister Act: Chorus of nuns

Hildegard von Bingen (1098 – 1179)

At a time when women were regarded as low status members of society, this religious woman was a hugely important figure in medieval history and culture. Hildegard von Bingen founded a convent in 12th Century Germany. She was a composer, wrote religious plays and made important discoveries about medicines derived from plants. She even wrote about the importance of good dental hygiene. Her music is still performed and there are many recordings of her works.

Maria Von Trapp (1905 – 1987)

The real Maria in *The Sound of Music*, Maria Von Trapp was a deeply religious woman who trained as a teacher. Her religious conversion came from hearing the choir

singing in a church in Vienna. She entered a convent as a postulant but never actually took holy orders, so not technically a singing nun, but the musical based on her life contains some of the most iconic images of nuns singing.

Jeannine Deckers (1933 – 1985)

Shooting to fame as the Singing nun with a hit single, *Dominique*, in 1963, Jeannine Deckers was a Belgian nun who recorded an album to raise funds for her order's mission in the Congo. She is the only Belgian ever to reach number one in the USA and her life was made into a film with Debbie Reynolds in 1966. This rather syrupy portrayal was belied by the subsequent facts of Jeanne Decker's life. She caused controversy in the Catholic Church by approving of the contraceptive pill. Later she got into trouble for non-payment of taxes, although she had donated all her money to the convent. In 1985 she took her own life in a double suicide with her partner, Anna Pecher. A new film about her, *Soeur Sourire (Sister Smile)* was release in April 2009, directed by Belgian director Stijn Coninx.

Airplane

Check out the fictional, comedy nun in the 1980 film *Airplane*, who causes havoc with her erratic guitar playing.



RESEARCH TASK

Can you find out about real singing nuns who are currently touring and recording?
What styles of music do they perform?

DRAMA ACTIVITY

CHOICES AND SANCTUARY

Drama asks us to put ourselves in another person's shoes and imagine how they feel. These workshop exercises use *Sister Act* as a springboard for issue based drama.

CHOICES

Discussion: If you were Deloris and you saw Curtis murder someone, what would you do? Would you be able to make a decision on the spot or would you have to think about it?

Drama: Imagine you are Deloris and create a monologue where she speaks her thoughts out loud, show how she comes to the decision to tell the police.



CHOICES

Discussion: What would you do if you witnessed a serious crime?

Drama: In small groups, create a scene, with made-up characters, based on that discussion. Does the witness report the crime?

Show how they make their decision. In a second scene, imagine that the witness is either: in a witness protection programme or living in fear of the killer, but scared to go the police.

SANCTUARY

Discussion: What risks do the nuns take when they offer Deloris sanctuary?

Research: Find out about times in history when ordinary people have taken a risk by offering sanctuary to others.

Drama: Create a short drama about this. Divide your drama into scenes:

- Arrival
- Initial reluctance to take the person in
- Sanctuary is offered
- A threat is made
- Resolution (your choice of a happy or sad ending.)



WORKSHEET

DESIGN A POSTER

CHECKLIST:

Image – Does it grab people’s attention? What do you think it says about the show? What colour scheme suits the show? Stage Entertainment used blocks of simple colour, but you could experiment with something different.

Information – What does your poster need to tell people? Remember, your objective is to encourage people to buy tickets and come to the theatre, what do they need to know in order to do that?

Graphics – What style do you want to use for the text? Does it fit with your image? Is it easy to read?

Ideas

WORKSHEET

FILL IN THE GAPS

On _____ we went to see a production of _____
Sister Act at _____

When I was waiting for the play to begin I noticed _____

My favourite character was _____
played by _____

What I liked about this character was _____

My favourite scene was _____

The lighting used in this scene made me think of _____
_____ and it made me feel

The song that stayed in my head after the show was _____

The reason I remember that song is _____

WORKSHEET



This is a drawing of my favourite moment in the play showing the characters in their costumes and the set they are performing on.

WORKSHEET

WRITE ABOUT THE PLAY

Why does a director make certain choices? Watch carefully and write notes at the interval, or after the play. What do you see and hear on the stage and in the audience, when you are waiting for the play to begin? Watch carefully during the play, and write notes at the interval, or after the play. We would ask that you do not write notes during the performance. To work out what effects are being created in the production, ask yourself these practical questions and think about why these choices have been made:

The Set What is your first impression of what you see? What shapes, levels and colours are being used? How does the set hide or reveal actors? How are the different locations and scenes in the play demonstrated?

Costume What colours and styles are being used? What impression do they give about the personality and background of the characters? Compare different costumes, for example Deloris' stage costumes when she is a club singer with the nuns' habits. What story do the costumes tell? How do the costumes interact with the lighting design?

Lighting How does the lighting show where we are? Describe two contrasting locations. What colours and shades of colour are being used to create time of day, location or mood? What levels of brightness are being used and why? think about angles of light, who is well lit and who is in shadow? When do the lights change? What is atmosphere and what emotions are suggested by the lighting?

The Performers How does each actor create their character through the way they move? How effective is the transition from speech to song – can you give an example of a point in the play where this happens? How do the performers use the set? How do the performers relate to the audience – and when does this change?

The Music What musical styles are being used? Which artists do you think influenced Alan Menken's original score? What does Sister Act make you think, feel, want to talk about?



GLOSSARY

ACTOR person who acts/portrays a character in a play or film – in musicals, actors must also be able to sing and dance to a high standard.

BLOCKING a working out, in the early stage of rehearsal, of where the actors will move on stage. The blocking will be fixed before the technical rehearsals begin.

THE BOOK

1. The spoken text of a musical (also known as the libretto.)

2. The stage manager's copy of the script – used to mark the blocking and technical cues, as in "the deputy stage manager: on the book".

CHOREOGRAPHER person who creates dance compositions by planning and arranging dance movements and patterns.

COMPOSER person who writes and arranges tunes and songs.

COMPANY MANAGER oversees all practical aspects of the production, represents the production company in rehearsal and in performance.

DANCE CAPTAIN maintains the quality of the dance numbers and musical staging, working closely with the stage manager to ensure the choreography remains true to the original direction once a show is running.

DESIGNER person who creates the 'look' of a play, makes decisions about the shape of the set, colour schemes and costumes.

DIRECTOR person who has overall responsibility for translating a writer's words from the page to the stage or into film – has overall responsibility for integrating all the creative elements of a production – acting, design, choreography, lighting, sound.

ENSEMBLE group of supporting performers (actors, dancers, singers) – often understudies are drawn from this group.

LIBRETTO the text of a musical (also known as the book.)

LYRICS the words of a song. A lyricist writes the songs for a musical.

PRODUCER the person who oversees the financial and administrative aspects of a play or film, responsible for raising money, hiring a creative team and having overall supervision for all aspects of production, marketing and planning. In this case there are two producers, Whoopi Goldberg and Stage Entertainment.

REVOLVE a turntable which makes up part of the stage. Scenery is set and then the revolve turns it into view. Scenes may be played on a revolve as it is moving.

SWING must be able, at short notice, to take over another performer's role, covers several roles or members of the ensemble.



Joan Marcus

FURTHER RESOURCES

Sister Act

www.sisteractthemusical.com – the official site
Sister Act (1992) DVD starring Whoopi Goldberg,
Harvey Keitel and Maggie Smith

Producers

www.stage-entertainment.co.uk

Musical Theatre

www.equity.org.uk/Industry/CareersAdvice/Factsheets
– resources about a range of job roles in theatre,
created in association with Skillset.

www.singup.org – the national programme to develop
singing in schools.

Nuns

Books

Davies, Oliver (translator): *Selected Writings by
Hildegard von Bingen* (Penguin Classics)

Evangelisti, Silvia: *nuns: A History of Convent Life 1450-
1700* (oUP)

Kelly, Maureen and Stone, Jeffrey: *nuns Having Fun*
(Workman Publishing)

Weblinks

nunsurfing.blogspot.com – contemporary information
on nuns living and working today.



MOUSETRAP THEATRE PROJECTS

Mousetrap Theatre Projects offers young people with limited resources and access, the opportunity to engage with the best of London's live theatre. We are an independent charity, working with theatres in the West End and across London. Since 1997, we have taken nearly 70,000 young people to the theatre. We create innovative and exciting theatre access, education and audience development programmes. Young people take part with their school or youth group, their family or their friends.

Mission Statement

We believe that all young people should have the opportunity to attend outstanding theatre, irrespective of their cultural, social or economic background. Our mission is to increase young people's access to the best of live theatre in London (particularly those young people with limited resources, opportunities or support) and to enable them to engage creatively with that experience. As an independent charity, Mousetrap Theatre Projects is in a unique position to select the appropriate or relevant theatre productions in and beyond the West End that stimulate and inspire young people. We devise programmes that use theatre as a catalyst to explore ideas, learn new skills, develop creativity and offer new perspectives. At the heart of our education and outreach work is the desire to open doors to young people who might otherwise consider London's rich cultural heritage closed to them.

Areas of Endeavour

Access: to provide young people with limited resources, support or a disability, the opportunity to attend London theatre, often as a first-time experience: The London Theatre Challenge for mainstream and special schools, All-Schools Matinees, Family First nights and Envision

Education: to enable young people to engage actively with their theatre experience and to use theatre as an educational resource in and out of the classroom to stimulate creative work and to develop theatre-related skills: TheatreWorks, Play the Critic, Insight sessions, WriteThinking, TechTaster, PowerPlay and Stage Business

Audience Development: to encourage a legacy of theatregoing among young audiences by reducing barriers and enhancing their knowledge and understanding of theatre: C145 and West End for £10

Creating Links: to develop collaborations with young people, schools, teachers, artists, arts organisations, youth groups, community organisations and social service agencies with the theatre industry: Meet the Artists Events, Special Seminars/Round Table discussions, Teachers' Advisory group, Teachers Preview Club and StagexChange

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Mousetrap
THEATRE PROJECTS
...inspiring young people