



Sister Act

2022
SEASON

PLAY

PRODUCTION NUMBER 242

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DIRECTOR'S ◆ NOTE ◆

I am a huge Alan Menken fan. It's hard to find someone who isn't. He is single-handedly responsible for most music-memory of our childhoods (*Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin*). But as I get to know his work more and more, I realize how versatile he is, all while staying true to what makes him special. He knows how to bring the fun, he knows how to bring the heart. Here in this show, he gets to show-off his mad disco-writing skills, and then write immensely emotional ballads for many of our leading ladies.

I honestly don't know of another show that makes me smile, laugh, and cry the way this show does. It's themes of faith, family, unity, unconditional love, humility, and finding purpose through service are exactly what I have needed the past few months to regain my lessened faith in humanity. There are so many wonderfully relatable characters and character arcs that give a person pause... Deloris finding purpose in mentorship and looking outward, Superior finding humility as she lets go of pride, Roberts finding confidence and a voice and power in who she is.

Mostly, I will always have a special place in my heart for stories that show the power that music has to bring people together, to uplift, and to communicate important messages. Music has a way of communicating with us emotionally and spiritually, differently than any other medium. So sit back, be entertained, take an emotional bath, and bask in the awesomeness which is the wonderful cast of talented men and powerful women. I know I have been inspired by them. Allow them to do the same for you.

INTERESTING ◆ FACTS ◆

"I was lying on my couch one afternoon in the late nineteen-eighties, trying to come up with an idea for a screenplay, and I began thinking about drag. Why is a guy in a gown, I wondered, funnier than a woman in a three-piece suit? I tried to imagine a disguise or transformation that might be more fun for a female star, and my thoughts turned to nuns."

—Paul Rudnick, *The New Yorker*

When Paul Rudnick began thinking of what would become the 1992 movie *Sister Act*, it was as a star vehicle for Bette Midler. When approached for the role, however, she refused: "My fans don't want to see me in a wimple." When Whoopi Goldberg then stepped in to save the project, she had only one request: Her character's name should change from "Terri" to "Deloris", as Goldberg had always wanted to play a character named "Deloris".

Songs fill the original film as Deloris and the nuns turn classic Motown hits into church hymns (Mary Wells' 1964 "My Guy" is reinvented as "My God"). Broadway veterans were brought in to fill out the choir, and the soundtrack album containing their performances from the movie went gold. As Broadway increasingly turned to movies for source material, this music-driven story seemed like a natural choice.

Sister Act was developed as a stage musical in 2006, beginning life at the Pasadena Playhouse with a new score by legendary composer Alan Menken (*Little Shop of Horrors, Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast*, and many more). Uninterested in simply re-using the Motown hits in the original,

◇ INTERESTING FACTS ◇

Menken created new songs to take their place while moving the action from San Francisco and Reno in the 1990s to Philadelphia in the '70s.

“My very first thought, the first gut level decision I made, was ‘I’d like to do this in disco.’” said Menken in a 2011 interview about the change in the setting. “It was a flashy era, with the disco balls and sequins, very entertainment oriented and glitzy, and I thought it would really create a strong contrast between the world of show business and the world of the convent. [...] the musical is a show that thrives on a high degree of energy, and disco really provided that.”

Menken recalls it was not an easy path to success for the show: “All of the machinations one hears about leading up to our Broadway opening, are true in this case. Half the score got scrapped and rewritten. Directors came and went. Our leads changed. Producers changed. Book writers changed and in the end, I love this show so much. I’d go through it all again, gladly.”

After its debut in Pasadena, the show moved to London with changes and a special guest

star when producer Whoopi Goldberg stepped in as Mother Superior “in a pinch” to replace a performer who needed to leave the show due to a prior commitment. With additional changes, the show premiered on Broadway in 2011 and was nominated for 5 Tony Awards, including Best Musical and Best Original Score.

As the musical continues performances worldwide, keeping the memory of the film alive, plans for a *Sister Act 3* movie on Disney+ are in the works with Goldberg simply saying, “it feels right”.

—HCTO Guest Dramaturg Mark Fossen, MFA



Whoopi Goldberg as Deloris in the 1992 film Sister Act.



Whoopi Goldberg as Mother Superior in the 2010 London production of Sister Act, the musical.