

Sister Act



Auditorium Theatre (see Touring shows). Music by Alan Menken. Lyrics by Glenn Slater. Book by Cheri and Bill Steinkellner with additional material by Douglas Carter Beane. Dir. Jerry Zaks. With Ta'Rea Campbell, Hollis Resnik. 2hrs 35mins; one intermission.

As the movie-to-musical cash-ins of the last decade go, *Sister Act* might be among the most well-meaning. More than studio-backed transfers such as *Legally Blonde* and *Shrek*, the 1992 film starring Whoopi Goldberg as a nightclub singer who gets witness-protection placement in a convent actually seems to yearn to be a tuner, and composer Alan Menken (*Little Shop of Horrors*, *Beauty and the Beast*) is an established talent.

The stage adaptation transfers the action from 1990s Vegas to 1970s Philadelphia, the better to serve Menken's lite-rock versions of Philly soul and disco; heroine Deloris Van Cartier morphs from washed-up lounge act to young striver. The cop love interest is de-aged as well, becoming Deloris's nerdy high-school classmate nursing a long-term crush. So you can't say book writers Cheri and Bill Steinkellner (with some goosing by *Xanadu*'s Douglas Carter Beane) are simply Xeroxing the film.

But their changes don't do much to improve on it. This *Sister Act* struggles to get started, taking far too long to get to the real attraction of Deloris's bonding with the wacky nuns and spending too much time on silly secondary business like comic numbers for the bad guys. And the one memorable song, a yearning ballad for postulant Sister Mary Robert called "The Life I Never Led," is most striking for its resemblance to "Part of Your World" from Menken's *The Little Mermaid*. Ta'Rea Campbell's Deloris and Hollis Resnik's Mother Superior are given the most stage time but little oomph.—*Kris Vire*



BREAKING OLD HABITS Campbell, center, leads her sisters in joyful noise.

Listings

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail, e-mail (theater@timeoutchicago.com) or fax (312-924-9350) to **Oliver Sava**. Include details, dates, times, address of venue with cross streets, nearest El station and bus routes, contact information, box-office phone number and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 9am Monday, ten days before publication date.**

- ▶ Reviewed in this issue
- * Recommended or notable
- ♫ Musical or song-based play
- ♣ Cheap

Touring shows

- ▶ ♫ **Les Misérables** Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W Randolph St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Tue 7:30pm; Wed, Fri 2, 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$18–\$100. Through Dec 2. See Reviews.
- ▶ **Potted Potter** Broadway Playhouse at Water Tower Place, 175 E Chestnut St (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Tue 7:30pm; Wed, Fri 2, 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$39.75–\$69.75. Through Dec 16. See Reviews.
- ▶ ♫ **Sister Act: The Musical** Auditorium Theatre, 50 E Congress Pkwy (800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com). Tue, Wed 7:30pm; Fri 2, 7:30pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$28–\$103. Through Dec 2. See Reviews.

OPENING ♫ **Spank! The Fifty Shades Parody** Mills Entertainment at Royal George Theatre, 1641 N Halsted St (312-988-9000, millsentertainment.com). Wed, Thu 7:30pm; Fri 8pm; Sat 5, 8pm; Sun 3pm. \$42.50–\$52.50. Nov 28–Dec 16. The risqué romance of a prudish young woman and the sexy man who teaches her how to get freaky comes to the stage in this musical parody by Jim Millan. Here's hoping for a choreographed paddling number.

Resident companies

OPENING ♫ **Annie** Paramount Theatre, 23 E Galena Blvd, Aurora (630-896-6666, paramountaurora.com). Wed 1:30, 7:30pm; Fri 8pm; Sat 4, 8pm; Sun 1, 5pm. \$34.90–\$46.90. Through Dec 30. The sun comes out for everyone's favorite little orphan in this revival of the classic musical directed by Jeff Award winner Rachel Rockwell.

OPENING ♫ **Best Musical! Holiday Edition!** Porchlight Music Theatre at Stage 773, 1225 W Belmont Ave (773-327-5252, porchlightmusictheatre.org). Wed 7:30pm, \$15, students \$12. Through Dec 26. The improvised musical that uses audience suggestions to create a new show from scratch every night returns with a new holiday spin. See "Best of both worlds," page 80.

Blue Man Group Briar Street Theatre, 3133 N Halsted St (773-348-4000, blueman.com). Fri, Sat 1, 4, 7, 10pm; Sun 4pm. \$49–\$69. The Briar Street has been the Chicago outpost for the indigo-hued drum corps since 1997, and it shows few signs of leaving anytime soon.

CLOSING * **Bulrushers** Congo Square Theatre at Uptown Hull House Center, 4520 N Beacon St (congosquaretheatre.org). Fri 7:30pm; Sat 3, 7:30pm; Sun 3pm. \$35.

2hrs 35mins; one intermission. Through Nov 25. Bulrushers (Ericka Ratcliff) is an orphan who was found floating downriver in a basket, like Moses, which gives her a kind of clairvoyant ability to read people's futures through water. The idea of Bulrushers as both a seer and an innocent, protected from the harsh truths of the larger world, is intriguing, and Ratcliff is thoroughly compelling in her portrayal of the girl taking ideas from her new friend and trying them on like clothes. But the characters and circumstances surrounding these two are less convincing in Eisa Davis's script.—*Kris Vire*

▶ ♫ **The Burnt Part Boys** Griffin Theatre at Theater Wit, 1229 W Belmont Ave (773-975-8150, griffintheatre.com). Thu–Sat 7:30pm; Sun 3pm. \$36. Through Dec 22. See Reviews.

Ceremonies in Dark Old Men et al Creative Arts Foundation, 7558 S South Chicago Ave (773-752-3955, etacreativearts.org). Fri, Sat 8pm; Sun 3, 7pm. \$20–\$30, students and seniors \$15. Through Dec 23. Lonnie Elder's drama follows a group of black workers in 1960s Harlem trying to get the white people out of their neighborhood so they can get more work.

♣ **Chicago Dramatists Saturday Series** Chicago Dramatists, 1105 W Chicago Ave (312-633-0630, chicagodramatists.org). Sat 2pm. \$5 donation. This weekly series presents stage readings of works-in-progress.

OPENING ♣ **A Christmas Carol** Drury Lane Oakbrook Terrace, 100 Drury Ln, Oakbrook Terrace (630-530-0111, drurylaneoakbrook.com). Wed 10am; Fri noon; Sat 10am, 1pm. \$12. Through Dec 22. Scrooge and company arrive in Oakbrook Terrace to teach west suburban citizens the wonders of the holiday season.

OPENING ♣ **A Christmas Carol** Goodman Theatre, 170 N Dearborn St (312-443-3800, goodmantheatre.org). Preview Fri 23–Sun 25. Opens Sun 25 at 6:30pm. Tue, Wed 7:30pm; Fri 8pm; Sat 2, 8pm; Sun 2, 6:30pm. \$25–\$82. Through Dec 29. Learn to love the holidays with humbug Ebenezer Scrooge at the Goodman's 35th annual *Carol*.

OPENING ♣ **A Christmas Carol** Metropolis Performing Arts Centre, 111 W Campbell St, Arlington Heights (847-577-2121, metropolisarts.com). Fri 6pm; Sat 3pm; Sun 4pm. \$28.50, kids \$15.50. Through Dec 24. Metropolis resident playwright Scott Wolman adapts Charles Dickens's holiday classic for suburbanites who don't want to make the trek to the Goodman.

OPENING ♫ **The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey** Provision Theater, 1001 W Roosevelt Rd (312-455-0066, provisiontheatre.org). Preview Fri 23. Opens Sat 24 at 8pm. Wed 10am; Fri, Sat 8pm; Sun 3pm. \$10–\$32. Through Dec 23. Depressed carpenter Jonathan Toomey learns the meaning of Christmas when he carves a crèche for a young boy and his widowed mother in this remounted holiday musical by Timothy Gregory and composer Michael Mahler.

OPENING ♫ **The Christmas Schooner** Mercury Theater, 3745 N Southport Ave (773-325-1700, mercurytheaterchicago.com). Preview Fri 23–Wed 28. Opens Nov 29 at 7:30pm. Wed 2, 7:30pm; Fri 7:30pm; Sat 2, 7:30pm; Sun 1pm. \$29–\$55. Through Dec 30. A family brings the first Christmas-tree ship to Chicago in this bittersweet historical musical by John Reeger and Julie Shannon.

▶ ♫ **Cinderella** Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire, 10 Marriott Dr, Lincolnshire (847-634-0200, marriotttheatre.com). Tue, Wed 10am; Fri, Sat 10am, 12:30pm; Sun 10am. \$15.23. Through Dec 30. The fairy-tale princess tries to make her way to the ball in the stage adaptation of Rodgers & Hammerstein's TV musical.

CLOSING ♫ **Duck for President** Lifeline Theatre, 6912 N Glenwood Ave (773-761-

4477, lifelinetheatre.com). Sat, Sun 11am, 1pm. \$15. Through Nov 25. Forget about Obama and Romney at this new musical adaptation by James E. Grote of the children's novel about a duck who becomes commander in chief.

OPENING ♫ **Failure: A Love Story** Victory Gardens Biograph Theater, 2433 N Lincoln Ave (victorygardens.org, 773-871-3000). Preview Fri 23–Sun 25 (\$35–\$40); Fri, Sat 7:30pm; Sun 3pm. Opens Mon 26 at 7:30pm. Regular run: Thu, Fri 7:30pm; Sat 4, 7:30pm; Sun 3pm. \$35–\$50. Through Dec 30. Victory Gardens premieres its first production by one of its new playwriting ensemble members with Philip Dawkins's lyrical play about the deaths of three sisters living on the Chicago River.

▶ **The Gifts of the Magi** Porchlight Music Theatre at Stage 773, 1225 W Belmont Ave (773-777-9884, porchlightmusictheatre.org). Fri 8pm; Sat 4, 8pm; Sun 2pm. \$39. Through Dec 23. Young lovers Jim and Della hock their prized possessions to buy each other Christmas gifts. Mark Lococo directs the Chicago premiere of Randy Courts and Mark St. Germain's holiday musical based on two short stories by O. Henry.

CLOSING * **Hamlet** Writers' Theatre, 325 Tudor Ct, Glenview (847-242-6000, writerstheatre.org). Fri 8pm; Sat 4, 8pm; Sun 2, 6pm. \$35–\$70. 3hrs; two intermissions. Through Nov 25. Shakespeare's great tragedy earns an unexpected share of laughs in Michael

Halberstam's wry, gorgeously designed production at Writers' Theatre. These lighter moments prick up our ears to listen anew to Shakespeare's masterful character and plotting, rather than hearing the words as a familiar

greatest-hits collection. The all-star cast's interpretations are refreshing in their own ways. Michael Canavan's Claudius is less craven than sorrowful about his betrayal of his brother, seemingly resigned to his eventual downfall even as he enjoys the crown. Shannon Cochran, in turn, is an unusually sympathetic Gertrude, appearing to fool herself about her new husband's actions. And Scott Parkinson's sparky, sinewy Hamlet is a marvel, his impinging madness possibly equal parts feigned and fact, a kind of self-fulfilling fortune.—*KV*

▶ **Hellcab** Profiles Theatre Main Stage, 4139 N Broadway (773-549-1815, profilestheatre.org). Fri 8pm; Sat 5, 8pm; Sun 7pm. \$35–\$40. Through Dec 23. See Reviews.

▶ **I put the fear of México in 'em** Teatro Vista at Chicago Dramatists, 1105 W Chicago Ave (773-599-9280, teatrovista.org). Fri 7:30pm; Sat 8pm; Sun 3pm. \$25. 1hr 35mins; no intermission. Through Dec 9. The tensions along the U.S.-Mexico border are clearly worthy of reporting right now, whether journalistically or theatrically. But Matthew Paul Olmos's grating new Tijuana-set work doesn't fit the bill, at least in a Teatro Vista premiere in which director Ricardo Gutierrez's realism-based vision butts heads with Olmos's more fantastic tendencies. Despite the presence of thoughtful, solid actors such as Charin Alvarez and Cheryl Graeff, Olmos's characters come across more as arguments than human beings.—*KV*

OPENING ♫ **It's a Wonderful Life: Live at the Biograph!** American Blues Theatre at Victory Gardens Biograph Theater, 2433 N Lincoln Ave (773-871-3000, americanbluestheater.com). Preview Fri 23–Sun 25. Opens Nov 29 at 7pm. Fri 8pm; Sat 5, 8pm; Sun 2:30pm. \$19–\$49. Through Dec 30. Travel back to the 1940s as a cast of seven puts on a live radio show bringing Frank Capra's classic holiday film to life.

OPENING ♫ **It's a Wonderful Life: The Radio Play** American Theater Company, 1909 W Byron Ave (773-409-4125, atcweb.org).