

# 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.