

Grand Rapids Civic Theatre next production might be a little habit forming

By Joanne Bailey-Boorsma

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Choreographer Torrey Thomas, center in the black and white sweater, and Julianne Howe-Bouwens who plays Deloris is far right with the cast of 'Sister Act.'

To say Torrey Thomas was excited about Grand Rapids Civic Theatre's plans to present "Sister Act" as part of its 2015 - 2016 season would be an understatement.

"When [Director] Allyson [Paris] called I didn't even let her get the question out before shouting 'Yes!'" said Thomas, a Grand Rapids choreographer who has worked on a number of local musicals including Civic Theatre's "Fiddler on the Roof" and "Legally Blonde." It was no secret Thomas was interested in working on the musical since as soon as he heard "Sister Act" would be in Civic's lineup, he called Artistic Director Bruce Tinker to let him know he wanted to do the choreography.

"I had seen the show, and the costumes and choreography, I was just amazed," Thomas said for his reason in wanting to be part of the production. "I really have to give credit to the original choreographers for what they brought to the stage and the production allows me to bring my own special touches to it as well."

"Sister Act," which opens Feb. 26 at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, is based off the 1992 film of the same name starring Whoopi Goldberg. The story centers around Deloris Van Cartier, a night club singer who witnesses a murder by her gangster boyfriend Curtis Shank. She ends up in witness protection with the only place the police feel she will be safe is the local convent called The Holy Order of the Little Sisters of Our Mother of Perpetual Faith. "She really is lost," said Julianne Howe-Bouwens who plays Deloris. Howe-Bouwens might be familiar to many local theatergoers as she stole the show as Gary Coleman in Civic's 2015 spring production of "Avenue Q." "She is really thrown into something that is so foreign to her. I mean, she is use to the glitz and glamour and is a showgirl and now she is in this place where the joy is waking up at 4 a.m."

The clash of cultures creates for some very funny moments, but it also leads to much more: friendship and love. "It really is a heartwarming story of a group of women who discover that they are so much more than what they believe," said Director Allyson Paris, who was recently appointed as Civic's new associate director and is directing her first full production for Civic with "Sister Act."

"Deloris is destined to be there," Howe-Bouwens said. "She is drawn to something."

In fact, Deloris actually makes it to choir practice and after commenting on how bad the group is, the Mother Superior suggests she take it over, which leads to far more than anyone could have imagined. To discover the twist and turns to this story - along with checking out Thomas's choreography - you'll have to catch the show during its three-week run.

"Sister Act" runs Feb. 26 - March 20 at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, 30 N. Division Ave., Grand Rapids. Show times are 7:30 p.m. Wednesday - Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday with the theater being dark Monday and Tuesday. Tickets are \$18 - \$35. For more information on the show, other Grand Rapids Civic Theatre productions, classes and activities or to purchase tickets, visit www.GRCT.org or call 616-222-6650.