

**Hairspray**, music by Marc Shaiman and lyrics by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman, with a book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan, based on John Waters' film. Directed by Matt Lenz after Jack O'Brien, Choreographed by Robbie Roby after Jerry Mitchell. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

**"You can't stop the music."**

It's one of those shows. It opens after a brief prelude with Tracy Turnblad in bed singing an ode to her hometown of Baltimore, follows her through the day and ends a short time later with Tracy winning the Miss Baltimore Hairspray competition, something quite spectacularly out of step with the girl's own reality. En route the music almost never stops and it is infectious, almost joyous, show music. By the end of the evening, even earlier, you realize you cannot stop the music, that it is persistent and even if you don't like it, you can't escape it and you don't want to. This new touring production at Proctor's in Schenectady lets the music take you and shake you and swing you around in your seat. It's terrific!



"Run and Tell That" (aloft, from L) Sage as "Gilbert," Kyle Kavully as "Thad," Charlie Bryant III as "Seaweed J. Stubbs" and Company; Photo: Jeremy Daniel

When John Waters created the characters for his 1988 film that inspired this musical, it starred Ricki Lake, Divine, Debbie Harry, Sonny Bono, Ruth Brown and Jerry Stiller and dealt with a historic event in his native Baltimore when integration came to local television. Set in 1962 Mark Shaiman's score has a definitely theatrical slant on the dance music of that era. The choreography establishes the period nicely as Robbie Roby works through Jerry Mitchell's original dance designs. For this show the tempo seems to be pushed and the frenetic choreography works to accentuate the emotional crisis that surrounds the characters. All 29 actors in this production seem to be working as hard as possible at record speed and the effect is both exhilarating and exhausting.

The role of Edna, Tracy's mother, was created for, and by, Divine in his only serious and non-sexually threatening role in Waters' work. For the musical, in 2002, the part went to Harvey Fierstein who brought great pathos to a role which is, at best, sketchy. It is a "drag" role with the male actor playing a woman whose life consists of taking in laundry, wearing the same housecoat all the time and trying to control her daughter's mad social impulses. For this production the role is taken by Gregg Kalafatas who brings a certain dignity to it. He sings well, dances appropriately and acts the role with strength and conviction. His Edna is excellent and as his husband, Wilbur, Ralph Prentice Daniel is a fine match for Kalafatas's Edna. The two really shine in their love duet, "You're Timeless To Me."

Tracy is played lovingly by Niki Metcalf. She manifests great youthful femininity with an exuberance that is matched by Emery Henderson as Penny Pingleton, Tracy's best friend. Equally strong in his role of Seaweed J. Stubbs is Charlie Bryant III, who becomes Penny's first boyfriend. Penny's selfish and mean mother Prudy is neatly played by Emanuelle Zeesman.



Niki Metcalf as "Tracy Turnblad"  
and Greg Kalafatas as "Edna Turnblad".  
Photo: Jeremy Daniel.

The boy Tracy loves, Link Larkin, is played with sexual oomph by Nick Cortazzo who manages to bring both empathy and musicality to his role. The same can be said of Billy Dawson who plays TV dance party host Corny Collins, based on the original Buddy Deane whose actual show inspired these events.

Also well featured in the show was Sandie Lee as Motormouth Maybelle, whose "Negro-Day" version of the TV show inspires the plot-point that lands Tracy in jail. Mother and daughter Van Tussle (Velma and Amber, respectively) are hysterically portrayed by Addison Garner and Ryahn Evers. The two of them make evil into a joy to behold, especially when Garner sings the show-stopping "The Legend of Miss Baltimore Crabs."

The physical production designed by David Rockwell (sets), Patrick W. Lord (video), William Ivey Long (costumes) and Paul Miller (lights, based the work of Kenneth Posner is a great pleasure to watch. It holds all the acted elements of the show together. The production's own reality is a treat all its own, exaggerated though it may be.

I hope it is clear that this is a most enjoyable show with a very large collection of talent going for it. It flew by in just under two and a half hours led by Julius LaFlamme's baton. If I could I would see the show over again.

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**Hairspray** plays at Proctor's Theatre, 432 State Street, Schenectady through December 13. For information and tickets call 518-346-6204 or go to [proctors.org](http://proctors.org).

