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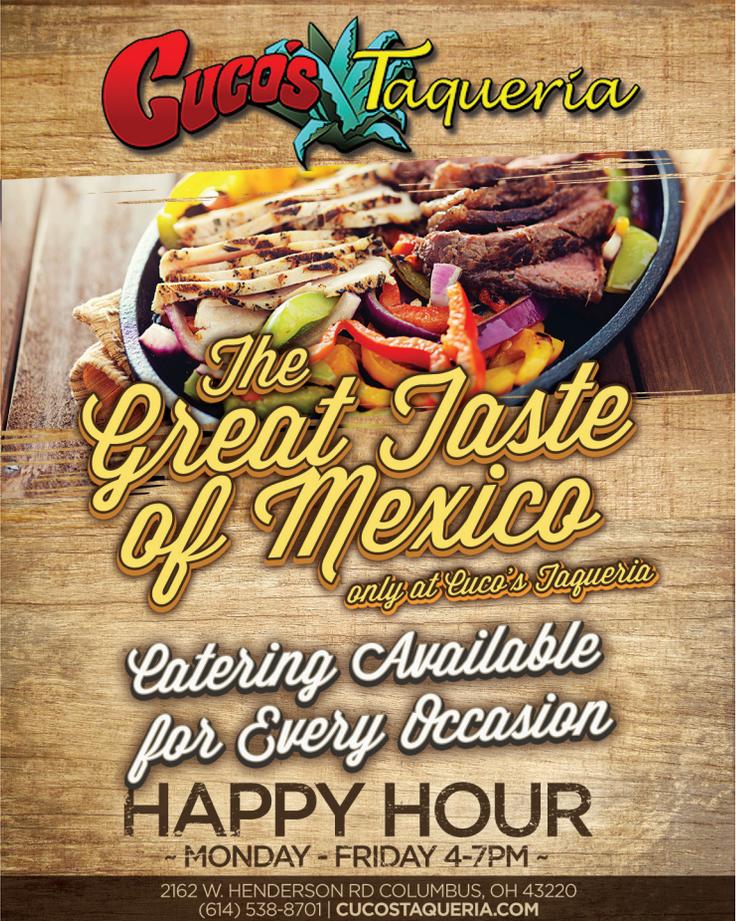
Beware the Plastics as *Mean Girls* comes to the Ohio Theatre

BY LINDA LEE BAIRD



It's been 15 years since moviegoers watched Cady Heron move from Africa to suburban Illinois and attempt to learn the rules of the high school jungle in *Mean Girls*. Kids born the year the movie came out are in the throes of navigating high school now: the lunchroom, the parties, the homework. Some things have changed since then (social media) and some have not (teenage awkwardness).

Mean Girls is coming to the stage this month, now as a musical production, as part of the Broadway in Columbus series. Following the movie screenplay written by admitted former "mean girl" Tina Fey, who infused much of her own experiences into the story, the show aims to appeal to both a new generation of high school students, as well as those of us who have (gladly, perhaps) left those hallways far behind. ▶



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Mary Beth Donahoe, a Cleveland-area native and member of the production's ensemble, spoke to (614) from New York City, where the cast was in its final day of rehearsals before launching a tour that will bring them to Columbus later this month. Donahoe previewed what audience members can expect. Like the film, the story focuses on Cady Heron's transition from being a homeschooled student in Africa to a high-school student in the Midwest.

"It has all the classic one-liners from the movie that you're gonna love, all the characters from the movie that you already know and love and think are hilarious," Donahoe said. However, the script also acknowledges that the experience of high school students has changed over the past decade and a half. "There are all these parts in the show now that involve social media and how word can spread so quickly."

Perhaps the biggest change is that the theater production—as you'd expect from a Broadway musical—includes musical numbers. Donahoe said that these add depth to the show. "You get to be in every character's thoughts so much more deeply. You get to really hear how they feel about other people," she said. "The whole point of music is when you can't speak, you sing, when you can't sing, you dance." The music itself enhances the characters' stories. "A lot of Cady's music has an African undercurrent," she said. Lead mean girl Regina's tunes have an ominous undertone that Donahoe described as "a little scary."

The songs also add opportunities for jokes and situational humor that Fey's writing naturally capitalizes on. "The choreography is all just ridiculous humor that just comes out of left field," Donahoe said. Fey, along with her husband, producer and composer Jeff Richmond, and songwriter Nell Benjamin, have been heavily involved in the production, attending rehearsals and offering notes to the cast. "That's been really cool for them to be part of the production process, because they've already been part of the Broadway show, and the tour production is actually slightly different," Donahoe said.

The tour will send Donahoe across the country over the next year, from shows across the Northeast and Midwest in the fall and then to California and Florida this winter. While Donahoe is looking forward to the whole experience, she is particularly excited to return to Ohio to perform for friends and family. "My parents still live in Cleveland so that's been a dream of mine forever," she said.





Donahoe credits the arts education she received in the Lakewood Public Schools as the beginning of her path to the performing arts, starting with a tap dance class she took in second grade. Her interest continued to blossom until she made the decision as a high school senior to pursue musical theater professionally. But that didn't mean hopping right on the bus to New York. Instead, she opted to attend Ohio Northern University. "A small school gave me the personalized attention that I knew I needed at the time ... to be pushed and expand my comfort zone."

Donahoe shared some advice for other Ohioans who share her interest in theater. "Follow the things that are your passion and the things that bring you the most joy, and the things that feels true to who you are," she said. "Working hard and being a decent person to other humans goes a long way."

And while that behavior isn't exactly modeled by all the characters in *Mean Girls*, the message certainly comes through. "Everyone's gone to high school, everyone's tried to fit in, everyone's tried to change themselves to be with the cool kids or figure out where you belong. So it really is a universal story."

Now is the time to fetch yourself a pair of tickets. ■

Mean Girls runs October 22-27 at the Ohio Theatre.
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