



**Five-Time TONY Award Nominated**  
***SISTER ACT the Musical***  
**Runs January 15-31, 2016**  
**(TSU Performing Arts Center)**

Circle Players presents *SISTER ACT*, the family friendly, outrageously funny musical with nuns that rock! Performances begin January 15th at Tennessee State University Performing Arts Center as part of Circle's annual collaboration with TSU Theater Program. The five-time TONY Award nominated musical comedy will run for three weeks, closing on January 31, 2016. Tickets are now on sale online at [www.circleplayers.net](http://www.circleplayers.net).

*SISTER ACT* is the story of disco diva Deloris Van Cartier, who witnesses a murder and is put in protective custody in the one place cops are sure she won't be found - a convent! Disguised as a nun, she finds herself at odds with both the rigid lifestyle and an uptight Mother Superior. Using her fabulous *disco-ness* and killer voice to inspire the choir, Deloris breathes new life into the church, but in doing so blows her cover. Soon she's a nun-on-the-run time who finds salvation in the heavenly power of her newly found sisterhood. *SISTER ACT* features an original score by Alan Menken/Glenn Slater that is inspired by musical styles from Motown and gospel to great big disco anthems and Barry White inspired soul in a musical comedy.

The director of Circle's production, Tim Larson, points out that the musical is only loosely based on the smash 1992 movie starring Whoopi Goldberg.

"It does not utilize music from the movie, which was based off popular 60's and 70's music," explains Larson. "The premise and some of the main characters are the same but the musical is circa 1978 and smack dab in the disco era, with some new and very funny characters."

The hilarious and beloved central character of Deloris is played by LaToya Gardner, a familiar and popular local actress with awards and critical acclaim for her stage work, including Circle's *THE COLOR PURPLE* (Celie) and *DREAMGIRLS* (Lorrell). Gardner reveals that she has a few things in common with Deloris.

"Like Deloris, I attended a Catholic private school through middle school-- St. Vincent de Paul, which was located here in Nashville and still stands today," says Gardner. "I was a member of the school choir and during Mass and programs, like Deloris, I was allowed to direct the choir and lead the congregation in song. It wasn't uncommon to see a tiny, tenacious me marching the aisles of the Catholic Church encouraging the congregation to sing along."

Mary Corby, in the role of Mother Superior, also relates to the story because of her real-life job as Director of Music at St. Henry Catholic Church.

**OUR MISSION STATEMENT: Circle Players' aim is to promote public education appreciation and enjoyment of dramatic literature, stagecraft, fine arts and the theatre through the production of plays and by conducting other related activities.**



“I grew up Catholic and the coolest nun I ever met played guitar and taught us new folk music for Mass. At 13-years-old I thought that was what I was going to do, too!” says Corby.

“I have many friends who are nuns and they are the sweetest, coolest people who do wonderful work in our cities and with people who are in need. They are not the grouchy nuns from long ago, nor do they have tunnel-vision about the way to worship God, like Mother Superior does. If she would just let loose and realize that not everyone prays-thinks-worships-lives in the same way, she could experience the joy that life brings!”

One cast member who is absolutely not like his character is Isiah Tatum, who most would describe as a gentle giant—not the murdering thug who wants to track down and kill Deloris.

“Sometimes I look at the script and say, 'Curtis, you're going to do what? You need to go see the priest!' But it's fun getting outside of the box,” says Tatum. “I'm having to study thugs from TV and movies to see how it's done. I try to block out what Isiah would do and think of what Curtis would do.”

Circle's production features a talented ensemble of local actresses in the roles of various nuns and men as Curtis' Thugs, who have some of the funniest numbers in the show. Featured roles include Sister Mary Patrick (Abbie Mummert), Sister Mary Lazarus (Taylor Simon), Sister Mary Robert (Rae Robeson), Sister Mary Martin-of-Tours (Adele Akin), Monsignor O'Hara (Ron Veasey) and Thugs, TJ (Leon Blandon), Joey (Brian Best), Pablo (Joshua Andrew Hosale) and Ernie (Jarvis Bynum).

“Sister Act's overall theme is accepting those who we perceive have no worth because of a mistake or certain situation and learn to love them for who they really are,” says Tatum. “The cast is very diverse, and we treat each other like family and with love. With all the social tensions today, a lot of individuals could use a good dose of this show to send their bias and hatred out the door. Let's Spread the Love! (the title of the show's finale song).”

The music director for *SISTER ACT* is John Kennerly, whose work with Circle includes music direction for the mammoth production of *TITANIC* at TPAC in 2012. Choreography is by Tosha Pendergrast. The technical design team includes Jim Manning (set), Rachel Gallup (costumes), Cathy Matthews (lighting) and Cameron Cleland (sound).

Circle Players was granted the right to be among the first community theatres in the country to produce *SISTER ACT*, which still has not been licensed for general release.

“We are so very proud to be granted this honor and believe it demonstrates that Circle and its volunteers are among the premiere community theatre organizations in the country,” says Larson.

Larson, whose directing credits include *RAGTIME*, *TITANIC the Musical* and *THE COLOR PURPLE*, adds that he's happy to direct a show that is not tragic and filled with human struggles and emotional tension.

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“*SISTER ACT* is a lot unadulterated fun, but also carries a message of love, renewal, and joy,” Larson says.

Cast members agree.

“Hopefully, the audience will see this as a chance to laugh at the twists and turns life will throw at you, whether by choice or by chance,” says Gardner. “But above all those things, I hope they receive the message that life is full of love and second chances and that each audience member leaves full of joy.”

Tatum says “I hope the audiences take away the essence of what unconditional love is all about and the importance of brother and sisterhood. We all need somebody!”

*SISTER ACT* is fun, uplifting entertainment for the whole family. Performances January 15-31, 2016, at the Tennessee State University Performing Arts Center on the main campus of TSU:

\* Thursday through Saturday evenings at 7:30 p.m.

\* Sunday matinees at 3:00 p.m.

Tickets for *SISTER ACT* purchased online at [www.circleplayers.net](http://www.circleplayers.net) are \$18 for adults, \$15 for students (elementary through college) and seniors (60-plus). Prices are higher at the door. Thursdays (January 21 and 28) are Pay-What-You-Can. Group discounts available for groups of 10 or more. For group sales and to make all reservations, email [boxoffice@circleplayers.net](mailto:boxoffice@circleplayers.net) or call (615) 332-7529.

Circle Players is pleased to partner with the National Museum of African American Music (NMAAM) and grateful to receive funding support from HCA TriStar Health.

*SISTER ACT* is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance material are also supplied by MTI. [www.MTIShows.com](http://www.MTIShows.com). Music by TONY and Oscar winner Alan Menken; Lyrics by Glenn Slater; Book by Cheri Steinkellner & Bill Steinkellner.

For more information about Circle’s production and to purchase tickets, visit [www.circleplayers.net](http://www.circleplayers.net)

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