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Good Morning, Tucson: University of Arizona graduates return to Tucson for 'Hairspray' national tour

By [Laura Latzko](#)



(Photo: Jeremy Daniel)

"You Can't Stop The Beat" (Nov 23) - (center) Caroline Eiseman as Tracy Turnblad and Company in Hairspray.

Some University of Arizona graduates are returning to Tucson for the "Hairspray" national tour. They'll be in town Tuesday, April 23, to Sunday, April 28, as part of the Broadway in Tucson series.

“Hairspray” may seem like a lighthearted show, with hit songs such as “You Can’t Stop the Beat,” “Good Morning Baltimore,” “The Nicest Kids in Town” and “Welcome to the 60’s,” but the show delves into deeper topics such as integration, social activism, body image and self-love, and acceptance. This is why it resonates with fans and actors in the show, including UofA alumni Alyssa Jacqueline and Sarah Hayes.

In the production, Jacqueline portrays Shelly, one of the dancers featured on “The Corny Collins Show,” and is also the understudy for Penny Pingleton. Hayes is featured as antagonist Velma von Tussle, the station manager and former beauty queen who is pushing her daughter Amber to follow a similar path.

“Hairspray” follows Tracy Turnblad, a 16-year-old girl who aspires to be on “The Corny Collins Show.” She faces opposition from Velma and Amber because she doesn’t look like a prototypical dancer. She ends up getting a spot on the show and becoming a trendsetter.

This is both Jacqueline’s and Hayes’ first national tour. Hayes, who is originally from Iowa, did theater in high school and interned with the Clinton Area Showboat Theater, where she had the chance to work alongside professionals in mainstage and children’s shows and learn technical skills.

She later attended Mesa Community College for two years before going to the UofA, from which she received a B.F.A. in acting and directing in 2006. She said that UofA helped prepare her for a career in theater.

“I’m just so grateful,” Hayes said. “If it wasn’t for the training that I got there, I know I wouldn’t be where I am. They really gave me all the tools I needed.”

While at UofA, she had a chance to understudy with the Arizona Theater Company, which she said was very helpful to her growth as an actress.

During her theater career, Hayes has done shows such as “Moon Over Buffalo,” “A White Christmas,” “The Rocky Horror Picture Show,” “Julius Caesar,” “We Will Rock You” and “Menopause The Musical.” She has portrayed male roles such as Cassius and Riff Raff and has played evil characters such as the Killer Queen in “We Will Rock You.”

She booked “Hairspray” during her first audition in New York, a feat that is rare.

“I just can’t quite believe it, but I’m incredibly grateful for the opportunity. I don’t take it for granted,” Hayes said.

In “Hairspray,” she is featured in songs such as “(The Legend of) Miss Baltimore Crabs” and “Velma’s Revenge,” a song which stretches her as a performer.

“She just loses her mind, and it’s very fun as an actor to get to that extreme level of staged insanity,” Hayes said. “I started out a little timid in rehearsals when doing that number, and now it’s just this freeing moment of losing it.”

She said it took her some time to get used to being such a mean-spirited character who is insensitive to others. She does check-ins with other actresses, especially Caroline Eiseman, who plays Tracy, and Kaila Symone Crowder, who plays Little Inez.

“It may be hard to say these things, but this character and these words are necessary to the story,” Hayes said. “I think as a human, I’m a peacemaker, so it’s funny I’m playing the villain. I had a friend tell me, ‘I think you’re perfect to play Velma because you can say these things onstage, and your cast will know there’s not an ounce of that in you as a human.’”

She does find it to be a compliment now when others say they don’t like her character. She said that means she has done her job as an actress.

She has already worked with Caroline Portner, the actress who portrays her daughter Amber, on “Mamma Mia!” and “White Christmas.” She had played auntie-type characters such as Martha in “White Christmas” and Tanya in “Mamma Mia!”

“That for me was the easiest relationship from the start because we already had love and respect for each other,” Hayes said. “I could tell her, her dancing was atrocious, and she knew it wasn’t the truth. ... It felt very natural. I already felt like we had mother-daughter vibes.”

While Hayes has more of an acting and singing background, her fellow UofA graduate has come from more of a dancing background. Originally from New York, Jacqueline has a B.F.A. in dance and B.A. in communications. She graduated in May 2023 and started on the tour in Aug. 2023. She did a lot of ballet, pointe and partnering classes while at UofA.

“Ballet is the center of everything, and if you have that technique, you can take it into almost any style of dance,” Jacqueline said. “So, I feel like it accelerated me into a position of feeling really comfortable on auditions.”

Jacqueline was a competitive dancer growing up, from the age of six through high school. She also trained in different styles of dance. Her older sister, who had studied dance performance in Oklahoma, was a major influence on her and got her interested in dance and musical theater.

“I remember when I would go and visit her in college, and I would watch her shows,” Jacqueline said. “It became something that I really wanted to do. I used to be her little doll, and she would teach me ballet classes at the age of two in our basement.”



(Photo: Jeremy Daniel)

“(The Legend of) Miss Baltimore Crabs” (Nov 23) – (center) Sarah Hayes as “Velma Von Tussle” and Company in Hairspray.

Her mom also took her to Broadway shows when she was young. In her theater career, she has performed in shows such as “Legally Blonde,” “A Chorus Line” and “Mamma Mia!”

She has a special relationship with the 2007 film version of “Hairspray”, which starred Queen Latifah, John Travolta, Michelle Pfeiffer, Zac Efron and Amanda Bynes. She and her college roommates used to watch the movie regularly.

Jacqueline said while other shows have been dance-heavy, “Hairspray” has challenged her in terms of stamina.

“It’s a lot of cardio,” Jacqueline said. “It’s a lot of really fast and high energy movement. We’re all playing 16-year-old kids who love to dance on ‘The Corny Collins Show.’ So, it’s a lot of digging deep and making sure you have that teenage energy.”

“Sometimes, it can be hard, especially with the travel and changing locations every other day, just long days and sleepless nights sometimes. I always go into every show thinking the audience that is here right now, it’s their first time seeing it. You don’t want to give them anything less than your best.”

With the show, she has had the opportunity to learn dance moves from the 1960s.

“We learned about the Fly, the Jerk and the typical Twist,” Jacqueline said. “It’s really, really fun because it transports you back to a time. It was really fun to learn and execute. You see older people in the audience that really resonate with the steps that you’re doing.”

Her main character, Shelly, is known for giving the thumbs up to the audience. Jacqueline describes her as a peppy 14 or 15-year-old girl who is one of the youngest and smallest dancers. She takes a liking to Tracy early on and supports her, and she even dons a similar big hairstyle as Tracy. The actress has developed her own backstory for her character.

“I always said that Shelly was coming from a bit of a broken family,” Jacqueline said. “Her mom was always around, but her dad wasn’t. That’s why she dances on ‘The Corny Collins Show,’ in hopes that she can help to support her mom.”

“I knew as an actor I needed to have a reason as to why I’m dancing on this show. Would a 14 to 15-year-old really be working every day after school? Why? So, it was something that I had to really think about, meditate on and dig deep and give her that kind of human connection that I needed for her. And she means a lot to me.”

National Tour of “Hairspray”

WHEN: Tuesday–Sunday, April 23–28

WHERE: Centennial Hall, 1020 E. University Boulevard, Tucson

COST: Tickets start at \$40