

After 2 years of disruption, this production of Sister Act raised its curtain in 2022 and this joyous, celebratory story has finally reached us here in Belfast's Grand Opera House. Sister Act, originally a film starring Whoopi Goldeberg and later a show directed by Craig Revel Horwood, is a story about community and people coming together. In this production they decided to be bold and different - to this end they cast older and plus-size actors

The Cast and Costumes

Best known for playing Dorian Green, the neighbour from hell in the sitcom Birds of a Feather, Lesley Joseph plays the part of Mother Superior. She is extremely petite with very pale skin and dark brown eyes accentuated by black eyeliner and mascara. She has prominent cheekbones and a small mouth with red lipstick.

She wears a nun's habit with the wimple covering her hair - a wimple is made of white cloth, covering the head and neck so the face is all that can be seen. Her long black veil is attached to the wimple and hangs down her back. The tunic of the black habit reaches her ankles and has long sleeves. A silver crucifix hangs from a chain. She wears black tights and sturdy lace-up black leather shoes. In a later scene we see her about to go to bed in a long, pale, quilted house-coat buttoned up to the neck over a long white cotton nightgown. Her wimple remains on her head and furry slippers on her feet.

Sandra Marvin has had an illustrious career in performance and now brings her immense talent to the role of Deloris Van Cartier. Deloris is a tall, buxom woman with long, dark afro hair which she wears to the side. She has large dark almond shaped eyes and a full mouth on her heart-shaped face. She is very heavily made up with large hoop diamante earrings. When we first see her she is wearing an extremely short silver and purple sparkly short dress with a plunging neckline and full sleeves of purple crushed velvet trimmed with silver. A pair of knee-high purple, platform lace-up boots finish off her outfit. Later she wears a traditional nun's habit as described above.

Lizzie Bea plays the part of Sister Mary Robert. As she is still training to be a nun, Sr Mary Robert's veil does not cover all of her hair and so her strawberry blond fringe which tops her youthful round face can be glimpsed. She wears a long-sleeved white shirt under her long black belted tunic, which stops above her white ankle socks and mary-jane style shoes.

Graham Macduff plays Eddie Souther. He is tall and slim with dark slick backed hair and an angular face. He wears a blue police officers uniform - the wide lapels and flared trousers placing him in the 1970's.

Jeremy Secomb plays Curtis Jackson - he has dark, wavy collar length hair slicked to the side, mutton-chop sideburns and dark handle-bar moustache. He wears a black and white striped suit - flared trousers and wide lapels on the jacket. A purple shirt open to reveal his hairy chest and medallion. He also has a silk waistcoat.

Joey, played by Tom Hopcroft has glasses and a goatee, brown cap, tan leather jacket, cream roll neck sweater, brown checked flared trousers and brown pointy shoes.

Pablo, played by Damian Buhagiar has long dark curly hair slicked back in a half ponytail. He wears a black leather jacket, pale patterned tight-fitting shirt open at the collar and blue trousers - tight at the top, flared at the bottom and brown heeled boots.

TJ played by Bradley Judge wears a blue suit, an orange and brown floral print shirt open at the neck to reveal his necklace.

For the finale Delores and the Mother Superior wear black and white sparkly sequined habits and the other sisters each wear a different brightly coloured sparkly sequined habit. Eddie, The Monsignor and altar boys also have sequined versions of their earlier costumes. Curtis and his boys were black and white striped prisoners uniforms- made out of sequins!

Rhys Owen plays the Monsignor.

Catherine Millsom play Sister Mary Patrick

Anne Smith plays Sister Mary Lazarus

Tricia Deighton plays Sister Mary Theresa

Lori Haley Fox plays Sister Mary Martin of Tours

Castell Parker plays Clemont

Along with members of the chorus they also play adoring fans, patrons of the bar, police officers and nightclub performers.

The Set

Sister Act is quite a busy and complicated show, with lots of quick little scenes. It's also a world of contrasts: the dark gritty underworld where Deloris comes from is miles away from the sombre and ornate elegance of the nun's world. And it's Deloris who brings colour into the drab, dilapidated environment of the cathedral.

Three large glitter balls hang above the front of the stage sending sparkling circles of white light around the auditorium which is also bathed in a pink haze before the play begins. The words Sister Act are written in neon across the front of the curtain.

The play opens in Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrow Cathedral, South Philadelphia. The church is in disrepair, buckets catch dripping water and there is incense smoke everywhere. A large marble arch with ornate carving represents the walls of the Cathedral- it reaches to the very top and sides of the stage. At the back and centre there is a circular stained glass window with most of the glass missing and what remains is covered in cobwebs. A tall, modest brass crucifix stands in front of this and on either side there is a tall candelabra on which flicker several candles. A lighting effect creates the illusion of the reflection of the stained glass window on the floor.

The removal of the candelabra and crucifix and the addition of two large rectangular wooden tables joined together end to end creates the dining hall. The nuns sit in a row on benches facing out and the Mother Superior has a large ornately carved wooden chair in the middle of them. There is also a metal catering trolley with a large lidded pot sitting on it - a bedraggled piece of gold tinsel hangs from the handle. On the table a simple white dish and spoon for each sister.

With the tables and seating removed the addition of pews and a piano creates the choir practice room. The removal of the piano and addition of a lectern and altar table creates the chapel. The Mother Superior's office is created by her chair behind a large wooden table with an old-fashioned black rotary telephone and a large book on it.

In addition to the various parts of the cathedral, a nightclub, an alleyway, a police station, a bar and bedrooms are created through the rotation and sliding in and out, up and down of the scenery. Cleverly, the crucifix becomes a microphone stand and a beer pump.

When we first meet Deloris in the nightclub she is singing in front of a wall of around two hundred multicoloured lit bulbs and there are tables on the left and right of the stage. The wall slides apart and we can see her imaginary fans with flickering lights creating the illusion of their cameras flashing. Without the bulbs lit the wall provides a backdrop to the cathedral. A large dumpster lets us know we are in an alleyway. A backdrop painted with a cityscape of Philadelphia and two flats with skyscrapers on them lets us know we are the city. On the reverse of these flats are filing cabinets and cardboard storage boxes so when they are rotated, along with the addition of a large cluttered office desk and a wheeled office chair, the police station is created. On top of one of the filing cabinets sits a small plastic Christmas tree. To create the bar in which Deloris encounters Curtis' gang along with a table and chairs, the altar table is lit up in bright colours and a juke box is added.