Welcome to Hairspray at the Grand Opera House, Belfast. We’re your audio describers for the night, Florence and Amy Stewart, describing for Sightlines NI.

Tonight’s show is 2hrs and 30 minutes long with a 20 minute interval.

There’s a lot of info in these notes and the show is fast paced, so we won’t be able to fit it in during the action. Listen up – we’re about to tell you as much as we can about the scenery, characters and the costumes!

SCENERY

The action takes place in Baltimore in the early sixties where a popular TV show, The Corny Collins teen dance show is sponsored by a hairspray company. The scenes in the show take place in various locations, at times simultaneously. We will see:

Streets in Baltimore, both in day and evening time.

The Turnblad household

The Pingleton’s

The Von Tussle’s

WZZT TV Studio

Patterson Park High School

The Har de Har Hut joke shop

Mr Pinky’s Hefty Hideaway outsize clothes shop

Motormouth Maybelles’s record shop in the black quarter of town

A Women’s Jail

The scenery changes rapidly throughout the show. Scenes are played out in different parts of the stage, with our focus drawn to the relevant action by spot lighting. The floor of the stage is of a geometrical design that remains throughout the show, but is lit differently depending on the scene.

The show begins with Tracy in bed before leaving for school. The bed stands vertically and has pink covers and a circular pink rug with a record player and records on the floor. The bed is drawn upwards, a gauzy curtain rises on a Baltimore street in early morning where some windows are lit up. There are old red brick buildings, both shop fronts and housing, some are two storey or higher, with a long straight road running between them.

The action in individual households is highlighted when the bottom section of the brick houses slides upwards and a small diaz, which is slightly raised, glides outwards onto the theatre floor.

The Pingleton house appears on the right, where we see Penny’s Pingleton in her austere bedroom consisting of a single bed with a curved pine headboard with small posts on each end, and a cross carved into the centre.

 The Von Tussle house appears centre stage, unlike Penny’s bedroom, Amber’s pretty room contains an ornate cream coloured dressing table with a mirror and matching round stool. The top of the dressing table is covered in bottles and creams. The pink wallpaper has a diamond design.

The Turnblad front door faces us on the left side of the stage. When the diaz slides out part of the green painted hallway is visible with a small picture on the wall. On this diaz we often see Tracy’s mum, Edna at her ironing board, which has a shelf beneath with neatly folded laundry. To the right of the ironing board is a small chair, and in front of it is a b/w TV on a low coffee table where Tracy and Penny sit on the floor to watch the Corny Collins Show.

The WZZT TV Studio where The Corny Collins Show is filmed occupies most of the theatre floor to accommodate the dancers. It is lit from above by 5 rectangular stage lights suspended from the studio roof.

 On the right of the stage a large movie camera on wheels is operated by a camera man who moves it back and forward whilst filming. The dancers and Corny Collins, occupy the entire area of the stage with movement, with a live band seated on an elevated platform at the back of the stage. The front of the platform consists of upright semi opaque columns which have a geometric design that reminds one of high rise buildings lit in pastel colours during the show.

When off air the studio is dark with double doors with signs above reading “ON AIR, “QUIET”, “STUDIO” and “APPLAUSE”. Velma Von Tussle has a private office to the left of the studio. Thelma and members of the council use the studio for auditions and sit at a rectangular wooden table with chairs.

Later, towards the finale of the show, the studio will be the scene of Baltimore Eventorium, Miss Hairspray 1962. A giant sparkling can of Ultra Clutch Hairspray is wheeled in by Wilbur. It lights up at the base and emits clouds of hairspray around the dancers. The sign for the event which is suspended above the studio, is also a score board for votes for Miss Teenage Hairspray.

The first scene in Patterson Park High School takes place outside the head master’s office which has a massive dark wooden door that dwarfs the students milling around outside it. It has a square panel above, two smaller ones beneath, and a brass handle on the left. A sign on the upper part says “Principal’s Office Enter”. Cleverly, the huge door recedes into the background to reveal a long school corridor with windows on both sides and a polished floor.

The detention classroom has square paned windows throwing light into the room. On the rear wall is a large blackboard with lines written in chalk and a clock above it. Those on detention loll about on a few desks on the right.

The school hop takes place in the gymnasium which has climbing frames on the rear wall and two mounted basketball nets to the side of the wooden bars.

Mr Pinky’s Hefty Hideaway clothes shop is revealed when a large poster of The Dynamites, a trio of black singers is lifted upwards. The shop opens onto the street and has double glass doors to the centre and two smaller glass doors to the right and left. Behind the long rectangular glass panes of the shop front we see mannequins dressed in pink and pink studded fabric on the walls. The shop front parts in the centre and each half pivots round to reveal a star burst design pulsing with light.

The windows of the adjacent buildings reflect psychedelic colours from the overhead strobe lighting.

Motormouth Maybelle’s record shop is in the black quarter of town. The street is similar to where Tracy lives, but here some of the buildings are in need of repair. A wide road with cars parked on either side runs between shops with metal blinds on the windows, and brick houses. A diaz slides out from the right of the stage where we see a large counter with speakers on both ends. The entrance is metallic silver and above the shop is a moving sign of a large spinning record, which when paused reads “Motor Mouth”. When Maybelle plays music coloured lazer lights flash ziz zag across the stage.

The Har de Har Hut joke shop is run by Wilbur Turnblad. A sign above the shop reads Har de Har Hut, with the word hut in very large letters. The simple counter, covered in various jokey items such as a deflated rubber chicken, glides in on a diaz on the right. The shop opens onto a narrow street where washing is strung on lines across an alley. Later a guaze curtain will obscure the washing and we will see a night sky with a crescent moon above high rise building with lighted windows. The scene will be framed in light bulbs as Edna and Wilbur dance together. Opposite the front of the shop is a wooden park bench with a curved slatted back and seat, with ornate iron feet where Edna sits with Wilbur.

The Women’s Jail has high metal bars with a brick wall at the rear of the cell. Search lights from the guard posts illuminates the prisoners who are behind the bars in prison clothing. Later they will be allowed into the exercise yard for keep-fit.

The scenery changes for this show are fast paced and exciting. Multiple props are used throughout, too many to mention individually. There is a clever use of lighting which is essential to draw our focus to the action, which at times takes place simultaneously on different parts of the stage. The scenery is very colourful, as is the lighting which reflects changes in the music tempo as well as setting the mood for various scenes.

CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

Tracey Turnblad is played by Rebecca Mendoza. Tracey is a happy teenager with an ample figure and big hair. Her black, shoulder length hair is backcombed at the crown so it sits up and flicked out at the ends. Her hair is blonde underneath so blonde streaks appear sometimes and she always wears a hairband with a small bow on top. In the opening scene she removes a dressing gown as she leaps out of bed, under which she wears a tight fitting white shirt together with a blue skirt flared at the knees, white ankle socks and trainers.

Later when Tracey dances on the Corny Collins Show she is wearing a pleated skirt with a 60’s style geometric check print. When she is dressed by Mr Pinky Tracey wears a knee length dress with a swirly pink and purple and blue pattern and matching pink shoes with a small heel.

In The Big Doll House number, Tracey is in a black and white striped smock type dress and all the other ladies are dressed in black and white striped overalls.

Tracey’s best friend is Penny Pingleton. She is played by Annalise Liard-Bailey. Penny is a tall, skinny teenager with dark hair in two long plaits. She wears dark rimmed glasses and has on a knee length tartan skirt, a pale blue shirt and long socks. Later she wears a pink gingham pinafore.

Corny Collins, played by John Tsouras. Corny is a slim, dark haired handsome young man in his early 20’s. When we first meet him he is wearing a shiny silver jacket and silver tie with slim fitting green trousers.

Velma Von Tussle is played by Gina Murray. Velma is the producer for the Corny Collins Show. She is around 40, small and slim with a big pile of blonde hair sitting high on her head. At first she wears a turquoise blue dress with a long chiffon scarf floating from round her neck.

Amber Von Tussle is played by Aimee Moore. Amber is very pretty with long curly platinum blonde hair. When she first appears she is wearing a pink calf length dress with short sleeves and a sash around the waist. Later on the Corny Collins Show Amber and the other female dancers wear bright coloured prom type dresses with wide skirts filled out with petticoats in yellows, blues, pinks and greens.

Link Larkin, played by Edward Chitticks. Link is a slim, handsome teenager with short dark hair swept back in a rock and roll pompadour style. He is wearing a slim fitting light blue suit with a yellow shirt and a blue tie with dark stripes. Later on the Corny Collins Show Link wears a slim fit pink suit with a bright blue tie. In the record shop Link is casual in sports jacket, jeans and trainers.

Edna Turnblad is played by Matt Rixton. Edna is a large lady in her forties with mousy hair tied back off her face. She is about 6ft tall. At first she is wearing a voluminous, calf length house coat. When she is dressed by Mr Pinky Edna wears an ankle length A-line dress in a swirly rainbow coloured print. The cuffs and the hem are trimmed with blue and pink marabou feathers and her hair is styled into a curled up-do. She has matching shoes with a small heel. Later in the record shop she wears a green dress.

In the Timeless to Me number Edna wears a calf length dress with a diamond pattern and a wide blue collar and cuffs.

Wilbur Turnblad is played by comedian Norman Pace. He is a short, stout man standing head and shoulders shorter than his wife. At first he wears bright cerise trousers, a pink polka dot shirt, a yellow spotty jacket and a grey trilby hat. Later he changes to green trousers.

Prudy Pingleton is Penny’s mum. She has brown hair, wears a brown dress and has sensible brown shoes.

Mr Spritzer is a middle aged business man in a blue suit. He has thick dark hair.

Little Inez is played by Monifa James. She is a young. Slim, pretty black girl with thick dark hair tied back off her face. At first she wears a pink pinafore with a knee length skirt and ankle socks.

Later when she dances at Motormouth’s record shop Little Inez wears a shiny green sleeveless top with a broad gold belt and a pink skirt that swing out as she dances. The other girls here wear A-Line mini skirt dresses in bright colours.

Seaweed J Stubbs is played by Layton Williams from Bad Education. Seaweed is a handsome black teenager with short black hair. At first he wears yellow coloured trousers and a white shirt with yellow sneakers. Later Seaweed and the other black dancers wear slim fitting trousers in blues and pinks and tee shirts with broad coloured stripes.

Motormouth Maybelle is played by Brenda Edwards, who came to fame in the X-Factor. She is an attractive, curvy black woman of about 40 years old and has a massive shock of curly blonde hair. At first Motormouth is wearing a gold leopard print cat suit with long sleeves and a low neckline, and tall gold stiletto shoes. In Act 2 Motormouth returns to the record shop in a blue trouser suit with capri pants and a matching jacket.

The Dynamites are a glamorous, all black, female singing trio. They wear glitzy silver sequinned cocktail dresses that sparkle when they dance.

Mr Pinky who runs the clothes shop wears a suit with a big pink check and a pink waistcoat and shiny black shoes.

In the Miss Teenage Hairspray spectacular at the end of the show all the characters appear in new costumes, so I’ll list the grand finale seperately. In order of appearance:

* Corny Collins wears a shiny pink jacket and orange trousers
* The female dancers are in smocks with the Ultra Clutch logo buttoned up to the neck and they have chiffon scarves covering their hair. Later when the smocks are removed they are wearing prom dresses with stripes in blue and pink and purple.
* Amber’s dress is the same prom style with black and white chevron stripes and blue petticoats.
* The male dancers are in different coloured trousers and shirts with a little bow tie at the collar.
* Velma wears a gold coloured knee length dress
* Wilbur comes on in a navy blue pair of janitors overalls and returns later in a gold sparkly jacket.
* Tracey wears a short dress just above her knee. It has a cerise pink bolero jacket over a pink dress covered in brightly coloured mirrored squares that glint in the light. She has a big blonde bouffant hairstyle with her dark roots showing and a little pink bow at the front.
* The black male dancers are in bright purple, pink and blue suits. Seaweed’s suit is pink.
* Link wears blue trousers, a purple shirt, an orange bow tie and a pink jacket with a swirling orange and purple pattern.
* The Dynamites wear sequinned evening dresses with a long slit showing off their legs, and purple ostrich feather boas.
* Penny wears a stunning gold sequin cocktail dress that sparkles as she dances. Her dark hair is slicked into a stylish pony tail.
* Little Inez wears a sleeveless blue sequin top and a wide skirt that spins out as she dances and she has bows in her hair.
* Prudy wears a blue coat with a high collar.
* Edna wears a full length shiny pink lame gown with pink feathers at the neck, cuffs and hem.
* Motormouth wears a shimmering full length blue and purple gown with a purple bolero jacket.