1. What is your history with “Hairspray”?

“My history with ‘Hairspray’ dates back to the early 90s when I first saw the movie. My sister and I watched the film repeatedly; it was one of our favorites. I was in college at Western Michigan University when I heard they were making a musical version of the movie. One year later I was in NYC auditioning for the Broadway show. I made it to the end but I was not cast. But a year later auditions began for the first national tour of Hairspray, The Musical, directed and choreographed by Tony Award winners Jack O’Brien and Jerry Mitchell and Disney’s High School Musical directed by Tony winner Jeff Calhoun. He also performed as Richie in A Chorus Line and Victor in Smokey Joes Café on the European tours of both shows. He most recently was seen in the Milwaukee Rep’s Dreamgirls and the Maltz Jupiter’s The Wiz, serving as assistant choreographer and dance captain. Other prominent theaters of note are Paper Mill Playhouse, Goodspeed Opera House, Barrington Stage, Atlanta Theater of the Stars, Stage St. Louis, Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, and many more. In New York City, Leonard directed and choreographed an original review called Dual Belters starring Jersey Boys star Courter Simmons. In Michigan he’s directed and choreographed shows at the University Liggett School, York Theatre, and Gulf Lake Café. He also performed in Rags, Godspell, and Company at the Kalamazoo Civic Theatre. Leonard worked at The Barn Theatre in 1999 and Cherry County Playhouse 2001. He has taught theater and dance workshops all across the United States.

2. What are some of the themes the musical addresses?

“The theme on all levels is acceptance. Acceptance no matter your size, race, or economic background. It’s a period piece that deals with segregation of white and black people in the 1960’s. Tracy overcomes a personal battle to get on the Corny Collins Show, which she doesn’t fit the typical standard for. She then helps get her black friends, who she feels also have the right to be on the show as well. These themes are themes we are still dealing with today.”

3. Do you recommend volunteers watch either the original 1988 movie or the 2007 movie adaptation of the musical in preparation for auditions?

“I think both films are important to understand the journey of the piece. The original film is what the writers used to write the musical, so it’s very relevant. The second movie is based on the musical so it helps to understand the flow of the show, especially if you’ve never seen it.”

4. How would you recommend volunteers prepare for auditions?

“Research the 60’s what was going on in 1964? The music, dance, hair and clothing style, socially and politically as well. Then come with a great 60’s song and show us what you got!”

5. Would you provide a brief character description of the roles?

“TRACY TURNBLAD: White. 15, 16, average teenage, bright, hopeful, energetic, innocent. Most common misconception is that she needs to be fat and short. Tracy can be short and not as thin as her peers but not necessary. If she is cast that way it is important to know Tracy doesn’t think she is overweight. She thinks she is on the cutting edge of fashion. She is more than a funny girl who has too much energy all of the time. She loves the Corny Collins show more than anything and teasing her hair higher than everyone else.

Corny Collins: White. A Dick Clark type. The only adult really on the pulse of the social change going on in America.

EDNA: White. Tracy’s mother (traditional played by a man) should be played honest not as a drag queen. She is a lower middle class plus size, mother who has lost her confidence and doesn’t leave her home anymore. However it is important to show the love between Edna and Wilbur to truly understand Tracy’s unique confidence. She is also very funny and protective of Tracy.

PENNY PINGLETON: White. Tracy’s kooky best friend, she a product of a strict conservative mother, always chewing gum and like Tracy views the world optimistically.

VELMA VONTUSSLE: White. Amber’s Mother, producer of the Corny Collins show, our antagonist who just wants to keep things the way they are. Sexy, may have slept her way to the top, upper middle class but probably worked for every cent. Former pageant queen.”
AMBER VONTUSSLE: White. Star of Corny Collins show, a product of her mother, pageant girl, spoiled.

LINK LARKIN: White. Star of Collins show, handsome, charming, not the brightest but follows his heart. Teenage heartthrob.


LITTLE INEZ: Black. Seaweed’s little sister. Strong singer.

MOTORMOUTH MAYBELLE: Black. DJ of Negro Day. Civil rights activist, plus size woman show is proud of her size. A mothering figure.

WILBUR TURNBLAD: White. Edna’s husband, eccentric, jokester, confident, comfortable in his own skin. Tracy gets her confidence from her dad.

PRUDY PINGELTON: White. Penny’s mom. She is sort of everything that is wrong with white America in this time period. But it’s important to remember that she is just a product of her environment and time, not evil or mean. There is a touch of crazy there as well.

MR. PINKY: White. Owner of plus size store Mr. Pinky’s Hefty Hideaway

GYM TEACHER: White.

HARRIMAN SPITZER: White. Sponsor for the Corny Collins show.

MATRON: White.

GILBERT: Black. Motormouth’s gang.

STOOIE: White. He’s in special ed.

CINDY WATKIN: Black. Motormouth’s gang.

LORRAINE: Black. Motormouth’s gang.

DUANE: Black. Motormouth’s gang.

THAD: Black. Motormouth’s gang.

COUNCIL MEMBERS: all white, very All-American and pretty famous for being on a local TV show, raging hormones, pushing the envelope and what they can get away with on TV. Eager to be on camera.

TAMMY, BRENDA, FENDER, BRENDA, SKETCH, SHELLEY, IG, LOU ANN

THE DYNAMITES: an all black, aspiring singing group, excellent singers.

JUDINE, KAMILAH, SHAYNA, ENSEMBLE, STUDENTS, SPECIAL ED KIDS, HOOKERS, BEATNIK CHICK, GUARD”

LEONARD E. SULLIVAN: Director of *Hairspray*

6. You describe *Hairspray* as “a very realistic, honest, but definitely heightened depiction of suburban life in the 60’s”. How does this affect the style of the acting?

“I say that because, if you read the script it is very funny and it definitely highlights so much nostalgia of what the 60’s were about. But what is important in the acting style is that we portray the characters very honestly. There wasn’t a ton of sarcasm or spin back then. So even though you are in outrageous hairdos, you have to believe that is perfectly normal. Velma isn’t a villain as much as she’s a product of her time and circumstance. We must play the characters honestly.”

7. What are the dancing demands volunteers will face being involved in the musical?

“The show is mostly sung so there is a lot of choreography but it is not ‘West Side Story’. It should depict kids dancing vernacular dances of the 60’s. It’s a musical, so every now and then we will bump it up a bit. But really think American Bandstand. So nothing too crazy. Practice the twist and the pony!”

8. How is off stage singing utilized in the musical?

“The score is written in different songs style of the 60’s and is often written in tight ‘Supreme’ girl group harmony. The offstage singing helps to make that Motown sound, a fuller sound like singing in the shower creates.”

9. Actors you like to work with have what three traits?

“Creative, Respectful, ‘Energetic or Present’.”

10. What is your directing process / style?

“My directing style varies depending on what I’m directing. I always start with the text and find out what the writers are trying to say, and then I decide what this production wants to say. With ‘Hairspray’, I’m working carefully with the music director and choreographer, so that we are all on the same page of how we want to approach this piece. Once music is learned, I always start with ‘You Can’t Stop the Beat’ choreography. It is truly the mantra of the show. With this message in mind we are ready for our journey together. I work fast and with fun. The piece is fun so we should be having fun putting it together!”

11. You’ve mentioned that the musical number “I Know Where I’ve Been” was almost cut from the original Broadway production. Why was that and why do you feel this is actually the climax of the musical for you?

“The song was almost cut because the show is a fairly upbeat piece, the creatives thought that the 11 o’clock number should be something upbeat not the slowest song in the whole show. Ultimately the writers felt that they needed to hit home the theme in a serious way or the audience wouldn’t truly appreciate that journey. It is the climax because it’s when the characters really realize what’s at stake. Lives are in danger, real change can be made all across the nation if the segregate the show. The weight of that discover and their decision to move forward with their plan is why it is the turning point of the play.”