



Triple threat

Bill Jackson, Times Staff

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Tammy Whetham isn't wet behind the ears when it comes to being on stage. But with every role, the 25-year-old triple threat is hoping to expand her repertoire that already includes a vast and varied resume in singing, acting and dancing.

The Cambridge soprano fell in love with singing at a young age and now reads music and sings harmonies in several different languages – a skill honed through her extensive choral/ensemble experience. She's performed alongside the Richmond Hill Philharmonic Orchestra, the Brantford Symphony and ARCADY, a Simcoe-based ensemble dedicated to the performance of baroque music.

Yet in a word, she said "diversity" is perhaps her best attribute.

"I can sing classical, but I can also do musical theatre repertoire – the older legit musical theatre and then the more contemporary belts."

The aspiring performer is also well versed in pop and jazz, and hosts an open mic night called Act Five at Maxwell's Music House in Waterloo, where singers are able to come and perform with an accompanist, "sort of like live karaoke".

Whetham took singing lessons and entered various competitions as an adolescent, but it wasn't until high school that she made the transition – along with her voice – to theatre.

At Monsignor Doyle Catholic Secondary School, Whetham was part of several productions, including *Bye Bye Birdie* and *Big: The Musical*.

"I loved it," she recalls.

At Wilfrid Laurier University, she earned an honours degree in music and was cast in several productions by local theatre companies. Upon graduating, she attended the NYU Steinhardt: Summer Study in Musical Theatre and has since worked with distinguished teachers, directors and production companies in all facets.

Whetham was the lead female singer in a production cast onboard the Pacific Venus, Japan Cruise Line as part of six production shows and three cabarets. Some of her recent stage credits include parts in Working Reel Productions' *Two & Two Make Sex* and *Nana's Naughty Knickers* and Hammer Entertainment's production of *The Wedding Singer*.

Most recently, she was cast as Amber Von Tussle in Hammer Entertainment's production of *Hairspray* that opens



Triple threat. Tammy Whetham (seen here in one of her costumes while performing on a cruise ship) plays Amber Von Tussle in Hammer Entertainment's production of *Hairspray*, which opens April 20. *Photo submitted*

April 20 at the Lyric Theatre in Hamilton.

The Broadway musical phenomenon that inspired a major motion picture will be in Steeltown for the first time ever and takes audiences back to 1962. Tracy Turnblad, a big girl with a big heart has one passion – dancing. She wins a spot on a local TV dance program and becomes a teen celebrity overnight, but whether the plus-size trendsetter in dance and fashion can usurp the program’s reigning princess remains to be seen.

“Amber is the snobby rich girl who’s kind of a bully,” explained Whetham. “She tries to steal the Miss Teenage Hairspray Crown. Her mother is kind of the same way. She cheats and lies.”

Whetham said role playing is challenging, but that doing it while singing and dancing is much more demanding.

“Rehearsal is a workout all on its own,” she said. “Amber dances a lot. There’s lots of dance numbers and I need to be able to sing while I’m doing that. So I have to learn all the ensemble stuff, but I have to learn the role as well. Once we learn the dances, we add vocals and need to build stamina and be ready to go.”

After linking up with an agent last fall, Whetham hopes *Hairspray* is one more step toward bigger and better things still to come.

Her rise in the musical theatre industry is gaining momentum, but hasn’t been instantaneous. It included playing the role of Boots in *Dora’s Sing Along Adventure* at Paramount Canada’s Wonderland and appearing in several small independent films. Her lifestyle still consists of several part-time positions at a local art gallery, museum and restaurant. She also teaches voice out of her home and helps out with the Kiwanis Boys’ Choir.

“In general, I live the typical life of an aspiring performer, working smalls jobs, teaching, training, waiting tables and waiting for my next big break,” she said.

Tickets and dates for *Hairspray* can be obtained by visiting www.lyrichamilton.com or by calling the box office at 905-527-6135.

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