



NO ONE PUTS BABY IN THE CORNER

Dirty Dancing: The Musical! Hits the Hult

JENNIFER MEALANI JONES, BRONWYN REED AND CHRISTOPHER TIERNEY IN DIRTY DANCING: THE MUSICAL!

What a great and glorious world we live in, when deliciously guilty pleasures from the '80s are reshaped for the stage: Johnny and Baby are back, and now they're singing and dancing? Yes, please!

The Theater League presents *Dirty Dancing* 7:30 pm Tuesday through Thursday, Feb. 28-March 2, at the Hult.

We recently caught up with one of the show's stars,

Jennifer Mealani Jones, who plays "Penny," the sassy dance instructor with a heart of gold. Jones says stepping into the role in the iconic story has been surreal.

"When I first got the part, I was still in college and my friends all teased me," Jones says. "They said, 'All you ever wanted to do is be in the movie *Dirty Dancing*!'"

Jones' character, Penny, has some big dancing shoes to fill.

"She's a powerhouse, a badass woman," Jones says. "And she also lives through controversy. There's a lot of work that goes into doing the role justice."

Penny comes from a rough background, and she's made some poor decisions. It's Penny's unplanned pregnancy that drives the narrative and gives Baby her own dancing shoes.

"She used to be a Rockette, but she started dating the wrong guy," Jones says of Penny's character. "Still, she's powerful and fun, and it's a joy to play this regal, blond, Hollywood-esque woman eight or nine times per week."

Jones says she dances through the whole first act of the show.

"It feels like I get shot out of a cannon," she says.

She and other performers stay on top of their game by hitting yoga classes or the gym in every town they visit.

"You do a lot outside the show when you're not in the show," Jones says.

So why see the musical, when you can just reminisce with Patrick Swayze in the film version?

"This show makes you feel like you're inside the movie," Jones says. "The scenes and songs move at such a fast-paced, exciting clip."

So will we see the lift? I mean, *will we have the time of our lives?*

"I have insider intel," Jones says, laughing. "You might as well get a refund on your ticket if you don't see that lift."

Dirty Dancing: The Musical hits the stage 7:30 pm Tuesday through Thursday, Feb. 28-Mar 2, at the Hult Center. \$47.50-\$108; tickets at BroadwayinEugene.com, the Hult Center Ticket Office or by calling 541-682-5000.

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