



They immediately fight as only loving family members can; Neary later quips to her Cambodian boyfriend, Ted (Moses Villarama), that, as the only child of an only child, she is doomed to be “disappointment made flesh.”

Guest artist Chay Yew — who directed *Cambodian Rock Band*’s world premiere last year at South Coast Rep and *Hannah and the Dread Gazebo* at OSF in 2017 — directs with fast, fluid energy. The show never stops moving and never stops wowing.

On a fundamental level *Cambodian Rock Band* is about the weaponization of art — especially music, but also storytelling itself. We see the bleakness that happens when the Khmer Rouge take over in 1975 and begin exterminating artists and intellectuals.

In the real world, a strong tradition of Cambodian rock ‘n’ roll that flourished in Phnom Penh in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s was all but eradicated by the Khmer Rouge. An L.A. group, Dengue Fever, has used a small number of recordings that survived the purge to bring back that Southeast Asian rock, and their songs — performed on stage by the fictional band the Cyclos — form the soundtrack to *Cambodian Rock Band*.

The play doesn’t stop there. The show — a taut melodrama, with a fast-moving plot and plenty of coincidences — dances delicately through the murky issues of personal responsibility and redemption in a world filled with evil. In the end, it explores the secrets that parents inevitably keep from their children, even in our tell-all, truth-as-therapy age.

The character in the play named Duch — it’s pronounced “Doik” — is based on a real person. Kaing Guek Eav, known as Duch, was arrested in 1999 for his role in the murderous Khmer Rouge death camps, best known in the U.S. through the 1984 movie *The Killing Fields*. The former math teacher is now serving a life sentence for his role in killing some 15,000 people.

In the play, Duch, the commander of S21, a Khmer Rouge death camp, tells one of his prisoners that whoever tells the story is always telling the truth.

That, of course, is why dictators and authoritative regimes of all stripes want to

**HAIRSPRAY—  
THE BROADWAY  
MUSICAL(2019): ENSEMBLE**  
PHOTO BY JENNY GRAHAM

ban or control art — an effort that, in the end, just gives art more power.

This is a beautiful, horrifying and exquisite play, performed to high-energy perfection. It might be the best show I’ve seen at OSF (my last favorite was Mary Zimmerman’s *White Snake* in 2012). It kept me in rapt attention for its entire two and a half hour run time before leaving me wrung out and gasping, near tears and laughing my head off. Get your seats now — they’ll certainly go fast, even though it runs for the full season.

## HAIRSPRAY

*Angus Bowmer Theatre through Oct. 27*

Who could not love *Hairspray*? The Broadway musical, based on the John Waters film of the same name, is a feel-good romp through the repressive shibboleths of the 1960s: racism, sexism and discrimination based on appearance among them, with a good dose of old-time Motownish rock ‘n’ rock for a soundtrack.

As the story opens, played out here on a wondrously versatile rotating set by Nina Ball, plus-sized Baltimore teenager Tracy Turnblad, played with zest by Katy Geraghty, is watching *The Corny Collins Show* on afternoon TV when Corny (Eddie Lopez) announces the show is looking for a new dancer.

Tracy wants to try out, but her plus-plus-sized mother, Edna (played wonderfully here by Daniel T. Parker, a physical comedy genius, in the role that was performed in the original film by Divine), forbids it, not wanting Tracy’s feelings to be hurt.

With that, the story is off and running, wending its way past the audition itself into Tracy’s determination to crash Baltimore’s strict color line and integrate Corny’s monthly Negro Day dance with the regular all-white show. This results in protests, cops and jail — much like the real-life events in Baltimore that inspired Waters’ film.

The music’s good, if rarely great; the best song is “I Know Where I’ve Been,” the show’s 11 o’clock number by Motormouth Maybelle (Greta Oglesby).

This is a fine show that feels a bit dated. Camp has long since lost the edge it had

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### JENNY SCHEINMAN & H. LEE WATERS KANNAPOLIS: A MOVING PORTRAIT

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