

Carly Jibson

Twenty-Year-Old *Hairspray* Star Raises The Bar

by Iris Wiener

Hairspray opens with Carly Jibson's dreamy, wide-eyed Tracy Turnblad bidding good morning to a world that holds dreams full of the innocent naiveté that fills the hopes of all teenage girls. The sentiment behind the opening lyrics couldn't be more fitting for the Broadway newcomer as she belts, "Every day's like an open door," and "Every night is a fantasy," to a packed house eight times every week. After having toured with the original company of *Hairspray*, 20-year-old Jibson raises the bar for the heart-warming role at the Neil Simon Theatre, as she lives the life that she has always known was intended for her.

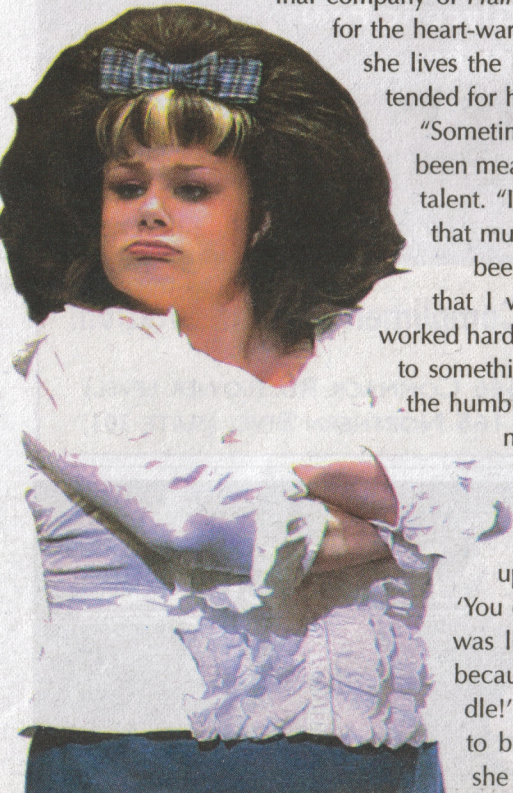
"Sometimes I think that it just would have to have been meant to be," says the actress of her natural talent. "In all honesty, I don't *feel* like I've done that much to get here. I feel like it had to have been planned for me or part of something that I was supposed to do. I auditioned and worked hard, but it wasn't like I fought from nothing to something. It's not this great success story ...," the humble star trails off. A Muskegon, Michigan native, Jibson grew up having received a shot at all of her dreams – including even the most fantastical. "I had such a good childhood and I kind of grew up in this fairy tale life. My mom was like, 'You could be anything you want to be,' so I was like, 'Let's give this princess thing a try, because it sounds like something I could handle!' And my mom said, 'No, no, you have to be born into royalty,'" laughs Jibson, as she attempts to tell this story with a straight

what you said and how you felt, and I think that's what *Hairspray* is trying to do."

Ironically, Jibson is frequently asked about the experience of bringing her weight to the part. "Being in this role is so fortunate in so many ways. Normally, a girl like me is the cameo character actress, does the five-minute entrance and steals the show – it's *never* like this kind of a situation. I don't know if that's changing; I'd like to think that it is, I don't think that it will," she says sadly. In fact, *Hairspray's* neighbor, *Little Shop Of Horrors* gets lauded with shouts of "Fat one!" as Joey Fatone leaves the theater after performances. "I think that everybody likes *Hairspray's* story because you're supposed to. Of course, you always root for the underdog, but in life nobody ever roots for the underdog and it's sort of depressing. It's like when people say, 'Yeah, Colin Powell should run, I'd vote for him.' No you wouldn't. It just sounds like the right thing to say. It's one of those things where I don't know if we're ever going to get past it. I really don't."

Jibson never considered herself the underdog and claims that it was due to a small matter of denial. "When people would be like, 'Look, the fat girl!' I would be like 'Where?'" she says, animatedly demonstrating her attempt to find the mocked culprit. Because of a confidence found through her high school dance teacher who would give her roles in atypical "chubby girl" parts (such as Anita in *West Side Story*), Jibson was able to take risks and practice her ingrained talent. In fact, it was in her very first performance that she stepped up to the plate. "We were doing this really crazy show that my elementary teacher wrote, and we were bears," she laughs as she remembers her costume, consisting of a paper bag over her head, complete

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day, and some days she would be so tired from work and just be like, 'Oh my god, she's not bored of this, we've been doing this for three weeks,' but it was something I looked forward to."

Jibson's optimism and drive mirrored those of her on-stage persona, Tracy Turnblad. "Anyone who comes into this role is obviously going to have different perspectives on who Tracy is, because I think you kind of have to be a Tracy Turnblad to play this role," she says. "Something I bring to the role is to show how open she is, and how she doesn't have boundaries – she's just so free with herself. Everything is all about acceptance nowadays and tolerance and trying to make that more and more prevalent on television and in magazines," Jibson moans. "I think we're just trying to get back to a time when it wasn't so damn important how everyone looked. It used to be about

was standing right next to me. It came time for her solo, and she just stood there and wouldn't do it. I was like, 'I know it,' so I just sang it, and I don't remember thinking why I did it, but it was one of those things like, 'You're not going to eat your tater tots?' So, I thought, 'I'll do it, I guess.' My music teacher put me in everything ever since then because I would do it."

Jibson says that she herself would be a teacher if, for some reason, she were unable to perform. "Teaching is just so rewarding in a sense of how cool it is to be a part of something where kids get to just be kids." But Jibson's real fantasy? "I'm lazy. I like to just watch movies all day long. If I could get paid to eat food and watch movies ... I could die!" But Tracy Turnblad is Jibson's dream, and she can't think of a single way to top her. "Does it get any better than this? If there's a bigger role then I don't want to play it, because *that's* a lot," she says swiping the sweat from her forehead at the suggestion. "My only wish in this business is to stay versatile and to do things that are meaningful to me. I just want to have fun and let it be about the work and things that'll progress me as an actress and challenge me as a performer, while making me better as a person and as an actress," Jibson smiles. "There's a lot of things I'd like to do, like have my own comedy act someday. I've always wanted to be on *Saturday Night Live*. But at this point, I'm open to just about anything – except for the pop world. I have no desire to be a part of that!" she says laughing at the thought. "Idealistically, I try to be like Tracy as much as I can, but in a world like today's, that's almost impossible, which is sad. Which is also why I think *Hairspray* is such an important story to be out there right now." ❖