

# 'Debbie Does Dallas'

**Porn-inspired musical has no nudity or sex - just lots of big inflatable bananas**

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When I walk into Blackfriars Theatre on a recent evening, the cast of the musical *Debbie Does Dallas* is busy blowing up giant inflatable bananas.

Christy Balonek, 21, of Brockport, who stars in the production as Debbie, is having a hard time with her banana.

"What does it say to our production if our Debbie can't even blow?" says director John Haldoupis, as the cast bursts into laughter.

The bigger question, as I listen to one double-entendre after the next, is how can a classic 1978 porn flick be adapted for the stage — as a musical comedy, no less?

As it turns out, by being campy and clever. The script of the musical (which played off-Broadway in 2002) follows the script of the movie faithfully — only there's no nudity, and the movie's hardcore sex scenes have been replaced by suggestive song and dance numbers.

"There's kind of a showgirl number that takes place during a backlit simulated (sex) scene, and getting the girls all dressed in yellow raincoats and galoshes with oversized bananas ... kind of takes the creepiness of that down and just makes it silly," Haldoupis explains. But, he adds, "If people are coming for a certain amount of eroticism, I don't think they're going to be disappointed."

*Debbie Does Dallas* follows Debbie, captain of her high school cheerleading squad, as she tries to raise money for a trip to Dallas so she can try out for the Texas Cowgirls professional squad.

Haldoupis says he didn't believe the play would be appropriate for teenage actors to participate in (apparently, it's not for younger audiences either — only people 18 and older will be admitted), so he hired actors mostly in their 20s. Though, initially, many of them struggled with whether the play was right for them.

"I had actually said no originally," says **Janine Mercandetti** who plays Debbie's cheerleading nemesis, Lisa. "But the reason I said no was because I was kind of afraid of the whole experience ... but then I realized that was not a good reason to say no."

In addition, **Mercandetti** and a few of her fellow actors have dealt with criticism from within the local acting community, as well as from friends and family.

"I've actually had (fellow actors) say, 'I'd never do that; it would ruin my reputation in this town,'" says the actress. And when **Mercandetti** told her mother about the musical's provocative car wash scene, she said, 'You can't do that, Janine!'"

Still, the actors have all committed themselves to the material, and after getting acquainted with the script, many of them describe it as "charming." They also have each other's support; most of the cast

members knew each other before starting work on *Debbie Does Dallas*, mainly from Rochester's theater community. In fact, Balonek and her leading man, J. Simmons, 28, of Rochester (who plays Debbie's boyfriend Rick), are engaged.

"That doesn't always necessarily make it much more comfortable," says Simmons of cast members' close relationships. "Sometimes it's a little weirder because you know them in a different area or capacity and now ..."

"... I'm supposed to say 'Hi' to (Simmons) and straddle him ..." says **Mercandetti**.

"... with my fiancée standing offstage," Simmons says with a laugh.

### **'Debbie' does car washes**

To promote the musical, costumed cast members of *Debbie Does Dallas* will host a car wash from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, Aug. 7, in the Blackfriars Theatre parking lot. A \$5 car wash receipt can be turned in at the box office for a \$5 discount on a ticket to see the show.