

'Sound of Music' tour starts with a tomboy leading the way

A new version of "The Sound of Music" is hitting the road and it's being led by a fresh-faced beauty from Vermont who really does believe "the hills are alive." Kerstin Anderson, 20, has taken off her upcoming semester at Pace University to play Maria in what promises to be a fresh, invigorating version of the classic Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. "I love the mountains. I love nature. So I think what I brought into the room was that mountain girl," said Anderson. "What they told me they were looking for was a tomboy, a country girl. I'm sort of like that."

Tony Award-winner Jack O'Brien, who has helmed such winning Broadway productions as "The Coast of Utopia" and "Hairspray," is directing the show, which also stars Tony-winner Ben Davis as Capt Georg von Trapp and Ashley Brown as The Mother Abbess. The tour officially launches Sept 20 at the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles. It then goes to Texas, North Carolina, Maryland, Tennessee, Florida, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, Georgia, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Missouri, Michigan and Colorado.

The musical debuted on Broadway in 1959 starring Mary Martin (at the advanced age for a baby sitter of 46). The 1965 film starring Julie Andrews won the best picture Academy Award. It has the timeless tunes "My Favorite Things," "Do-Re-Mi," "Sixteen Going on Seventeen," "The Sound of Music" and "Climb Ev'ry Mountain." O'Brien hopes to strip the show back to its essence, upping the sexiness quotient, making it more real and vital, setting it closer to World War II and losing the kitsch. One big challenge was casting Maria, the young novice nun who falls in love with a widower and his seven children.

"This isn't a star part. This is a star-making part," said O'Brien. "I kept thinking, 'Wouldn't it be fun if we could uncork that feeling? So the audience doesn't know this girl and invests in her journey through the show.'" Anderson, a self-described "goof-

ball" from Burlington, Vermont, who was "raised on a two-DVD set of 'The Sound of Music,'" won the part after an extensive search for a young woman. "They kept bringing me, one after another, lovely, enchanting, beautifully draped ingenues," O'Brien said. "And one day Kerstin walked into the room. She looked like somebody who'd played field hockey. I mean, she was like a jock and charming and fresh. And the world's best baby sitter, which I think Maria is supposed to be."

Beautiful songs

One of O'Brien's other bold casting decisions was adding 33-year-old bombshell Brown as The Mother Abbess. Brown originated the title role in Broadway's "Mary Poppins" and also played Belle in "Beauty and the Beast." Eagle-eyed viewers of the live version broadcast of "The Sound of Music" on NBC in 2013 with Carrie Underwood would have seen Brown as Nun No. 13 to Audra McDonald's The Mother Abbess. When O'Brien called Brown about the part, she initially had to think about it. "I never knew this was going to come in my life so quickly. I was like, 'Oh, I'll do that in like 20 years,'" she said. "Here I am and I'm loving it."

To get the show back to its realistic essence, O'Brien used some special techniques, like telling his actors not to sing any of the songs for several weeks. Instead, they spoke the lyrics to really understand their characters and not let the beautiful songs lull anyone to sleep. "I don't mean to backhandedly dismiss 50 years of great work, but these beautiful songs are like rafts on a river. You step on them and they just carry you along. And you're perfectly happy to have that happen," he said. "I want people to see and hear a piece they think they know completely fresh." —AP



(From left) Ashley Brown, who will portray Mother Abbess, music supervisor Andy Einhorn, Ben Davis, who will portray Captain von Trapp, director Jack O'Brien, Kerstin Anderson, who will portray Maria, and choreographer Danny Mefford appear during a press day for the national tour of 'The Sound of Music' in New York. — AP



Gigi Hadid, from left, Hailee Steinfeld, Cara Delevingne, Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift, Serayah, Lily Aldridge, Mariska Hargitay and Karlie Kloss arrive at the MTV Video Music Awards at the Microsoft Theater on Sunday, Aug 30, 2015, in Los Angeles. — AP photos

With guest-filled tour, Swift's star power shines brighter

You could call Taylor Swift baby Oprah, and the stage is her version of Winfrey's couch. Easily the most important pop star of today, now Swift's star power has reached even greater heights and stretched outside of music, thanks to her uber successful, star-studded 1989 World Tour. In typical Swift fashion, she has invited fellow radio-friendly singers to join her onstage, including Nick Jonas, Jason Derulo, John Legend and close gal pals Selena Gomez and Lorde. But Swift, 25, has also shared her stage with iconic folk singer Joan Baez and breakthrough acts like The Weeknd and Fetty Wap, who sang his hit "Trap Queen," a contemporary love song about cooking cocaine - among other things - with your lover.



Taylor Swift arrives at the MTV Video Music Awards at the Microsoft Theater, in Los Angeles.

And then there were the tour's unorthodox moments: Ellen DeGeneres appeared onstage, Lisa Kudrow sang the memorable "Smelly Cat" from "Friends" at one show, and Kudrow's former co-star, Matt LeBlanc, hit the stage at a show with Chris Rock. Julia Roberts even walked the stage like a runway as Swift performed her hit "Style." The pop star also invited athletes to join in on the fun, from Kobe Bryant to Serena Williams to the US women's soccer team, just days after they won the World Cup. And the models she calls her friends, from Gigi Hadid and Karlie Kloss. "Interviewers always ask me how we 'get' these people to come to the shows to walk, and the truth is that everyone who has walked the catwalk at one of the shows was already there just to see the show. Usually I ask them in my pre-show meet and greet if they want to come out onstage, then I'll explain to them how the stage/elevator lift works and we just wing it," Swift said in an email to The Associated Press.

'People support her'

Many of her surprise guests have children who are die-hard Swifties. "Joan Baez and Julia Roberts were both at my show in Santa Clara, and they were in my meet-and-greet room together. Julia is such a huge Joan fan and they were really hitting it off. I asked them if they wanted to walk out onstage together and Julia's kids exploded into 'PLEASE!!' So

that's how that happened." Other guests on the 1989 World Tour, which kicked off in Tokyo in May, have included Justin Timberlake, Alanis Morissette, Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks, Sam Hunt, Wiz Khalifa and Beck.

"A lot of stars you can see maybe not wanting to kind of share the spotlight and not wanting to necessarily have other people up there with her, but Taylor's thrilled to do that," said Josh Duboff, who interviewed Swift for the cover of Vogue's September issue. "She's kind of excited to share the stage, which I think is kind of unique right now." Mary J Blige, who sang her songs "Family Affair" and "Doubt" at the Staples Center in Los Angeles with Swift, said the singer "was someone I always loved way before she invited me to her show." "It's amazing. She deserves it. She's a giver. She's a real sweetheart, big heart - so she's getting back everything that she is," the R&B diva said of Swift and her big-time tour guests. "People support her."

At the same show, Swift performed a duet with Emmy winner and "Orange Is the New Black" star Uzo Aduba, marking her second appearance on the singer's tour. Girl group Fifth Harmony said Swift learned the choreography for their latest hit, "Worth It," in 20 minutes backstage before they performed in front of 60,000 screaming fans in Santa Clara, California. "I was actually crying while we were performing. I really was and like, I couldn't even sing my words correctly, especially when she came and stood right next to us," band member Dinah Jane Hansen said. "I mean, come on. It's Taylor Swift."

Big fan

Models also have been a part of the tour, which wraps Dec. 12 in Melbourne, Australia. They include Heidi Klum, Kendall Jenner, Lily Donaldson and Andreja Pejic. And there are also Swift's close friends, like Lena Dunham and Hailee Steinfeld, who helped recreate her jam-packed "Bad Blood" music video at live shows alongside Kloss and Hadid. "She's a big inspiration to me. She knows that. We started our friendship because she was a really big fan of my music before anyone else. That's a really cool thing," said singer Ellie Goulding, who appears in the "Bad Blood" video. "I think she's an inspiration to a lot of other female artists."

Goulding has yet to join Swift onstage on her latest tour, but she's ready: "That would be so much. Anything that involves a catwalk I would be into because I know I'll never do a real catwalk." Swift has been a longtime supporter of her musical peers, and the Swift approval could help launch or boost a career. Ed Sheeran's star power rose after Swift declared she loved his music on social media, introducing him to her feverish fan base. (She's the most followed person on Instagram with 46.5 million followers and she boasts 63.5 million followers on Twitter.) They later became friends and collaborators, and she continues to tweet about new artists she loves, most recently 19-year-old R&B singer Alessia Cara. "I think it's amazing that she has an attitude that she can bring all these new artists who some I think are her competition," said Nicholas Petricca, the Walk the Moon lead singer who performed his band's massive hit "Shut up and Dance" with Swift on her tour. "Like, if they succeed, she succeeds. We all succeed together," he said. — AP

Joplin's psychedelic Porsche to hit the auction block

Janis Joplin may have famously pleaded for a Mercedes-Benz in her 1970 a cappella song but her car of choice was a psychedelic Porsche that now is going to be sold at auction. Her 1965 Porsche 356C 1600 Cabriolet is expected to fetch more than \$400,000 when it is auctioned by RM Sotheby's in New York in December. The auction house said Joplin bought the Porsche in 1968 but decided its white paint job was boring and asked a friend to paint it with a kaleidoscopic mural. It ended up covered in butterflies, jellyfish and a portrait of Joplin and her band, Big Brother and the Holding Company.

"Janis drove the car everywhere, all around San Francisco and down to Los Angeles when she was recording there," her sister and biographer Laura Joplin said. "Wherever Janis went in the car, her fans recognized it. When she parked it and returned, there was always at least one (fan) note under the wipers."

Joplin died of a heroin overdose at the age of 27 on Oct 4, 1970, three days after recording the song "Mercedes Benz," in which she sang, "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz. My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends." After her death the car was driven by Joplin's manager. It was restored in the early 1990s and has been on display at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum in Cleveland since 1995. Joplin's family now has decided to auction the car, RM Sotheby's said yesterday. "It's a fantastic automobile that transcends art, pop culture and social movements and is as groundbreaking and stunning as the renowned singer was herself," said Ian

Kelleher, managing director of RM Sotheby's West Coast division. The car is to be sold on Dec 10 as part of RM Sotheby's "Driven by Disruption" auction of 30 creatively styled automobiles. — Reuters



The legendary Janis Joplin's psychedelic Porsche for auction in this handout photo provided yesterday by RM Sotheby's auctions in New York shows the 1965 Porsche 356C 1600 Cabriolet once owned by the late singer Janis Joplin. — AFP

'Everest' actors had to discover their inner mountaineers

Jason Clarke was already an avid outdoorsman when he signed on to play the lead role in "Everest." He'd visited most of the national parks in North America and trekked through Chile and Argentina. He knew his way around an ice-ax and crampons. He even backpacked to Everest base camp - a staggering 17,600 feet above sea level - a few years back just for fun. But just like his less-outdoorsy colleagues, Clarke had to physically prepare for the challenges of working at extreme elevation to make the epic drama.

"I loved it," he beamed. "I loved every single second of it." Clarke leads the ensemble cast of "Everest," opening Friday, which tells the story of the doomed 1996 expedition that claimed the lives of eight climbers - the deadliest day on the mountain at the time. To scale the planet's highest peak on screen, the actors - Clarke, Josh Brolin, Jake Gyllenhaal, John Hawkes and Michael Kelly - had to train like real mountaineers. Director Baltasar Kormakur insisted on authenticity, so he brought his cast and crew to Nepal, where they filmed at an altitude of 16,000 feet. (The highest ski resorts in the U.S. top out around 13,000 feet. Most are less than 10,000 feet tall.)

High altitude has an undeniable effect on human function. With less available oxygen, the mind slows and the body weakens. Even expert climbers can get altitude sickness, characterized by headache, nausea, dizziness and exhaustion. Where climbers experience gradual elevation gain during their ascent that helps them acclimatize to the thinner air, the "Everest" cast and crew were flown in. Advance preparation was essential, and still sometimes insufficient. "We were dropped off in helicopters at the end because it was too hard to walk up there and then shoot a scene," Kormakur said. "At that point, I just saw the crew start falling apart. People got sick. We had to evacuate them."

Other snowy sequences were filmed in the Italian alps at around 12,000 feet - still high enough to cause the aches and foggy thought associated with being at high altitude. To work up there, the actors had to become hikers months before production began - which suited Clarke and Brolin just fine. Brolin was already a rock climber, and he used the film as an excuse to up his outdoor game. He spent seven months training, climbing on Switzerland's famous Eiger and summing California's Mts. Shasta and Whitney.

'Incredibly grounding'

"This is selfish to me," he said. "I got to do all the things I love to do and I got to do it in an extreme fashion that I probably wouldn't have if I didn't have the excuse of doing a movie." Brolin plays Beck Weathers, who miraculously survived the fated 1996 Everest expedition, despite spending 18 hours stranded on the mountain, weathering its extreme conditions. He lost his hands and nose to frostbite. His book, "Left for Dead: My Journey Home From Everest," served as an inspiration for the film. Actors Hawkes and Kelly, who wouldn't consider themselves mountaineers, each hiked to ready for their roles. Still, they felt the weary effects of working at high elevation.

"There was a part of you going, 'I'm light-headed, I'm not thinking clearly,'" Hawkes said, "but it also affords you a chance to really not act and just be in the moment, which is a great gift for actors." Ironically, the cast said the most physically challenging aspect of making "Everest" happened on a London soundstage. That's where Kormakur captured his close-ups: a turbine engine pelting the actors with bits of plastic, paper and salt to mimic a snowstorm. Brolin joked that the resulting exfoliation was great for his complexion. —AP



Actors Michael Kelly, from left, Jake Gyllenhaal, Jason Clarke, Josh Brolin, and John Hawkes, from the film 'Everest,' pose for a portrait in Los Angeles. — AP