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THEATER

Lighting Up The Stage In *Sweet Charity*

By Iris Wiener

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Janine LaManna may get to perform in one of the hottest Broadway musicals this season, but she won't be completely fulfilled until she gets to tap in some ruby red slippers. "There has always been this running theme in my life with *The Wizard of Oz* — I was in the third grade, and it was the first show I ever got to do. Then I did it again in the eighth grade, but I never got to play Dorothy. Then I did it again in college, but I was the good witch — never Dorothy. I've always been really upset about that!"

Chances are pretty good that many of LaManna's old wounds have healed. In addition to her current role as Nickie, best friend to Christina Applegate's Charity in *Sweet Charity*, LaManna has graced the stage in *Seussical*, *Swing!*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, *The Look of Love* and *Ragtime*, among others. But, despite numerous theatrical credits, her most popular claim to fame could very well be her stint as the first Carmen Sandiego on the tel-

family who are sort of like Nickie. In real life I'm a little bit more like Charity. But my sister is more like Nickie. For example, on opening night she's trying to get me into my dress, she's zipping and zipping and its really tight, and I turned around and said, "You gotta zip it," and she zips it, and I turn around and say, "What do you think?" and she goes, "Well, you look like a sausage." My sister is exactly like that with me all the time. There's always an expletive with it, which is what makes it funny.

When did you realize you wanted to perform for a living?

When I was 11 I took a summer course at the Baltimore Actor's Theater. My sister got me to do it for my birthday. That was when I knew. I took drama and music and ballet...and that was it. I'm hoping to thank my sister on the Tony Awards some day. I think that's all she'd want.

Do you have any fond memories of Broadway from when you were a child?



Carmen Sandiego?
Sweet Charity allows LaManna to show off her bubbly personality and unique talent, both qualities of which were evident in a recent interview from her dressing room before a performance of the Tony nominated show.

There are a lot of clichés about the best friend or token sidekick in any story. Aside from the fact that she gets to sing “Baby, Dream Your Dream,” one of the most memorable numbers in the show, how is Nickie unique?

Nickie is absolutely a comedian, she’s the antithesis of Charity in the fact that Charity is optimistic, whereas Nickie is realistic. She tries to get Charity to not be pessimistic, but realistic instead. Nickie sees this girl just not really looking at life as it should be. She’s sort of looking at life through rose-colored glasses and Nikki really just wants to bring her down a notch and say “Kid, you’re stuck like the rest of us.” Nickie is very funny, but funny coming from an organic place. She’s got these great one-liners and this very unique way of seeing the world.

In what ways can you relate to Nickie?

I have some women in my

I didn’t come to Broadway until I was in high school! I was on a trip and my best friend’s mom said, “Come on, let’s go to a Broadway show.” Little did she know ... It was on 42nd Street. The one that really changed me was *Dreamgirls*. But I knew when I was 11 that this was going to be my life, so of course seeing a Broadway show was like the cherry on top.

If someone decided to take Nickie’s character and run with a spin-off, what do you think her ideal situation would be?

Definitely in a television series. Maybe she could be a Rhoda or the wise-crackin’ best friend, like Mary Tyler Moore. You know it’s a staple, you see it in *Will & Grace*, Megan Mullally does it with Debra Messing. Without love underneath it wouldn’t work, you’d think she’s such a terrible best friend. But because there’s so much conflict underneath and because there’s so much already established, you can get away with it. It’s like a sister relationship.

Let’s say Janine LaManna, Nickie, and Gertrude McFuzz [LaManna’s character in *Seussical*] were talking over a delicious meal. What do you think you would all discuss?



Photo Courtesy Barlow Hartman Public Relations

Janine LaManna stars in *Sweet Charity* as Nickie, alongside Christina Applegate, but her lifelong dream is to be in the *Wizard of Oz*.

Oh, boys boys boys! Gertrude talks about the cute little portly ones. I think Nickie always goes for the bad boy, I would imagine that she goes for that stupid guy, the jerk, some macho guy that kind of bosses her around. I think I like a combination of both. I have a boyfriend, but I like somebody who’s really confident, funny, determined, grounded, honest....My boyfriend would love

that I said that.

If acting hadn’t worked out for you, what would we have found you doing?

After high school I had a tendency towards working with special children. I always wanted to work with autistic children, it was something I was always interested in, but never really pursued it.

Who is your ideal character to play – someone who doesn’t wear ruby red slippers....?

(Laughs) It would have to be Eva Peron in *Evita*. I’d love that!

For more information about *Sweet Charity* or to purchase tickets, visit www.sweetcharitythemusical.com.