

SunSentinel

TRAVEL & LIFE



JOAN MARCUS PHOTOS

Danielle Wade as Cady Heron, from left, Megan Masako Haley as Gretchen Wieners, Mariah Rose Faith as Regina George and Jonalyn Saxer as Karen Smith in the national touring company of "Mean Girls," which will be in Fort Lauderdale March 3-15.

How 'Mean Girls' learned to sing

In Broadway musical of beloved film, teens belt out inner thoughts

By ROD STAFFORD HAGWOOD

Back in the day, Lindsay Lohan was known for her acting. And it was the whip-smart teen comedy "Mean Girls" that took her starlet status and blasted it into the pop culture firmament in 2004.

That screenplay was written by Tina Fey ("Saturday Night Live," "30 Rock," "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt"), and almost immediately there were offers to turn her script into the book for a Broadway musical. You can see the results when the national tour begins a two-week run on March 3 at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts in Fort Lauderdale.

Jeff Richmond — the composer of the stage musical, Fey's creative partner and her husband — recalls, "We were especially busy, working on '30 Rock.' It laid in the back of our heads that if someone was going to make it a musical, it's going to be us."

Richmond says the couple come with theater backgrounds and just couldn't resist the siren call of the stage.

"We always wanted to follow our roots back to doing a theater piece," says Richmond, who was also musical director for "SNL" and the composer of the movie score for the 2018 movie "Baby Mama," which starred Fey and bestie Amy Poehler. Richmond met Fey when she joined Chicago's Second City improvisational company, where he was the musical director.

And yet Richmond adds that he was nervous about how to approach the music for "Mean Girls."

"I didn't want to write a musical full of pop music, very contemporary music that maybe kids would be listening to today, but wouldn't be listening to four years from now."

The creative team signed on lyricist Nell Benjamin, who did the score for the stage version of "Legally Blonde" with her composer husband, Laurence O'Keefe.

"I remember my first thought was, 'Please hire me,'" Benjamin says. "That is absolutely what I thought. I think I got the news from my agent, who had heard a rumor about the musical. I



Naturally, the teenage characters use social media in the modern Broadway musical adaptation of Tina Fey's 2004 film about high school girls navigating social cliques.



Adante Carter as Aaron Samuels and Danielle Wade as Cady Heron.

loved the movie obviously and, like any woman with any sense, I love Tina Fey. Where was the downside. I was such a fan."

The book

The show debuted on Broadway in 2018, putting song to the story of high school girls negotiating a take-no-prisoners game of social cliques.

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If you go

"Mean Girls" runs March 3-15 at the Broward Center, 201 SW Fifth Ave., Fort Lauderdale

Showtimes: 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays (and Wednesday, March. 11); 1 p.m. Sundays.

Tickets: \$33 to \$140. To order, call 954-462-0222 or go to BrowardCenter.org.

MARCH BOOK EVENTS

Albom, Coben on festivals' lineups

Bestselling authors on tap at Palm Beach, Jewish book fests

By OLIVE H. COGDILL

The sixth annual Palm Beach Book Festival features a stellar lineup of New York Times bestselling authors. The festival, sponsored by Florida Atlantic University's Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, begins 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. March 21 in FAU's University Theatre, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton. Tickets for the full day are \$75,



Albom

and individual panel tickets are \$20 and \$25, and can be purchased at fauevents.com or call 561-297-6124. Free parking is included with admission, and lunch will be for sale. For more information, visit palm-beachbookfestival.com or call 561-297-2595.

Events include "Twisted History," Larry Loftis in conversation with Louis Bayard at 10 a.m.

"You Don't Have to be Jewish (To Love This Panel)" with Patricia Marx, in conversation with Cathleen Schine ("The Gramarians") at 11 a.m.

The 'O' Oprah Magazine Panel will address the social issues of immigration and the opioid epidemic with panelists Leigh Haber (O Magazine), Liz Moore ("Long Bright River") and Kiley Reid ("Such a Fun Age") at 12:10 p.m.

"Protest and Power: U.S., U.K. and #RealFakeNews" will feature Mark Thompson in conversation with political analysts Joy-Anne Reid and David Kogan at 2 p.m.

The Palm Beach Book Festival continues into Broward as it co-presents Mitch Albom in a conversation discussing his latest book "Finding Chika: A Little Girl, an Earthquake, & the Making of a Family" at 7 p.m. March 23 at the Amature Theater, Broward Center For The Performing Arts, 201 SW Fifth Ave., Fort Lauderdale. In "Finding Chika," Albom recounts the story of Chika Jeune, who was born three days before the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. She

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IN TRAVEL



CHANCE CHATS ABOARD TRAIN

A 2-day rail journey has its ups and downs. For a frequent flyer taking her first Amtrak trip, her favorite part of the experience is getting to know her fellow travelers. **I**

IN SOCIETY

■ Leaders honored at South Florida LGBT Philanthropy Awards. **4**

■ Morikami Museum's moonlit gala its first in a decade. **5**



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SPRING
BREAK
PARTY WEEKEND

Resorts World Resident DJ Laz
March 27 - 29



MUSICAL

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Essentially the musical's book mirrors the plot points of the movie, which was inspired by the 2002 nonfiction book "Queen Bees and Wannabes - Mean Girls" by Rosalind Wiseman.

The story follows Cady, a teenager who moves with her zoologist parents from the wilds of Africa to suburbia in the United States. Cady has been home schooled and is spectacularly unprepared for the intrigue and maneuvering of high school hierarchy.

Cady does manage to make friends with Janis and Damian, who explain to her that she should steer clear of the Plastics, a trio of popular girls led by queen bee Regina, who rules over all the students with her lieutenants, Gretchen, an insecure suck-up, and Karen Smith, a stereotypical dimwit.

After falling in with the Plastics, Cady goes from gathering intel for Janis, who wants to destroy the clique, to emulating all their worst traits (partially because of her pursuit of a first-time boyfriend, Aaron).

"Pay attention to what happens to her," points out Danielle Wade, who was in the show on Broadway and is now playing the lead in the national tour. "Don't get lost in the show ... and the high notes. There are consequences for her. You forget that when you're watching a big pink musi-

cal. There are actual consequences for everyone, which I think people gloss over sometimes."

And there are little things, too, small moments. No spoilers here, but Richmond hints, "Here's something that's hilarious that slips by: During [the act one song] 'Apex Predator,' watch Karen during the animal transformation moment. Priceless."

One of the big differences between the movie and the show is that social media has been added to the musical's book, giving the work a whole new zeitgeist peg to hang from. Of course the other big change is that now the characters have songs to externalize their inner thoughts.

The music

Benjamin says, "The great thing about lyrics is you have a little more time to root around in the character's brains and their thoughts and bring them to the stage."

For example, the lead character Cady is a "mathlete," something she hides trying fit in with the Plastics and to get the attention of a boy. "She's a great character for a lyricist," explains Benjamin. "She's a smart young woman with lots of vocabularies since she's a math whiz. As we move through the musical, she picks up the slang around her, using words maybe incorrectly. And as she gets better at it, you see her at the height of her plasticity. And then you get



JOAN MARCUS

Mary Kate Morrissey as Janis Sarkisian and the company of the national tour of "Mean Girls," which will play Fort Lauderdale's Broward Center for the Performing Arts March 3-15.

to give her language back. That's a beautiful arc for a lyricist."

For his part Richmond says he had to find the right style and sound for each of the main characters.

"For Damian, he's a high school nerd. It didn't feel right that he would be singing pop songs. But when we wrote a Broadway show tune, he came alive and his thoughts came alive. For Janis, pop music didn't work for her and definitely not the Broadway thing that we'd seen with

Damian. We tried alternative, dark, grungy, a rock anthem. Suddenly her voice came alive."

The queen bee Regina took more time.

"I remember when we first started writing it I was thinking, 'What is she going to sound like when we first hear her?'" Richmond recalls. "The sound we found for her, she's like a Bond villain. All her music has a James Bond villain theme, dark, retro, seductive, sweeping sounds. That felt right. We were in the

right ballpark for that, [we] just freshen that sound up, dripping with sexy seductiveness. Everything is bigger. In Bond films, the villains are bigger."

Benjamin says she was mindful of the message.

"I will say Tina and I, having daughters around the same age at the time, there was a free-flowing conversation of what we want to say to girls. We thought that teens won't listen to us, but what could we put out there in the culture that they will listen

to us through these characters?"

"The movie has this great message about not being mean to one another. But there is another layer that is just saying, 'Hey girls, don't be mean.' And what it is about is relational aggression. How does it happen? We don't really value girls' anger. We value them with how many friends they have, that we don't with boys. That's very dangerous. It's dangerous in school, in toxic relations and dangerous later."

AUTHORS

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spent her infancy in extreme poverty. After her mother died giving birth to a baby brother, Chika was brought to The Have Faith Haiti Orphanage that Albom operates in Port Au Prince. A copy of the book is included in the price. Cost is \$40 for members, non-members or at the door, \$50. Register at ollifl.fau.edu/wordpress. Proceeds from book sales will be donated to help children in Haiti.

Jewish Book Festival

The Diane & Barry Wilen Jewish Book Festival continues with three events at the David Posnack Jewish Community Center, 5850 S. Pine Island Road, Davie. For reservations, call 954-434-0499, ext. 336, or visit djcc.org/culturalarts.org.

Heather Morris' novel "The Tattooist of Auschwitz" vividly recreates the experiences of Lale Sokolov, who tattooed the arms of thousands of prisoners with what would become one of the most potent symbols of the Holocaust. Morris will discuss her novel during Books & Bites, 12:30 p.m. March 12. Tickets are \$10, RSVP required.

Lionfish are an invasive species that threaten native sea life. Apparently, they also are delicious as James Beard award-winning chef Allen Susser shows in his cookbook "Green Fig and Lionfish." Susser will show how to turn lionfish into delicious dishes beginning at 6:30 p.m. March 19. Prices range from \$75 per person, including a four-course meal, to \$175 per couple, including a four-course meal with wine and the book.

Harlan Coben discusses his latest New York Times bestseller "The Boy From the Woods" at 7:30 p.m. March 25. Coben's newest thriller is about a man with a mysterious past must find a missing teenage girl. Cost is \$36 for one ticket, one book or \$50 for two tickets, one book; reserved seating is available for \$10 a seat.

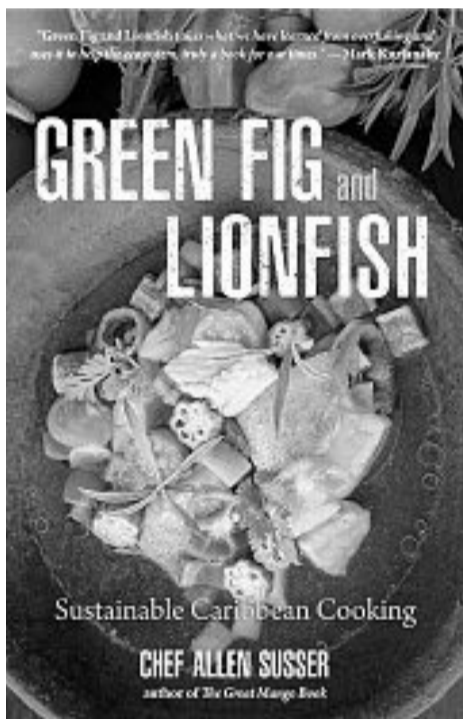
Literary Feast serves up authors

The Broward Public Library Foundation's annual Literary Feast, one of South Florida's biggest book events, kicks off April 3 and 4. Begun in 1984, the Literary Feast has grown to include free public panel discussions; Author Day for Students, during which writers speak at high school panel discussions at three different venues; and dinners where donors mingle alongside authors. Proceeds from the Literary Feast underwrite the Foundation's literacy programs.

The author dinners begin with a cocktail party April 4 at Bahia Mar, 801 Seabreeze Blvd., Fort Lauderdale. For more information on any of the Literary Feast events visit bplfoundation.org/literary-feast or call 954-357-7382.

Free panel discussions with the authors occur from 6 to 8 p.m. April 3 at the following venues. Seating fills up quickly so reservations are a must. (A percentage of all sales at Barnes & Noble that night also is donated to the Library Foundation.)

- "Fiction in Fort Lauderdale" with moderator Gail Bulfin, Barnes & Noble, 2051 N. Federal Highway, Fort Lauderdale,



Chef Allen Susser has written "Green Fig and Lionfish," a new cookbook featuring recipes using lionfish, an invasive species which threatens sea life and reefs.

954-561-3732. Authors are: Tasha Alexander, "In the Shadow of Vesuvius"; Bruce Holsinger, "The Gifted School"; Julia Phillips, "Disappearing Earth"; Laura van den Berg, "The Third Hotel."

- "Mystery in Plantation" with moderator Oline Cogdill, Barnes & Noble, (Broward Mall area), 591 S. University Drive, Plantation, 954-723-0489. Authors are: Jeff Abbott, "The Three Beths"; Carla Neggers, "Rival's Break"; Peter Houlihan, "Norco '80: The True Story of the Most Spectacular Bank Robbery in American History"; Kwei Quartey, "The Missing American"; Wendy Walker, "The Night Before."
- "Panel in the Pines" with moderator Mim Harrison, Barnes & Noble at Pembroke Crossings, 1820 Pines Blvd., Pembroke Pines, 954-441-0444. Authors are: Holly George-Warren, "Janis: Her Life and Music"; Adam Higginbotham, "Midnight in Chernobyl: The Untold Story of the World's Greatest Nuclear Disaster"; Susie Levan, "Getting to Forgiveness: What a Near-Death Experience

Can Teach Us About Life and Love"; Adam Platt, "The Book of Eating: Adventures in Professional Gluttony"; William C. Rempel. "The Gambler: How Penniless Dropout Kirk Kerkorian Became the Greatest Deal Maker in Capitalist History."

Levan

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Festival of the Arts Boca

In addition to its strong musical and other events, the 14th Annual Festival of the Arts Boca also has a strong books-related component. Events are at the Mizner Park Amphitheater and Mizner Park Cultural Arts Center in Boca Raton. Festival tickets range from \$15 to \$150 per person and are available at festivalboca.org or call 561-300-4138.

The book events are at Mizner Park East Tent, 590 Plaza Real, near the Amphitheater and are \$35 at the door:

- March 2 at 7 p.m.: Jesmyn Ward is the first woman and the first person of color to

win two National Book Awards for fiction, for her novels, "Salvage the Bones" and "Sing, Unburied, Sing." Ward discusses her writing process and how her experiences growing up poor and black in the South influence her work. A ticket option for Ward is \$45, which includes a copy of "Sing, Unburied, Sing."

- March 3 at 7 p.m.: Award-winning author and New Yorker cartoonist Roz Chast discusses her art, her family and her work, which she chronicles in "Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?"
- March 4 at 7 p.m.: Global TED talk speaker and professor of one of Yale University's most popular courses, "Psychology and the Good Life," Laurie Santos discusses tips on how to live your best life.
- March 5 at 7 p.m.: Political analyst and national editor of "The Cook Political Report" Amy Walter discusses "Where Are We Now?" Walter will give her insight on the 2020 elections and what to watch out for in the months ahead.

Sleuthfest is for writers

Sleuthfest, the annual writers' conference featuring sessions on writing, marketing and forensics with an array of writers, editors and agents will be March 26-29 at the Doubletree by Hilton Deerfield Beach, 100 Fairway Drive, Deerfield Beach. Sponsored by the Florida chapter of Mystery Writers of America, Sleuthfest has grown into one of the most respected conferences for authors at all levels. Guest of honor is Catriona McPherson with authors Charles Todd, Con Lehane, Frankie Y. Bailey, Richie Narvaez, Chantelle Osman and Alex Segura. Agents and editors will take pitches and participate in round table discussions. More information is at sleuthfest.com.

Adjusting to widowhood

South Florida journalist Leslie Streeter and her husband had been married five years — together 6 1/2 years — when he

died from a heart attack in 2015. Streeter was 44 at the time, and devastated from the loss. As a writer, Streeter began penning about her grief, turning her feelings into her memoir, "Black Widow: A Sad/Funny Journey Through Grief for People Who Normally Avoid Books with Words Like Journey" in the Title." The memoir details her first year of widowhood with a raw, honest and at times funny look at her new life.

Streeter will discuss her story at the following venues:

March 2, Culture and Cocktails in an interview with James Patterson, presented by the Cultural Council of Palm Beach County, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Colony Hotel, 155 Hammon Ave., 561-472-3330. Admission is \$75 per person in advance, \$85 at the door. March 11 at 6 p.m. at the Mandel Library, 411 Clematis St., West Palm Beach, 561-868-7700; at March 12 at 7 p.m. at Murder on the Beach, 104 W. Atlantic Ave., Delray Beach, 561-279-7790, www.murderonthebeach.com; March 16 at 8 p.m. at Books & Books, 265 Aragon Ave., Coral Gables, 305-442-4408; 6:30 p.m. April 4 during the West Palm Beach Library Foundation's Food For Thought at the Mandel Library, www.wpblf.org.

Streeter also is scheduled to be on "The Today Show With Hoda and Jenna" on April 6.

Author luncheons

Alyssa Maxwell, author of "The Gilded

Newport Mysteries" and "A Lady and Lady's Maid Mysteries," will be the guest during the annual scholarship luncheon sponsored by the American Association of University Women, Pompano Beach Branch, at 11:30 a.m. March 14 at the Lighthouse Point Yacht Club, 2701 NE 42nd St., Lighthouse Point. Tickets are \$55. Reservations required; 312-316-6229 or email: pompanoscholar@yahoo.com.

Two Florida authors will speak during the Helen B. Hoffman Friends of the Library's annual authors-fashion luncheon beginning at 11 a.m. March 21 at the Jacaranda Country Club, 9200 W. Broward Blvd., Plantation. Tickets are \$45. Contact Pam Alexander at 954-424-9464 for reservations. Authors are Warren Richey, whose "Without a Paddle" describes his 1,200 mile race in a kayak around Florida, and Diane Stuckart, whose latest amateur sleuth mystery is "Peach Clobbered."

Mystery writer and bestselling New York Times author Diane Stuckart is the guest speaker at the National League of American Pen Women, Fort Lauderdale Branch's monthly luncheon at 11:30 a.m. March 12 at Prima Vera Restaurant, 2500 E. Commercial Blvd., Fort Lauderdale. Tickets are \$30; contact 954-288-7972 or visit: www.lauderdalepenwomen.wixsite.com/nlapw.

Broward College Speaker Series

The seventh annual Broward College Speaker Series kicks off with Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales on March 12. Each

lecture begins at 7:30 p.m., in the Amaturo Theater, at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, 201 SW Fifth Ave., Fort Lauderdale. Tickets are \$55 to \$65. Visit BrowardCollegeSpeakerSeries.com. Wales will discuss "What's Next in Tech?: Thrive in a 'Wiki' Future." Other speakers include Abby Wambach, two-time U.S. Olympic gold medalist, World Cup Champion, April 29, and chef and humanitarian José Andrés, on May 18.

Author notes

Barbara Fox, mystery writer and producer/director of Mystery On the Menu Theater company, discusses her first children's book, "Alphabet Rhymes," at 11 a.m. March 14 at Barnes & Noble, 11820 Pines Blvd., Pembroke Pines, 954-441-0444; at 10 a.m. March 28 at Fairy Tales, 2000 Harrison St., Hollywood, 954-822-4699.

The following authors will be at Murder on the Beach Mystery Bookstore, 104 W. Atlantic Ave., Delray Beach, 561-279-7790, murderonthebeach.com:

Linda Rosen, "Disharmony of Silence" at 7 p.m. March 6; Charles Salzberg, "Swann's Down," at 7 p.m. March 19; Elaine Viets, "A Star is Dead," at 6 p.m. March 21; Debra Goldstein, "Two Bites Too Many," and Cheryl Hollon, "Down in Flames," at 7 p.m. March 26; Deborah Goodrich Royce, "Finding Mrs. Ford," at 4 p.m. March 28; Al Pessin, "Sand Blast," at 7 p.m. April 3; Robert Watson, "George Washington's Final Battle," at 5 p.m. April 4.

Nancy J. Cohen leads the workshop "Self-Publishing Made Simple" at 2 p.m. March 14 at Nova Southeastern University, Conference Room 2053, Alvin Sherman Library, 3100 Ray Ferrero Jr. Blvd., Davie, FL 33314. 954-262-5466. Advance reservations recommended, <https://sherman.library.nova.edu/>

Deadline is March 20 for the April roundup. Email olinecog@aol.com.