



Carmen Matarazzo: Talks *Sweeney Todd* and Crafting the Role of Tobias

Transcript

Story by Gina Marie Rodriguez

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

This is Gina Marie Rodriguez, and you are listening to the *Jersey Arts Podcast*. While HBO's, the last of us may currently have the television market cornered when it comes to the genre of horror and thrills, let's not forget the stage. Stephen Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, is set to thrill audiences at the Levoy Theatre in Millville, New Jersey this February. Today, I have the pleasure of chatting with Carmen Matarazzo, who plays Tobias. The Levoy marks the last New Jersey theater to put up the show before it hits Broadway later this month, where Tobias will then be played by none other than Carmen's brother, Gaten Matarazzo, known to many *Stranger Things* fans as Dustin Henderson. Carmen and I discuss what it's like to craft a role with his older brother, his family of performers, our shared love for Steven Sondheim, and of course, *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

Carmen, it's so nice to meet you virtually. How are you today?

Carmen Matarazzo:

I'm doing good. I'm, I'm really excited, uh, that we're starting to really get into tech week for the, the show. It's a little stressful, but it's very exciting.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

<laugh> I remember Tech Weeks. They are stressful, indeed. Is this your first day of tech or no?

Carmen Matarazzo:

Uh, we actually start tech on Saturday.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

So tell me, you are going to be playing Tobias, right? Tobias? Toby in *Sweeney Todd*.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Yeah. The characters say Toby throughout the show, but it's written as Tobias.

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Gina Marie Rodriguez:

Had you been familiar with the show prior to being cast?

Carmen Matarazzo:

I think when I first heard of *Sweeney Todd*, I actually, I had seen the, it was just something that was the, the movie was always on in the house. My, my sister watched that when, when she was a teenager, and, uh, it was, it was Johnny Depp and I was just like, it's really weird to, to see him singing. And that was before I got into theater and I was just like, oh, this is a, this is a really scary story. And my mom was like, well, there was, it was originally, uh, a musical and, uh, she showed me the George Hearn and Angela Lansbury recording online, and I was just hooked immediately. And, uh, just with, with every character, I was just like, I eventually, I just wanna be part of this show one day. You know, I just, I, I started auditioning for more stuff and hopefully it would come up. So this was actually my, my dream show. So, very happy <laugh>.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

That's awesome. Congratulations!

Carmen Matarazzo:

Thank you <laugh>.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

So you said at the time, when you were first introduced to the movie version, you hadn't yet gotten into entertainment. So when did you get into entertainment?

Carmen Matarazzo:

So I started off playing music. I, I, uh, I'm a, a drummer and, uh, I started that when I was about 13 years old. You know, I, I do, I was in the jazz band at my school and I did, uh, like pit orchestra for a couple of shows. I was, I was watching my friends as I was in the pit on stage, and I was just like, that just looks like so much more fun just to be up there and the, the audience, you know, just, just watching you and just, you know, really just you getting to express your feelings in a different way. And, uh, you know, I just thought that was really cool. So I, I auditioned for the next show at my, my school, which was, uh, *Mary Poppins*, and they casted me as Robertson Ay, who is like the, the butler of the house. And he's sort of like the, the comedic relief of the show. And, uh, that was very fun to do. And I just started, you know, auditioning for more stuff since then.

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Gina Marie Rodriguez:

That sounds amazing. And personal preference. I love being comedic relief. I think that's the best part of the show <laugh>.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Yeah. Most shows that I have done, I, I've been the comedic relief. So when I was casted as, uh, Tobias, I was definitely a little shocked, you know, also just, it's, it's, I knew it was gonna be a challenge, but I, I think I finally know what I wanna do with the character and, uh, I'm just very excited to show it to the audience.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

Well, I'm sure that everyone is really excited to see it as well. I happen to be a big fan of *Sweeney Todd*. I love the show, even though I'm a huge baby and I don't typically like horror stuff <laugh> <laugh>, this is a unique genre for me.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Yeah, definitely.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

But I'm really looking forward to this show. And you are going to be at the Levoy in Millville, New Jersey, correct?

Carmen Matarazzo:

Yes, correct.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

And you run February 10th through February 19th? What I find fascinating about this is that you and your brother, Gatén, right, are playing the same role?

Carmen Matarazzo:

Yes.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

Okay. So that's, this is fascinating to me. So our listeners might know of your brother as Dustin in *Stranger Things*. So the Broadway production that he will be in goes up, I think in previews on February 26th. That's only a week apart! Yeah. So how, how are you guys coping with that? Do you talk character building together?

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Carmen Matarazzo:
Yeah.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:
So how, how are you guys coping with that? Do you talk character building together? Do you actively avoid it?

Carmen Matarazzo:
We, we talk about it all the time, and I knew we were gonna be talking about it all the time. The second I was casted as this role because I knew he was, uh, gonna be in the show before I was. And, um, he was the first person I called after I, I got the, uh, the email, you know, he, he just started, I could just hear from his voice how excited he was. I called the rest of my family after that. But, uh, we're always talking about what, what different choices we're gonna make and, uh, what exactly what we wanna do with the character. Cuz there's definitely some, some lines and stuff, uh, in the script that it's, we don't really understand, so we'll, we'll ask each other for help for, uh, for certain things. And it's, it's been really fun to bond over.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:
What a great resource to have. You know, I can only imagine, I know that there are certain actors who, who really like to keep it close to the vest, the choices that they're going to make. Yeah. Um, but I think it's fascinating that you guys get to talk about it and, and build these two different versions of the same character together.

Carmen Matarazzo:
Yeah. He's, he's always been, uh, a huge fan of the, the show as well. It's just crazy that we, uh, we're both doing the show. I knew we were eventually both gonna do the show at one point. I just had a feeling, but for us to do it at the same exact time, it was just, it's, it's really fun <laugh>.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:
I love that you had an intuition about it. So are you guys planning to see each other's shows? Because I love that it's, you're not overlapping, right? So this is the last show in New Jersey before it hits Broadway. Yeah. So that means he has time to come see you, right?

Carmen Matarazzo:
Yeah.

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Carmen Matarazzo:

Yeah, he's gonna, we're both gonna be able to see each other, uh, uh, play the part, which is what we're most excited for, especially cuz a lot of the time we have our own stuff going on, so we're not really able to, you know, see each other's, uh, you know, whatever it is we're doing. You know, it just sort of works out. We're both gonna be able to, you know, see each other's shows. So I'm very excited.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

<laugh> I can only imagine how excited your parents are right now that they have both of you.

Carmen Matarazzo:

<laugh> yeah, especially my mom. Cuz she's a huge theater fan. You know, she's, she always just says, oh, I have two Tobys now and my two Tobys. I'm always most excited to show my family.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

Is this your mom's favorite show or? Well, she's gonna say it's her favorite show now.

Carmen Matarazzo:

<laugh> yeah <laugh>. She kinda has to right now.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

Yeah. Whether it was or wasn't, it is now.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Yeah. But I, I know it's up there. She's got a, she's got a few, I know she loves the classics. Angela Lansbury's one, one of her favorite, uh, actresses and, uh, you know, just everyone from that, that time period of theater.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

Absolutely. Well, do you have any classics that you're fond of?

Carmen Matarazzo:

Uh, a bunch. Most, mostly. I could go down a whole list. I just, I love Sondheim. I love *Into the Woods*. I

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love, uh, you know, *Sweeney Todd*, which, which our mo- you know, some of our, his, his most popular, but I like, uh, *A Little Night Music*, I'm not sure if you you're familiar, but, uh, I'm pretty sure he, he won the Tony for that one as well. Um, *West Side Story*, of course, pretty much any Sondheim show, you know? Yeah. There's, there's not many shows that I, I don't like.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

I am also a huge Sondheim nerd. I just, I, I don't know the one that you mentioned, so shame on me and I should look it up <laugh>. Um, but I do absolutely love him and I love this show, and I'm looking forward to seeing this, uh, in Millville where, you know, honestly, with without being rude, um, I, I can afford the show in Millville, right? Yeah. That Broadway prices can be rather prohibitive.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Oh, definitely.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

For anybody who's relatively local to Jersey, this is the time to see it.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Definitely.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

And we wanna see Carmen Matarazzo

Carmen Matarazzo:

<laugh>.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

So let's come out.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Yes, please.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

I wanna know just like a little bit more about what I, you mentioned it before you started as a drummer and then you kind of saw your friends on stage, but like, what was that impulse to say: I really think I wanna learn more about being a performer, you know, because the, I mean, drummers are performers, but it's a different, it's just a different medium. Yeah.



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Carmen Matarazzo:

Yeah. Um, well, my sister and my sister actually started us off on it. She, uh, she did this, uh, this showcase when she was, I think maybe like 11 or 12, which would've made me and Gaten five and six.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

Aw.

Carmen Matarazzo:

And, uh, she did this showcase and basically there were a bunch of like, uh, managers and, uh, agents there. And, uh, basically they, they'd watch these young actors perform and see, you know, who would, you know, they want, uh, as their client. And Sabrina found her client there, and me and Gaten and Sabrina, we all, uh, we started, uh, you know, we, we read for, for her, uh, for Peggy, that's her name. And Gaten and Sabrina both wanted to stick with it. And at the time I was very little and I was just like, this isn't something I wanna do. Cause I was just too nervous going to the audition room.

I was like, I wanna play sports. And then I did, I went to a whole sports phase and then I saw Gaten, uh, on Broadway for the first time. And I was like, wow, there's a lot of people here. Just watching him up there. And I'm just like, that, that's really cool. And, uh, I started singing and I was like, people could watch me do this too. You know, Gaten and Sabrina are definitely my biggest inspirations towards it. Without them, I probably wouldn't have even, uh, thought about doing theater. I'd probably be doing, you know, playing sports right now or playing basketball, which, uh, you know, which I liked. But, you know, definitely it's nowhere near, you know, what I feel for, for theater and for performing. Um,

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

So it's a different kind of adrenaline, right? Sports give you one kind of energy and then you have that, you know, the thrill of a live audience.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Yeah, yeah, definitely.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

I get that. I do.

Carmen Matarazzo:

I, I remember just, uh, performing with, uh, you know, school band for the first time and it was kind of my first time performing in front of an audience and I was just like, I think I just, I wanna perform forever, whether it's theater or whether it's music.

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Gina Marie Rodriguez:

That's great. I'm so, I mean, you're definitely a showbiz family, right? There's the, the three of you who are, are very much involved. Did your parents also start in entertainment or did you guys just branch off on your own?

Carmen Matarazzo:

My, my mom, she, uh, did a lot of theater in, uh, high school in college. She's a fantastic singer too. She doesn't do it that much, uh, that often, but when she does it makes us very happy 'cause she really does have a good voice. But she doesn't think she does

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

<laugh> oh no. All right, mom, we gotta change that. I wanna see her on stage now too <laugh>.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Me too. She, uh, we actually convinced her to audition, um, start going out for auditions with us again. And I think she'll eventually, once she finds the show she likes, she'll start doing community theater with us and you know, just 'cause she, she did a, um, when my sister was really little, she did *Annie* with her, you know, she, she always had a fun time doing theater too, and I know she misses it, so.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

Yeah, absolutely. Man, I'm just gonna be over here rooting for you and Gaten and Sabrina and your mom. Your whole family. I just wanna see you guys doing stuff. It can be like the Von Traps, you know <laugh>?

Carmen Matarazzo:

<laugh>.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

That's- alright, we have a new goal in mind. You guys are just gonna go out on a singing tour.

Carmen Matarazzo:

I agree. Yeah.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

And when it happens, I would like credit. Thank you <laugh>. It was my idea. What is your mom's name? Since we're promoting her now.



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Carmen Matarazzo:
Heather Crupi.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:
There you go. Heather Crupi, we wanna see you on stage too <laugh>. Okay. So is there anything that you wanna tell people about the, the production that's coming up? What are you excited about this particular production?

Carmen Matarazzo:
Well, everyone's extremely, uh, talented. You know, I could just go down the, the entire list of everyone in our cast and just everyone is, is just- Every time I've, I've the first time I've seen every person, you know, step up and do, uh, you know, their scene or song or whatever it is. They, they surprise me every single time and they, they, they just make different choices every time. It's like watching them for the first time. It's fantastic. You know, uh, Dom is, is playing our, our Sweeney. Their voice is just, just fills the entire theater. I love it. It's just, uh, Katie Hughes, she's hilarious. She's gonna make the audience, you know, laugh the entire show. You know, our, uh, Anthony, Kevin and, uh, Johanna, uh, yeah, their voices together resonate so well. I just can't wait for everyone to just to, to see them, you know, just, just besides from me, just this entire cast, just our ensemble too. They're fantastic.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:
Can you tell me, um, a little bit about the Levoy too? I've only seen pictures online so far. I can't wait to go. It looks gorgeous.

Carmen Matarazzo:
It's a beautiful theater <laugh>, when I, when I did the audition here, I, uh, instantly was just like, I really, really hope I get to, you know, do a, I do this show or just eventually do a production here because it's, it's got, uh, the mezzanine and it has, uh, the orchestra and, uh, you know, back orchestra. It's, it's really not far off from a Broadway theater. There are some Broadway theaters that are smaller than this theater.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:
I'm really looking forward to, to heading down to, to Millville. I haven't been there. My grandparents actually used to live there, so I haven't been there in a while. Oh, cool. Oh cool. I'm looking forward to heading back down to see you.

Carmen Matarazzo:
Yeah, like a quick trip down memory road.

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I just appreciate you, uh, having me here and just having me talk about, uh, the production. I'm, I'm very excited about it. I just can't wait to to you know, show everyone what we've been working on for the past couple months.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

I have so much to look forward to because I'm looking forward to the Levoy's production of *Sweeney Todd*. And I'm also looking forward to your family going out on tour, you know, as the next Von Trapps.

Carmen Matarazzo:

Oh yeah, <laugh>. Me too. It's gonna happen. I know it.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

<laugh> exactly. Looking forward to it. Carmen, it was so nice talking to you. Thank you so much for chatting.

Carmen Matarazzo:

You too. Thank you so much.

Gina Marie Rodriguez:

You can see Carmen Matarazzo: as Tobias in the Off Broad Street Players' production of *Sweeney Todd* at the Levoy Theatre in Millville, New Jersey. The show runs from February 10th through February 19th. For more information, be sure to visit Levoy.net.

If you like this episode, be sure to review, subscribe, and tell your friends a transcript of this podcast. Links relevant to the story and more about the arts in New Jersey can be found at jerseyarts.com.

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This episode was hosted, edited, and produced by me, Gina Marie Rodriguez. Executive producers are Jim Atkinson and Cie Stroud, and a very special thanks to Carmen Matarazzo today!

I'm Gina Marie Rodriguez for the *Jersey Arts Podcast*. Thanks for listening.



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