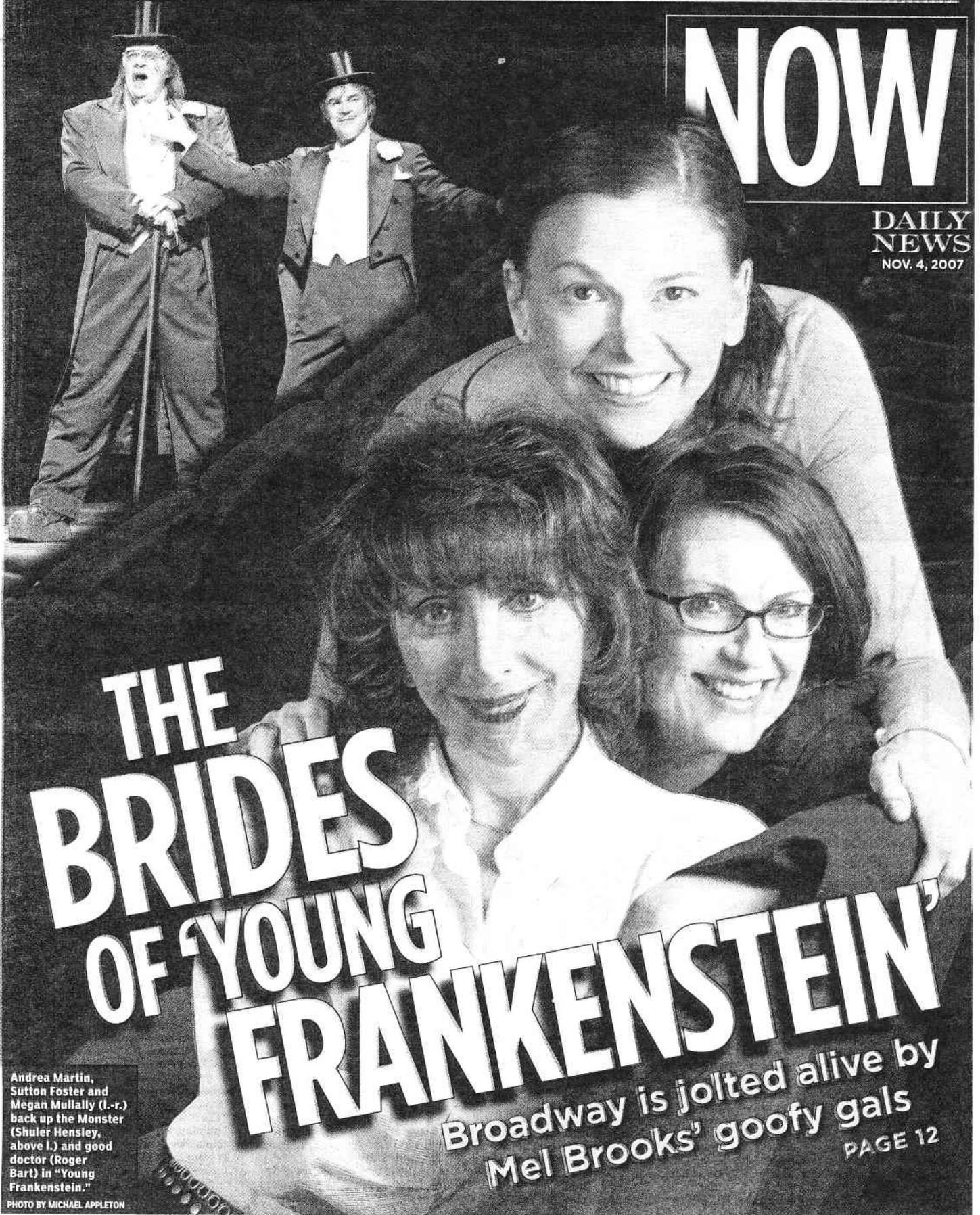


# NOW

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# THE BRIDES OF 'YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN'

Broadway is jolted alive by Mel Brooks' goofy gals  
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Andrea Martin, Sutton Foster and Megan Mullally (l.-r.) back up the Monster (Shuler Hensley, above l.) and good doctor (Roger Bart) in "Young Frankenstein."

PHOTO BY MICHAEL APPLETON

# Three of a kind



Transylvania, here they come: From l., Sutton Foster, Christopher Fitzgerald & Roger Bart in "Young Frankenstein"

**S**ure, they're following a legendary Broadway hit. True, "The New Mel Brooks Musical Young Frankenstein" (as the full title goes, opening Thursday at the Hilton Theater, 214 W. 42nd St.) is based on the classic 1974 comedy by writer-director, and now theatrical hit-meister, Brooks. And, yes, say it: Expectations and ticket prices are monstrous.

But Brooks, director/choreographer Susan Stroman and their leading ladies — Sutton Foster as Inga, frisky assistant to Dr. Frederick Frankenstein (Roger Bart); Megan Mullally as the good doctor's fiancée; and Andrea Martin as housekeeper Frau Blucher (cue horses) — aren't feeling any high anxiety.

"They're all very different women," says Stroman. "All three are talented and all three can do it all. They can sing, dance and are funny. In Mel Brooks' world, the key to successful casting is to get people who are one-of-a-kind."



Andrea Martin horses around as "Young Frankenstein" caretaker Frau Blucher.

## ▲ Sutton Foster: Unearthing her inner vixen

"I'm underneath some hay in the wagon for about a minute and a half before I pop up," says Foster. "And then every night I get to perform this fantastic number. You rarely get to yodel these days on Broadway."

*Yodel-ay-he-ho*, indeed. As the delightfully lusty Inga, Foster wears a blond wig and a nurse's uniform so short those in the front rows may need Dr. Frankenstein's life-reviving equipment. But don't expect Inga to attach the electrodes herself — she's busy cavorting (and yodeling) in "Roll in The Hay," a number that also requires her to shimmy around a giant, rollicking cart.

"Oh, the layers of Inga. What does she want? Sex!" Inga certainly doesn't get jealous when her lover's fiancé Elizabeth (Mullally) shows up. "Inga's European!" says Foster, laughing. "She's like, 'Oh, nice to meet you. Wanna join?'"

Striving Broadway sexpots might be jealous of Foster, 32, if she wasn't so sweet — and talented. Her storybook career began by making her debut on the Great White Way next to her brother, Hunter Foster, in a revival of "Grease." (Hunter, coincidentally, is now in an unrelated, dramatic musical version of "Frankenstein" off-Broadway.) That

was quickly followed by a classic big break: The lead dropped out of a new musical and Foster was pulled from the chorus to star in "Thoroughly Modern Millie," winning a Tony in 2002 for Best Leading Actress in a Musical (and the love of her "Millie" co-star Christian Borle, now her husband). She's since played Jo in "Little Women" and a cart-wheeling ingenue in "The Drowsy Chaperone."

Foster says she's loving the opportunity to be a Transylvanian sexpot, and isn't afraid of Teri Garr's Inga in Brooks' 1974 movie — she's devoured it again and again. "It's my favorite of his movies," says Foster. "I saw it for the first time a couple of years ago with a group of people who knew every line. I'll watch certain sections to get little reminders. You get inspired with little ideas and moments."

"The film is so emblazoned in people's minds that we have to honor it. There's a reason why it worked."

And she loves the anything-goes spirit of Brooks and Stroman, who each won Tonys for "The Producers." In previews, she says, "Chris Fitzgerald, as Igor, had an idea for one of his entrances, to hang upside down. Next thing I know, they actually built something for him to hang from."

## The ladies of 'Young Frankenstein' are what a ghoul wants

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

### ▶ Megan Mullally: Her, her, her, her!

Mullally — formerly the martini-swilling, snarky Karen Walker on TV's "Will & Grace" — feels almost guilty about her big numbers as Elizabeth in "Young Frankenstein." In the role played by Madeline Kahn in the movie, Mullally has grand entrances in fabulous gowns (or hilarious fright wigs), dives into the comic numbers "Please Don't Touch Me," "Surprise" (in which she comes on stage trilling, "It's me, me, me, me!") and "Deep Love," in which she professes her devotion to the Monster, played by Shuler Hensley — and then walks off with flair, clacking her heels with every step.

"I just swan around, and then go back to my dressing room and buy things online," jokes Mullally. "I feel like I'm getting away with something, because it's so fun."

"I was dying to come to New York and do a musical," she says. "It's the most fun on and offstage because it's so silly. This was the best possible job I could have gotten."

Mullally's co-stars say they were a bit nervous about meeting Brooks, but not her.

"Mel and I have a groovy kind of love," says Mullally, 48. "We have a good bantering relationship. I always tell him he's a firm second position for my affections if something should fall through with my husband."

"I wasn't intimidated by him at all. I don't get intimidated that easily anymore." Of course, that was before rehearsals.

"The first day we sat around a table to do a read-through. And Mel was being really hard on two guys in the ensemble and being really specific with them and giving notes. Andrea Martin was sitting next to me, and my scene was the next [coming up]. She wrote a note to me saying: 'It's been nice knowing you.' Then we became hysterical."

Like everyone else, Mullally was a huge fan of the film version, even though she hadn't seen it in years. She doesn't dive into it again and again like Foster does, but she doesn't avoid it like Martin. And once, she couldn't have missed it if she tried.

"I got the call to audition and the next day flew from Los Angeles to New York, and in first class, they give you a little DVD player — and 'Young Frankenstein' was one of the movies. How weird is that?"

So, that was a good sign? Mullally laughs, "Or a slap in the face!" she says.



Megan Mullally (with Martin and Fitzgerald, foreground), sashays down a staircase at Castle Frankenstein.

PHOTOS: PAUL KOLNIK

### ◀ Andrea Martin: What a Blucher

Usually, actors audition and campaign for a role. With the famously indecisive Andrea Martin, it's often the other way around.

"Stro [director Susan Stroman] called me and said, 'Don't speak for 10 minutes,'" says Martin. "And then she told me about the show and the role of Frau Blucher and why she wanted me to do it. Finally, I said, 'Can I speak yet?'"

A key member of the legendary Second City TV troupe in the late '70s and early '80s, Martin admits

that she has hemmed and hawed a bit about taking on roles in "Candide," "Fiddler on the Roof" and "The Rose Tattoo," among other productions. On opening night of an Encores! performance of "Out of this World," she told her director she absolutely, positively couldn't go on stage.

As with all those shows, she could and did.

Once she commits, Martin, 60, is all in. It has paid off, too: She had the opportunity to do dramatic turns in "Oklahoma" and "Rose Tattoo," won a Tony for "My Favorite Year" and garnered nominations aplenty. Her take on Frau Blucher — a housekeeper so fierce that every time her name is mentioned ("Blucher!") horses rear up and neigh in dismay — is typically committed. She says she has avoided watching the movie

version again, and Cloris Leachman's iconic Blucher. "I'm very impressionable," says Martin.

For inspiration, the actress instead has a still from Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 classic "Rebecca," which features Judith Anderson as Mrs. Danvers, an equally creepy, intimidating housekeeper. But Mrs. Danvers certainly didn't break into a goofy Marlene Dietrich-ish musical number like "He Vas My Boyfriend," in which the Transylvanian Blucher recounts her passion for young Frankenstein's grandfather.

"I'm just glad that song comes early in the show," confesses Martin.

"If I had to spend the entire evening knowing that [later] I was going to be doing that number, I couldn't think of anything else." ♦