

## Interview: One on One with the McFlys

**Ashleigh Rubenach and Ethan Jones** talk to Theatre Thoughts about their time preparing for and performing the roles of **The McFlys – Lorraine Baines and George McFly** – in *Back to the Future: The Musical*.

Dripping with Hollywood magic and simultaneous 1950s and 1980s nostalgia the DeLorean has landed in Sydney for *Back to the Future the Musical*. Australian audiences are also lucky enough to have **Roger Bart** (who originated the role on the West End and Broadway) as their Doc Brown. Bringing dazzling special effects including full scale flying DeLorean, with video projections, lighting effects, and a large orchestra – it’s a Broadway level experience which brilliantly pays homage to the film.

I had the opportunity to chat with **Ashleigh Rubenach** (Lorraine Baines) and **Ethan Jones** (George McFly) about their time preparing for and performing their roles. In the plot, we see their love story awkwardly blossom from their teenage selves through to thirty years on in two very different timelines – mainly due to the meddling of their future son, Marty McFly (**Axel Duffy**).



*Ashleigh Rubenach as Lorraine Baines. Image: Daniel Boud*

### Creating the Magic

Discussing what it’s like working in such a technically epic production that involves electrifying visual projections, and a flying time machine, Rubenach comments on the joy she’s had at experiencing audience reactions “there’s a camera on the musical director so that we can see what’s happening and sometimes you can see the people in the front row right behind the conductors head reacting.”

The technical brilliance of the work has provided opportunities for crew members to really flex their skills, Jones says “particularly in this show, the stage management and crew and everyone is really excited to be so involved with it all – they get do so much on this. People don’t realise how much work it takes for a family kitchen to slide onto stage one second and then disappear and we’re back in the 1950s; that’s a team of people who all work in such intricate sequences”.

But it’s not all technical wizardry that is the key to the nostalgic chemistry of George and Lorraine. “There’s a long time on stage before there’s anything technical that happens,” says Jones, “that’s us trying to give a moment for the audience to connect with the human characters”. Rubenach echoes this sentiment, adding, “even if what convinces people to come along is to see how we do it or to see the car, I think what people are charmed by and fall in love with are the characters.”



*Ethan Jones as George McFly. Image: Daniel Boud*

### **Portraying Two Ages of One Character**

The couple both appear as their teenage-hood and forty-year-old selves thanks to the science-fiction setup of time travel. When speaking to their experience playing this duality in one performance, Rubenach says, “I think what is so fun about Lorraine as a character is that she is such a contradiction, not just in between young and adult personas, but also within herself. Her seventeen year old self looks like this sweet innocent classic kind of 1950s doll on paper, and then it turns out she’s actually not.” She adds, “I’ve been quite lucky in my career to have played a few women like that who are sort of ingenues on paper and then reveal something a little different.”

“I’d say the hardest part of the job is the time jumps and then remembering and maintaining what’s relevant to the same person at that time.” Adds Jones, “there’s certain things that you would have attributed to the younger self and I’m personally trying to highlight this character growth.”

Jones also discussed what it’s been like preparing for the character of George McFly – especially one portrayed with such iconography by **Crispin Glover**. “It was fun to learn the vocabulary, both vocally, cadence-wise, and physically, then to marry that with the text and then slowly start to find my natural connection to that so it still feels real”. He says, “in the lunchroom scene where George first approaches Loraine, there’s this kind of this public embarrassment moment around the vulnerability and love situation. And that is something that I every so often am reminded of ..literally.”

He remarks, “Ashley’s really playful. I think that’s one part of the job I’m grateful for – that we’re encouraged to play and be silly. We spend most of the time as 17 year olds and I think that youthfulness comes out in that as well.”

When commenting on the vulnerability it takes to play around with physicality and try out silly or weird things, Rubenach says, “that was really challenging and something that we were very lucky to get plenty of time to really play with in the rehearsal room and under the wonderful direction of **John Rando**, our director and our associate director.”



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*Back to the Future the Musical has announced since opening in Sydney that it will not continue with it's national tour, instead finishing its run at the Sydney Lyric Theatre on January 25th. Book tickets now to see Ashleigh Rubenach and Ethan Jones in the production before it leaves.*

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