

Director's Download: Marlo Hunter on *Ever After*, Adaptation, and the Stories That Find Us

By Elizabeth Montgomery



Before the ball and the glass slipper, there was a woman with a future she was determined to shape. *Ever After*, the new musical inspired by the beloved 1998 film starring Drew Barrymore, is a show that director Marlo Hunter has spent the last five years bringing to the stage.

Running May 6 – June 14, 2026, in the Dr. Stacie J. and Richard J Stephenson Theatre, previews begin May 6, with an official opening night on May 15.

We sat down with Hunter ahead of the premiere to talk about adaptation, theatricality, and why this Cinderella story is unlike any you've seen before.

Q: Tell us about *Ever After*. What's the story?

Hunter: So *Ever After* starts in 1812, where the Brothers Grimm have just published their now very famous collection of fairy tales, and they've been invited to the home of the grand dame. They don't know why. But they find themselves in the midst of a party, and at this party they're informed that one of the tales in their book, the story of the Cinder Girl, is not accurate. It's actually based on somebody very, very real. Very three-dimensional, very

layered, very strong, and in fact, their relative. They were brought there that night to set the record straight, to tell them the true story of Danielle de Barbarac. Their Cinderella has a name.

Q: Can you describe the world of the production? What will audiences see on stage?

Hunter: Scenic designer Reed Thompson has brought this world to life just exquisitely. We're telling the story through the lens of this 1812 family, and what's really resonant about this version of Cinderella is that it's real. It was really important to Reed and to me that the design, the world of this magical fairy tale, actually feel very real. The trees will look like trees. The leaves will feel like leaves. The stones will look like stones. That's where the magic lives. It's both lush and a little bit abstract at the same time. This is a story about how we tell stories, so the craft of storytelling is something we're really bringing to the forefront. And then when we get to some very large, iconic moments, it becomes genuinely magical in its fairy-tale-ness.

Q: This show is based on the film Ever After with Drew Barrymore. When audiences come in already carrying their love for the film, how do you build on that?

Hunter: I think this production is truly an adaptation at its apex. You can't, even with the most beloved of films, and this is a very beloved film with a very fierce fan base, myself included, you can't take a movie and just plug it on the stage. Anything that earns its right to be on stage has to be inherently theatrical in some way. So we're really leaning into this framing device, this family in 1812 bringing us into the past to tell this story. There's a real theatricality to that. It's also been really important to our writers that this show feel like it's made for a 2026 audience.

In 1998, when the film came out, it was wildly feminist. To have a Cinderella story with this very three-dimensional, headstrong, impassioned Cinderella at its center felt very edgy and modern. And now in 2026, we're in an even more evolved time. So aspects of the story have had to evolve with it.

Most of what audiences love most about this story is very much in the DNA of the stage show. But the psychology of it has been updated. That's the joy and the challenge of adaptation.

Q: Can you speak a bit about your history with the show and what drew you to this project?

Hunter: As an artist and a human, I've always been drawn to stories about characters who discover that they're starring in a story they didn't write, and what they have to access within themselves to take control of their own narrative. Those stories really find me. And this is that story. This is what *Ever After* truly is about.

I came aboard five years ago through Marcy Heisler. She and I were working together on another project, and she mentioned this show to me. I read it and instantly fell in love with its themes, with its beauty, with its outrageously lush and beautifully crafted score. There is nothing like it out there right now. Shows just aren't being written like this anymore. And we've been in development for the past five years, so we are really excited to finally have this opportunity in Phoenix.

Q: What excites you most about this show?

Hunter: This mantra that I hold in my life, that you are not destined to become what you're born into, is very central to my life as a person and as an artist. This show is inspiring people to ask questions. Ask questions of your time, of your place, change your story. And when you do, you can love and be loved most fiercely. I believe that love and that perspective shift can change the world. For me, that is a fairy tale I want to leave my daughter. It's what I'd like her to grow up with.

Q: What do you hope audiences walk away thinking or feeling after seeing *Ever After*?

Hunter: I have to quote the show here. I hope they walk away thinking: we are the once upon a time.

Details

Dates: May 6 – June 14, 2026

Location: The Phoenix Theatre Company, Dr. Stacie J. and Richard J Stephenson Theatre

Tickets: phoenixtheatre.com | (602) 254-2151

Audio Description and American Sign Language interpretation are available for this production. Performance dates and details can be found at phoenixtheatre.com.

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