You can call it an actor’s instinct—or perhaps it’s the Chicago way—but Jane Lynch knows better than to tinker with a stellar script. The Dolton, Illinois, native didn’t change a word written for her now meme-worthy role as cheerleading coach Sue Sylvester on Glee (which ran for six seasons on Fox). Those “perfect” lines were written by Ian Brennan, a fellow Illinoisan from Mount Prospect. On the flip side, her lines in Christopher Guest films, such as Best in Show and A Mighty Wind, were largely improvised. That fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants style was a skill Lynch aced as she toured with Chicago’s The Second City. Her latest character, the two-faced Sophie Lennon on Amazon Prime’s The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, has Lynch sharing the 1950s set with fellow suburbanites Rachel Brosnahan and Alex Borstein. Though Lynch now lives in the Hollywood Hills with her partner, Jennifer; Jennifer’s son; and a pair of cocker spaniel rescues, she gets back to Chicago often to visit family and sip coffee at her favorite spot. (Hint: It’s in a furniture store.) We chatted with the five-time Emmy winner to learn how the city formed her, in and out of the spotlight.
Q WHAT ARE SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS FROM YOUR TIME IN CHICAGO?
A I always loved going downtown, even when I was a kid. I loved the Lincoln Park area and Old Town. After graduating from Illinois State University (in Normal), I went to grad school at Cornell and then came back to Chicago. I got a little apartment in a three-story walk-up in Old Town and eventually got into The Second City’s touring company. Although I didn’t know that sketch comedy would be something I would want to do, I loved it. Loved it. From there I started doing shows at Steppenwolf Theatre, which was always something I aspired to do.

Q WHAT WAS ONE BIG TAKEAWAY FROM YOUR TIME DOING THEATER IN CHICAGO?
A At The Second City, it was really from the seat of your pants. You have to be able to make quick decisions—strong decisions—and stick with them. And that’s how I work now. I rarely suffer over decisions. Any time I find myself thinking too much, I muck up the process. It’s usually my first instinct that’s best, and I go with that.

Q ARE THERE ANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVISED MOMENTS IN THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL?
A No. The script is a bible, and it is so well-written and so well-conceived. And they’re sticklers about it too. I have asked to change words, and you see people go off in a corner discussing, then someone gets on the phone. They’re usually quite open to what I want to do, but I rarely, rarely want to change a word.

“AHA, I KNEW I LIKED YOU!”
LYNCH’S REACTION WHEN SHE LEARNS SOMEONE IS FROM CHICAGO

BACK ON BROADWAY
Jane Lynch jumped into the theater spotlight in March 2022 to join the highly anticipated Broadway revival of Funny Girl. She portrays the fiercely devoted (and poker-loving) mother of Fanny Brice, played by Beanie Feldstein of Lady Bird and Booksmart fame. It’s not Lynch’s first time on a Broadway stage, however. In 2013, she stepped into the role of wicked orphanage manager Miss Hannigan in a revival of Annie.
**Q**: HAVE YOU SHARED ANY CHICAGOAN BONDING MOMENTS WITH THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL COSTARS?

**A**: Oh, yeah. We [Rachel Brosnahan, Alex Borstein and Lynch] all take pride in the fact that we grew up in a theater town. There's a respect for the process. A wardrobe designer once said to me, "I can always tell an actor from Chicago because they hang their clothes up." We take responsibility for our craft. When I find out someone's from Chicago, I'm rarely surprised. I go, "Aha, I knew I liked you!"

**Q**: WHERE DO YOU LIKE TO HANG OUT WHEN YOU COME BACK TO THE WINDY CITY?

**A**: I love coffee, and they have a great coffee bar at Restoration Hardware on Dearborn Street. I could sit there all day with my computer. On my last visit, I stayed at the Soho House Chicago in the West Loop, and that is an amazing neighborhood. The architecture is basically untouched from the last century, and there are some terrific coffee shops and restaurants in that area.