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Classic 'Annie' a rousing revival

Young lead charms, ensemble delights

12:52 AM, Jul. 24, 2011 | 1 Comments

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Written by
BODEN DAY
Special to The News
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For the 144 regional theatergoers who have yet to experience the musical "Annie," please note that New Candlelight Theatre's production is now the platinum standard.

And for those "Annie" fans of whatever intensity, please note: this latest local incarnation of the 34-year-old cultural phenomenon has immense heart, unforced hilarity and real heft.

Its heart is due, in large part, to its director, NCT stalwart Paul Goodman. He delivers a triple-thrill cast -- singing, dancing, acting -- beginning with young veteran performer Jamieson O'Brien in the title role.

O'Brien is a spunky, determined -- and thoroughly believable -- Annie in this rags-to-riches classic. O'Brien is charming, not cutesy. And, by gosh, can this girl sing.

The seven other mostly prepubescent performers portraying the residents of Manhattan's decrepit Municipal Girls Orphanage in 1933 are appropriately mouthy and scruffy. And, by gosh, can these girls sing.

Thankfully, music director Jeff Reim rehearsed the girls to, in Goodman's words, "sing like real girls, not mimicking the latest pop diva."

Unforced hilarity: the matron of the orphanage is child-hating, disillusioned, boozy Agatha Hannigan.

Gerri Weagraff, an NCT performer for, yes, two dozen years, is a pure hoot as she gives the sadly comical Hannigan some necessary humanity.

Weagraf, Dewey Oriente and Lindsay Mauck bring down the house (twice) with the brassy show-stopper "Easy Street."

Patrick O'Hara gives his Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks just enough gravitas and grace, and the production heft.

Reim, also the scenic designer, provides a jaw-dropping set and a stage portal that's a giant version of Harold Gray's ruminative comic strip "Little Orphan Annie," which inspired the musical.

THEATER REVIEW

WHAT: "Annie, the Musical"

WHEN: Through August 21. Friday and Saturday, doors open at 6 p.m., show at 8 p.m. Sundays, doors open at 1 p.m., show at 3 p.m.

WHERE: New Candlelight Theatre, 2208 Millers Rd., Ardentown

INFORMATION: 475-2313 or www.nctstage.org

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With this "Annie's" fast, smooth scene changes, its hint of that unique New York edginess in its patter and its precise and engaging ensemble work, every one of NCT's 150 audience seats should be filled.

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