

Entertainment

Spirited 'Annie' at New Candlelight Theatre

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By Christina Perryman

It is the original rags to riches story. *Annie*, a spirited, rambunctious, orphan was left on the doorstep of the Municipal Girls Orphanage as a baby in 1922. With Annie is a note from her parents saying they will be back for her as soon as they can and they include a half a locket; her parents kept the other half so when they returned Annie would know she was theirs. Annie shares the orphanage with several other girls, guided by drunken Ms. Hannigan.

Annie has her heart set on finding her parents but Ms. Hannigan blocks every escape attempt the girl tries. Annie's fortunes change when Grace, secretary to the powerful billionaire Oliver Warbucks, comes to the orphanage with directions to bring a child to the Warbucks mansion for Christmas.

Grace chooses Annie, Ms. Hannigan reluctantly agrees and Annie is taken home to meet Mr. Warbucks. Warbucks is at first an intimidating workaholic, but Annie quickly wins his heart and the man decides to adopt the child. Annie, however, still holds hope that her parents will return and Warbucks agrees to do all in his power to find them.

When word reaches Ms. Hannigan and her scheming brother Rooster, the duo, along with Rooster's wife Lily, concoct a plan to get Annie, and the \$50,000 reward for her parents, away from Warbucks.

Annie, based on the Harold Gray comic strip "Little Orphan Annie," written by Charles Strouse with lyrics by Martin Charnin, first debuted as a Broadway musical in 1977.

The movie, starring Albert Finney as Oliver Warbucks, Carol Burnett as Ms. Hannigan and Tim Curry as Rooster, opened in 1982. The musical includes many numbers people would be familiar with including "Hard Knock Life," "Maybe," "Tomorrow" and "I Don't Need Anything But You." And the show is now receiving top notch treatment at New Candlelight Theatre.

Director Paul Goodman assembled an excellent cast and wonderfully guided a production parents and children will love. Jamieson O'Brien is phenomenal as the affable orphan Annie. O'Brien is spunky, lively and lovable and her singing is incredible. Patrick O'Hara, playing Warbucks, is equal parts powerfully gruff businessman and doting father to Annie.

O'Hara and O'Brien's interactions are touching and sweet. Megan Pisors is wonderful as Grace, handling both Ms. Hannigan and Warbucks with a gentle but firm hand. Gerri Weagraff is absolutely hilarious as dissatisfied, stumbling, girl-hating Ms. Hannigan. Her interactions with the orphans are not only well choreographed but laugh out loud funny.

Dewey Oriente as Rooster and Lindsay Mauck as Lily are dangerous conspirators and also add a touch of humor.

Orphans Rebecca Smith (Kate), Katie Loftus (Tessie), Gueneviere Sherlaw (Pepper), Jordan O'Brien (July), Kayla Brock (Duffy) and Nicole Hemphill (who steals some scenes as adorable Molly), are delightful.

Shauna Goodman's choreographer is fantastic and costume designer Lorraine Anderson captures the feel of the time period. The set, by designer Jeff Reim, is outlined by panels of the comic strip. The stage itself has a cartoonish feel that compliments the actions.

In fact, the production feels very much like a comic strip come to life. It gives a nostalgic feel that works well with the show.

This is a production, start to finish, that children and parents will enjoy. Topped with the delicious buffet included with the ticket, *Annie* is the perfect way to spend a family night out. Buffet selections include kid friendly foods such as chicken tenders, mac and cheese and french fries along with ham and grape jelly sauce, delectable chicken pancetta and creamy scalloped potatoes among other selections. The buffet also includes a salad bar and dessert.

Annie runs at New Candlelight Theatre, 2208 Millers Road, Ardentown, Del., through Aug. 21. Shows are Thursdays through Sundays and tickets are \$55 for adults and \$32 for children 4-12. Doors open at 6 p.m. Thursday-Saturday and 1 p.m. Sunday.

For tickets or information, call 302-475-2313 or visit www.ncstage.org.

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