

Aspen Business Journal

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TA's Annie: A show to be remembered long after "tomorrow"

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By Gail Pison Montany



Julian Foran (Annie) and Zoot (Sandy) sing 'Tomorrow' in Theatre Aspen's production of *Annie*. Photo Credit: Jeremy Swanson [More images](#)

ASPEN, Colo.—It's possible Aspen audiences might have some difficulty relating to the Depression-era backdrop of the musical "Annie," but there's always the sweet, sentimental story and memorable songs they can take away.

And with an astonishingly talented ensemble cast of 16 humans and one canine, you can bet your bottom dollar that Theatre Aspen has produced an "Annie" that audiences – particularly youngsters who might not be familiar with the show – will remember long beyond "tomorrow."

Staged in Theatre Aspen's spanking-new Hurst Theatre tent, "Annie" features a number of gifted locals, including young Julia Foran in the title role (if her opening rendition of "Maybe" doesn't get you at least a little choked up, check your veins for ice water), and the hilarious, larger-than-life Nina Gabianelli as Miss Hannigan, the evil, child-hating lush who runs the orphanage.

"Annie," based on the book "Little Orphan Annie" by Charles Strouse, tells the tale of a plucky 11-year-old orphan during the Great Depression who is taken in for the Christmas holidays by billionaire industrialist Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks (David Hess), who decides he wants to permanently adopt her. But Annie first wants to try to find her real parents, whom she is convinced are still alive, so Warbucks launches a nationwide search, offering a \$50,000 reward for proof of parentage. Miss Hannigan and her ex-con brother Rooster (Dennis Kyle), along with Lily (Melinda Cowan), Rooster's girlfriend of the moment, scheme to get and split the reward money and later do away with Annie. (Spoiler alert: The scheme almost works, but the story has a very happy ending.)

Among the characters in Annie's post-orphanage life are President Roosevelt, played by a startlingly convincing look-alike, Jeffrey Duncan, Warbucks' long-suffering personal assistant Grace, played by the lovely Joan Hess, and "Sandy," a mutt Annie finds on the street during an escape from the orphanage and adopts – and in turn is adopted by Daddy Warbucks along with Annie. (This Sandy, an impressively well-behaved local Airedale named Zoot, makes disappointingly few appearances on stage.)

Julia Foran's competition for the lead role reportedly was fierce, but she was chosen over experienced young actresses from around the country – and it's easy to see why. Her singing and speaking voice is pure, her pitch perfect, and she resists the temptation to over-act her part.

Her fellow orphans include adorable and talented local girls Sophie Schlosser as Molly, Karlie Nelson as Pepper, Tatum Malena Shane as July and Kaia Vresilovic as Tessie. Duffy is played by Talitha McDougall Jones.

The balance of the hardworking ensemble, Franz Alderfer, Tess Ferrell, Thadd Krueger and Chelsie Nectow, seamlessly blend their various roles, making the cast appear far larger than it is. And the dancing, staging and set design for TA's "Annie" are superb as well. Aspen is indeed fortunate to have a production of this caliber performed in the community.

A song not included in Theatre Aspen's version of "Annie" is "We'd Like to Thank You, Herbert Hoover," in which Annie runs away from the orphanage and finds herself in a "Hooverville" among the city's down-and-out. It's too bad, because that scene explains not only the desperation of the times that would lead a crowd of "liars" claiming to be Annie's parents to try for a \$50,000 reward, but also of the president, who wants desperately to make the country right again.

Like the show itself, the closing tune, "A New Deal for Christmas," begins on a wistfully sad note ("All 'cross the land, folks are bawling and filled with despair, 'cause cupboards are bare"). It is the Great Depression, after all, and many people are unemployed. Both the song and the show end on a hopeful note, though, with FDR, inspired by Annie's can-do spirit, promising better times ahead ("I've heard a terrible rumor: no good will, no cheer! But we'll get a new deal for Christmas this year!").

The ultimately upbeat "Annie" just might be the perfect musical for our own divisive and troubled economic times. After all, when Annie and FDR, a Democrat, and Warbucks, a Republican, sing, "The sun'll come out tomorrow, so ya gotta hang on 'til tomorrow, come what may," ya gotta

believe there's still hope for all of us.

TA's "Annie" is directed and choreographed by Marjorie Mae Treger; David Dyer is musical director. "Annie" runs through Saturday, Aug. 20. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit www.theatraspen.org.

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Posted by paigepri *Aspen, CO*

July 14, 2011 11:54 am

Zoot agrees that he should have had more stage time! Check out his new facebook page for pictures and insider information! <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Theatre-Aspen/58104050732#!/pages/Zoot-Alors-Benson/240369555987627?sk=wall>

Posted by aspenhiker *Aspen*

July 14, 2011 10:16 am

Julia Foran is a rock star!

Posted by Chris Catlow *Aspen CO*

July 13, 2011 11:15 pm

Loved it! Very professional production. Julia Foran is destined to go far.

Posted by Kent Reed *Aspen, CO*

July 13, 2011 9:27 pm

Nice, thoughtful review!