

Proctors Theatre, Schenectady,, NY

*Annie*, book by Thomas Meehan; lyrics by Martin Charnin; music by Charles Strouse. .

Directed by Jenn Thompson. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

**“Little Girls, Little Girls, everything around me is little.”**

“Annie” is the perfect musical. Developed at Goodspeed Opera House, a perennial hit on Broadway and on national tours, as two movies and a television show, it has delighted audiences everywhere for years. It does require a gaggle of little girls with an exceptional talent as the title child (*based on the historic comic strip Little Orphan Annie*), there comes a moment when the youngster playing the role must move her audience to tears and then brighten their lives. It’s a challenge not every little girl is equal to. In the case of the current national touring company’s lead player she is almost equal to the starring task. Rainier (Rainey) Trevino delivers a solid, non-stop performance of the role and almost, but not quite, succeeds in pulling it off. As her controlling supervisor, Miss Hannigan sings, “everything around me is little.”



[c] Kaleb Jenkins, Rainer Trevino; Photo: Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

Trevino’s talent is large but her delivery is too held back, too little in fact, to make her Annie both seductive and adorable and this hampers this production a bit. She gives a good performance but not a great one and a great one is what is needed to make the show completely successful. She is surrounded by a troop of eager young girls who sing and dance up a storm but who never manage to enunciate their lines or their lyrics properly. This also hampers the show. They have the eagerness but not the training it would seem. This, in spite of superb direction by Jenn Thompson, shifts the audience’s concern for their future to one side and makes us concentrate on other things, such as Oliver Warbucks (*his last name defines the source of his fortune, by the way - World War I made his day, and his “factories” have been shuttered by the*

*Depreassion - the show is set in 1932*). We concentrate on his personal secretary, Grace Farrell, who obviously loves her inattentive boss. We spend time with FDR, with the Hannigans and with a policeman who shows up often. Christopher Swan does a fine job as Warbucks and Julia Nicole Hunter plays Grace superbly. Mark Woodard brings President Roosevelt to life very nicely.



Savannah Fisher;  
Photo: Evan Zimmerman

As Star-To-Be, with her own, uncredited solo chorus in the number “N Y C” Savannah Fisher comes close to stopping the show with her superb rendition of the song. Fisher is also Mrs. Greer and Ronnie Boylan and her work in those roles is excellent as well. She also wears two of the finest costumes designed by Alejo Vietti whose overall look for the show truly defines the period and adds a certain glamor to the production.

Others in the show who stand out for the excellence of their work are Tony Mowatt as Drake, the butler, Kaylie Mae Wallace and Caroline Glazier as the other two Boylan sisters, Samantha Stevens as Lily, the lady friend of Rooster Hannigan and Seamus as Sandy, the stray dog Annie adopts and is finally reunited with near the end of the show. Kaleb Jenkins is a fine Bert Healy.

It is the perennial wonder of this show that cartoon characters take on so much importance in our lives today. The songs by Martin Charnin and Charles Strouse play an important role in this juxtaposition of musical comedy and real life in the time of Trump. We are a people desperate for hope and this show provides us with just that. Within its two and a half hour walls we feel safe, we are inspired with possibilities, we find ourselves thanking Herbert Hoover, wondering about the “Maybe” in our future and dreaming about “Tomorrow.”

Even the evil Miss Hannigan’s brother is able to give us a touch of what might be as he serenades her, and us, with his complete belief in “Easy Street.” Jeffrey T. Kelly is a marvelous Rooser and Stefanie Londino gives Hannigan a terrific edginess that lapses into hysterical comedy when meanness



Stefanie Londino, Jeffrey T. Kelly, Samantha Stevens;  
Photo: Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade





Christopher Swan, Rainier Trevino;  
Photo: Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

turns comic flirtatious as men come into her life.

Miss Trevino is at her best as Annie when she is paired with Oliver Warbucks as played by the wonderful Christopher Swan. “Together forever” they sing in the second act duet “I Don’t Need Anything But You.” The girl becomes the star she is meant to be in this song and Swan is no slouch. He not only belts his lyrics out, he actually embraces them with his whole body. It’s the moment to wait for in this edition of “Annie” and it is well worth the wait.

The production is very attractive with sets by Wilson Chin (a “Berkie” award winner in 2023), and lighting by the original tour’s designer Philip S. Rosenberg. Patricia Wilcox has done some lovely work with the choreography including a few surprise references to the 1932 Radio City Music Hall Rockettes. That theater opened on December 21, 1932, the same time Annie leaves the orphanage to spend Christmas with Warbucks. All things considered this production of a classic musical brings us back to a time as confusing as our own and lets us know that there are solutions to every problem and political certainty even when our heroes don’t agree with our President. FDR was re-elected, after all, so who can do anything but sing another fine chorus of “Tomorrow” and move forward.

+ 10/01/2024 +

**Annie** plays at Proctors Theare, 432 State Street, Schenectady, New York through January 14. For information and tickets call 518-346-6204 or go on line to [atproctors.org](http://atproctors.org).