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Stage Right offers 'Annie' as a season ender

By **Peggie Miller** Performing arts columnist

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"Annie" is a musical about a depression-era orphanage where a mean matron named Miss Hannigan oppresses a little red-haired girl and other young wards.

But don't get out the hankies just yet — this one is joyful and uplifting, with an Annie, her pooch Sandy, and a huge cast destined to gain the hearts of all comers.

It includes award-winning songs such as the optimistic "Tomorrow," and "It's a Hard Knock Life," as well as "You're Never really Dressed without a Smile," and more. STAGE RIGHT OF TEXAS presents the show that opens July 23 at Conroe's Crighton Theatre.

"We had over 90 people show up for auditions," said a jubilant CAROLYN WONG, a SR mainstay. "Some came from as far away as Katy."

Director TINA CAFEO double cast the orphans and the role of Annie.

The first one is KAYLIE KING, a natural red head who amazed audiences with her version of "Zing Went the Strings of my Heart" in SR's vaudeville show.

The second Annie, HOPE HARRIS, came from Katy on the second night of auditions.

"Her parents read about our production on-line," Carolyn said. "She was Annie previously at the Berry Center, and was thrilled to get another chance to play Annie before she gets too tall."

It's a hefty commitment for Hope's parents to drive their daughter from Katy to the Crighton Theatre for rehearsals several times a week, but one they're willing to espouse.

"We are going to offer a special discount to Katy residents willing to come all the way to Conroe to see this little girl," Carolyn added. "She will be worth the trip."

An important character in the musical, as it was in the late Harold Gray's 1924 comic strip that spawned it all, is Annie's dog Sandy. Because this is a story about orphans, SR selected a homeless canine from the MONTGOMERY COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER on Texas 242 to be Sandy on stage.

"Her name is Ginger, she's a 4-year-old Lab-Airedale Terrier mix, and very sweet," Carolyn said. "She was left at the shelter because of a divorce. She had been neglected, but is about recovered after some TLC from Hope Harris's family who has now adopted her."



Kaylie King of The Woodlands and Hope Harris of Katy have been dual cast in Stage Right of Texas' "Annie" which opens July 23 at the Crighton Theatre in Conroe. Ginger, a rescue dog, will play Annie's dog Sandy.

But there are many more animals just like Ginger, and the Wong family's "wonder dog" Harley, who was a rescued pet and now acts on stage at the Crighton, as well as being a uniformed celebrated visitor at local convalescent centers.

Other notables in the "Annie" cast are HAROLD WOODS as Daddy Warbucks, millionaire industrialist who becomes the little girl's advocate; TOMMY HUNTER who portrays "Rooster" and is involved in a kidnap plot against Annie; and MAREDITH ZARITSKI as Rooster's dim witted side kick, Lily. The woman that everybody loves to hate, Miss Hannigan, is played by YVONNE NELSON, whom Carolyn describes as "one of the most talented women I have ever had the opportunity to share a stage with." Yvonne portrayed the mean orphanage director in a production that TINA CAFEO directed at Playhouse 1960 several years ago.

JULIA STINSON a church cantor from The Woodlands, portrays Warbuck's secretary, Grace Farrell. Julia is a trained opera singer with credentials from University of North Texas as well as from Vienna, Austria. After roles at Garland Civic Center in Texas, she makes her local debut in this role.

"Julia ended her audition on a note so high and clear I thought for sure it was going to shatter the chandelier," Carolyn said.

Warbuck's right hand man, Drake, is depicted by PATRICK SLAGLE. All these actors have plenteous experience with SR and in other places.

"Besides, we have tons of wonderful kids and adults in the chorus," Carolyn added. "They are very important to the show. Many are experienced, but some never have been on stage before."

Number of cast members is 80, with more than 50 children which allowed Tina Cafeo to double cast the roles of orphans.

The musical closes the current season for STAGE RIGHT OF TEXAS, resident acting company at Conroe's Crighton Theatre since the Crighton Players left for new digs at the near by Owen Theatre.

Stage Right also solicits financial aid from underwriters and playbill advertisers, as well as assistance painting, sewing and running crew, along with backstage helpers.

During the run of "Annie," pet food and other needs will be collected for the local animal shelter. They hope for high quality dog and cat food like Nutro or Science Diet, since many animals are malnourished upon arrival. However, nothing will be declined, and all donations will be gratefully accepted for the shelter.

Call the Crighton Theatre box office at (936) 441-7469 weekdays 3 to 6 p.m. to reserve at \$17; \$12 for students. Show dates are weekends July 23 through Aug. 8 at 8 p.m. and two 2 p.m. Sunday matinees.

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