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Pasadena Theatre's 'Annie' comes home at Chesapeake Arts

July 10, 2013 | By Mary Johnson, For The Baltimore Sun

For the Pasadena Theatre Company, the recent opening of the musical "Annie" at the Chesapeake Arts Center was a homecoming celebration.

The show marks the first Pasadena Theatre and Chesapeake Arts partnership, but the two share a rich past — Pasadena was the first company to perform an extended run at Chesapeake's 800-seat theater with its 2001 production of "Camelot."

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Julia Salatti as Annie and Chuck Dick as Oliver Warbucks in the... (Photo courtesy Pasadena...)

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Twelve years later, the troupe delivers another show with a large and talented cast in "Annie," taking its rightful place on Chesapeake's big stage.

"Annie" has been a theater favorite for 36 years. The 1977 Tony Award winner for best musical is based on the "Little Orphan Annie" comic strip, with music by Charles Strouse and lyrics by Martin Charnin, and ran for nearly six years on Broadway and in countless productions nationally and abroad.

The tale of a spunky orphan's belief in a bright tomorrow continues to resonate with audiences today.

The story is set in the 1930s, in a Depression-era orphanage in New York City run by mean Miss Hannigan.

Annie has been abandoned by her parents, but with [help](#) from the other girls in the orphanage, she escapes to search for them and finds a stray dog, Sandy, along the way. The orphan's adventures include encounters with a policeman, Lt. Ward; secretary Grace Farrell, billionaire Oliver Warbucks; and even President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The search for Annie's parents includes a radio appeal that attracts hundreds of impostors ... and one apparently legitimate couple.

Pasadena's production is skillfully directed by Chuck Dick, who also plays Warbucks. Dick moves the action smoothly and draws polished performances from the cast, most notably the 18 adorable orphans — all genuine, [smart](#) and talented, but never deliberately cute.

Dick does his usual excellent work as Warbucks, displaying a strong rapport with fellow actors and a touching fondness for Annie.

"Thrilled to be back with friends at PTC," said Christy Stouffer, who creates a deliciously nasty Miss Hannigan. A wry sense of humor, a need for frequent nips from her flask and an attention to daily radio soaps make Stouffer's Miss Hannigan the show's comic center.

Her singing of "Little Girls" — listing all the ways she detests them — is a treat. Joining brother Rooster and his fiancée, Lily, to dance through "Easy Street," Stouffer reveals her [skilled](#) moves, including kicks worthy of any chorus line.

Zak Zeeks as Rooster and Malarie Novotny as Lily add humor to the con caper and deliver all that their roles require.

Bob Nichols has notable stage presence in a total of five roles, including Mr. Bundles (where he skillfully avoids Miss Hannigan's advances), dogcatcher Joe, Judge Brandeis and Santa Claus.

As Warbucks' secretary, Grace Farrell, Sandra Rardon charms and displays a lovely, classically trained voice.

David Merrill also displays notable vocal skills in the dual roles of President Roosevelt and radio personality Bert Healy

In her Pasadena debut, Andy Kay Wojciehowski is a standout vocally as the character A Star To Be, and her husband, David (DJ) Wojciehowski, also makes a strong debut with the troupe as Lt. Ward, Jimmy Johnson and Roosevelt Cabinet [member](#) Harold Ickes.

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The heart of any "Annie" production is the girl cast in the title role, and Pasadena's Julia Salatti seems a natural fit. She defines spunk and smarts, and convinces us all to believe in a better tomorrow. She belts out every song like a pro and delivers every word brilliantly.

Her companion Doozer, playing the role of Sandy, adds to Julia's charm, coming on cue when called by Annie.

Everyone in the 40-plus-person cast of "Annie" delivers a fine performance, making this a true team effort and adding to the [family](#) atmosphere.

"Annie" continues Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m., through July 21, at the Chesapeake Arts Center's Hammonds Lane Theater. Tickets are \$15 for children 12 and under and \$20 for adults. Order at <http://www.chesapeakearts.org>, or call 410-636-6597 for details.

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