

When you're performing a musical comedy that won seven Tony Awards and the love of audiences around the world, it's not exactly a "hard knock life." Okay, perhaps I'm underestimating the difficulty of putting on a great show, but this cast truly makes it look effortless.



The production was directed and choreographed by Jodi Layman, who says in the program, "these children have amazed me more and more with each show." Color me equally amazed – not just by the kids, but by Layman, too. She really knows how to block to create maximum visual impact with her large cast. The high energy and superb choreography in the opening number, "It's the Hard Knock Life," – led by standout orphans Keelin Sanz, Skyler Stephans and McKenna Byrne – sets a winning tone for the rest of the play.

Set in 1930s, Depression Era New York, this is the story of little orphan Annie, who dreams that her parents will one day return to save her from her desolate existence at the orphanage, run by the cranky, bitter, Miss Hannagan. When Annie is befriended by the prominent industrialist, Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks over Christmas, she embarks on a wonderful adventure; but her good fortune is threatened by the greedy schemes of Hannagan and her accomplices.

Jenny Zmarzly, as Miss Hannagan, is simply awesome. Rarely have I seen an actor imbue this well-worn role with a trace of human frailty, as Zmarzly does. There are a couple of moments you actually feel Hannagan's pain, catching a glimpse of the complex forces that drive her thoughts and actions. An unexpected pleasure!

Leo Barros, as Hannagan's slimy brother Rooster, is a comedic gem. His stage experience really shows, making him one of the strongest players in a solid ensemble.

Barry Bryant, who plays Warbucks, is a more consistent actor than singer, but with such a great cast and such a fast-paced, entertaining show, who really cares how well Warbucks can warble?

Haley Stuligross, in the title role, has a wonderful voice, with near perfect pitch. While she is still developing as an artist, she delivers a first-rate performance. Keep an eye on this one; her future is bright!

Not to be outdone by the terrific performances, the set and costumes are brilliantly creative. Everyone associated with the show deserves thunderous applause, which they earned the night we were there.

The sun'll come out, tomorrow... so bet your bottom dollar on a ticket to *Annie*. You'll be rewarded with a winning family play for a feel good day!

Annie will continue at the Main Street Theatre on Hilton Head through May 4th, Fridays and Saturdays at 7pm, and Sunday matinees at 2pm. For more information, call 689.main(6246) or visit www.msyt.org