

All in the Family

Father and daughter team up in summer musical

By ANDREA BAILEY
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Instead of tight red curls, she has long blonde strands. And instead of one dog, she has three cats.

But Laura Larson still makes one heck of an Annie.

The 11-year-old soon-to-be Grade 6 student at Laurelwood public school can belt out the tunes much like the little orphan herself, while charming her co-stars with her sweet smile.

"I love it," Laura said of her leading role in J.M. Drama's summer production of *Annie*, running Aug. 18-21 at the Registry Theatre in Kitchener.

"It's my first big show, and I'm so excited."

Laura was first bitten by the acting bug as a four-year-old when she sat in awe of actress Cynthia Dale's performance in *Camelot* at the Stratford Festival.



Laura Larson and her dad, Larry, are making their musical theatre debut in the upcoming J.M. Drama production of *Annie*, Aug. 18-21 at the Registry Theatre in Kitchener. Laura stars as Annie, while Larry is the show's music director.

ANDREA BAILEY PHOTO

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— Laura Larson
Annie

"I've loved Cynthia Dale ever since," said the outgoing young stage star. "I've seen *Guys and Dolls* at Stratford four times already this season.

"I love singing, dancing and musical theatre, and I know I want to be an actress when I get older."

And she's spent the last few years working toward that dream.

Laura has been a member of the Waterloo Philharmonic Children's Choir for the past five years, and she's preparing to start her second year as a company member at Carousel Dance.

She's also spent the past two summers with the Junior Acting Studio at Wil-

frid Laurier University, gaining some practical stage experience.

All of these skills combined helped Laura earn the leading role in *Annie*, the story of a little orphan girl and her dog, Sandy, who are adopted by a rich businessman named Daddy Warbucks.

"I had a great audition," Laura said. "I went in and sang 'I feel pretty' and flipped my hair a few times. When I did that the director laughed so hard. She loved it."

"When the director called me and said that I got the part, I was so happy I started jumping around the house."

Laura's parents, Larry Larson and Mary Jay, shared in her enthusiasm.

Larry, who is the principal trumpet player for the K-W Symphony, was asked to be the musical director for *Annie*.

"It's been a really fun experience," he said. "I've never done anything like

this before."

Larry said the arts have always been an influence in his household.

"My wife is also a trumpet player at the Stratford Festival," he said.

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— Larry Larson
Music director

"We've never pushed (arts) on our kids, but when you're in the middle of it, it's hard not to be swept up in it."

Laura's eight-year-old brother, Erik, is even showing signs of a future interest in entertaining.

"He sings around the house," Larry said with a chuckle.

"He could be Laura's understudy for *Annie*. He

knows all the songs."

But the biggest change has been in Laura, he said.

"She's more focussed in general," said Larry. "She's learned to be more prepared. It's been really fun to watch."

Laura said she's learned a lot from the other actors in the production.

And she's made some new friends along the way, too.

"They tease me about not having red hair," Laura said.

"The actor who plays Mr. Warbucks always asks me if I'm getting a wig."

"They've been really good to her," Larry said of the other actors. "It's really helped her confidence."

Annie will run from Aug. 18-21 at the Registry Theatre, 122 Frederick St., in Kitchener. All shows are at 8 p.m.

Tickets for *Annie* are available at the Centre in the Square box office, by calling 578-1570, or online at www.jmndrama.org.