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Relating to Annie

J.M.Drama utilizes local acting families for production of Broadway musical

BY HARRY CURRIE
RECORD STAFF

When J.M.Drama presents the Broadway musical *Annie* at Kitchener's Registry Theatre they could easily subtitle it *A Family Affair*.

By far the largest group of family members is the Schmaltz family, with 10 of them involved: Brian, his brother and sister-in-law Kevin and Jo Ann, Kevin and Jo Ann's children Lauren, 15, Madison, 12, Curtis, 10, Patrice, 9, Zeke, 4, and cousins Hilary and Shannon Kaufman.

Of this group Patrice is on stage as an orphan, while the rest have various behind-the-scenes responsibilities. Four-year-old Zeke, for example, has proved that it really is possible to paint yourself into a corner.

Waterloo sports medicine specialist Dr. Bob Lee is playing piano for the show, while his daughter Kerri is playing Kate, one of the orphans, and co-directors Cheryl Ewing and Lisa Croezen-Kauk are mother and daughter.

The central part of *Annie* is being played by eleven-year-old Laura Olivia Larson, a grade 6 student at Laurelwood public school in Waterloo. Larry, her dad, is musical director for the show. Larry, of course, is best known as principal trumpet of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony.

"I'm conducting from the trumpet chair," said the elder Larson. "As you probably know, J.M. Drama operates on a shoe-string budget, so we've only got a four-piece group playing the backings — clarinet, trumpet, piano and drums."

Larson was asked to participate be-

STAGE

What: **Annie**
Who: **J.M. Drama**
Where: **Registry Theatre,
122 Frederick St.,
Kitchener**
Day: **Wed. through Sat.**
Time: **8 p.m.**
Cost: **\$20 (\$15 students,
seniors, members)**
Phone: **578-1570**
Web: **www.jmdrama.org**

cause his daughter was in the show.

"I'm glad to help out," he said. "This is real community theatre — everyone there has some day job, from all walks of life — and yet they love theatre from performance to backstage, and they do this for the love of it."

This is the first real production for Laura.

"She's performed at school assemblies," said Larson, "but never in a show like this. She's had four years of dance training, and sung in the Philharmonic children's choir for five years. But this is the realization of a dream for Laura. When my wife started working at Stratford eight years ago we took Laura to see Camelot with Cynthia Dale, and Laura fell in love with musical theatre. She's seen every musical at Stratford since that time, some of them, like *Guys and Dolls*, she's seen four times."

Larson's wife, Mary Jay, also a trumpet player, was principal trumpet of the Hamilton Philharmonic for five years, and now plays in the Stratford

orchestra.

Originally from Chicago, Larson graduated from De Paul University and was doing well as a freelance trumpet playing in the windy city.

"But you never know how your life is going to unfold," he said.

"Especially when your trumpet-playing girlfriend says let's have a holiday in Canada and do some auditions just for fun. I ended up with Symphony London for five years, then the Hamilton Philharmonic for two, and I've been here for the past 12 years. But this is home in so many ways. This is by far the most extraordinary community I've ever encountered — the support and the love for all things artistic here is beyond any community I know.

"You know what we've gone through in the last nine months with the orchestra, and the outpouring of support, no matter which side you're on, was incredible. That many people really concerned about the orchestra is unbelievable."

Larson has been tempted to head to New York or Los Angeles in the past, but his priorities have changed over the years.

"When you have a family you really start to think about the community in which you live," he said, "and this is one of the best. And in a place like this you can make much more of a contribution and a difference than you can in one of the major cities."

Annie is one of the classic Broadway musicals. Great tunes and witty lyrics, with characters like millionaire Oliver Warbucks (Mark Pan-chaud), the nasty orphanage director Mrs. Hannigan (Darcel Kirvan), Warbucks' charming secretary Grace (Dawn Sadler), and the nasty villains Rooster and Lily (Steve Robinson and Lisa MacColl), and, of course, the dog Sandy.

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PUBLICITY
Laura Olivia Larson plays
the lead role in *Annie* at the
Registry Theatre next week.