

Annie People



MEMBER



The Newsletter for Annie Fans

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Annie People is published every other month in January, March, May, July, September, and November. Publication has been continuous since January 1983.

Hello, Annie People! As you will soon find out, most of this issue of AP is devoted to the opening installment of our interview with Martin Charnin. We apologize for the minuscule print, but the whole tape was over two hours long, and we want to get the entire interview into three issues. So, get out your magnifier and enjoy reading all about the very earliest days of Annie!

Annie People has recently received an update on Louanne, who was featured in AP last September. Louanne had played Annie in the 2nd National in 1979 and the 1st National in 1981 and had appeared in numerous TV shows and movies, including her starring role in Oh God, Book II, but two years ago, when she was 14, she retired completely from show business. We are pleased to learn that Louanne has begun to work again.

Apparently, ever since her last regular appearance, which was on the ABC series Two Marriages, Louanne's many credits in theater, movies, and TV over the years had not been forgotten in her home area of southern California. "Since then," her mother wrote to AP, "she has been besieged by agents and casting directors to get back in the business. One studio even traced us down in Palm Springs while we were on vacation to come in and audition the next day." And so, Louanne decided to "come out of retirement."

Of course, now that she will be 17 in January, she is now naturally looking for more adult-oriented roles than she had been used to. Her first new part will be on an episode of the upcoming serial coming out in the new fall schedule called True Confessions. And, for the first time since Oh God, Book II, Louanne will have a part in a movie. The movie is tentatively called Jimmy Reardon, about a boy growing up in the 1950s, and Louanne will play the part of Susie, the rich gossip in love with Jimmy.

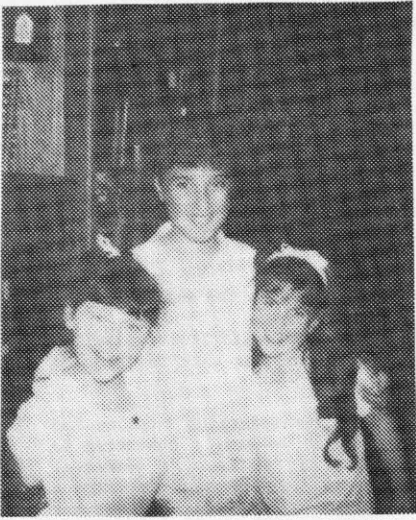
Louanne is now in Chicago and will be there filming most of the fall. AP, along with her many fans, wish her lots of luck in her renewed movie career.



★ Annie Stars Since Annie ... ★

CHARLES STROUSE's Rags opened on Broadway in August but immediately fell on hard times, closing after four performances and 19 previews. The musical starred MARCIA LEWIS and featured WENDY KIMBALL (Lily in the 3rd National in 1981)...ALLISON SMITH and Brian Bloom have been named National Youth Ambassadors for the American Lung Association...AILEEN QUINN is presently in Tel Aviv, Israel filming a new movie. She will star as Princess Zora in The Frog Prince, which will be one in a series of children's films put out by Cannon Films...Lots of news came in recently from Maryland's DANA MICHELLE MATLES, who played Pepper in the 3rd National with BRIDGET WALSH and BECKY SNYDER: Recently Dana sang the National Anthem for the U.S. Senate and performed for Jim Brady and William Bennett, the Secretary of Education. Last year she was in the episodes of Lime Street done with the late Samantha Smith, and more recently in the miniseries Liberty with Carrie Fisher. This fall Dana will be seen in a TV special called Awake and Aware and in the upcoming film Bedroom Window. She also was a featured dancer this summer at the Capital Centre in Washington in Walt Disney's Symphonic Spectacular...ANN REINKING will soon replace Debbie Allen as the lead in Broadway's Sweet Charity...MOLLY RINGWALD is currently in New York shooting The Pickup Artist, which is being produced by Warren Beatty...SARAH BETHANY REYNOLDS and MOLLY BETH TOTTEN are guest soloists on a new album by Phyl Contestable called Phyl and Friends...SUZANNE ISHEE is in the national touring company of La Cage Aux Folles, which is currently on the West Coast...VICKY TODD, who was July in the 1st National with LOUANNE, recently played Annie at a dinner theater in her native Delaware. Vicky did something probably not many have done--she played the title role at age 17...ALEXANDRA (SANDY) MICHAELS, one of Toronto's busiest teenage stars, is currently doing promos for the Singing Machine, a portable recording studio device. Alexandra recently recorded two new songs in English and French and has sung in both languages on Canadian TV many times. In 1984 she was Duffy in Annie in Toronto--a big moment for her, since she is the proud owner of probably the largest collection of Annie national tour-related clippings and articles anywhere...Two TV sitcom pilots were seen during the summer on CBS; one was The Alan King Show, which starred SARAH JESSICA PARKER, and the other was Rita, starring APRIL LERMAN and MOLLIE HALL. They were both very good, but unfortunately, neither show made it to the regular fall schedule this year. We will, of course, continue to see ALLISON SMITH, ALYSSA MILANO, and KIA GOODWIN every week, as their shows have all been renewed. However, it looks as if Allison will lose her co-star on Kate and Allie at the end of this season, since Ari Meyers plans to leave the series to attend college...The Children To Children's Chorus performed at the United Nations in September and were on Good Morning, America. Annie kids included ALLISON SMITH, CAROL-ANN PLANTÉ, CRISTINA CONOMOS, TANI TAYLOR POWERS, ERIN DALY, and KIMBERLY STERN. Children To Children is a non-profit organization comprised of professional children of the entertainment industry, dedicated to calling attention to the problems of needy children here and abroad. You might remember seeing the chorus sing in the Live Aid concert in the summer of 1985...STEPHANIE WINTERS from the 1st National is currently playing Julie on All My Children...New to Peter Sklar's Professional Children's Revue in NYC: SALWA ABDULLAH and KRISTY GRAVES. Salwa played Annie in Massachusetts, and Kristy played Annie in Michigan, Wisconsin, and two productions in Florida...Some of us older folks may remember a top ten song from the summer of 1958 by the Poni-Tails called "Born Too Late." What you probably did not know was that it was written by CHARLES STROUSE. A brand-new 1986 version of the song has been released in England by Katrina Lee...Birthdays: MOLLIE HALL, 16 on Sept. 8; MELISSA KALFA, 15 on Sept. 9; HARVE PRESNELL 53 on Sept. 14; DOROTHY ANDRES, 11 on Oct. 13.

Very Hard TRIVIA QUIZ: (1) We all know that ALLISON SMITH's introduction to show biz before she went to Broadway in Evita and then Annie was a school play in fourth grade. What was that school play, and what part did Allison play? (2) In January 1981 at the press conference when it was announced who had won the title role in the upcoming Annie movie over 8,000 others, what was unusual about the way JOHN HUSTON introduced AILEEN QUINN? (3) What Broadway Annie Warbucks had a major part in the 1970 movie M*A*S*H? (BONUS) Six years before Annie DOROTHY LOUDON starred in an Alan Jay Lerner-John Barry musical which was one of the most short-lived ones ever; the show had pre-Broadway runs in Philadelphia and Boston, but it closed before it ever got to Broadway. Can anyone name this extremely obscure musical which starred Dorothy?



From left, Lisa Kurzel, Salwa Abdullah, Tani Taylor Powers - Peter Sklar's Professional Children's Showcase



Submitted by John Tonner

Elizabeth Batton as Annie
Louisville, KY, 1986



WILMINGTON, DE - Top row, Christen Link, Heather Morrissey, Kristen MacFarland, Donna Williams; bottom row, Alison Newitt, Kimberly Shaffer, Vicky Todd (Annie)

(1) Annie, the title role; (2) Over nationwide TV and in front of dozens of photographers and reporters she was crowned "Miss Annie"; (3) JOHN SCHMIDT played "Fagin" in the musical MURDER BY LOVE (in which Dorothy played the mother opposite John Neville).

Submitted by Sybelle Franklin



KENILWORTH, NJ - Top row, Samantha Manburg, Becky Hubinger, Christina Sempepos, Lori Ann Neves, Hilary Altman; bottom row, Karen Savage, Dawn Zielinski, Sybelle Franklin (Annie), Muffin, Cynthia Sempepos, Jennifer Shallcross



Submitted by Monica Gradischek

Monica Gradischek as Annie
McKeesport, PA, 1984

AP's Exclusive Interview with MARTIN CHARNIN
Creator, Director, and Lyricist for the Broadway Show of Annie

Conducted by Tricia Trozzi on April 30, 1986

PART I

- AP: The first category is the preshow and the creative process. OK, we all know the idea for Annie came from Arf!--the famous Arf! book--but was there any particular moment as you were reading through the strips where you just said, "Hey kids, let's put on a show?" or was it after you read the whole book and you thought--"Hmm, you know, maybe this would be..."
- MC: No, it was not a moment, it was a compilation of moments; it was the whole experience of reading the book and connecting the episodes. The book covered about 30 years--
- AP: It's ten years, with gaps.
- MC: It was more the spirit of page to page to page than any individual moment.
- AP: One of the early sequences in Arf! is "Inkey," when Annie's in the movies, so maybe that show business tie inspired you?
- MC: No, as a matter of fact [that was] one of the things we conspicuously avoided--one of the very, very early drafts was one in which we had her in a theatrical circumstance and we simply took all of that material out. We wanted it to simply have it have to do with our invented reality as opposed to anything that had existed there. So, it was not a single moment, it was many moments. Don't forget, I grew up on the strip also; I mean, the strip has been around--
- AP: Oh, so you had been reading it?
- MC: I had read it; I had never gotten a bath of it, I mean the way that book is a bath of something. You read it day to day or week to week or whatever, and you could always pick it up somewhere in the middle, very much like a soap opera, always know where you were. It took you two strips to find yourself right back in the swing of things.
- AP: Well, I think Harold Gray's idea was to have each strip represent a day; today's strip is moments--a week could be one whole day, but in Gray's strip each strip was an individual day.
- MC: Also, the Gray strip, all of the strips have made a basic assumption which is that time changes, the world changes, and she stays the same. I mean, that's the conceit; she never changed, and it's a very interesting philosophical point of view, which is part of the reason that it's consistent, that it's successful. That consistency is something that an audience has very, very quickly bought--they've obviously bought it in the strip; they bought it from 50 years of Gray and now they buy it with Leonard Starr.
- AP: Once you convinced Mr. Meehan and Mr. Strouse--after they said "Ugh!"--to work on the project, how did you come up with the basic plot?
- MC: The decision of what we were going to tell was really to tell the one story that allowed us to de-cartoon-ify--if that's a word--the piece, because the premise behind the whole thing was that we were going to invest these cartoon characters with flesh and blood feelings. The reason that this musical works is because those people have real feelings; they're not cut from the same bolt of cloth as Li'l Abner and Superman and Charlie Brown. We really went and dug--we gave another kind of dimension to these individuals, and part of that was the decision very early on that she would not surface in the musical at the beginning either with the red dress or with her hair in that condition. We wanted to make both of those moments realistic plot points; our conceit was that whatever happened, happened before, even though the time differential is--our musical takes place in '33 and the strip started in '24--as though there had never been a strip until the moment that the curtain comes down on the show.
- AP: I read somewhere that the idea was to show how Annie and Warbucks got together because somebody thought that that wasn't shown in the strip--
- MC: Well, it wasn't.
- AP: No, that's not true, though. They showed how they met--Mrs. Warbucks brought Annie home [as a gesture of charity].
- MC: But they never identified any of the detail and it was never plotted and there was certainly no story. She was brought "whole" into the situation. She had no history whatsoever, and we decided to invent her history.
- AP: So, then you started writing the songs?
- MC: The songs and the script were written simultaneously; it was not a question of the book coming first--Tom and I worked very, very closely on laying out the script, laying out the story, laying out the individual scenes, laying out the scene breakdowns and deciding what musical moments were going to be serviced in each one of the sequences, and then Charles and I would go off and write. So I was walking on both sides of the fence at that time.
- AP: So, there would be a scene, and then you would say, "This scene should have a song which will explain the plot or define this character"?
- MC: That's right, and then we'd go and write the song.
- AP: Was there one song that was impossibly difficult to write, where you said, "We need a song here, but what is it going to be"?
- MC: The opening number of the show was something that we had written early on because we wanted to give a character to the Depression and set a time, and we wrote a wonderful song called "Apples," which was sung by four Depression apple salesmen on a street corner of New York. It was not only impossibly difficult to write--I think it saw the dress rehearsal at Goodspeed and then it got cut, and that was it. It may resurface again, you never can tell.
- AP: I've heard an audiotape of that Evening With Charles Strouse program where you sing that song. It's basically the same kind of chord pattern as "Hooverville."
- MC: We wanted to use the same Depression-sounding number characteristically written and put it into the show, so, when we came to the point in rehearsal we needed a number--because "Hooverville" wasn't written until a week into rehearsal. We were already in Broadway rehearsal when I cut "We Got Annie" which simply didn't work. I threw that song out.
- AP: That was in the second act where the false parents come in?
- MC: That was in the first act, which was done in the Beanery and it just simply stopped the action of the play, and so the whole scene went. We'd had a wonderful Beanery set that was in the process of being built that got stopped just in time, so that it never saw the light of day, and we went to the Hooverville set and wrote the "Hoover" song. But the Hooverville song also had some political bite to it--the Hooverville moment, as a moment, was much more an adult moment, an off-the-point of the show, which is one of the things you have to do; you can't always be on the target--you've got to let go of some of the relentlessness of the telling of the story; there has to be pure entertainment on an adult level in a show that is riddled with children. So, that's the reason for the Hooverville piece.
- AP: Well, of course, Hooverville also, as you said, explains the '30s and the Depression and sets that up too--
- MC: Exactly. It does indeed, and that's basically what the "Apples" number, going back to the Goodspeed circumstances, was supposed to do. But it happened way too early and (the audience was) much more interested at the beginning with (Annie's) story. In other words it might have been a question of placement. Theoretically, the "Apples" number could have worked had it been done deeper in the show, with Annie in the number. It was not; it was done by four guys who walked out on the stage and simply were peddling

their wares which we thought was a way to set a tone, a style, a time, a place. The audience was much smarter than we thought they were. They knew it was 1933, they'd read their programs, and they knew it was Little Orphan Annie, so they wanted to get on with the story.

AP: So that's when you decided to put the opening in the Orphanage?

MC: The opening would be in the Orphanage because this "Apples" number took place in a limbo set directly outside of the Orphanage anyway, so we would have bled through a scrim and gone right into the Orphanage. Annie made an appearance in one version at the end of the "Apples" number to buy an apple and she brought the apple into the scene. But, again, the audience wanted to get to her. "Tell me what it's about. Who is it about?" The musical is not about apple salesmen, the musical is about the kid.

AP: So that's really what then you wanted to do with "Maybe"?

MC: "Maybe" was not the opening number; "Maybe" was the second number in the show for all of Goodspeed. "Maybe" sat there after "Hard-Knock Life" got done. For nine weeks "Hard-Knock" was the opening number of the show. And in the last two weeks I decided to try something--again in the cutting and thinning and in the shorthand part of the making of the play--I decided to try [Annie's] story, setting her story up from the gun and see if that could propel us through the first part of the play. And it was very risky to start the show with a lullaby, and that quiet kind of moment, but the audience was enraptured from the minute that it started, and it doubled the effect of "Maybe," and it tripled the effect of "Hard-Knock Life"--by reversing it.

AP: It set the whole mood? The reality?

MC: It set the reality, and set the history, and set the plot. I mean, "Maybe," as much of a "song" song as it is, is pure book. It just simply tells you what the story of the play is.

AP: So, how did you come up with "Tomorrow"? Was that when you were doing the scene you said, "OK, we're going to have her meet the dog--"?

MC: No, "Tomorrow" was written very early. "Tomorrow" might have been the first song written, I don't remember. One of the things that we ended up talking about in the conversations prior to the writing of the show was the need for a single, solitary number to display the spirit of the individual, the thing that this person feels, and the spirit of the individual as it paralleled what we as authors felt about the whole musical--what we were trying to say about this musical. Now, this musical was written as a violent reaction to a very unhappy present, to an unhappy "today." "Today" was not particularly thrilling, the [Vietnam] war was going on, the '60s were at their height in the [early] '70s, it looked like Nixon was going to be with us for a long time--"Tomorrow" was written as just a plea, a desire, an eternal scream for something to happen--better--for something better to occur down the pike. And it is a song that had a swatch of a melody which Charles gave me, and I set that front part of it, and then we batted it around and wrote it and realized it would be a perfect song for her no matter where it happened. And then the decision was reached to make it the song that she sings to the dog at the moment that she meets him.

AP: So, "Tomorrow" was part of the authors' feelings about "tomorrow," not only Annie's?

MC: Not only it happens to reflect Annie's feelings about "tomorrow" but it is certainly the authors' statement, if there is a statement, in that show.

AP: Then you put it as the moment when Annie is meeting the dog--as Sandy is an important part of the strip?

MC: Well, he's an important part of the strip, but the plight, their circumstance is what provokes the song--the fact that they're both alone, that they're both homeless, that they're both hungry, that they're both desperate, that they're both without parents-- and they decide to join forces and try and look for a better time; so it justifies itself at that moment. Every beat in this show I did by working on--none of this stuff just happened, none of this just occurred. It was all very carefully thought out, second to second, comma to comma, parenthesis to parenthesis, line to line, note to note, song to song. That's why it was the kind of hit that it was; that's why it ran for

as long as it ran; that's why there were as many companies as there were. That kind of detail is rarely put in amateur productions, stock productions--they don't have the time, and many people don't have the experience or the knowledge. I'm planning on writing a primer that I'm going to send over to MTI [Music Theater International, who administers the rights] and have it go out with the material to really define what this play's about.

AP: I was always wondering about that. Is there a guide?

MC: No, there isn't anything. I perhaps simply assumed that people would look at it and say, "Oh, of course. This is about this and this is about that and that's how to do it," and I'm wrong. They need a guidebook; it's purely and simply a map on how to do Annie, and most directors should do maps as to how to do musicals. I think Moss Hart should have done a map as to how to do My Fair Lady and Michael Bennett should ultimately do a map as to how to do A Chorus Line, because it doesn't sit in the script; it isn't there.

AP: So you're planning on writing something that would say, "This show is real, Annie doesn't smile all the time, she's not a silly kid, she's serious, her plight is, dot dot dot--"?

MC: That's right. I also at one time considered--and I don't know if I'm going to do it--doing an audio cassette of how those jokes are supposed to be read.

AP: Oh, that would be such a good idea!

MC: If I did that--and send it out for a dollar to cover the cost of mailing--to the people who are going to do this thing so that they understand where these jokes are. Because these jokes are character jokes and people invariably sort of mess them up and don't understand how the lines are to be read.

AP: But even easy ones, I mean, if I had a nickel for every time I heard, "The next time you leave this Orphanage it'll be nineteen-fifty-THREE!" And I want to go, "...FIFTY-three..."

MC: That's right. Those kind of rhythms--you know, but we make assumptions in this business. The assumptions are that people will have seen it at some point, and that they will have enough information and enough knowledge and that there will have been enough publicity to keep the flame burning properly with the right kind of light. Obviously not.

AP: Most of what I've seen since '82 have been local productions, and some of them are quite good. I can tell when somebody has either seen the show or done their homework on the material--

MC: Right.

AP: --or somebody who just maybe said, "Oh, well, let's do this or that, let's bring in some gymnasts, let's bring in some roller skaters, let's have six hundred Orphans!" and I go, "Oh, no!"

MC: Even those things don't really disturb me. Sometimes you have to live inside certain ground rules; and high schools and amateur groups have a lot of children and they want to get them all into the show. But I'm more concerned about the message of what the piece is about not getting across as opposed to anything else, and that's what I'm hoping I will have time to correct.

AP: Oh, I think a primer would be an excellent idea. I always wondered if the book goes to a director or a theater company with directions.

MC: [Just] the script. That's it. And there are occasional stage directions in it.

AP: I think that's a great idea.

AP: How were characters and their names created? Like, for example, how did Miss Asthma of the comic strip become Miss Hannigan?

MC: That was again all in the de-cartoon-izing of it. It was all a process to take it further and further away from it being a cartoon. You call somebody Miss Asthma, that's not really a name, it describes a condition that she's got--

AP: That was Gray's forte, all of his characters had descriptive names.

MC: That was how he approached it, in a cartoon that's allowed, particularly in this cartoon. The only name that we literally stuck with was Warbucks; I mean, we obviously stuck with Annie because that was the name of the show, but Warbucks' name is one of those jokes also. A man makes his millions from selling munitions, so he's called Warbucks. It went along with all of the early jokes like someone once asked him in one version how he got all of his money and his reply was that any time a gun was shot—any time a bullet was shot anywhere in the world he got a penny royalty. I mean, those kinds of jokes were unnecessary, unreal—cartoon, cartoon, cartoon. And when one is thinking in that way the danger signals go off; you start getting laughs on the stage that are the wrong laughs. Just because they're there and just because they're laughs does not mean that they're right, so they have to be excised, they have to go, but you learn how to do that.

AP: So, how about characters that weren't directly in the strip, like Grace, Rooster, the Orphans, how'd you get their names?

MC: We just invented them. We just sat around one afternoon—I remember Tom and I doing it very specifically—just sitting around and saying, what do you wanna call [her]...

AP: "How about Grace," or something?

MC: Well, her name was Grace Fair, her original name. And again that was a cartoon name, so we changed Fair to Farrell; it was a reasonable, WASP-y kind of name, and it made very good sense. In the Orphans, Kate's named after Tom's daughter; Duffy we just pulled out of a hat; Tessie we just pulled out of a hat; July was the month that my daughter was born in, and so we used July for that name. Molly we liked as a name—it sounded like a little girl, and—who else is there?

AP: Pepper.

MC: And Pepper. Pepper we just thought was a name that sounded tough. Rooster was called—actually, what his name was, was Daniel Francis Hannigan, which we got first and then decided that he really needed a nickname. As I remember specifically, it was because I wanted to give him a characteristic and I wanted him to be long and lanky and make chicken noises when he came in on the stage, so we decided to call him Rooster.

AP: All right, since you were writing this in the '70s, were you concerned that some of the jokes of the '30s would be alien to people?

MC: I was not concerned about it then; I am concerned about it now—as practically another generation has appeared, has put itself into the seats of the orchestra. The last performance that I saw, nobody knows who Herbert Hoover is anymore; they've simply forgotten. The emotion of the moment works when [the] Lou Gehrig [line] is used, and we considered changing that name into Babe Ruth—as a matter of fact we did in London, because they didn't know who Lou Gehrig was in London. Yes, we're losing topical jokes.

AP: Well, the only reason I know Fred and Adele is that I'm an old movie buff and I knew that Fred Astaire worked with his sister, but not many people—

MC: But Fred and Adele is a memory at this particular moment, but fewer and fewer people laugh—

AP: And Barney Baruch; I mean I still really don't know who he is.

MC: Well, Bernard Baruch was a great economist, he was a great friend of Roosevelt, a great friend to the New Deal, an economist and a philosopher of the New Deal, and I'll tell you something; in Washington, where that is a heritage, that joke still works. They know who Barney Baruch is to this day, as you can probably still make a Lincoln joke in Washington and have it work. But when you go outside of that city, not a lot of people remember who Barney Baruch is.

AP: Would that be a problem, though, in the future as time goes on, would you feel you'd want to change those references?

MC: No, because I think that that defines it. No, no, no, we wouldn't change it at all. It defines its time, it is the honesty of the time, and it has to be maintained. We're not going to update it.

AP: That's what I would think, because, it'll be up to us Annie fans in the audience, we'll still laugh.

MC: You don't have to laugh at it, but you have to understand the truth of it. Maybe it sends you back to your dictionary or to your encyclopedia to go find out who Bernard Baruch is. In some history books he is still discussed.

AP: OK, one line has been puzzling Annie fans for years and years and years—the "cheese" line: "Cheese, you know, cheese!" I've heard the most ridiculous explanations: (a) the dog likes cheese, (b) there was an entire scene about cheese, (c) Warbucks is rich, so only he can afford cheese, (d) cheese goes with champagne. We've heard everything. Now, what is—

MC: At Goodspeed Grace had a song called "He Doesn't Know I'm Alive" that she sang in the second act. I tried to make it work ten different ways. Sandy Faison was wonderful, the song was a good song; it was about her feelings for Warbucks. After all of the business of the fake parents having come, it was sung directly at that moment, and it was provoked by Grace sitting there with her shoes off and Drake coming in and saying "Can I get you something to eat, Miss Farrell?" and she said, "Oh, nothing, just some cheese and crackers and I'll be fine." And he went off and something else happened and he came back with a little tray, a silver tray on which were some crackers and some slices of cheese. And she simply sang the song "He Doesn't Know I'm Alive" while she was eating the cheese. And she kept on eating the cheese and the song got progressively harder to sing and—it was a very interesting idea—

AP: So she was actually eating and singing at the same time?

MC: She was eating cheese; she was eating American cheese and Swiss cheese and Brie and God only knows what she was eating as she was singing! Now it's very hard to sing and eat cheese.

AP: I would think so!

MC: When the song was cut—when we had to lose the song, I said to Sandy that I am going to keep this; it's a memorial to that moment. I then inserted it as a lyric into "Annie" where they say "Have they sent the cheese?" which when the other song was there, was a good laugh. When the other song was not there it meant nothing. So that's where the "cheese" line comes from.

AP: OK, but, I'm talking also about the line that's just before the song [I Don't Need Anything But You], though, when Warbucks says, "We need champagne, caviar..." and Grace goes—

MC: "And CHEESE!" It all had to do with her having done an entire four-minute number about cheese, and it being so much on her mind that in the middle of champagne and caviar she's still thinking about cheese.

AP: Some of those explanations I've heard, it's like "Oh, come on, you're wrong," I always thought, my personal explanation was that it was just a simple subtext for her that at that moment Grace was so excited that they were going to adopt Annie—

MC: Sure! I think it is—I mean, the "cheese" line is equivalent—

AP: So it's really an "in" joke, then?

MC: Totally an "in" joke; it belongs to the three authors and Sandy Faison. They're the only four people who really know, and anybody who has ever played Grace since has wanted to know; has never been able to deliver the line properly. No one will ever be able to do that line correctly except Sandy. She owns it. She owns the moment on the stage. And the only people who ever laugh are Tom and Charles and myself.

AP: So it's a joke where you had to be there—

MC: Boy, did you have to be there!

AP: That must've been something, with four minutes of cheese! I can imagine—that must've been so neat—

MC: It was quite wonderful, but the problem with the moment was not how it was done nor the song nor the joke that we were playing there--the audience simply wanted to know who the kid's folks were, at that moment. They were not interested in that love story at that particular moment in time. So it had to go.

AP: I feel bad about that, because Grace is my favorite character; I would like her to have a solo song--

MC: Grace will have--your dreams will come true in Annie II.

AP: (Casp!) Uh, oh--

MC: Grace is a significant character in Annie II.

AP: Oh, good!

AP: So, now you're going to Broadway, and you were having those backers' auditions. In A Theater Memoir you say that a lot of times you were rejected. Was that making you even more determined to produce the show?

MC: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I don't think I ever wavered for a single, solitary second, personally. I'd be angry that we were being dismissed or not taken seriously, but every knock was a boost up the ladder to try to get it on.

AP: What were you looking for when you were casting the show, and especially at Goodspeed?

MC: Well, I was looking very much for a very unique group of people, and of the twenty people that ended up going to Goodspeed, I think seventeen of them ended up being not only people who played Goodspeed but ultimately went on and did the Broadway production. I was looking for character actors, ensemble people, people who had the ability to shine in their own individual moments and then to gracefully become part of the ensemble and learn how to play as scenery and as background while somebody else had a moment.

AP: I heard that you said once you never wanted any "stars."

MC: I never wanted any "stars"; the "star" was the show. That was the whole conceit; and when Annie is done with a quote, "star," the scales are tipped incorrectly. When it says "Martha Raye in Annie"--

AP: I was just going to say that!

MC: --the balance is incorrect, the focus is in the wrong place. The bow at the end is not the Miss Hannigan bow, the bow must be the Annie bow. Again, one has very little control over moments like that.

AP: Yes, when I saw the '84 National Tour in New Haven, to me she wasn't a Miss Hannigan, she was just herself.

MC: She was doing her own persona, which is what she does.

AP: Well that, for me--I mean, I'm sort of a purist, so it bothered me.

MC: Absolutely. If you're a purist about the show, then indeed you're going to be finding fault with [that] but I'm also a purist about a badly approached Annie; I mean, a kid who is parky and smiling and all teeth and curls all through the show is as equally incorrect in her approach as a Miss Hannigan who's above the title.

AP: Especially when you were casting Orphans, I guess it was the same; you didn't want smelly, cutesy kids.

MC: I wanted ragamuffins and I wanted, as I said in the book, unfinished actors. Most of them had really very little experience; I wanted to do the finishing touches on them. If they came in with too much experience, too much technique, then I could not really get them to be the band of kids that I wanted them to be, to shape them, and to let them be natural. No unnatural children, at least not in any company that I ever did, ever got hired. The kids who were all teeth, and who were all tap, never made it; those are the ones who were gone very fast. The ones with braids, the braids were always undone at the auditions to really mess them up. The neater they were, the sloppier I made them. The more starched their dresses looked, the more wrinkled I made their improvisations. So, that was a very, very specific thing to just find out; inside every clean child I know there's a muddy little person who just loves to splash around, and that was the one I wanted. The mothers and the agents and the managers would bring

these clean, spiffed-up little girls to the auditions, and the ones I ended up hiring were the rats.

AP: I guess for most auditions the kids have to go and look spiffed up for commercials.

MC: Well, the perception has always been a commercial perception--you know, this show is responsible for bringing children into the theater in a way that no other piece of theater had ever brought kids into the theater--and the difference is that in most opportunities, meaning at a television audition or at the Nutcracker or wherever, you'd come in clean as a whistle, and that's what they want to see; they want to see these bright, spiffy little girls. I didn't want to see anybody bright and spiffy. I wanted to see the glow burning from inside their eyes, and the rattier they were on the outside the better off they were--

AP: --and the more believable as an Orphan.

MC: Right.

AP: OK, rehearsing at Goodspeed, now you had a very limited amount of time--

MC: I had eighteen days.

AP: And didn't you also have actors helping you, like saying "maybe my character should do this" and--your show was changing from day to day--

MC: Not really in the rehearsal time. In the rehearsal time it was quite simply something that I said at the very beginning of the rehearsal period--"Folks, I'm going to put this show up on its feet. We are not really going to be able to make cuts and adjustments; you're going to have to do a lot of microwave acting,"--which is cooking a character from the outside in, as opposed to from the inside out--which is what we did, and what had to happen in order to accomplish the traffic of getting a major, hitherto undone, musical up on its feet, with twenty songs that had never been sung before, orchestrations no one had ever heard before, sets no one had ever seen before, costumes no one had ever worn before.

AP: OK, but that was the opening night where the power went out?

MC: Yes, we had a power failure. [And] pieces were being changed every other day. We would see a show, stay up a little bit, talk about it after; spend the next day doing the rewrites; that same thing would be played the second night to reassure our thinking that it had to be fixed; and then the next day it would be out. We would be rehearsing something brand-new and it would go in that night. So that was the process for eleven weeks.

AP: So the actors really had to be--

MC: On their toes.

AP: --to make sure which version they're doing tonight!

MC: Yes, but this is what happens in summer stock, you're rehearsing Desert Song in the afternoon and playing Student Prince at night, so you have to keep your wits about you; and the company was terrific. They wanted it to work and they worked very well with me and for me.

AP: So the audience reactions were your barometer?

MC: Very much so. I mean, our own reactions were obviously first; we had to do what we wanted to do first, and then assume that what we wanted to do would satisfy an audience, and in, I would say, 90% of the--not in 90% of the cases were we absolutely borne out--but we were right.

AP: So the actors, though, didn't they have some suggestions?

MC: There was input, but they were also very aware of the fact that they had a director on their hands who really knew the material. Now, actors give you a hell of a lot of input when they sense waffling. I'm not denying how much they can and do, and in this instance we had actors who really understood the things that they were doing and really understood the characterizations--Roosevelt they understood, they understood Warbucks. The children did not make suggestions; at seven, eight, and nine nobody's going into depth or plumbing the subtext of what a character is going to be doing. The children were given everything, relatively everything. In the other instances all of the

other actors--the principals and the ensemble made contributions, of course they did. But it was also a case where Tom and Charles and I knew what we wanted and what we were after. And when everybody hooks on, links arms to that, a funny kind of shorthand begins to develop. You end up finding that you don't have to finish sentences. They know what you want and they know where to go and they know where to take it. And the only thing you end up then doing is being an editor and saying "You've gone too far. [Your character] wouldn't go that far." That's not even the authors' excess, that's the actors' excess. So, I mean, those moments occurred also.

AP: So then you had the tryout in Washington, you had those rehearsals for the opening at the Kennedy Center and the appearance at the White House all occurring at the same time. Was that a lot of pressure?

MC: Terrible. Terrifying amount of pressure. But one of the things that was more important than pressure was the excitement of it. I don't think anything--as pressured as everybody felt, not a single solitary human being that you could talk to today ten years after the fact who would not say it has to rank as one of the most exciting moments in their life.

AP: So then you had that opening night, and Dorothy Loudon [had her foot broken in] the treadmill, what was that like, when it was such a big hit and the phone lines blew out and everything. Were people in the show going, "I didn't know we were going to be such a big hit--"

MC: Well, that's all Monday morning quarterbacking, everybody after the fact said, "well, I knew it all along." I knew we were going to be a hit; I didn't know the size of it, I didn't know the extent of it; I don't think anybody really knew.

AP: So you thought they might fill up maybe one phone line?

MC: Yes, I mean, you expect response, but the kind of response that we got comes once every four thousand shows; it was phenomenal.

AP: From Washington to Broadway, what were some of the scenes and/or songs that had to go, because you were still reworking the show then.

MC: "NYC" was rewritten--only because it was being restaged; "Hooverville" got a second chorus; a lyrical reprise of "Easy Street" was cut out in the second act then and shortened; a number with the parents in the second act was cut out; and that was it.

AP: That's the "She's Our Annie" song?

MC: Yes, that was it. Everything else was what it was. The score that went into rehearsal in January of 1977 was the score that turned up on the stage of the Alvin Theatre.

AP: So there wasn't as much change from Washington to Broadway as there was from Goodspeed to Washington--?

MC: That's right. That was the big period of change.

Don't miss the next installment in AP #24 in November,
when we will find out all about Annie on Broadway--
its opening, its casts, its run, and its closing.

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(NY Daily News - Sept. 15, 1977)

Arf 'n' Annie

Glendale: I am thoroughly disgusted with Little Orphan Annie for leaving her dog, Sandy, locked up on a ship that exploded and presumably sank while she took off to save her own hide. Worse than that, she hasn't shed one tear or even mentioned Sandy since. Shame on you, Annie! After all these years, how could you do that to him? Just for that, I hope the pirates get you, and that Sandy is rescued by a kind and loving family. *Cathy Knott*