

## 'Annie's' star-filled cast includes a couple on all fours

BY ALICE RHEIN  
CORRESPONDENT

If Annie's the most famous orphan ever to grace the Great White Way since Oliver, then her dog, Sandy, is second only to Toto, Dorothy's furry pal in the *Wizard of Oz*.

And while there are several well-known names on the marquee for "Annie," now playing at the Fox Theatre, the canine stars, Buster and Kelly, don't garner top-billing.

They do, however, get royal treatment, thanks to their trainer A. J. Sullivan.

"When the cast flies from city to city, we drive our dogs. On the airlines, you have to sign their life away," says Sullivan, who is on his 10th touring production of *Annie*.

If the distance between cities is particularly long, as it was with a recent stint from Memphis to Boston, the production company often flies another driver out to help transport the dogs in safety and comfort.

And as far as accommodations go, Buster and Kelly have been able to stay in the same hotel as the cast, even if "no pets" is the usual policy.

"The hotels see it as a celebrity thing. They are very accommodating," says Sullivan, who rooms with his canine friends and sometimes allows them to have a sleep-over with Annie.

### THE TALE OF SANDY

While Sullivan, a Boston native, is also an actor and understudy for three roles in "Annie," certainly his most challenging role is as dog trainer. He is responsible for the execution of all Sandy's "behaviors," or tricks, during each show.

"Buster's been traveling for four or five years now, and just like it's hard for some actors to sustain enthusiasm, it's that way for him," says Sullivan.

Typically a beef jerky treat or a chance to play with a squeaky toy is all Buster needs to keep him in top performance.

Kelly, the understudy, is still pretty green in the role, but her story reads like the discovery of Luna Turner at the lunch counter at Schwab's.

"When we found Kelly wandering the streets of Newark, she was down to 60 pounds. We took her in and trained her," says Sullivan.

The "we" he refers to is his boss, Bill Berloni, the original trainer of Broadway's first *Sandy*.

As Broadway legend goes, Sandy was plucked from the animal shelter eight hours before she was going to be put down. Berloni, who was also an animal behaviorist at the Humane Society of New York, decided that rescuing dogs from shelters to play *Sandy* and *Toto* would be a good idea. It's been more than 30 years, and that is still the policy.

Sullivan has worked with four or five different

### ON STAGE

What: *Annie*, the Broadway Musical

Where: The Fox Theatre, Detroit

When: 2 p.m. Sunday, March 9

Tickets: \$22-\$60 at the box office or online at [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com).

Sandys, but, he says, that role is nothing compared to Toto, who has to be on stage the entire show.

Sullivan was last in Detroit when he accompanied Toto in the *Wizard of Oz* production that starred Mickey Rooney and Eartha Kitt.

The way the schedule stands now, Detroit is the last stop for this national tour of *Annie*, so that means Buster and Kelly will have some chill time on a farm in Connecticut with other working animals.

No rest for Sullivan, though. He'll be working on a new production of *Gypsy*, which requires a small lap dog and a lamb. And the story goes as far as *Annie* goes, what's not to love about that adorable red-headed mop top?

Kids love *Annie*. Adults who, as kids, loved *Annie*, still love *Annie*.

It's an unending audience of adoring fans. Set in New York City during the Depression, *Annie* is the ultimate rags to riches story. An orphan searching for her lost parents, a billionaire who befriends the adorable waif, controversy, heartache, redemption, cute dog - all this and a winning score from Charles Strouse.

Ever the optimist, 11-year-old Annie, played by Maggie Watts and Addison Timlin, dreams of a better life outside Miss Hannigan's orphanage. When she befriends Daddy Warbucks, she wins the old curmudgeon's heart, only to have what she thinks are her real parents come and whisk her away.

The storyline is certainly predictable, but no one sees *Annie* to be surprised by it. The love of the musical comes from its unflappable energy and its endearing hope that even though today was a bad day, tomorrow's going to be better.

Two worthy reasons to see this traveling production, other than the canine leads, are its stars Marcia Lewis Bryan, who plays Miss Hannigan, and Conrad John Schuck, who plays Daddy Warbucks.

While Broadway's *Annie* is pushing 30, she continues to exemplify the hope and spirit of the child in us all.



Annie played by Maggie Watts, Marcia Lewis Bryan as Miss Hannigan, Conrad John Schuck, as Daddy Warbucks, and Sandy the dog in a scene from 'Annie.'

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