

Local girl is littlest orphan

By JOSEPH SULLIVAN

It may be a bit premature to say that nine-year-old Shannon Burrows is a natural for a career on the stage. After all, when she begins performing in the play "Annie" at the Fisher Theater, on March 20, it will be her first professional acting job.

But the Birmingham youngster is definitely off to a running start. Shannon began rehearsing Tuesday for the part of "Molly," the smallest of the six orphans in the play, and already she has memorized not only her own lines but those of most of the other characters.

She won the part over 400 other Detroit-area girls, who auditioned for the play in January at the Fisher. She is scheduled to perform in the show's final three weeks in Detroit, then travel with the troupe to Chicago for an indefinite run there.

Shannon's mother, Mrs. Morris Burrows of Arlington in Birmingham, said she expects the Chicago run to last nearly a year. The play broke box office records for the Fisher, with its 22-week run ending April 7, and has not yet played in Chicago.

Mrs. Burrows took Shannon to the tryouts for Annie as a "fluke" — just out of curiosity, when she heard of the auditions.

"She's a born ham who loves to sing and dance," Mrs. Burrows said. "She didn't really have any preparation, no vocal instructions, but she does have a lot of natural ability."

"I guess that's what they wanted for the play, a child they could mold."

Shannon's acting experience consists of rehearsing six weeks for the part of Marta in Birmingham Seaholm's spring production of "The Sound of Music." Due to playing in "Annie," she will have to give up the

part she won over 155 other girls.

The third-grader at Midvale Elementary School in Birmingham seemed to have adapted to the switch pretty well. Besides running through some of her lines Friday morning, the 4-foot-11-inch package of energy displayed a tap dance step she'll do in the song "You're Never Fully Dressed Without A Smile" from the show.

SHANNON SAW "Annie" once at the Fisher before her tryout and was enthusiastic about it then. "I loved it," she said. "The night I saw it Kathy-Jo (Kelly, who stars as Annie) was sick but it was still really good."

The Burrows home has been topsy-turvy since the rehearsing for the play started Tuesday, Mrs. Burrows said.

"I'm a real basket case, trying to figure out how to pull all this together by the 20th. Rehearsals start at 10:30 a.m., and then I have to pick up Brian, my six-year old from school at 12," Mrs. Burrows said.

"I've been driving back and forth from the Fisher (to Birmingham) about two or three times a day."

Besides Shannon, a new "Annie," Mary K. Lombardi from Philadelphia, and a new actor for the role of "Julie" will also be added on March 20.

Rehearsals end about 6 p.m., and the new acts members then stay around the Fisher to watch the evening performance, Mrs. Burrows said. Shannon is lucky to be home by 11 p.m.

"I've gotten a girl to chaperone Shannon while the play is in Detroit, and I'm hoping she'll want to travel with them to Chicago," Mrs. Burrows said.

"I just can't keep up this schedule, and a new actor for the role of the cast in the Leland House, so I think that's what we'll probably do."



A high-stepping Shannon has already learned her lines and most of the others in preparation for her first Fisher appearance on March 20. (Staff photos by Stephen Cantrell).

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