

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Dana Powers Acheson (far left) and Laura Buono (center), along with another girl, alternate in the role of Little Cosette in "Les Miserables" at the Fisher Theatre. The three girls also alternate as Little Epinone. Joe Denawetz (right) alternates with another boy as Gavroche, the street urchin. Dana attends school in Bloomfield Hills, Laura lives in Oakland Township and Joe lives in West Bloomfield.

Right at home

Performers from area in musical 'Les Miserables'

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

FOR DANIEL COONEY, who lives in New York, being "on the road" with "Les Miz" is something he hasn't experienced yet, even though he is appearing in the ensemble of the show at the Fisher Theatre.

Cooney auditioned for the smash-hit musical in New York, rehearsed in Chicago and joined the national company when it opened last month in Detroit. But since he is originally from Westland, the 21-year-old performer has rented a house, near his parents' home there, and is comfortably staying right around home during the run of "Les Miz" in Detroit.

Several children in the show also get to go home at night, to their permanent homes, since they auditioned in Detroit and were chosen just to appear in "Les Miz" during the show's local stay.

They are Joe Denawetz, 11, of West Bloomfield, and two nine-year-old girls — Laura Buono of Oakland Township and Dana Powers Acheson, who lives in Detroit and attends Roeper City and Country School in Bloomfield Hills.

ON TUESDAY MORNING Dan Cooney had just returned from a fishing trip taken on his day off, Monday. In a phone interview, he sounded sleepy, as he talked about catching perch in Lake Erie, in Michigan waters.

In "Les Miz," he said, "the main character I play is Joly, one of the students. He does most of his work on the barricades — the revolution and fighting scene." Cooney said his character has a few spoken "lines" (actually all "lines" in the show are sung). "Joly is basically a happy guy. You can tell that by his name," he said.

"Besides that, I do close to 10 other characters. There are some pretty fast costume changes." He appears variously as one of the factory workers, farmers, and people in the inn, or bar-room.

The tour started two years ago in Boston and is expected to run for another five to seven years, traveling throughout the United States. None of the original principals is still with the show. "Everyone in principal roles, now, started in the ensemble," he explained.

Cooney may get a chance to move up, but it's not likely he will progress to the role of the main character,

Jean Valjean. "The youngest Valjean is 33," he said. "In the near future, I'm right for Marius (who falls in love with the grown-up Cosette).

COONEY WAS BORN in Westland, where he graduated from John Glenn High School. A few weeks ago, he visited an advanced drama class at the school, talking about his career and "Les Miz." After high school, he spent a semester at Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn, then decided college was not for him.

As a high school student, he had appeared in several musical productions at John Glenn. A community theater production for the Dearborn Players Guild eventually led him to Florida, where the guild's director went to do dinner theater.

"Before 'Les Miz' I spent two to three years doing dinner theater all over the U.S.," Cooney said. "I consider that my training. I didn't go to college." Joining the national company of "Les Miz" is his first Equity production.

For the children from local communities who appear in "Les Miz," it's an experience on which they agree. "It's fun. I love it." Each of the youngsters, in separate phone in-

terviews Monday, came up with the identical, enthusiastic comment in response to the question asking how they liked being in the show.

JOE DENAWETZ plays Gavroche, the street urchin. Without hesitation, he describes his character as "a straight, spunky stud." Joe declared, "I just love the role." He has given several newspaper interviews and has appeared on radio and television. Talking about Gavroche is something he has gotten used to. His favorite scene in which he appears in the show is the one where he gets to climb all over the barricades, and later dies.

Joe said he knows everybody in the show. "The actors are real nice. They're nicer than most shows." He had figured they were rich, and that they might be stuck-up or mean, he said.

A sixth grader at Abbott Middle School, he currently attends school Monday and Tuesday and has a tutor Wednesday through Friday. He alternates with another boy, who travels with the show, and gives four performances a week.

When Joe was rehearsing with the show in Chicago, a group of teenagers approached him for autographs,

outside the stage door. He pointed out that he wasn't playing Gavroche in Chicago. "They said, 'Who cares! You're Gavroche. We want your autograph,'" he said.

Joe thinks he is well-suited to the part because he has been told that, in person, "You look and sound like Gavroche." He admits, however, he doesn't have the personality of the feisty character. "I wouldn't have any friends if I did," he declared.

LAURA BUONO and her family just moved to Oakland Township from Sterling Heights and she would attend Hugger Elementary School for the first time, the next day. She alternates with Dana Powers Acheson and another girl, who travels with the show, in the roles of Young Cosette and Young Epinone.

She likes playing Cosette, who is "an abused little girl. Her mom dies. Valjean comes to take care of her." Of the character Epinone, "She hardly does anything. She makes fun of Cosette. She's the innkeeper's daughter."

Laura had an unexpected experience onstage when "Thenardier (the innkeeper) drops me. I rolled off his lap and my foot went into the orchestra pit."

The youngster heard about auditions for the show from her Uncle Joe, who plays French horn in the orchestra for "Les Miz" at the Fisher. She is an experienced performer, who started dancing at age two and had her first stage role at five.

"I met a lot of new friends. We have fun. I get along with the kids very well. We sleep over at one another's house," she said.

DANA POWERS ACHESON enjoys the role of Cosette because, "I get to sing more stuff." She also said, "Usually when I'm in a play they say, 'Smile, Dana, smile.'" With "Les Miz," "You usually can't smile very much. In this show you don't smile unless Jean Valjean picks you up."

Why doesn't she like to keep smiling? "I'm not the cutest kind of person. Your mouth starts hurting," she said.

Dana wants to continue her show-business career until she grows up. Then she would like to become an archeologist. However, the entertainment field may yet win out. "When I grow up I want to try out for the part of Epinone," she said. "I like the songs she sings."

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