



WE GOT ANNIE!

The world's favourite family musical is here

Two of the biggest names in local and international entertainment, Pieter Toerien and Hazel Feldman, have once again joined forces to bring world-class entertainment to South Africa. Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I give you, 'Annie'. After a smash hit season at Johannesburg's Montecasino, this glorious show opens in Cape Town at Artscape on the 2nd of December 2016 and runs until 8 January 2017.

The show is dynamic and leaves the audience humming those catchy tunes long after the curtain has come down. 'Tomorrow', and 'It's a Hard Knock Life' have, over the years, become so well recognised internationally that often, a bar

or two of the melody will bring memories flooding back, and toes tapping. Having been translated into 28 languages and staged in 34 countries across the globe, 'Annie' is, and always will be, the eternal love note to optimism and to the triumph of love.

'Annie' the musical is written by Thomas Meehan, with music by Charles Strouse and lyrics by Martin Charnin. Focused firmly on the story of a survivor, little orphan Annie, who is placed in a Dickensian orphanage under the close eye of the mean-spirited Miss Hannigan, the story takes place in 1930s New York City. It is the era of The Great Depression and American President Roosevelt is in office. The storyline follows Annie as she is brought to Daddy Warbucks' mansion for a Christmas party, in an attempt by his office to soften his image and endear him to the public. Not wanting to miss out on an opportunity to capitalize on making some money, Miss Hannigan, her brother Rooster and his girlfriend Lily set out on a mission to ruin Annie's happiness, and in doing so make for a great trio of villains.

Leading the South African cast are three fantastic young local actresses who alternate in playing our loveable title character. Emma-Rose Blacher, Lilla Fleischmann and Caitlin Dicker have been wowing audiences since the show opened in Johannesburg earlier this year. The strategy of casting multiple child actors is aimed at lessening the taxing performance schedule, and is carried through to the orphan ensemble where three teams of young starlets were formed; they are Team Empire, Team Madison and Team Rockefeller – all complimented with strong performers who all seem to glow with sheer delight on stage. The role of Miss Hannigan is played by Charon Williams Ros, who many will remember from the critically acclaimed collaboration between Pieter Toerien Productions and Durban's Kickstart, Sweeney Todd. The multi-talented Neels Claasen, whom many will remember from local hits such as 'Mama Mia' and 'We Will Rock You', plays the role of Daddy Warbucks. The charming Stephen Jubber plays the sly Rooster with the perfect amount of sleaze, while the beautiful and talented Delray Hलगryn portrays the role of Rooster's girlfriend Lily.



Highly acclaimed Associate Director and Choreographer Nick Winston has remained true to the smash-hit 'West End' production and has painstakingly recreated the magic that blew London audiences away using the best talent South Africa has to offer. The sets and costumes are outright magnificent, and so playful and practical that one could mistake this show for a lavish 3D movie experience; except only better as the show is 100% live. The show is a lavish and punchy reinvention of the original classic that promises to hook new theatre audiences while keeping purists satisfied. Fueling the pulse of this massive show is the orchestra, led by musical director Bryan Schimmel. Maestro Schimmel has assembled the best musical talent to really drive the energy of the show, from beginning to end. Referring to the production as "fresh, fast-paced and fabulous" Bryan Schimmel adds 'Annie' to his already impressive portfolio of international work, which includes shows such as 'Chicago', 'Dreamgirls', 'Jersey Boys', and 'A Handful of Keys' and 'Rent'.

The origin story of Annie begins way back in the 1920s, when James Whitcomb's poem became the inspiration for a comic strip that would eventually debut in New York's Daily News. The comic strips of Harold Gray would later be compiled in a coffee table book collection called 'The Life and Hard Times of Little Orphan Annie'. It was in the 1970s that Martin Charnin would buy this coffee table book, planning on giving the gift to a friend. However Charnin would then decide against it, and ended up keeping the book with plans on creating the musical masterpiece that we all know and love today. Charnin collaborated with Charles Strouse and Thomas Meehan and set about fleshing out the story of Annie and her faithful canine sidekick Sandy. Set against the background of New York's Great Depression, 'Annie' would become the musical that cleaned up at the 1977 American Tony awards. The show garnered awards for Best Book of a Musical, Best Choreography, Best Costume Design, Best Direction of a Musical and ultimately Best Musical. The success would bring about a 'West End' production, which opened in 1978. The US show went on to run for 6 years totaling an impressive 2,377 performances.

Photos: Courtesy of Pieter Toerien Productions, photographer Christiaan Kotze



To date, 'Annie' has been performed in excess of 800 times every year in the USA. The Broadway show was adapted for the silver screen in 1982, and would showcase performances by legends Carol Burnett, Tim Curry and Bernadette Peters in the roles of Miss Hannigan, Rooster and Lily St Regis respectively. The film would at the time be the most expensive film musical to date, costing in excess of \$40 million, with \$9,5 million going solely to buy the rights of the 1977 Broadway hit. Interesting fact, the original Broadway production that ran from 1977 to 1983 saw five young actresses play the part of Annie, most notably were young Andrea McArdle and Sarah Jessica Parker. McArdle, now 53 years old, managed to successfully transcend the role of ingénue into womanhood, and was recently seen playing the title role of Dolly Levi in the Pennsylvania production of 'Hello Dolly!'. Sarah Jessica Parker (51 years old) would become a star of not only stage, but also big and small screens alike. Parker would become not only an international style icon, but also a star of among other projects, HBO's 'Sex in the City', as well as a film star, wife and mother of three.

Although the show is often referred to as a children's story, 'Annie' includes many strong political themes. Coupled with a sense of social pertinence and naive characters with a combination of childlike optimism and adult confidence, the musical satisfies audiences both young and old, making 'Annie' the number one show for families this festive season. Of course, having a pronounced Christmas feel does only add to the charm of this perfect holiday fare. Much has been written about the importance of family entertainment, and how family fun is an important part of building a strong family identity. Having a tradition such as visiting musicals with family can help to define and individualise families, and give them a common language. Identifying this need, Pieter Toerien and Hazel Feldmann have offered generous early-bird specials and family discounts. These offers can be found by visiting South Africa's most trusted ticket portal www.computicket.com. ■ Dean Roberts