

Young stars in the making

Newbury Nomads: Annie, at The Corn Exchange, from Wednesday, October 5 to Saturday, October 8

Never mind the sun coming out tomorrow, the sun shone as soon as the curtain went up on the girls of the New York City Municipal Orphanage last Wednesday.

Director Stuart Honey retained in this Nomads production many of the elements of the 1920s comic strip on which the story of the orphan longing to find her parents but ending up with a billionaire is based, It was difficult, Stuart said, to pick only 14 children from the 70 who auditioned.

The casting panel didn't put a foot wrong, for it was the children who were the stars in spite of superb performances from many of the adults, especially Matthew Haynes as Daddy Warbucks, Emma Newman as his secretary; Grace Farrell, and Jeanette Maskell as that raucous harridan of an old soak, Miss Hannigan. Jeanette, who has done so much for Newbury theatre, was also responsible for the slick choreography taken up with enthusiasm and expertise by the girls and magnificently punchy in Hard Knock Life - worth every penny of the ticket money on its own.

Musical theatre is about to receive a boost in Georgina Hendry (Annie) who has decided to make it her career. Here is a 12-year-old who has to sing the shows topper sitting on the floor of a stage with a dog who though extremely well-behaved must have been a distraction. She did it without a flicker, singing straight out at the audience, holding long notes, every word clear as a bell.

Georgina is a natural actress and, backed by Pip Cummings, Beth Buckland, Georgia Oldman, Georgie Rowe, Rebecca Webster and Ellie Bradshaw as the orphans, this was a team of talent which bodes well for the future; they were not only keen but were very, very good.

Nic Cope's orchestra soon got into the spirit of the thing, aware of the need not to overwhelm the singers but gloriously rampaging with them when the music was bright and sassy.

It was so good to see the theatre was packed with a variety of ages enjoying themselves. Nomads can be proud of what must surely rank among their best shows.

CAROLINE FRANKLIN