

ARTIST TALK LOUNGE



Photo by Sukie Park

That Girl

from THE MUSICAL

Annie



Broadway little actress **Junah Jang**



At front (l-r) Georgi James (*Pepper*), Emily Rosenfeld (*Molly*), Madi Rae DiPietro (*July*). At back (l-r), Lilla Crawford (*Annie*), Junah Jang (*Tessie*), Taylor Richardson (*Duffy*) and Tyrah Skye Odoms (*Kate*) in *ANNIE* at the Palace Theatre (Broadway at 47th Street). *ANNIE* features a book by Thomas Meehan, music by Charles Strouse and lyrics by Martin Charnin. The production is choreographed by Andy Blankenbuehler and directed by James Lapine. © Joan Marcus

A little girl from Columbia, Missouri had a big dream to perform on Broadway one day. At the age of ten, she made the dream come true. A name to remember, Junah Jang, 11, is a Korean-American Broadway actress.

In March 2012, after more than 5,000 auditioned in a coast to coast search for the revival musical "Annie," Junah was cast as Tesse, an orphan, along with five little actresses. Annie was played by Lila Crawford, who already had "Billy Elliot" under her belt.

As the only Asian orphan with spectacles on her tiny face (Tesse, the cry-baby orphan), Junah was transformed into a character who also speaks Korean. Improvised during the rehearsal by Katie Finneran, the original Miss Hannigan of the revival, and director James Lapine, the character of Tesse was transformed into a Korean orphan in the Depression era.

Since "Annie" opened last November at the Palace Theater, Junah played not only Tesse but was also a standby for Molly, and was on stage 8 times a week, sometimes 7 days a week.

In July, she left the musical to focus on studies. Attending Booker T. Washington School on the Upper West Side of Manhattan where she is the president of the sixth grade student council, Jang has been auditioning for musicals and TV pilot programs as well as voice-overs. Now Junah Jang's tomorrow seems wide open.

Q: Isn't it the hard-knock life for you?

A: Not really. I really enjoy school. I like to do a lot of homework. It's not hard knock for me.

Q: What do you miss most about "Annie"?

A: I miss show business. Because I really enjoyed singing and dancing. I loved working with all those people. I miss that, but it's fun to do a lot of things at school. To meet my classmates every day and learn new subjects.

Q: How about performing in front of the audience in the theater?

A: Yes, I miss performing every day in front of a big audience and seeing little girls come up to me after the performance asking me 'are you the girl from Annie?'

Q: When did you start performing in public?

A: My first real show was 'Sound of Music' when I was five years old. Then I did "Seussical" "Annie Junior" and "Schoolhouse Rock" in Missouri.

Q: Did you have a dream about Broadway back then?

A: I was living in Missouri, far away from Broadway, so it wasn't something that I was driving for. But when I did the auditions, I was excited about and started dreaming about Broadway!

Q: How was the audition process?

A: The first audition was in July 2011 when I was nine years old. We drove to Omaha, Nebraska, seven hours of long driving. After that, we came to New York City for open call and then it took a lot, about seven auditions

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Be yourself. Also be prepared.

and call backs. And finally I got the casting call in March 2012.

Q: Were there any other Asian girls at the audition?

A: I think there was one or two. And one at the final call back.

Q: What do you think they saw in you as an Annie girl?

A: I really, really love to sing. But dancing was not my strongest part. I knew that. So through the auditions I took dance classes and I'm still taking dance classes. Now I like to dance more than before.

Q: On Broadway there are many shows with children actors other than "Annie" - "Matilda" "Newsies" and "Motown" to name a few. What do you think about them?

A: I met the 'Matilda' girls and 'Newsies' boys at the Easter Bonnet. The 'Matilda' girls are really amazing. I love all the Broadway kids because mostly for us, it's our first Broadway show and we are experiencing the

same things. We all kind of connected. A lot of 'Matilda' girls also auditioned for 'Annie,' I recognized some girls. It's cool to see them again. And older girls from 'Matilda' know older girls in 'Annie.' At the dinner break we met at the playground near Broadway. We called it 'Broadway Playground,' all the Broadway kids were there. It's fun because in 'Matilda,' there's a big swing scene and they taught us how to swing.

Q: You are not tired after the show?

A: Actually I feel more energized after the show. With all the dancing and singing, and

Every day we go to the show. Waiting for scenes... I need to make sure about the microphone, costumes I'm wearing and I needed to warm up. I learned how to prepare myself, keep calm, because some times there will be a famous person out in the audience.

Q: Who came to see the show?

A: One day Kristin Chenoweth came and it was a thrill for all of us! Because she was in the original "Wicked." I love "Wicked"! It's my favorite show. One day I want to be Elphaba.

Q: So as a Korean, you were quite used to 'ppalli, ppalli'?

A: Also for me it was much more efficient. I felt like we were getting a lot of stuff accomplished. In the first week in the rehearsal, we learned all of the show already. It was incredible. I also liked meeting a lot of professional people. For example, in the ensemble, there were a lot of adults who had done 16~18 shows, and they showed me the difference between professionals and amateurs. They were always rehearsing on the backstage, always stretching. Also they are very nice and funny people. I really enjoyed being with them. I also learned how to manage my time.

eggs in little glass cups and put swans on the top. I had to make swans for about 60 people and about 300 little eggs with my Mom.

Q: How did you juggle with performances and study?

A: I was home schooled and on set partially tutored with all the girls. I think it was fun to be schooled with my Mom because we could do more of my level, especially math.

Q: You mother is also the manager and teacher for you.

A: Before in Missouri she worked all day, so we didn't have much time to spend together. Right now she is home all the time, so we go for shopping and library together. We are spending more quality time together.

Q: Do you have any advice to the kids who want to be on Broadway like you?

A: Don't let anyone's comments make you mad or disappointed or feel bad. If someone says 'you are not a good dancer,' don't take it too hard. Be yourself. Really, Broadway is not about doing one thing particularly well. There's parts for everybody and everybody has some unique talents. That's really what counts. Also be prepared. Don't be intimidated. It's more about just trying hard yourself, practicing and being yourself.

Q: What do you like most about New York City?

A: There's always something to do, like museums. My favorite museum is the Natural History Museum, because they're always updating and adding new exhibits. Recently there was an I-MAX film with penguins. I really like to learn things from there, there's so much depth and details.

Q: What do you want to study in college?

A: Truthfully I don't know yet. I really can't see my future because there are so many paths I could take. I could do some academics and acting and singing. My Daddy is a professor in industrial engineering, so he does a lot with math and so does my Mom. So I like to do math and I like reading. I like to write realistic fiction, things which can actually happen in real life. I like to write poems to express myself. And I'm also taking debate club as an after school program. There's a lot of research involved and you have to write. I like to argue, debate and persuade people.

Q: How do you picture yourself in 10 years?

A: I'll be graduating college. Berkeley, Stanford or Yale... M.I.T. maybe. My Daddy went to Berkeley, so I want to go to a good college like him and my Mom. Also I want to do more Broadway shows. I want to be in 'Wicked,' as Elphaba some day!

By Sukie Park

MUSICAL ANNIE IS...

Based on the popular comic strip, Annie tells the extraordinary story of a little orphan who spends ends up in the lap of luxury with Depression-era billionaire Oliver Warbucks. Unlike most of the other children at Miss Hannigan's orphanage, spunky Annie believes that her parents are still alive and will one day return to claim her. So when Mr. Warbucks offers to adopt her, she asks the most powerful man in America to help find her real mom and dad instead, and he agrees. Warbucks' whopping reward for Annie's parents attracts the attention of con artists Rooster, Lily and the wicked Miss Hannigan, who hatch a plot to kidnap Annie and take the \$50,000 reward. But don't fret: This classic family musical has a happy ending for Annie, Daddy Warbucks and the whole gang.

Annie is a big-time Broadway musical complete with lavish sets, striking choreography and terrific performances. Directed by Tony winner James Lapine, this revival has a darker and more realistic tone, but the story is still pure joy. Set in New York City around Christmas 1933, the show mixes fictional characters like Annie and Warbucks with real-life historical figures like President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The Tony-winning musical features classic tunes including "Tomorrow," "It's a Hard Knock Life" and "Easy Street."

Source: broadway.com