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reviews

Life After Tomorrow

Reif Entertainment

Hard to believe, but it has been almost 30 years since "Annie" bowed on the Broadway stage, creating a viable market for singing-and-dancing orphans the world over.

Julie Stevens was one of them, and, along with co-director Gil Cates Jr., she relives that experience in "Life After Tomorrow," a delightful and insightful behind-the-curtain glimpse into the lives of a group of young girls — Sarah Jessica Parker and Molly Ringwald among them — who

survived the smell of the grease paint and the roar of the crowd.

The intimate documentary, currently seeking adoption by a caring distributor, provides a lively and reflective take on fame at a tender age from a uniquely female perspective.

While the original Annie, Andrea McArdle, and Aileen Quinn, who did the honors in the 1982 movie version, both declined to participate here, Stevens, who has a Web site, AnnieOrphans.com, that functions as a virtual sorority for "Annie" cast members, managed to find plenty who were willing to share that life-changing experience, including Parker (aka Annie No. 3), MSNBC anchor Dara Brown and "As the World Turns" Emmy winner Martha Byrne.

In addition, Stevens and Cates speak with other "Annie" personnel, including creators Charles Strouse and Martin Charnin, whose show came at a time when the nation was looking for something to lift it out of its recession-depleted spirits.

Once the curtain came down, many — especially those on the national tours — found it could be a hard-knock life, fraught with out-of-control stage mothers, separation anxiety and, worst of all, prepubescent growth spurts that could find the moppets being replaced by smaller, younger editions just waiting in the wings.

During the show's original six-year run, the girls also had to contend with parental breakups, over-protective gun-bearing fans and a Miss Hannigan who would get a little careless with her stage slaps. But most admit they would have done it all over again in a New York minute.

That becomes especially clear during a mini-reunion at the end, when a group that includes full-time moms, a financial planner and a psychologist gathers around a piano and, lifting those still remarkably sweet voices in unison, proves that no matter how hard they try to leave it behind them, they can't stop thinking about tomorrow.

Michael Rechtshaffen