

In the late '70s and early '80s, becoming a cast member of "Annie" was like achieving the pinnacle of little girlhood in America. But it was never meant to last forever. To hear the now-adult girls from the show tell it in the new feature documentary *Life After Tomorrow*, co-directed and produced by Gil Cates, Jr. and Julie Stevens, the experience was a wonderful Cinderella-like whirlwind, but one which also left many of them bewildered as to what to do for Act Two of their lives when it was all over. Former "Annie" cast member Kristi Coombs kind of sums this up when she says in the film, "I feel like my career could not have peaked at 10!"

The film, which features interviews with some 40 former "Annie" cast members, is a personal story as well for Julie Stevens, who herself played the orphan Tess in the national tour and closed out the Broadway run in 1983. Some six years ago, Stevens started a website, AnnieOrphans.com, to find out what happened to some of the other girls from the show. This led to semi-regular reunions, and Stevens soon realized that there was a bigger story here that might make a compelling film. Says Stevens, "We've all seen 'The El True Hollywood Story' about child celebrities and some of their tales are fascinating. But I didn't think anyone had ever explored theater kids before. And since I had the personal connection, it seemed like a natural. Not so much the 'Where are they now?' take,

because we weren't all famous, but more about what happens when you have such an incredible experience at such a young age and it sets the bar so high."

The "Annie" phenomenon touched a lot of lives aside from just the performers in the show, and when Stevens first met Cates, Jr., it turned out that they shared an "Annie" connection of their own. Recalls Cates, Jr., "My first real love was a girl when I was 10 years old named Louanne, who was the original "Annie" in the L.A. production and also starred in a film my dad directed entitled, *Oh, God! Book II*." It turned out that Stevens also knew Louanne, and Stevens would soon present Cates, Jr., an experienced director with three features under his belt, with the idea for what would become their joint venture. Cates, Jr. immediately saw the potential, not just because of the connection many feel with "Annie," but also because it was a unique take on the oft-visited child actor story. He elaborates, "Unlike movie child stars who might be shooting a big movie for two months and then never work again,

some of these girls were in this show for two years, eight shows a week. So I think that has much more of an imprint on the inner workings of a human being."

And the "Annie" mystique still has its pull with a new tour currently in progress. Says Stevens, "You could have an open call for this 30th Anniversary Tour of 'Annie' and 300 girls would be lined up around the block. It still is the penultimate job for a young girl." ▼

*Life After Tomorrow* premieres on Showtime on Christmas Eve at 8 PM with an encore presentation on Christmas Day at 12 noon.

## Julie Stevens and Gil Cates, Jr. Find *Life After Tomorrow*

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