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Lafayette's Dramatic Duo

By Lou Fancher



Meaghan and Diella Wottrich Photo provided

In a time when family togetherness is on the endangered species list, Diella and Meaghan Wottrich have found a novel way to beat the trend. When the Diablo Theatre Company's *Annie* opened on September 10, the Lafayette duo strolled and strutted across the Leshner stage together-taking the quaint idea of a mother/daughter dance to a whole new level.

The musical, scheduled for a Broadway revival in 2012, follows the exploits of feisty orphan Annie and is based on Harold Gray's famous comic strip.

Meaghan, 11, appears as Emma, an orphan friend to title character Annie. "She makes sure we don't get in trouble with the woman who runs the orphanage," Meaghan explains. Her mother plays the role of Cecille, the maid and seamstress to Annie. "She's sweet and kind, and dedicated to making things run smoothly," Diella Wottrich says.

They might be speaking of themselves: during an interview they coach and gently correct each other, sometimes overlapping in their earnest efforts to answer.

"I never really pictured myself doing this," Wottrich begins. "I was so shy." It's hard to believe this tall, head-turning woman, who speaks

expressively and with good humor, ever hid behind a parent's leg. Miraculously, the passage of time and opportunities to emerge from her instinctive shell led her to where she stands today. "Now, I feel like I'm not complete," she says, about the periods when she is away from the stage.

Meaghan, on the other hand, is 100 percent hooked and full of third-grade fearlessness. She's already well-versed in rules of the stage, having appeared with The Ballet School, Town Hall Theatre Company and with her mother in Contra Costa Music Theatre's *Oklahoma!* "Being onstage at the Leshner was just amazing," she says, leaning forward, her blue eyes wide with wonder. "If I looked, I could see people...but you aren't supposed to look at specific people."

Her mother, drawn to the twin magnets of music and dance, remembers seeing a Broadway production of *Annie* at the age of 11. "I remember thinking, 'Gosh, I would love to be on the stage doing that!'" After high school experiences in musical theater, she pursued degrees in psychology, married, and started a family; performing in Marin's community theaters and holding onto a "long term dream of having children who were interested in theater."

Now, spliced between work and children, Wottrich appears in East Bay productions. "I have an agreement with my family that I do one a year," she says, "although this year, *Annie* came along after *Oklahoma* and we just couldn't pass it up."

Like her mother, Meaghan is more than a one-trick theater pony. She's an avid soccer player, sharing a dedication to the sport with her father. "I like being goalie best," she says. "You have to always keep an eye on the ball." On stage, she's much the same, saying, "I concentrate on myself to do the right thing and I watch other people to make sure it's all ok."

They both learned more than just lines from their time on stage. "I've learned this before, but I keep learning that people who are mean in the play are actually really, really nice," Meaghan says. Her mother, practical, but no less magical, says she discovered "how much I appreciate that we have the same passion and this time together."

Asked about the future, Wottrich says, "I'd love to have a leading role opportunity...but this is just fine-ensemble roles-as long as I am dancing and singing."

Asked if she'd like a leading role, Meaghan nearly jumps out of her chair. "Yes, I definitely do!" she says. "I want to continue doing this for a long, long time."

Annie runs through October 2; for more information go to www.dloc.org.

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