



Some of the Random Farms Kids' Theater veterans who are or will be in Broadway musicals this season: from back left, Libbie Jacobson, 14, of Tarrytown, Sky Jarrett, 13, of Chappaqua, Kylie Goldstein, 8, of Montebello, Delaney Moro, 11, of Pomona, Kathryn Faughnan, 12, of Pleasantville, and Nicole Bocchi, 10, of Jamaica Estates, Queens.

BABES ON BROADWAY

Random Farms Kids' Theater floods New York stages with talent

Peter D. Kramer
The Journal News

Anya Wallach started Random Farms Kids' Theater in her neighborhood's clubhouse in Chappaqua 11 years ago, gathering children and putting on shows.

Now, Random Farms kids are taking Broadway by storm.

Ten young actors appear in five shows this fall: "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas The Musical," "Mary Poppins," "Les Miserables," "Annie" and "Spring Awakening."

Cast in "The Grinch": RFKT alums Libbie Jacobson from Tarrytown, Sky Jarrett from Chappaqua, Brianna Gentilella of Pleasantville, Danielle Freid from Upper Saddle River, N.J., and Nicole Bocchi from Queens. Bocchi plays Cindy-Lou Who.

In "Mary Poppins," the role of Jane Banks will alternate among three young actresses, two of whom studied under Wallach: Kathryn Faughnan of Pleasantville and Delaney Moro of Pomona.

This time last year, Moro was landing a part in "Cinderella" at Random Farms, playing one of the wicked stepsisters.

One of her Cinderellas is coming to Broadway, too: Jennifer Damiano will be in the ensemble and understudy one of the lead characters in Duncan Sheik's "Spring Awakening." Damiano also played Dorothy in the Random Farms production of "The Wizard of Oz."

The "other Dorothy" in that production was Yorktown's Marissa O'Donnell, who plays the title role in the 30th anniversary national tour of "Annie," which comes to The Theater at Madison Square Garden from Dec. 6-30.

The tenth, and smallest Random Farms kid to hit Broadway this fall is Kylie Goldstein, of Montebello, who'll play Young Cosette in the revival of "Les Miserables." (Ali Ewoldt, of Pleasantville, plays the grown-up Cosette. Read her behind-the-scenes blog at www.lesmiz.lohudblogs.com.)

Is there something in the water at Random Farms?

Nope, says Wallach. She attributes the success to a strong program, talented, energetic kids and a schedule that puts the family first.

"(It's a) short but intense time commit-

ment — we rehearse for three weeks and then perform — so kids who are performing professionally are still able to participate," she says. "We don't tie them up for a long time."

In rehearsal, Wallach's approach is to teach actors, dancers and singers by letting them act, dance and sing. She schedules workshops and mainstage productions year round, keeping tuition low by suburban standards — \$225 for a mainstage production.

This year's Broadway crop has something special, she says.

"All these kids are triple threats," Wallach says. "But I think what sets them apart is a sparkle in their personality. It's an energy. You're drawn to them. They're magnetic."

Wallach isn't sitting idly by waiting for those opening nights: She has a show to cast.

Today, she begins auditions for "High School Musical," a stage version of the wildly popular Disney telemovie. Wallach had planned two auditions for the February production, but demand has forced her to add a third day of tryouts.

"We've never seen such a turnout for auditions," she says. "I'm guessing we'll have 250 to 300. Which makes it an event unto itself." She's planning two high-school and two middle-school casts.

It's not uncommon for families to drive

Please see RANDOM, 5E



Anya Wallach
Marissa O'Donnell of Pleasantville is playing the title role in "Annie" on the national tour, which comes to The Theater at Madison Square Garden this holiday season.

They're young, but acting vets

Peter D. Kramer
The Journal News

Here's a look at the 10 Random Farms alumni appearing on Broadway this fall:

Sky Jarrett, of Chappaqua, played Tiny Tim to F. Murray Abraham's Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol" at Madison Square Garden in 2002.

Jarrett and Random Farms go back to when his sister, Bonnie, began taking classes with Wallach. Soon, at 4, Sky was begging to get on stage and Wallach cast him as one of the urchins in "Oliver!"

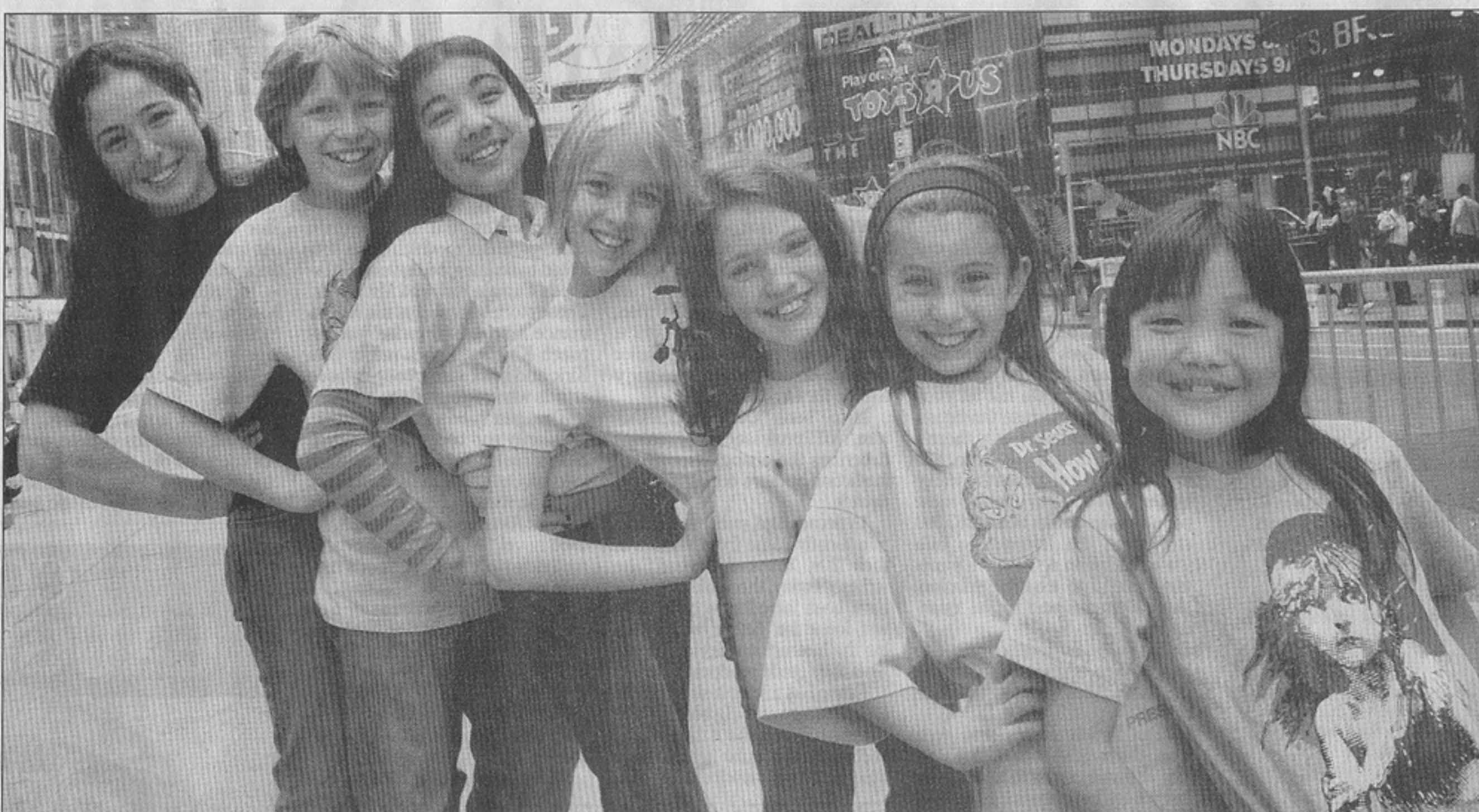
Now 13, the Robert E. Bell Middle School seventh-grader is one of those Grinch-bothering denizens of Whoville in "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas! The Musical."

Wallach calls Jarrett's voice "angelic, like out of a boy choir. He's very gifted, musically. When he was 5, he was in one of the workshops and we had him sing 'Where Is Love?' from 'Oliver!' It was a duet with Kathryn Faughnan, who was also 5.

Please see KIDS, 5E

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Who's who, from left: Director Anya Wallach, Sky Jarrett, 13, and Libbie Jacobson, 14, are in "How the Grinch Stole Christmas;" Delaney Moro, 11, and Kathryn Faughnan, 12, share the role of Jane Banks in "Mary Poppins;" Nicole Bocchi, 10, is also a Who in "Grinch," and Kylie Goldstein, 8, is Young Cosette in the revival of "Les Miserables."

Random Farms kids take the stage

KIDS, from 1E

"It was heart-breakingly adorable. At 5 years old, to be able to get up on stage is a huge triumph. These two kids were singing on pitch and doing a duet with taped accompaniment, so you knew there was something special there with both of them."

Kathryn Faughnan, 12, is now a seventh-grader at Pleasantville Middle School. She'll play Jane Banks in "Mary Poppins."

She found out she got the part while vacationing on the Jersey Shore.

"I came back from the beach and my mom was holding a spoonful of sugar and she said, 'Jane, a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down,'" Faughnan says.

"I covered my mouth, then my grandma started to cry and I started to cry and my dad started to cry," she says.

Like the other student-actors, she's getting assignments from school and keeping up with her work. Sometimes the day starts with school; sometimes schoolwork is fit in later in the day.

She has been at RFKT for seven years, and played Gretel in "Hansel and Gretel" and Alice in "Alice in Wonderland."

"On stage," Wallach says, Faughnan is "very engaging and very believable."

Another Pleasantville Middle Schooler, **Brianna Gentilella**, 11, comes to "The Grinch" on Broadway by way of the "Today" show, where she won the on-air contest "Are You a Who?"

Three judges picked her from six finalists in the national contest. She's in the Little Who ensemble.

"When we did 'Grease,'" Wallach says, "I remember telling her mom, 'She needs to be in a Broadway show. If she can't be in one, they need to write one for her.'"

The sixth-grader's school roles have included Violet Beau-

regard in "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and the Queen and Hearts in "Alice in Wonderland."

When she needed to get her hair cut to make the "Grinch" wig fit better, she donated the trimmings to the Locks of Love program that provides wigs to sick children.

Also playing Jane Banks in "Mary Poppins" is **Delaney Moro**, whom Wallach calls "a little spitfire." The 11-year-old Pomona girl, a student at Saddle River Day School, was in the "Annie" national tour.

Moro learned a valuable theater experience at Random Farms: handling autograph-seekers.

"After the show, we went out and gave kids autographs," she says. "I liked how we were still in our costumes, so the kids wouldn't forget who we are."

"When Jennifer Damiano came out — she was my Cinderella — all of the little girls just went right over to her."

Moro says she's most excited to be wearing a wig made just for her and to be on the other side of the footlights.

"It's a really cool experience," Moro says. "When I see a Broadway show, I always wonder what it must feel like for those people. Now, I get to feel that."

Another resident of Whoville, **Danielle Freid**, "came to me already a pro, just off the national tour of 'Annie,'" Wallach recalls.

Freid, 12, plays Belle Who, and understudies Betty-Lou Who. She's a seventh-grader at Emil A. Cavallini Middle School in Upper Saddle River, N.J.

"The costumes are all great and they're all true to the book," Freid says. "They're mostly using red, white and black, which is what the book used."

"It's amazing to be part of this. I was in the 'Annie' national tour, but this is my first time on Broadway."

The tour meant 50 cities over four months, when she was 6.

Then she did "Annie" at Random Farms, playing the same part, Molly.

Her biggest Broadway surprise, so far: "You never realize how much work they put into everything on Broadway, even into one little prop."

Nicole Bocchi, 10, goes to P.S. 178 in Queens and remembers playing evil orphanage matron Miss Hannigan in "Annie" at Random Farms.

"She was as tiny as a peanut, with this huge string of pearls, a huge voice and this mop of wig hair," Wallach says. "I will never forget her flouncing around, swinging her pearls and strangling that doll."

Taking a break after "Grinch" rehearsal, Bocchi, still as tiny as a peanut, is a seasoned vet. "It's a lot of work, but I wanted this job. I went for it and now I've got to work for it," she says.

"Everybody has their own Who-ish thing and has to learn to walk like a Who," she says, demonstrating a penguin-like walk.

"I cannot wait till it opens. I'm very excited because my half-birthday is Nov. 7, the day before we open."

Being in "The Grinch" is a bit like coming home for **Libbie Jacobson**. It's not that she's a Who; she's just a kid from Tarrytown. But the last time she was on Broadway was in "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang," in the same theater, the Hilton on 42nd, when she played a "sewer child."

Coming back to the Hilton for "Grinch" rehearsals was strange, she says, because she was looking around for the "Chitty" costumes that used to hang in the hall.

The tryouts for "Grinch" included an eight-hour dance audition that was "quite painful, because my jazz shoes were too small that day and I didn't realize it until about the third hour."

"By the end of the day, I had this horrible blister and my feet were a little misshapen," Jacob-

son says with a laugh.

The 14-year-old ninth-grader goes to the Professional Performing Arts School in Manhattan, majoring in musical theater.

She gushes about how she'll look on stage: "My costume looks like a frilly, pink pear. It has a giant bulge out by my hips. It's a lot of fun. And I have these crazy tights and these kooky little shoes with twirly points."

Wallach recalls the "amazing comic flair" Jacobson demonstrated as Mrs. Mayor in "Seussical," last summer's mainstage production.

For the past year, the sun has been coming out eight times a week for Yorktown's **Marissa O'Donnell**, the title character in the national tour of "Annie."

Soon, it'll come out over the Theater at Madison Square Garden.

"When we were trying to cast 'Annie' at RFKT, Wallach says, 'we had a million little girls, all of whom could sing and dance. So how do you pick Annie?'"

"We came up with the 'adoptability factor.' The audience has to want to take her home. Marissa has the ultimate adoptability quality. She's so honest on stage, you root for her. You want to scoop her up in your pocket-book and take her home with you."

O'Donnell, reached at a tour stop in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., recalls how far her director would go to make great theater.

When she was Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz," O'Donnell says the dog playing Toto was too big for her to carry.

"So Anya said we could use her dog, Phyllis, a Maltese teacup. I loved her and she would come to me on stage. That, I thought, was a great idea."

"Anya was also thinking about dying her dog black, for the part, but then we figured out that that wouldn't be good for the dog, so we didn't do it."

Now, O'Donnell is dealing with two dogs in "Annie" — Lola,

who plays Sandy, and Lola's understudy, Mikey.

Last year, **Kylie Goldstein** was a singing mouse in "Cinderella" at Random Farms. This year, she's Young Cosette in the revival of "Les Miserables."

The 8-year-old from Montebello is a third-grader at Viola Elementary School in Suffern.

She explains her role in "Les Miz": "We're at a very dirty house and Cosette is like a maid of Madame Thernardier. Madame Thernardier is really mean to Cosette and she lives there her whole life. Then Jean Valjean comes and takes Cosette and she becomes a little successful."

Goldstein will have the Broadway stage to herself, singing "Castle on a Cloud."

"I've been waiting for this to happen," she says the 8-year-old actress.

Jennifer Damiano, 15, of White Plains, has been with Random Farms for five years.

"She came through the ranks, doing ensemble roles, lead roles, then Off-Broadway," says Wallach. "So Broadway was the next natural step for her."

Wallach calls Damiano, who played Cinderella at RFKT last winter, "an extremely mature performer. At 15, she's performing at the level of a college kid, or someone in their 20s. She needed this challenge."

Cast as a member of the ensemble and as an understudy in "Spring Awakening" this fall, Damiano will be in a play that contains graphic and possibly disturbing images.

Wallach isn't worried. "Doing stuff like this is a personal decision for the family and the kid, deciding if the material's appropriate."

"Jennifer had seen it several times when it was Off-Broadway. My feeling is if she's comfortable with it and her parents are comfortable with it, then great. Good luck. Have fun. I'll be there on Opening Night."