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Take a peek inside an Annie audition workshop, as hundreds of girls ages 6 to 12 prepare for open auditions for next year's Broadway revival of the musical. WSJ's Ellen Gamerman reports.

## Auditioning for Broadway Revival of 'Annie' Is a Hard-Knock Life

*Wannabes Bet Their Bottom Dollar on Boot-Camp Prep With Former Orphans*

By ELLEN GAMERMAN

Brynne Norquist isn't taking any chances with her audition for a new Broadway revival of "Annie." The eight-year-old with a moon face and blond pigtails got rid of her friendship bracelet so she won't fiddle with it during her tryout. She worked on her performance style with a private coach. She attended a workshop to perfect her song, "Born to Entertain," under the steady gaze of other wannabe orphans.

"She wants to be a Broadway icon," said her mother, Lauren Norquist of Irvington, N.Y.

Hundreds of children with similar ambitions are expected to line up Sunday outside an audition space on Manhattan's Upper East Side. It's an open call, so anyone can come: no agent necessary, no experience, either. The girls, 6 to 12 years old, will hand over a photo, sing without instrumental accompaniment and hope for a call-back for the late 2012 production.

The opportunity has prompted parents to seek out Annie boot camps around New York to get their daughters ready. Workshops—many led by former Annie cast and creative-team members—are helping little girls figure out what to sing (no age-inappropriate love songs), what to wear (no prissy dresses) and how to enter the audition room (fearlessly).

It took 12 minutes for Broadway Workshop, a New York musical theater school, to sell out its audition prep with

Aileen Quinn, who played Annie in the 1982 movie based on the Broadway show.

At another youth acting studio, A Class Act NY, 24 kids recently took the \$150, three-and-a-half hour workshop with Caroline Daly Antonelli, an orphan in Annie on Broadway in 1980 and '81.

A waiting list quickly formed for the six, \$65-per-child Annie workshops at Random Farms Kids' Theater in Elmsford, N.Y., with guest coach Keith Levenson, musical director of the only revival of Annie that has been done on Broadway, which ran for seven months in 1997.



Angie Gaul

Brynne Norquist plays the title role in a recent Random Farms Kids' Theater production of "Annie."

The new production will coincide with the 35th anniversary of the original Annie, which opened in 1977 and ran for nearly six years. Arielle Tepper Madover, who is producing the prospective 2012 revival, said she isn't looking for a particular type for the starring role, which was played first on Broadway by Andrea McArdle and later by Sarah Jessica Parker, among others. "You'll know it when you see her," Ms. Madover said.

The casting team, led by Broadway veteran Bernard Telsey, is also looking for the show's six lesser orphans and is keeping the audition rules simple: Don't sing music from Annie and don't come in costume.

At a recent mock audition for Annie held by Broadway Workshop, Ms. Quinn, who also appeared as an orphan in the original Broadway show, listened intently as kids sang 16 bars of music. Then she gave them advice. "Be grounded in your movement," she told one fidgety girl. Later, she shared Annie lore with the girls, telling them how the movie crew once spread Alpo on her face to get Sandy, the dog, to lick her.

Broadway Workshop's director, Marc Tumminelli, saw potential in some of the younger girls, like six-year-old Tori Feinstein, because the older kids could be too tall by opening night late next year.

Next to her, Bebe Wood, a Manhattan 9-year-old with purple-framed glasses who is performing this summer in an 8,000-seat theater in Kansas, was thinking strategy. She hoped for a private audition, with the help of her agent.

When the last child left the workshop at the Ripley-Grier Studios just south of the theater district in midtown Manhattan, Mr. Tumminelli declared the day a success: "No one cried. No one threw up."

Ms. Madover, the Annie producer, plans to attend this weekend's auditions, where a team of 20 will see potential orphans. Later, staff will run private auditions, visit summer camps and hold open calls in Los Angeles and in Florida. Kids can also submit videos online.

For the open call, Ms. Madover has sought the help of a child psychiatrist to create a "self-esteem program" that includes six volunteers to help girls who may struggle at the audition.

"You forgot the words? Everyone freezes up from time to time," reads a pamphlet that staff will give each child. The leaflets also offer advice to parents: "Try not to say, 'You were better than everyone else' or 'You deserved it.'"

Some parents are wary. Tara Kennedy-Fishman, who played an orphan on Broadway from 1980 to 1982, is reluctant to take her two oldest girls to the tryout, though they are eager to go. "If you're a working child actress, your life is great, you're in limos and you're going to Sardi's for lunch and you're working," said the mother of

five from Irvington, N.Y. "But when your life changes and you get older and you get braces and the parts diminish and it becomes a different time for you, it's done, it's over, and it's very hard to deal with." A 2006 documentary, "Life After Tomorrow," examined the often-difficult lives of young women who have appeared in various productions of the show.

Kids with the best chances this year may be the ones who look younger than they actually are, said Ms. McArdle, the original Annie. "If they're 10 and they look 7, it's like 'Wow, those kids are fantastic.' It's smoke and mirrors," said Ms. McArdle, who was a short 13-year-old when she played the part. Ms. McArdle, now 47, gives private lessons to little girls going out for parts like Annie.

The glow of a former Annie orphan still shines bright for many young girls. At the end of the workshop at A Class Act NY, Ms. Antonelli, who played the orphan Pepper on Broadway, sang "Tomorrow" to the kids. The girls jumped to their feet applauding. Lily Discepolo, 10, was in awe. "You could see the song," she said, "through her eyeballs."