

Aspen Business Journal

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Aspen locals to star at Theatre Aspen

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By Gail Montany



From left: David Ledingham as Signor Naccarelli in Lincoln Center's Tony Award-winning production of *The Light in the Piazza*; Nina Gabianelli in last season's *Defying Gravity* at Theatre Aspen; Julia Foran as Amaryllis in Aspen Community Theatre's 2009 production of *The Music Man*.

ABJ talks with local actors Julia Foran, Nina Gabianelli and David Ledingham

ASPEN, Colo—When Theatre Aspen's 2011 season opens later this month, a number of locals and actors with a local connection will be on stage in "Annie" and in "Becky's New Car."

In addition to a slew of local youngsters playing orphans in "Annie," which opens July 7, two of the lead roles in that production are Aspenites: Nina Gabianelli as Miss Hannigan and Julia Foran as Annie.

And David Ledingham of Aspen plays opposite the Tony- and Emmy Award-nominated performer Sandy Duncan in "Becky's New Car," which opens June 24 in TA's brand-new tent in Rio Grande Park.

"We've been waiting for the perfect role to come along for David," said Paige Price, artistic director for Theatre Aspen, "and this year, he was actually right for three parts! We initially wanted him to do a role in both *Becky's New Car* AND *Annie*, but the rehearsal schedule just doesn't work to make that happen. So he's going to have to settle for only one role: playing Sandy Duncan's husband."

Price said rehearsals for "Becky's New Car" began Tuesday.

"I can't tell you how exciting it was to have that much talent in the room," she said. "Sandy's going to be great and we are going to have a rollicking opening!"

For 13-year-old Julia Foran, an eighth-grader next fall at Aspen Middle School, being offered the title role in "Annie" was a surprise – especially since many youngsters, both locally and in Los Angeles had auditioned. Some had done "Annie" all over the country and had lots of experience. But Price said Julia was a natural choice for the part of Annie.

"Julia was our most exciting find," Price said. "We auditioned all the local kids first, back in February and when Julia came in, our director, Marjorie Mae Treger, just fell in love with her quality for the role. She said she was 'a real kid,' had a pure voice and was so convincing in the scenes, she'd just break hearts."

If you met the affable and friendly Nina Gabianelli on the street or in her capacity as vice president of programming and education for the Aspen Historical Society, but were not familiar with her work in local theater and the Crystal Palace, it might be hard to imagine her playing the part of mean Miss Hannigan in "Annie."

But Miss Hannigan is ultimately a comical character – and Gabianelli is a very, very funny woman and skilled comedic actor.

"Nina Gabianelli is really one of the main reasons we're doing "Annie," Price said. "It's the biggest show we've ever done and really stretches us to our limits – almost all of them."

Price said Gabianelli, with her big voice and skill for comedy, is perfect for the role of Miss Hannigan.

"We began talking about her doing the show last fall," Price said. "I'm really grateful that the Historical Society is helping us make this work, since she has a pretty big position there. She'll be one of the busiest Aspenites this summer for sure!"

Other local performers include Heather Lee, a graduate of Aspen Middle School and Aspen High School, who plays the role of Ginger in "Becky's New Car"; Franz Alderfer plays Bert Healy/ensemble in "Annie"; and the following local girls will be "Annie" orphans: Karlie Nelson (Pepper), Talitha McDougall Jones (Duffy), Tatum Malena Shane (July), Kaia Vresilovic (Tessie) and Sophie Schlosser (Molly).

Julia Foran

Julia Foran made her musical theatre debut as Amaryllis in Aspen Community Theatre's "The Music Man" in 2009. She is absolutely thrilled to be a part of this awesome cast. Julia enjoys singing, playing the violin, reading, being with her friends, playing with her dog, and the tv show "Glee!"

Aspen Business Journal: What musical instruments do you play?

Julia Foran: Violin, mandolin and a little piano.

ABJ: What will you do with the money you earn from this professional theater experience?

JF: My parents insist that most of it should go into my college account, but I would probably buy a music-writing software or an electric violin.

ABJ: Is landing the role as Annie as cool as becoming an aunt this spring?

JF: It is such a great honor to be cast as Annie! I love acting, but becoming an aunt has been very, very important to me.

ABJ: You did such a wonderful job as Amaryllis in "The Music Man" for Aspen Community Theatre in 2009. What other stage experience have you had?

JF: When I was in elementary school, I was in two of Jayne Gottlieb's plays. My first was actually "Annie." In that show, my role was Mrs. Pugh. I have done school plays and various performances at the Aspen Chapel.

ABJ: What is the scariest part of working for professional theater? What's the best part?

JF: I am very afraid to make a mistake while I'm doing the show! When you perform an instrument, you just clear your head and go on "automatic pilot." When you're acting, you can't do that. You have to think ahead and remember stage directions and whatnot. But I am very excited about the amount of amazing talent coming from many of the actors. Joan and David Hess (Grace Farrell and Daddy Warbucks) have numerous Broadway credits.

ABJ: What do you hope to be when you grow up?

JF: I am definitely going to teach music and perform. I would also like to be a photojournalist for National Geographic. The amazing pictures I see in the magazines and the places that the reporters go make me really want to work for National Geographic.

ABJ: Your Dad [local Realtor Ed Foran] has been doing community theater for a number of years. Are you looking forward to giving him some tips on professional stage acting when you're done with the show?

JF: Oh definitely! He's usually the one giving me "tips." I am looking forward to switching places!

ABJ: Were you surprised to learn you had landed the role of Annie?

JF: I was extremely surprised to land the role of Annie. There were girls who were younger than me and had more acting experience than me. The girls who auditioned were just bursting with talent! I was, and still am, in shock!

ABJ: Anything else you'd like to tell our readers?

JF: I'd just like to thank Marjorie Mae Treger, Paige Price, David Dyer, and everybody at Theatre

Aspen for giving me this amazing privilege to act with such a talented cast.

Nina Gabianelli

Nina Gabianelli, a graduate of Boston Conservatory of Music, has performed in New York City as well as with Theatre Aspen, Aspen Community Theatre and The Crystal Palace. Her off-Broadway roles include Pleasure in "Pretty Faces," as well as Charlotte in "Falsettos" (Arden Theatre), Frieda in "Sunday in the Park with George" (St. Louis Theatre Factory), and Eva in "Evita" (Buck's County Playhouse). Local audiences may also remember her starring role in "Mame" with Aspen Community Theater.

Aspen Business Journal: How long have you lived in Aspen? Where did you grow up and were you onstage as a kid?

Nina Gabianelli: I've been here almost 12 years, but I'm originally from St. Louis. I started performing at the age of 12 with a children's theater company, where you had children playing adult roles.

ABJ: What, if anything, prepared you for the role of Miss Hannigan?

N.G.: I don't know! But I am so looking forward to it! I can't answer that yet, haven't started. [Rehearsals for "Annie" start this week.]

ABJ: You have an amazing singing voice and such a wonderful comedic stage presence. Did that come naturally to you, or did it take work?

N.G.: Oh, thank you! I went to school for theater and I have a degree in musical theater. Miss Hannigan was one of those roles I was bound to play when I got old enough.

ABJ: Do you feel you're old enough now?

N.G.: (Laughing) Almost old enough.

ABJ: Who was your comedic inspiration?

N.G.: Growing up, Carol Burnett, wholeheartedly. Bette Midler – I remember going to see her in college. Y'know, comedy is a defense mechanism.

ABJ: Who or what cracks you up now?

N.G.: I enjoy all sorts of comedy. I am intrigued by many comediennes both on stage and television – I like Tina Fey, Faith Prince, and Swoozie Kurtz is big favorite!

ABJ: What advice would you give aspiring young actors, like Julia Foran and the other kids in "Annie" who might be seeking a career in entertainment?

N.G.: I would encourage them to study and learn about all aspects of the business. There are so many incredible opportunities in the theater arts and passion is the main ingredient for success!

ABJ: What do you do to get away from the craziness of your everyday life?

N.G.: I like to flyfish, I garden – I'm cutting some rhubarb today to make a pie – I go hiking, just the lifestyle in the mountains. When I was working at the Crystal Palace, people would say 'you should be in New York.' But here, I get to ski during the day and go to work, or work here at the Historical Society and then give a walking tour of the West End.

ABJ: Do you make a mean rhubarb pie, too?

N.G.: Absolutely – rhubarb is my specialty!

David Ledingham

David Ledingham has starred and appeared in numerous productions on Broadway ("The Light in the Plaza" at Lincoln Center), off-Broadway ("Comedy of Errors" and others), the Royal National Theatre in London ("Grapes of Wrath"), and regional theater. Past Theatre Aspen appearances include the role of George Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life," plus Moonlight & Magnolias," "The Underpants," "Twelfth Night" and several others. His film and television credits include starring with Brad Douriff in "The Final Judgment," and appearances on "Law & Order," "One Life to Live," "Hunter," and other TV shows.

Aspen Business Journal: How long have you lived in Aspen? Where did you grow up?

David Ledingham: I was born in San Diego and moved to Aspen when I was 11. I left to pursue my acting career, and in 2001 started returning to Aspen to act at Theatre Aspen in the summers. Finally, I decided to make Aspen home base in 2007, after finishing a year playing the lead in the Tony Award-winning Broadway play "The Light in the Piazza" as the Italian patriarch Signor Nacarelli.

ABJ: I see from your biography you have done movies and television and even some directing. Do you have a "day job" or other career besides acting and directing?

DL: I have written several screenplays, a TV pilot, and two plays, one of which – "The Song That Killed the Snake" – was selected by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and I subsequently directed it there in 2003. It is about a Mexican classical composer (Silvestre Revueltas) and friend of Garcia Lorca and Pablo Neruda, who travels to Spain to fight against Franco's fascist regime, and featured his music performed live by the LA Philharmonic's 16-piece chamber orchestra. I developed The Aspen Fringe Festival, (June 10-15), which is now in its third season presenting award-winning performing arts and artists. I also manage our small family-owned hotel, The Snow Queen Lodge, in Aspen. My wife was a professional dancer in NYC for 15 years and now is on faculty at Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. Our son is a fourth grader at Aspen Elementary School and will be acting in "The Wizard of Oz" this summer for Theatre Aspen.

ABJ: Which medium (stage, TV, film) do you enjoy most?

DL: Theater, without a doubt, is the most exciting and collaborative medium to perform.

ABJ: Were you a ham as a kid? Did you get your start on stage as a child in local productions, go to college for theater, etc.?

DL: I earned both a BFA (CU Boulder) and MFA (UC San Diego) from professional actor training programs. I perform with the Crystal Palace Players and I also teach and coach actors.

ABJ: What advice would you give young, aspiring actors?

DL: In pretty much all acting programs you hear the same speech before you ever start an acting program. "if there is another career that you want to do in addition to acting ... do it." In Derek Jeeter's biography, he says he always knew what he wanted to do since he was a kid and worked constantly to achieve that dream. If you know with all your being you want to be an actor, get the best training you can, learn how to market and sell yourself, learn how to network, and keep contact with everyone you meet in the industry. Above all, be prepared for the long haul and have a side career to bring you income while you are waiting for your acting career to blossom.

"Annie" opens July 7 and runs through August 20. Opening day for "Becky's New Car" is June 24; the show runs through July 23. "Vices: A Love Story" opens July 28 and runs through August 20.

Tickets are available at the Wheeler Opera House. For show schedules and ticket information, visit www.theatraspen.org, or call the Wheeler at (970) 920-5770.

Comments in chronological order

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Posted by Box *Aspen, CO*

June 12, 2011 7:33 pm

What an incredible group of actors. Have you heard Julia Foran sing? there will not be a dry eye in the house!!

Posted by anatra *Aspen, CO*

June 12, 2011 7:02 pm

Fantastic! What a great story. As always, will be so excited to see locals performing in Aspen's own professional theater. Sounds like a wonderful season!