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FREE

Andrea  
McArdle  
stars in

**Blood  
Brothers**  
at TheatreZone

NAPLES ■ FORT MYERS ■ CAPE CORAL ■ PORT CHARLOTTE

# TheatreZone: Blood Brothers on Naples stage

## Tomorrow for Andrea McArdle - Broadway life after Annie

Broadway actress Andrea McArdle, who you may remember as the original Annie, takes on new professional territory. Her next role challenges her in a new way as she brings to life a multi-layered and deeply conflicted lead character in the musical Blood Brothers this month at TheatreZone in Naples.

"I'm at a crossroads to reinvent myself," she said. McArdle reflected that much of the theatre world has known her as one thing her whole life, as the young heroine of Annie. Certainly it launched her career to new heights and became what people associated with her success. Directors easily imagined and cast her as the young ingénue in future roles. "My specialty was the girl next door," McArdle said. "But when you wear that crown, sometimes you have to go away for awhile." She said.

McArdle says her Blood Brothers character is more unsavory than previous roles she's played. "I'm ready for harder, more multilayered and complex roles," she professed. "It's different when you've learned so well how to be liked by the audience. Audiences have to love to hate you in some roles, but I love [playing] those characters the best," McArdle said.

McArdle, who is in her late 40s now, feels that the parts for women over age 50 include some of the best roles. Some of her favorites over the years have been bold, complex characters, including Sally Bowles in



### KatTayls: The Arts in Focus

Kathleen  
Taylor

Cabaret. "That role belonged to Liza, but I really made it my own," she said. She also enjoyed flipping the script on her childhood claim to fame, playing the harsh Ms. Hannigan in a regional production of Annie.

Now, Mrs. Johnston in Blood Brothers looks to become a new favorite. "You get – immediately in the first five minutes – their plight in life. My character finds out she's having twins and her husband leaves her. Her rich employer talks her into giving her one of the babies, and then the lady fires her. She becomes destitute, and the plot unfolds," McArdle described.

### Coming to Naples

She calls Blood Brothers the Fantasticks for the current generation, given its popularity and longevity off-Broadway and in London, where it is still running. Blood Brothers enjoyed a two-year run on Broadway and was nominated for seven Tony Awards. It also won the Theatre World Award. Artistic director of TheatreZone Mark Danni says she was a natural choice for the lead. "Andrea's dramatic acting and versatile voice are perfect for this particular role," Danni said. "From a director's viewpoint, Andrea is marvelous to work with because she is a very quick study and has a great memory. She has a big voice with great range."

McArdle and Danni have known each other in the business for several years. They met in McArdle's hometown of Philadelphia on the national tour of Les Miserables. He was an assistant conductor and percussionist in the orchestra, and she was starring as Fantine, which she did for a year and a half before picking up the role of Eponine for a few months.

She praises what Danni has started in Naples. She's worked with him a couple of times before at TheatreZone, including as Eva Peron in TheatreZone's 2008 production of Evita, which performed to sold out audiences. In 2009, she performed Broadway and classic pop tunes in "You Don't Know Me" at the G&L

Theatre, TheatreZone's home stage. Danni accompanied her band on the drums while maintaining a friendly commentary and waxing nostalgically about Broadway lost treasures with McArdle throughout the performance. McArdle is again excited by the adventure of mounting a show here.

She says Naples reminds her of early Miami, commenting on the sweetness of the community. She's a sailor, and she loves to visit from her New York City home and sail around the Gulf waters. She often brings her 93-year-old grandmother with her. On the road trips she enjoys learning the family secrets. "My grandmother is part-Elaine Stritch and part-Anne Bancroft, and in perfect health; we have a lot of fun on our adventures!"

### Getting her start

McArdle got into acting through participating in gymnastics, at a local Police Athletic League.

A manager came in to the practice and announced that they needed a gymnast for a Cheerios commercial. McArdle begged her parents to take her. They went, but producers wanted to sign her brother instead. Still, it was a positive experience for her because she got to go into a different commercial audition, which led to other jobs and opportunities in commercials. She starred in 50 commercial in two years. "I got one part because I looked like the mother," McArdle remembered. She was gaining skills that would eventually help her get cast in Annie. It was 1977 when she learned about her big break opportunity.



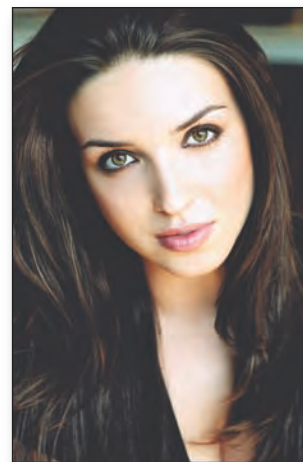
Andrea McArdle is Broadway's original Annie.

During my lunch hour at CBS when she was 12 years old, McArdle read about the casting call for a musical production called Annie, based on the popular Harold Gray comic strip "Little Orphan Annie." It would be honed to eventually go to Broadway. McArdle was the first child on the audition, she remembers, and producers cast her almost right away as the toughest orphan, but not as Annie. "They weren't considering me initially because I didn't have red hair." When producers decided to make a character change with Annie instead being the toughest orphan with the biggest voice, McArdle with her big voice was a natural choice, red hair or not. "At time, I had long hair; they had to cut it and dye it red." Annie would be the final big Broadway musical that would not use microphone amplification for actors. They had foot microphones near the front of the



### ON THE COVER

Andrea McArdle



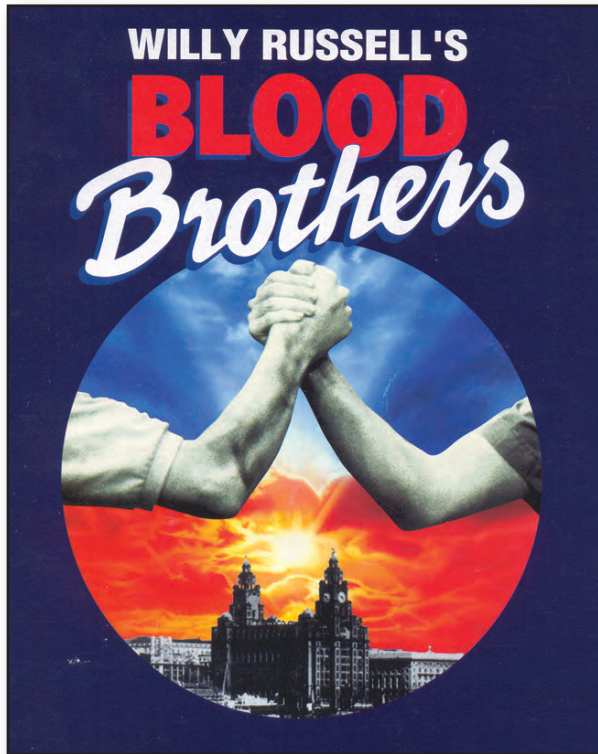
Alexis Kalehoff is the daughter of Andrea McArdle and is cast in the TheatreZone production of Blood Brothers.

stage, but McArdle could belt strongly enough so that even people in the back of the theatre could understand.

"The director asked me on a

Sunday if I wanted the role. On Tuesday I opened." McArdle learned quickly how complex a Broadway-bound musical production could be. "We would have 14 pages a day of rewrites [that we'd need to memorize and perform for the show that night]." The cast and crew spent an entire summer changing and adjusting Annie in workshop before taking it to New York City, and it was well worth the time. Through her performance in Annie, McArdle became the youngest performer ever to be nominated for a Tony Award as Best Lead Actress in a Musical. She also received the Theater World and Outer Critics' Circle Awards for her performance.

McArdle became a star right at the end of Broadway's hay day, surrounded by super stars such as James Earl



Jones, Frank Sinatra, John Travolta, Ethel Merman and more. "I was so young, but it felt normal." I thought I knew what a big deal it was, but I really had no idea. It felt very organic and natural," she said.

**Connecting past to the future**

McArdle lived in London for eight months while performing Annie on the West End. "I fell in love with the British mind, accent, high class, low class." The exposure may help her in current role as well. As the conflicted moth-

er in Blood Brothers, McArdle will not only speak with a Liverpool accent, but she's committed to blending the accent into her singing pronunciation as well. She describes the accent as tough to learn quickly, but it's a pet peeve of hers when she hears actors speak in character, then break out of it when they sing. "It can't just go away. Particularly, I'm making sure to pick words that I've said earlier in the show to keep the dialect," she said.

As an extra treat for audiences, McArdle's daughter, Alexis Kalehoff, plays the role of Linda, who is the love interest of both brothers. Andrea and Alexis get to sing together on a song at the end of the show. "When we sing together, our voices are so similar. Her voice sounds like me when I was younger." McArdle says that in the course of the musical, they also each sing the same melodies with different lyrics; she recounted listening to her daughter in rehearsal, wondering if someone had recorded her earlier rehearsal. "It's so cool to see that."

**TheatreZone performs in the G&L Theatre on the campus of the Community School of Naples, 13275 Livingston Rd., Naples.**

**Blood Brothers runs for 10 performances March 10-20. For more information or to purchase tickets, call TheatreZone at 1-888-ZONE-FLA, 1-888-966-3352 or purchase online at [www.theatrezone-florida.com](http://www.theatrezone-florida.com).**



**Andrea McArdle stars in TheatreZone's Blood Brothers March 10-20.**

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