



Show Report

Footlights Tameside

Annie JR.
Rooster Cast

17 July 2026

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

PRODUCTION	Annie JR. – Rooster Cast
SOCIETY	Footlights Tameside
VENUE	Hyde Festival Theatre
GENRE	Musical
CAST SIZE	34
DIRECTOR	Josh Fyson
MUSICAL DIRECTOR	Joanie Edge
LEAD CHOREOGRAPHER	Hannah Lees
LIGHTING & SOUND	Ste Oliver-Grant & Daniel Oliver-Grant
BACKSTAGE CREW	Caitlyn Spurgeon, Aimee Bone, James Bradshaw, James Bradbury Erin Bradbury, Niamh Edge
CHAPERONES	Clara Selberg, Lady Sue Bradbury, Jayne Webber, Nicola Haughton, Karen Matthews, Tony George, Nicola Mulryan, Sally Morgan, Susan Beddows, Diane Laurent, Elliot Eve, Katie Costello & Hayley Waugh
COSTUMES	Tameside Youth Drama Group, Showstoppers, Sparks Dramatic Society & Drama Department
PROPERTIES	TYDG and Showstoppers, Sean From Stage Squad, Conor Hanvey Of Tameside College and Ace Entertainment Ltd
FRONT OF HOUSE	Hyde Festival Theatre Volunteers
TICKET SALES	Sparks EM
FILMING	Mike Berry
PHOTOGRAPHY	David Lee
REHEARSAL SPACE	Holden Clough

CAST LIST

Annie	Evangeline K
Miss Hannigan	Stevie Gee
Grace	Bethany Dawson
Warbucks	Keilan Gee
Molly	Lydia Waugh
Duffy	Daisy-Rain Shackleton
Kate	Millie Jackson
Rooster	Sydney Brown

Lily	Aoife Etchells
July	Erica Cheetham
Tessie	Caoimhe Griffin-Marsland
Pepper	Faith Lee
Sandy	Megan Roberts
Apple Seller	Marco Farrugia-Bellamy
Star-To-Be	Jessica Collins
Bert Healey	Archer Haughton
President FDR	Riley Turner
Dogcatcher	Maria Todorova
Willow	Jessica Beddows
Florence	Holly Cropper
Margaret	Holly Laurent
Dorothy	Mila McNamara
Juliet	Harper Walsh
Orphan	Liya Jones
Mrs Pugh	Leah Griffiths
Drake	Elijah Mehmood-McHugh
Bundles	Madison Rowbotham
Officer Ward	Patrick Holness
Mrs Greer	Bria Etchells
Annette	Aleyna Whettam
Boylan Sister	Allison Burke

ENSEMBLE

	Robyn C Jessica T Abella W
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DATE OF PERFORMANCE	Friday 17th July 2026
DATE REPORT PUBLISHED	Saturday 18th July 2026
ADJUDICATOR ID	NSA0003

NSA LOGO ON POSTER	Yes
NSA IN PROGRAMME	No
PROGRAMME CLASS	Best Licenced Design

THE REVIEW

REVIEW WORD COUNT

2595

STRONGEST ELEMENTS

Mischief, mayhem and memorable performances

- The orphan ensemble brought some of the strongest characterisation of the evening. Their playful sibling dynamic, infectious energy and commitment to their individual characters made every scene they appeared in a joy to watch, with *It's the Hard Knock Life* proving to be a particular standout.

A strong vision brought to life

- Despite working with a cast of 34 young performers, the production made effective use of a minimal set, allowing the action to remain the focus. The lighting, particularly during *NYC*, helped define the different locations and added excitement to key moments, while Sandy the puppet was a charming addition, skilfully operated to create a believable and engaging character.

Learning skills beyond the spotlight

- The decision to dual-cast many of the principal roles was a fantastic way of giving more young performers the opportunity to experience leading roles. It also introduced them to the skills required of swings, understudies and alternates in professional theatre, helping to prepare them for future opportunities in the industry.

It's the weekend, which can only mean one thing – another trip to **Hyde Festival Theatre**. This time, we were there to see **Annie Jr.**, presented by **Footlights Tameside**. Although this was my first time seeing Footlights perform, I was already familiar with their reputation for providing inclusive, energetic classes and creating a nurturing environment where young people can grow in confidence through acting, singing and dancing. It was great to finally see some of their students take to the stage and needless to say, I was looking forward to seeing what they had to offer. With performers ranging in age from six to sixteen, it's important to remember that productions like this are as much about giving young people the opportunity to learn, grow and build confidence as they are about entertaining an audience.

Before I even talk about the show itself, I can't bang on enough about how warm and welcoming everyone at Hyde Festival Theatre is. From the friendly volunteers in the box office to the welcoming atmosphere throughout the venue, it always feels like a comfortable place to spend an afternoon or evening. It's one of those theatres where you're made to feel at home the

moment you walk through the doors, so I settled into my seat excited to see what the evening had in store.

With a cast of 34 young performers (the **Rooster** cast), staging everyone comfortably was always going to be a challenge. Because of that, I think opting for a more minimal set was a sensible decision, allowing the performers plenty of space to move while keeping the focus on the action. As the curtains opened, we were transported to the orphanage, complete with a set of triple bunk beds that doubled as an effective climbing frame and performance space. I also liked the addition of the moving wall, which cleverly transformed into Miss Hannigan's office. A single desk was used throughout, serving both the orphanage and Mr Warbucks' office.

One area that could be refined was the scene changes. They occasionally felt a little noisy and drew attention away from the story. I always think the best transitions are the ones the audience hardly notices. The stage crew wore black tops, but the sparkly lettering on the back, along with white socks and trainers, caught the stage lights and made them more noticeable than intended. A possible solution for future productions would be to incorporate some of the scene changes into the action itself. For example, when the Christmas tree was brought into the Warbucks mansion, this could easily have been carried on by performers playing the household staff. Not only would this have kept the world of the show intact, but it would also have made the transition feel like part of the story rather than a pause between scenes.

The lighting design, provided by **Sparks Theatre Management** worked particularly well in helping to define the different settings despite the minimal set. Simple changes in colour and intensity transported the audience between the orphanage and the Warbucks mansion. I particularly enjoyed the vibrant use of colour during NYC, which added to the excitement and spectacle of the number. There were a handful of occasions where the lighting didn't quite land as intended. At times, areas of the stage were illuminated before performers had reached them, while elsewhere some performers found themselves briefly in darkness. Whether these were the result of missed performer cues or slight mistiming in the lighting operation, they're the sort of small refinements that will continue to elevate the overall polish of the production. The sound design, again provided by Sparks Theatre Management, also supported the production well. There were one or two moments where microphone issues and the overall sound balance made dialogue a little difficult to pick out, but these were only minor blips in an otherwise smooth technical performance.

It was clear there was a strong vision for how to stage such a large company. Managing a cast of 34 performers is no easy task, and for the majority of the production, the stage pictures were well balanced, with performers used effectively throughout. As with any youth production, there were naturally a few missed lines and cues, but that's all part of live theatre. As the cast continue to gain experience, encouraging them to support one another when those little moments happen will help keep the story flowing naturally. Occasionally a missed line resulted in a brief silence or a few panicked expressions which immediately alerted the audience that something had gone awry. Helping each other while remaining in character would keep the story flowing naturally. The only point where I felt the pacing dipped was right at the beginning, the curtains opened, the overture began, and we spent several minutes watching the orphans carrying out their daily chores, scrubbing floors, making beds and rearranging blankets. The

concept itself worked well in establishing life at the orphanage, but trimming this sequence slightly or introducing a little more variety in the action would help draw the audience into the story more quickly and create a stronger opening.

The choreography was well suited to the mixed abilities of the cast and ensured everyone could take part with confidence. There were, however, a few moments where it felt as though two different routines were happening on opposite sides of the stage. Whether this was intentional or not, it occasionally made the ensemble feel divided rather than working as one. For future productions, it might be worth looking at ways of blending the choreography more seamlessly across the whole stage. Even if different groups are performing different movements, tying them together visually can help create the impression of one cohesive ensemble rather than separate sections. What I particularly enjoyed was the characterisation within the choreography. Rather than simply performing the steps, many of the cast used the dances to tell the story, bringing personality and emotion to their movements. It's those little details that help bring a production to life.

No review of Annie Jr would be complete without mentioning the music as the storytelling through song is just as important as the dialogue. As one of the most recognisable musicals of all time, many audience members arrive already knowing and loving the score, so there's an added expectation when those iconic songs begin. For me, the ensemble singing was probably the strongest aspect of the production. The cast knew their lyrics well, and there were some lovely moments of layered harmonies that were a pleasure to listen to. A great deal of work had clearly gone into preparing the company, and that hard work certainly paid off. One area to continue developing for future productions would be combining the singing with the choreography during rehearsals as much as possible. There were a few moments where the volume dipped slightly as the movement became more demanding (something that even experienced performers can find challenging), however, this never distracted from the enjoyment of the performance and is simply one of those skills that develops with experience.

Before highlighting some individual performances, it would be remiss of me not to mention that many of the older members of the cast were taking on dual roles across the two casts. It's a creative way of ensuring more young performers could play principal characters, although I can only imagine how complicated the rehearsal process must have been. What impressed me most was how seamlessly everyone appeared to switch between their different roles. At no point did anyone look unsure of where they needed to be or what they were doing, which is a real testament to both the cast and the production team. Learning to cover multiple tracks is an invaluable skill and one that mirrors professional theatre, where swings, understudies and alternates are essential to keeping productions running smoothly. Experiences like this not only give young performers more opportunities on stage but also equip them with skills that will serve them well should they pursue theatre in the future.

Our Annie for the evening was **Evangeline K**, taking on her first major role, and what a role to be entrusted with. She demonstrated a strong grasp of her dialogue and worked well with all her scene partners throughout the show. Evangeline brought a sweet and endearing quality to the character, making her instantly likeable. Personally, I would have liked to see a little more of

Annie's scrappy, streetwise edge in places, but that is very much an interpretation choice. Nevertheless, her performance was lovely to watch, and she should be incredibly proud of what she achieved in such a demanding role.

Oliver Warbucks was played by **Keilan G**, who brought confidence and authority to the role. He carried himself well on stage and moved with purpose, making it easy to believe he was the wealthy businessman at the heart of the story. As the show progressed, it was nice to see the softer, more caring side of Warbucks begin to emerge, allowing the audience to see his relationship with Annie develop naturally. Keilan gave a confident performance and should be pleased with what he achieved. **Bethany G** portrayed Grace Farrell with warmth, kindness and elegance. From her first appearance, she established Grace as a caring and compassionate presence, providing a lovely contrast to some of the larger personalities around her. Her characterisation was consistent throughout, and she carried herself with a poise that suited the role perfectly. Bethany successfully conveyed the maternal qualities that make Grace such an important figure in Annie's journey, creating a believable and engaging performance.

Miss Hannigan was played by **Stevie G**, bringing to life the gin-soaked caretaker who resents both her job and the children in her care. Stevie clearly relished every moment of the role, throwing herself wholeheartedly into the character's larger-than-life personality. I particularly enjoyed her exaggerated staggering and physical comedy, which generated plenty of laughs from the audience. One thing to encourage for future performances would be stage positioning, as there were a few moments where facial expressions were lost from certain areas of the auditorium. However, there was certainly no missing her blood-curdling scream, which is still ringing in my ears! Stevie delivered some fantastic comedic moments and looked completely at home in the role.

The comedic villains of the story, Rooster and Lily, were played by **Sydney B** and **Aoife E**. The pair worked well together and had an enjoyable on-stage chemistry, making them believable partners in crime. Sydney made excellent use of facial expressions throughout, adding plenty of character and humour to their performance, while Aoife fully embraced Lily's ditzy personality, creating a fun contrast between the two. One point to keep in mind for future performances is stage positioning. There were several moments where both performers were angled away from the audience, meaning some of their expressions and reactions were lost. Turning out just a little more would allow the whole audience to appreciate the character work that was clearly going on.

There were also plenty of opportunities for other cast members to shine in some of the smaller featured roles. **Riley T** confidently took on the role of President Roosevelt, delivering his dialogue clearly and making the most of his time on stage. Although his stage positioning meant some of his performance was obscured from parts of the audience, he showed good confidence and composure throughout. **Archer H** embraced the role of radio presenter Bert Healy with confidence and charisma, capturing the flavour of a classic New York broadcaster through his snappy, punchy delivery and plenty of swagger. His energetic performance brought a real sense of occasion to the scene. **Jessica C** (Star-to-Be), **Madi R** (Bundles) and **Elijah M** (Drake) also made the most of their stage time, each contributing positively to the scenes they were involved in.

The orphans (**Lydia W**, **Daisy-Rain S**, **Faith L**, **Caoimhe G**, **Erica C**, **Jessica B**, **Holly C**, **Holly L**, **Mila M** and **Harper W**) were a delight to watch and, for me, brought some of the strongest characterisation in the production. The time spent developing individual personalities was evident, with each child bringing something different to the stage. At times they genuinely felt like a family, capturing the playful sibling dynamics through their mischievous antics, little squabbles and interactions with one another. Their enjoyment of performing was absolutely infectious, and that energy spread throughout the auditorium. *It's the Hard Knock Life* was a particular highlight, delivered with enthusiasm, commitment and plenty of personality. There were a few moments where that excitement got the better of the vocals and the singing became a little shouty, but that's something that naturally develops as young performers learn to balance energy with vocal technique. Importantly, it never took away from the enjoyment of the number. A special mention goes to Lydia W, whose characterisation particularly caught my eye, although every one of the orphans played their part in creating a believable and entertaining ensemble.

The wider ensemble also deserves recognition. The full company numbers were great fun to watch, with lots of glimpses of thoughtful character work throughout. It was particularly pleasing to see so many performers reacting to the action around them rather than simply waiting for their next line or piece of choreography. Two performers who especially caught my eye in this respect were **Marco F** and **Robyn C**. Even when they weren't the focus of the scene, they remained completely immersed in their characters, continuing to react naturally to everything happening around them. It's a skill that can often go unnoticed, but it makes a real difference to the overall quality of a production. Those little moments of reactive acting help create a much more believable world on stage.

A performance of *Annie* wouldn't be complete without Sandy, and I was delighted when a sandy-coloured puppet made its first appearance. Created by **Adrian Roberts** and skilfully operated by **Megan R**, Sandy quickly became a charming addition to the production. Puppeteering is far more challenging than it often appears, relying on the performer to create the illusion of breath, focus and weight so that an inanimate object feels alive. Megan made some lovely choices throughout, giving Sandy a curious and playful personality that drew plenty of smiles from the audience. As her confidence with the puppet continues to grow, those small details and movements will become even more natural, but this was already an enjoyable performance and a lovely addition to the show.

Productions like this are a reminder of exactly why youth theatre is so important. Theatre is, by its very nature, ephemeral; each performance exists only in that moment, never to be recreated in exactly the same way. While there are always little areas that can be refined, they should never overshadow the confidence, commitment and enthusiasm shown by these young performers. From the principals to the ensemble, it was evident just how much hard work had gone into bringing *Annie Jr.* to the stage.

Congratulations must go to everyone involved – on stage, backstage and within the creative team – for bringing *Annie Jr.* to life. While there are always little refinements that can be made,

they should never overshadow the confidence, commitment and enthusiasm shown by every member of the company. Footlights Tameside is clearly providing a supportive environment where young people can develop their skills, grow in confidence and discover a love of performing. Thank you all for your wonderful hospitality, and I wish you every success for the remainder of your run. I look forward to seeing what Footlights Tameside produces next.

PHOTOGRAPHS







PROGRAMME

