



Delaney Westfall, who plays Pearl in *Starlight Express*, applies makeup before a show at the Tuacahn Amphitheatre.

LIFE ON STAGE

Reward of performance makes profession's uncertainty worthwhile

By Lisa Larson

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When Laura Taylor steps on stage in the role of Millie Dillmount, the small-town girl who comes to New York in 1922 hoping to realize her dreams in Tuacahn's production of "Thoroughly Modern Millie," it's not a far stretch from the life Taylor actually leads.

"I'm really just a girl from Tennessee," the New York-based actress said. "I love New York (but) I feel like for me New York is access to my dream, not the dream itself."

In Millie's case, the dream is not to become an actress, but to free herself by biting into modern life and women's liberation. For Taylor, the dream is to be an actress, regardless of the challenges such a life can bring.

"There is definitely an element of uncertainty in our profession," Taylor said.

Uncertainty that includes a near-constant need to look for work, moving from city to city and making the dearest of friends, only to leave them behind after a few months.

For example, last year Taylor attended more than 100 auditions in four months, knowing her ef-



Delaney Westfall, who plays the role of Pearl, signs an autograph for a fan after a performance of *Starlight Express* at the Tuacahn Amphitheatre. PHOTOS BY TREVOR CHRISTENSEN / THE SPECTRUM & DAILY NEWS

forts might only lead to booking one or two shows. For her, the key is to stay focused on the few things you can control in the business: being prepared, being on time and doing your best with the material.

"A lot of people worry about other people's best," Taylor said. "That's a really difficult mindset to get in. It's not one that's going to enable you to get up and do this (every day)."

Life on the stage is certainly not the life for everyone, but it is a life that makes Gail Bennett, who plays the title role in Tuacahn's "Mary Poppins" sublimely happy.

Growing up, Bennett always thought she was going to be an attorney. Then, when she was 16, she took part in a production of "West Side Story" and she realized it was what she wanted to do with her life.

After studying for a year at the University of Miami, Bennett took time off to serve a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and then continued her schooling at Brigham Young University, where she met her future husband, who is also an actor. While they were dating, he played the title role in Tuacahn's production of "Peter Pan." Bennett said she remembers being extremely jealous watching him fly over the red rocks of Tuacahn. Seven years later, she's the one doing the flying as *Mary Poppins*.

Even if you're not the actor flying above Tuacahn's outdoor stage, landing a contract with a regional theater like Tuacahn is a "unique gig" and one Taylor and many of her castmates are extremely grateful to have.

"It lends us stability for six months, which is kind of amazing," she said.

Not only that, but participating in three very different shows in repertory fashion allows the actors the opportunity to stretch themselves in a variety of ways.

"I came out here to do 'Millie' but I'm also learning to use Heelies and rollerskate and also learn

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