



Michael Davis / Courtesy of Syracuse

JACQUELINE BAUM (right) plays Helen, and Anna O'Donoghue is Annie Sullivan, in the Syracuse Stage production of "The Miracle Worker," which opens Friday and runs through April

WATERSHED MOMENT IN THE MIRACLE WORKER

YOUNG ACTRESS TACKLES ROLE OF HELEN KELLER IN SYRACUSE STAGE DEBUT

By **Diep Tran**
Contributing writer

For any actor, playing a real person, on stage or on screen, can be a challenge. For Jacqueline Baum, it is magnified. She is only 11 years old and about to portray a real-life figure who was blind and deaf.

Jacqueline will play Helen Keller in "The Miracle Worker" at Syracuse Stage, which opens Friday. With her Stage performance, she is making her theatrical debut.

Yet Jacqueline, who lives in Fayetteville, remains composed.

"It's such a good first role because you get to do things you normally can't do," says Jacqueline. "It's really fun to be crazy and do a bunch of things, like wreck some rooms and run around."

She plays 7-year-old Helen in the William Gibson play about the first months with her teacher Annie Sullivan. Helen lost her sight and hearing at 19 months.

Sullivan taught Helen sign language. Eventually, Helen also learned to speak. Helen would later become an author, social activist and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Playing opposite Jacqueline is Anna O'Donoghue as Sullivan. The casting of O'Donoghue, who has acted on Broadway in Tom Stoppard's "Rock'n' Roll," hinged on size.

"I was on hold for it because they needed to find out whether they were going to have a huge Helen," she says. "There's a highly physical relationship (between Helen and Annie as they frequently scuffle). And I'm not the biggest person in the world, so if they had cast a mature, 13-year-old, I would have been in trouble."

Luckily for O'Donoghue, Jacqueline is a petite middle school student who has impressed the cast.

Jacqueline "is extraordinary in that she is a very, very precocious and mature and kind of a brilliant 11-year-old," says O'Donoghue. "She's a 25-year-old in an 11-year-old body, and the 11-year-old body happens to be three-quarter-sized. We lucked out."

EXHIBITIONS TO ACCOMPANY STAGE SHOW

Syracuse Stage will present two exhibitions in its lobbies in conjunction with "The Miracle Worker."

■ "Reflections of the Miracle Worker in Central New York History" is a group of photos and other archival materials produced by the Onondaga Historical Association. It examines some of the region's educational institutions for students who are visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing.

■ "Know Me — The WHOLE ME" is a video installation filmed and produced by Ellen Blalock, who is also a Post-Standard videographer and photographer. It features Whole Me, an after-school program for deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

THE DETAILS

What: "The Miracle Worker" by William Gibson.

When: Friday through April

Where: Syracuse Stage, 820 E. Genesee St.

Tickets: \$16 to \$48. Call 443-3275 or go to www.syracusestage.org.

Also: A signed performance for the deaf and hearing-impaired will be presented p.m. April 2, an open-caption performance will be held 2 p.m. April 17 and 20. An audio-described performance scheduled at 7 p.m. April 9.