

DAILY NEWS

EDITED
BY
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K I D S

The start of something big

They're tiny and cute and they strut around the stage singing about agents and Broadway—lines like "I wanna be in 'Aaaaannie....'" They can hold a microphone as easily as if it were a glass of chocolate milk, and their voices project like Liza Minnelli-ettes. But Peter Sklar, the creative director, composer and something like the den father for "Beginnings," a musical showcase for children, insists they are just kids. "I don't have them acting like sexy 18-year-olds. The kids just play themselves," he says.

Still, these are not ordinary children. Alison Smith, the latest star of "Annie," is cooler than Clint Eastwood on the stage and she's only 9. All of the kids have been in commercials, in "Peter Pan" or "Annie" (on Broadway, of course), in performing arts camps or with the First All-Children's Theatre.

Nine or 10 performers crowd the stage at Something Different, the neonated dessert place that houses the showcase. They wear yellow sweatshirts and Bonjour jeans and sing the "Beginnings" theme song: "You're gonna grow. You'll be a has-been at 14 years old...." Then they each sing solos. Stacey Lynn Brass, who plays "Duffy" in "Annie," got up one night and belted out "Rubber Ducky" like a vamp. Gina St. Nichols, a

little thing with pigtails and a whiny, nasal voice, had to be lifted onto her stool by Sklar, and soulful Sabrina Frank practically outdid Connie Francissinging "Where the Boys Are."

After the 6 o'clock show, Jonathan (Michael in "Peter Pan") Ward is rushed through the crowded restaurant by his mother who guides him into a cab headed for Times Square and an 8 p.m. curtain. Would-be stage mothers look on with envy from the audience as their own offspring slurp ice-cream sodas or spoon cream puffs.

Peter Sklar is not unconcerned with parental pressure. In fact, he has created a discussion group for kids "in the business." They talk about problems and pressures; tapes of these talks will become part of the script for the kid-style "Chorus Line" he's plotting.

Sklar says anyone between from age 7 to 17 can audition for his showcase, but he gets most of the kids through agents. Until Dec. 22, shows are Saturdays and Sundays from 6 to 7 p.m.; from Dec. 22 to Jan. 4, there will be "Beginnings" Christmas shows every night. There is a \$4 minimum. Call 249-1480 for information about auditions. Call 570-6666 for showtime reservations. Something Different is at 1488 First Ave. near 77th St.

—Jan Cherubin

