

Triple Threat: The Three Sisters of the Shuck Family Take the Stage Across the Country

By Whitney Spaner

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Raleigh Shuck

Playbill.com talked with young performers Raleigh, Brooklyn and Sydney Shuck and their mother Angie about their life-changing decision to move to New York, sibling rivalry and the girls' love of being onstage.

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Parents often need to be in several places at once: a school choir concert, a PTA meeting, a baseball game... But what is a parent to do when they have one child starring on Broadway at the same time that another is performing in Oklahoma City and yet another is on stage in Pittsburg? As Angie Shuck, the mother of three very talented singing, dancing and acting young girls says, "you make it work." She is currently on tour with her eight-year-old Raleigh who is starring as the sweet Cindy Lou Who in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*; while her husband T.G. Shuck is home in New York with their nine-year-old Brooklyn, one of four lucky young ladies chosen to take over the role of the girl wonder in *Matilda the Musical*; and a family friend is accompanying their oldest, the 11-year-old Sydney, as she travels the country playing the shy orphan Kate in *Annie*.

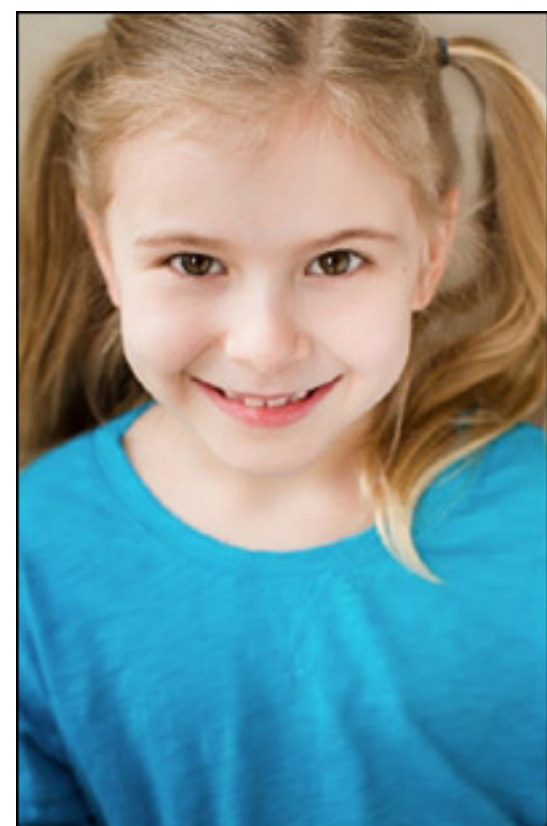
"Some kids do gymnastics, some kids do karate or play soccer — this is just what my kids do," says Angie on the phone from Oklahoma City, the second stop on the *Grinch* national tour. "We're lucky enough that when they're not touring, they go to public school in New York City, so they have a somewhat normal life."

Nothing in these past few years, however, has been all that normal for the Shucks. It all started when Sydney saw her first school play in their hometown of Lexington, KY. "I was like, I need to be up there. I need to be performing in that show," remembers Sydney on the phone from the *Annie* tour bus. Angie started taking the then six-year-old Sydney to voice lessons with a woman they knew from church. "We'd go to her house and she'd play the piano and just let Sydney sing, but it wasn't really vocal training," says Angie. So they decided to enroll the ambitious young girl in the Academy for Creative Excellence, a "triple threat" training program at the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre.

While Sydney was focused on the stage, her younger sister Brooklyn was becoming a star on the soccer field. "Brooklyn was our little athlete," says Angie. "She was really good at soccer, and we thought that was her path." But with three young children and her husband working long hours as the chief meteorologist for WKTV, Angie didn't have time for many activities at once, so she made a deal with Brooklyn and Sydney. The girls would both play soccer six months of the year for Brooklyn and the other six months they would take theatre lessons for Sydney. As a result, the girls ended up auditioning together for a production of *Seussical Jr.* at the University of Kentucky. When Angie went to pick them up from the audition, she saw both of her daughters up at the callback table, and her heart sank. "All I could think was, 'Poor Brooklyn, she's followed Sydney to the callback table thinking she got one too,'" says Angie. "She thinks she can do anything her sister can do — that's just her mentality.

"I was thinking, "How am I going to break it to this little girl that she didn't really get a callback?" When the girls

excitedly told their mom the news, Angie was in disbelief. "I went up to the music director and I said, 'I'm really concerned because Brooklyn thinks she got a callback.' The music director looked at me and said, 'Have you ever heard her sing?' I said, 'No,' and she just laughed and turned around and walked away."



Brooklyn Shuck

After they were double cast in the role of the Baby Kangaroo, the two eldest Shuck sisters were hooked. T.G. and Angie decided they would put their own lives on the back burner to help their daughters pursue their dreams — flying back and forth to New York for open-call auditions and training.

A year later Brooklyn was cast as a standby in the Broadway production of *Annie*, and Angie found herself with 11 days to move to New York with her tiny blonde "belter." "It was a whirlwind to say the least," laughs Angie. "Brooklyn and I went to the city first and then when school was out Sydney and Raleigh joined us. We wanted to give living in New York City a year to make sure we really wanted to be there, because it was quite a change from Lexington, Kentucky. During that year, my husband flew back and forth about once a month to see us, and then we decided we wanted to make the move." They sold their house and T.G., who had previously resigned from WKTV to spend more time with his family, transferred to New York with his new job at an insurance company. "We didn't want to make it a quick move without knowing that the girls would have opportunities and be happy living in the city," explains Angie. "It turned out to be the best decision for our family."

Once they began to call Manhattan home, Angie brought Raleigh to see Sydney and Brooklyn's agent Nancy Carson, who signed the adorable redhead right away. "I really wanted to be an actor like my sisters," says Raleigh, "so I asked my mom and she said, 'Yes,' so I'm an actor now, and I like it." At first Angie — whose only theatre experience was a small community production of *Annie* — was skeptical that all three of her daughters could be blessed with the same talent. "I remember saying to Raleigh's vocal coach, 'Be honest, can she sing or can't she? Because if she can't, I'm okay with it,' and she said, 'She has the exact same gift that the other two do.' I was like, 'Okay that's amazing.'"

This kind of natural ability and passion in one family would have made Mama Rose choke on her egg roll. But instead of pushing her girls to succeed, Angie follows their lead. "The girls have this inner confidence that I never had and that I don't really understand. When they go into an audition room they just know what to do. They know to be professional and give their very best effort," explains Angie. "I feel like my job is just to make sure they're prepared and that they get to the audition. They take care of the rest themselves."

The family's hard work and sacrifice paid off this fall when all three girls became gainfully employed. "The fact that they are all having this opportunity at the same time takes the competitiveness out of it a little bit," says Angie. "They're very close and supportive of each other, but there are times like when the youngest two, who are the same size, have auditioned for the same roles. Before going in we always talk to them about what it means if one of them gets it and the other doesn't. It's really not a reflection on them personally, it's just what that particular casting director or creative team is looking for at the moment."

When Brooklyn was the first one to get cast professionally, Angie was worried that sibling rivalry would overshadow the exciting moment. "It was a little bit hard especially for my oldest, Sydney, who started this," says Angie, "Although she wasn't involved in the [*Annie*] casting process at the time, I just wasn't sure how she would take it, but when Brooklyn got the phone call, Sydney squealed as loudly as Brooklyn. She wasn't like, 'I wish I'd gotten it over you.' She was just happy for her sister."

Brooklyn reciprocates the sisterly love, explaining that although she was happy to be cast in a Broadway show, it's even better now that all of her sisters are living their dream. "I think that it's great being the first [sister on Broadway], but I think



we have the same amount of talent, so I am proud of all of us."

With this kind of maturity, it's easy to forget that the collective age of the Shuck girls is less than 30. But a quick tour of their social media outlets (all three have Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, although Brooklyn says Angie is helping her with her posts "until I get old enough to take it over"), where the girls can be seen looking for tadpoles in the park, making spaghetti tacos and having sleepovers with their friends, is a reminder that despite pulling in a regular paycheck the girls are not all grown up yet.

"They're still kids and they still get to do talent shows and field trips at school," says Angie. "but they're also getting this opportunity to tour the country." Sydney says she recently enjoyed going out to a Hawaiian restaurant during a stop in Fort Lauderdale ,and in Oklahoma City Angie took Raleigh to the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. "They're doing things that they wouldn't get to do otherwise," says Angie. "I feel like they're getting the best of both worlds."

The hardest part of the family's life-changing year is being separated for

Sydney Shuck Thanksgiving and Christmas but everyone will be back in New York by New Year's Eve. "The 28th is the last performance of the *Grinch*," says Angie, "so we'll do our Christmas a few days late. It's just a day. We can hold off so that we can do it together."

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