

Katie McClellan's Cincinnati Connection

By Connie Yeager

Katie McClellan, who grew up in Mount Washington and graduated from McNicholas High School in 2005, received her BFA in acting from the University of Miami (Fla.) Theatre Conservatory in 2009. Now based in New York, she returns as daughter Annie Pazinski in *Over the Tavern*.

What led you to an acting career?

My parents, Lynn and Michael McClellan – both musicians and performers before starting a family – always required us to be involved in at least one athletic activity and one musical activity, so I wound up with a lot of dance classes and voice lessons, which started my appreciation for performing arts.

The first major influence is when my dad was roped into directing McNick's musical my freshman year, so he and my mom pretty much forced me to audition. I resisted, as I knew the musical wasn't exactly the coolest extracurricular activity, but I did it as a favor to my dad. I actually ended up enjoying the experience, and it prompted me to audition for the school play the following year, *You Can't Take It With You*, and was cast as the lead ingenue. This was an amazing experience, and gave me such confidence and sparked such a desire to explore more theatre that I went on to do every play and musical that I could in high school (and the musicals became a special thing for my dad and me every year). I was a runner-up in the Cincinnati Arts Association Overture Awards my junior year, which helped compel me into considering acting for college. I attended Carnegie Mellon's pre-college summer conservatory program and was hooked. The rigorousness of that summer fit me like a glove and fueled my passion for this profession even more – I knew I had the discipline to go through that kind of training, which felt so important if I wanted to pursue this crazy career.



You are performing your first Equity role at the Cincinnati Playhouse. Did you attend shows at the Playhouse, and what were your favorites?

Yes, this is my first Equity role, and I couldn't be more honored than to be experiencing it at two of the most respected regional theatres in the country, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis and Cincinnati Playhouse. I feel so unbelievably proud to be getting my Equity card by performing in my hometown.

We always went to see shows at the Playhouse when I was growing up. It started out as a yearly trip to see *A Christmas Carol* (when I met Celeste Ciulla in St. Louis, who plays the mother in our cast, I recognized her immediately from her years doing *A Christmas Carol* when I was a kid). It was something I looked forward to, and as I got older, we started seeing more and more productions – some of my favorites were *Company*, *Doubt* and *Metamorphoses*. I've been inspired by so many performances at this theatre. It holds such a special place in my heart, and I feel privileged for the opportunity to perform in it.

Are you excited to have friends and family in the Over the Tavern audience?

Yes, my family still lives here – my dad is a doctor in Hyde Park and music director at Bellarmine Chapel and Knox Presbyterian Church. My mom is a technology coordinator for Nielsen and plays in both music groups. My brothers Andy and Kevin are students at UC, and my older brother Dave is a musician in town. My mom's entire extended family lives here, and I'm so excited to have them here to see the show, along with all our family friends who have been so supportive.

What connection do you feel to your role as Annie Pazinski?

I feel several connections to Annie, the most prominent being that I also have three brothers, grew up acting like the oldest (even though I was second) and went to Catholic school. I always felt the responsibility to be the peacekeeper in the house – another Annie-like quality – and to never be the one stirring up trouble. As siblings, we had our share of fights and moody years; but all in all we are very close, and I feel blessed to have the family dynamic that we have. At Annie's age in the play, I was a freshman at McNicholas, so I was definitely having similar feelings of awkwardness and being a fish out of water. I was also fairly new to the Catholic school system, having gone to Sands Montessori for grade school.

It's been hard being away from my family and my life here the last five years for college and now living in New York, but I'm grateful to be back and able to do what I love in the place I came to love it.



Celeste Ciulla as Ellen and Katie McClellan as Annie in *Over the Tavern*. Photo by Jerry Naunheim, Jr.