

TOMMY

Is 6-year-old Mississauga girl Samantha Fletcher

She likes to sing and dance. She likes acting up and at the ripe old age of six she has just landed the role of a lifetime.

Meadowvale's Samantha Fletcher is going to be the young Tommy in the much talked about stage production of rock legend Pete Townshend and The Who.

The gritty, highly acclaimed rock opera has become a tribute to the iconoclastic people and apocalyptic events of 1969. Its driving beats, intense drama and forceful choreography provide the backdrop to a heartrending story of Tommy.

Tommy was first released as a double album billed as a rock opera. The ground breaking album spawned a hugely successful cinematic release and, now, a theatrical production that promises a new-yet-faithful-to-its-roots show replete with classic songs like Pinball Wizard, I'm Free and See Me, Feel Me.

Already hugely successful on Broadway — it's still running strong after two years — the show brings to Toronto both Townshend and Des McAnuff who has been extensively decorated for his direction of the stage production that began at California's La Jolla playhouse.

And it was Townshend who helped hand pick the petite, gregarious six-year-old from Meadowvale.

Samantha has been singing and dancing since the tender age of three, emulating both of her parents and older siblings. Fletcher's mother Debora and father Paul as well sister Kelly are all regulars with Mississauga's Eleanor Calbes Voice Studio Productions.

Among their credits are roles in *The King And I* and *Oklahoma*.

Samantha is also a regular at the Dance Factory where she takes jazz, tap, ballet and acrobatic dancing as well as staging lessons.

It was through an advertisement the Fletchers became aware of auditions for the Toronto show.

"We saw the show (Tommy) when we were in New York and I knew Samantha could handle the role (of young Tommy)."

By Mark Holmes

In her first audition Samantha sang happy birthday and read a single line using an English accent. She was called back the next day this time sang the song See Me, Feel Me for Townshend.

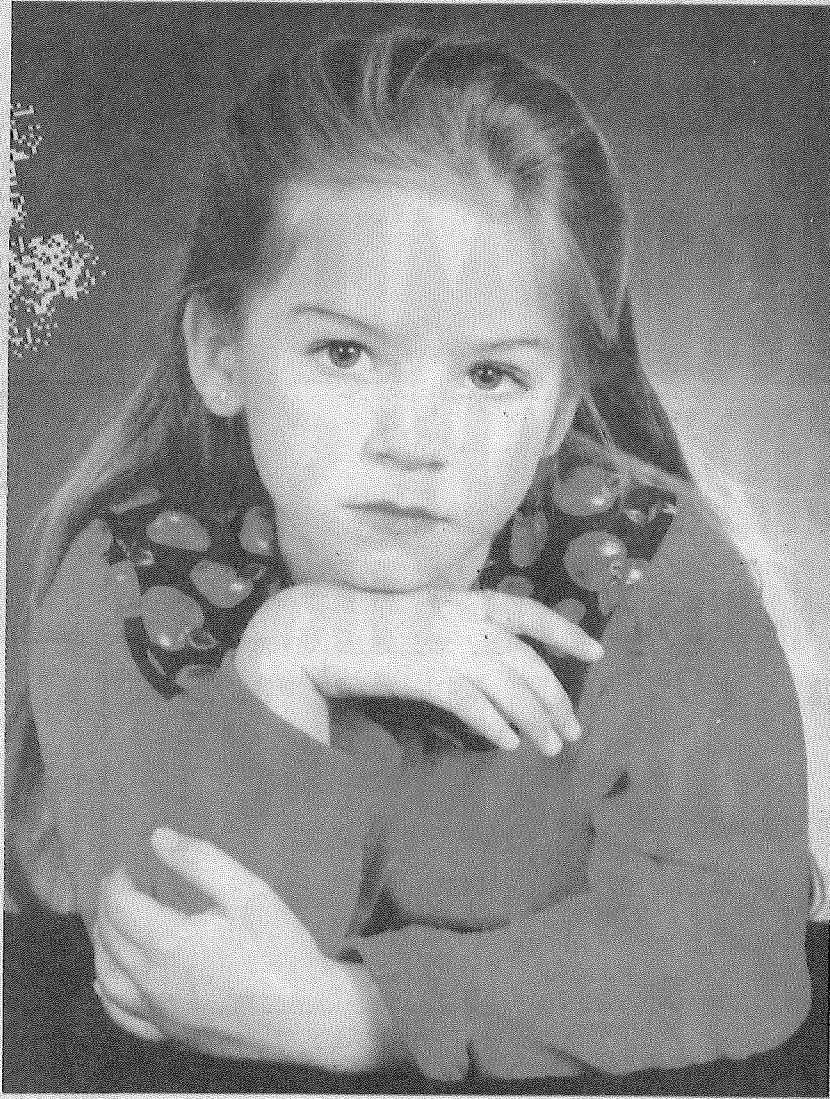
With the field of candidates narrowed to three boys and three girls, Samantha was called back for no less than four more auditions before she was given the coveted role.

Well over 2,000 hopefuls tried out for one of 31 roles in the show that premieres Feb. 20 and opens March 1 at the Elgin Theatre.

The only down side, according to Samantha, is that she'll have to get her waist length blond tresses cut and dyed black.

Otherwise she said, "I'm really excited. I can't wait."

The wait won't be as long last Tuesday marked her last day of classes in Grade 1 at Miller's Grove Public School.



For the next few weeks she'll be in rehearsals or with a tutor who'll help keeping up with her lessons. Her day is 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. six days a week for the next five weeks. After that she'll be doing shows nearly every day. She's under contract for the next year and she'll split duties portraying the young Tommy with one other young actress.

Publicist for the production, John Karstanatis said theatre goers can expect nothing less than a spectacular show. The Broadway production has drawn rave reviews from critics lauding the special effects. Karstanatis said virtually the same stage and effects are coming to Toronto. And he hinted there may be even more gimmicks that were planned but never built into the stage at New York's St. James Theatre.

Samantha isn't all that caught up in the special effects. She said she is just happy to doing what she likes best — singing and dancing.