

● REALLY BIG SHOW

'Eloise'

costarring Julie Andrews
as an English nanny, again

Julie Andrews (below) is practically perfect as Eloise's (Sofia Vassilieva, right) nanny.



By MICHAEL GILTZ

JULIE Andrews and Eloise — the headstrong fictional little girl whose antics as a resident of The Plaza Hotel on Fifth Avenue were chronicled in a series of children's books — have been linked by success for many years.

When Andrews was conquering Broadway in the legendary production of "My Fair Lady" in March of 1956, the original "Eloise" book, by Kay Thompson and illustrator Hilary Knight, had just hit shelves and was becoming a literary phenomenon.

Now they're joined forever in two TV movies. The first, "Eloise at the Plaza" airs tonight at 7 p.m. on ABC, while the second, "Eloise at Christmastime," which was filmed currently with the first movie, is planned to come out in December.

Andrews plays Nanny, the lovable, non-nonsense minder of Eloise, played by Sofia Vassilieva. Nanny who has a frightful time trying to teach the little girl manners but won't hear a word said against her by anyone else.

Jeffrey Tambor of "The Larry Sanders Show" plays the Plaza's beleaguered manager, Mr. Salomone, alongside Christine Baranski and Debra Monk.

"Because it was about the Plaza," Andrews recalls that the book "seemed to hit New York City very hard. It was very popular and sort of the 'in thing' to get."

Doubtless, Andrews never imagined she would win an Oscar playing a very prim and proper nanny in "Mary Poppins" a few years later, go on to write close to a dozen children's books and young adult

novels herself (starting in the early '70s with a book called "Mandy" and including the Dumpy the Dump Truck picture book bestsellers) and then play Eloise's nanny nearly 40 years later.

"The most important thing was trying to get the look of that wonderful stance of Nanny," laughs Andrews, who loved giving her a Cockney accent overlaid with more posh phrases while letting the old girl drink beer and watch fights on television.

"The illustrations [by Hilary Knight] are so good."

Andrews even unexpectedly sings a bit with Eloise at the beginning of the film, a delightful surprise for those still reeling

from the news that an operation gone wrong had diminished one of the most famous voices in the world. (The British tabloids have reported Andrews received a settlement of \$30 million from the allegedly delinquent doctor.)

"I don't really [sing]," says Andrews. "I just belt it out à la Nanny."

This is prime time for Andrews, in many ways. Her appearance at this year's Oscars was marked by one of the warmest standing ovations of the night. But Andrews isn't a twilight figure — she's as active as ever.

Last year's "The Princess Diaries" marked her biggest box-office hit in years and she voices the role of Mum in "Shrek 2."

And if you're wondering why someone with as rich a career as Andrews hasn't written her memoirs yet, you're not the only one.

"That's actually a taboo subject at the moment because I'm only about four to five years late on it," says Andrews. "With enormous patience and restraint, the publishers are saying, 'Okay.' And I fully intend to honor my commitment and I've done a great deal of work on it. It's just that a little thing called life keeps getting in the way."

ELOISE AT THE PLAZA
Sunday, 7 p.m., ABC



ANDREWS

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