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## Theatre in Park gears up for 'Les Miz'

By JOE HENDERSON

Special to The Star

Hundreds of performers as young as 7 years old are expected to audition next weekend for Theatre in the Park musicals, including a school version of "Les Miserables" directed by an Olathe South teacher.

The play is a late substitution for "Willy Wonka," which the theater's new executive producer, Tim Bair, said would have been too expensive to produce.

"Although the change was made primarily because of cost, I believe it's a change our audiences will enjoy," said Bair, who was named to his position in December. "And it's especially exciting for an age group that doesn't often have an opportunity to go for roles this substantial and challenging."

Organizers expect more than 700 people to audition for roles in Theatre in the Park's 2011 season on March 26 and 27. To be considered for a role, performers must commit to a six-week rehearsal schedule in addition to production dates.

The school edition of "Les Miserables" runs about two hours instead of three. Roles are reserved for actors who won't be older than 19 years old during the show's run, June 24-26 and June 30-July 3.

"Les Miserables," will be directed by David Tate Hastings, drama teacher at Olathe South High School. Hastings has been associated with Theatre in the Park as a performer and director for more than 20 years. He directed "Gypsy" there in 2005 and his musicals at Olathe South have been nominated for Starlight Theatre Blue Star Awards.

"I'm excited to be directing 'Les Miserables.' It's one of my all-time favorite musicals and I think one of the best ever written," Hastings said. "I'm also excited to be working with school age performers I typically teach at South."

"I originally wanted to direct 'Seussical' but when 'Les Miserables' was substituted for 'Willy Wonka' and I was asked if I would direct it, of course, I was delighted to change."

"Seussical," a musical adaptation of the Dr. Seuss books, is the season's final show. It will run July 22-24 and July 28-31, directed by Jim Shelton. Shelton works locally with the Christian Youth Theatre and directed "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" at the theatre in 2009. He has been a performer and director most of his life.

The 2011 season opener is "The Sound of Music," which runs June 10-12 and June 16-19, directed by Nathan Norcross. Norcross trained as an actor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and returned to Kansas City in 2006 to teach acting at the Coterie Theatre.

Also in the 2011 season is "Aida," a contemporary adaptation of Giuseppe Verdi's opera, directed by Greg Shaw, July 8-10 and July 14-17. Shaw lives in Pittsburg, Kan., and teaches speech and theater at Pittsburg High School. He won The Theatre's best director award last year for "All Shook Up."

"I'm very much looking forward to my first season as executive producer at the Theatre in the Park," said Bair, 49, who grew up in Kansas City, Kan., and graduated from Wyandotte High School and Graceland University in Iowa. His professional career includes work in New York City, Denver, Phoenix and San Jose, Calif., where he was artistic director of the American Musical Theatre.

He returned to the Kansas City area to succeed Melissa Wyckoff, who resigned last summer.

### How to audition

General vocal and dance auditions for The Theatre in the Park's 2011 season will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 26 and 27 at Blue Valley High School, 6001 W. 159th St., Stilwell. Performers also can mail a video

audition and resume to Theatre in the Park, Antioch Park Building A, 6501 Antioch Road, Merriam, KS 66202.

Cast lists will be posted at [www.theatreinthepark.org](http://www.theatreinthepark.org) on April 5.

For more information, go to [www.theatreinthepark.org](http://www.theatreinthepark.org) or call 913-236-1216.

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