

'Charlie Brown' bows at Theatre in the Park

By JOE HENDERSON
Special to The Star

Robert Hingula has put aside the razor he wielded as the Demon Barber of Fleet Street in "Sweeney Todd" to don Snoopy's flying helmet and goggles in "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown."

"Sweeney Todd is a more difficult role because of the emotional challenges it presents. Snoopy requires more energy because he's always on the move chasing the Red Baron," Hingula said with a laugh. "There's definitely a contrast in roles. I'm glad I did both this season."

"You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," the 2012 season finale, opened Friday at The Theatre in the Park in Shawnee Mission Park.

It's being directed by Tim Bair, the organization's producing artistic director, marking the first time an executive producer has personally directed a show at The Theatre in the Park.

"I think it's a good idea," said Jill Geller, superintendent of recreation with the Johnson County Parks and Recreation District, which sponsors The Theatre in the Park. "It gives Tim a different perspective. I don't know when or if it will

happen again. It depends on whether he has time to do it."

Bair said he is happy to get the chance to direct a production. He loves that the work keeps him in touch with actors and what's happening on the stage, but it's a challenge.

"It seems there's always something that demands my time, but that's life in the theater," he said.

This is the second time Bair has directed "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown." The first was when he was producing artistic director of the Millbrook Playhouse in Lock Haven, Pa. And Bair frequently directed shows when he was producing artistic director at the American Musical Theatre in San Jose, Calif. He moved to The Theatre in the Park in 2010.

In the local production, Charlie Brown is portrayed by An-

SHOWTIME

"You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" runs tonight and Sunday and again Thursday through Aug. 12. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m. For more information go to www.theatreinthepark.org or call 913-236-1237.

drew Schmidt, who moved to Kansas City from Columbus, Ohio, in March. It's his first show in the Kansas City area.

"I like playing Charlie Brown," Schmidt said. "I think there's a lot of Charlie Brown in all of us. He's sincere but gets flustered easily and most of the time doesn't think very highly of himself."

Schmidt said he moved to the Kansas City area because he there are more theater possibilities here than in Columbus. He graduated from Baldwin-Wallace University in Berea, Ohio, in 2007 with a degree in musical theater then spent two years in New York City.

Joella Wolnik of Overland Park, a junior at Wichita State University majoring in musical theater, plays Lucy, Charlie Brown's nemesis.

"I enjoy playing her because I'm usually cast as some innocent type. I get to play a bratty character in this show. It's fun," she said.

Matthew King of Leawood is Schroeder.

Sally is portrayed by Emily Vargo of Gardner. She's also a junior in musical theater at Wichita State University, where she and Wolnik will be roommates this fall. "I like playing Sally. She's very innocent and has a good sense of humor. It's interesting playing a 5-year-old."

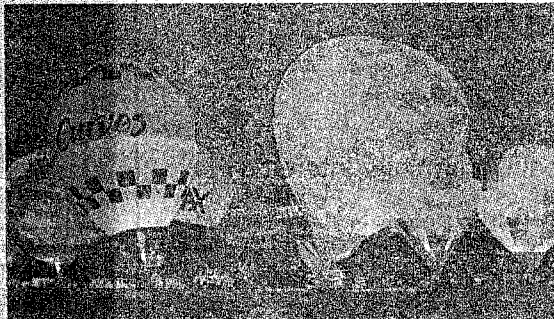
This is Vargo's third show at The Theatre. She was in "Annie" in 2010 and "Seussical" last summer.

Brant Stacy of Overland Park, a graduate of the University of Kansas, plays Linus.

"It takes some doing to play a kid at my age," he said.

This is his fourth show at The Theatre. He has performed in "42nd Street," "The Wedding Singer" and "All Shook Up."

COMMUNITY



Look, up in the sky: Is that a hot-air balloon or perhaps the Red Baron? It all depends on whether you are at the second annual Great Midwest Balloon Fest, coming to Olathe, left, (PAGE 3) or at The Theatre in the Park, where "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" features the gang from "Peanuts," including Snoopy himself. (PAGE 4)