



TODD FEEBACK | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Ten-year-old Catherine Stagner of Overland Park faced the judges in her singing audition for Theatre in the Park.

Auditions set the stage for Theatre in the Park season

By JOE HENDERSON
Special to The Star

Tom O'Rourke, 71, has been auditioning at The Theatre in the Park nearly every year since 1996, when his daughters, Julie and Laura, talked him into making theater a family affair.

"Since then, the three of us and Jan, my wife, who is the accompanist for rehearsals and plays piano with the pit orchestras at The Theatre, have been in at least 50 area productions. We just enjoy show business," he said with a chuckle.

O'Rourke, who lives in Overland Park, was among the more than 600 hopefuls as young as 7 years old who participated in auditions held last weekend at the Jewish Community Center for the Theatre in the Park's 2012 season.

The auditions were conducted by this year's directors, who select casts for the season's five shows. Callbacks are being held today and cast lists for all shows will be posted at 9 a.m. Tuesday at www.theatreinthepark.org.

"There's probably only two shows, 'Sweeney Todd' and 'Urinetown,' for my age group, but

I'm not particular; I'll take anything," O'Rourke said.

O'Rourke admits to a "few butterflies" each time he auditions. "But there's usually a place for an adult male who can sing and act a little," he said.

Robin Christie, 48, a music teacher at Bishop Miege High School who auditioned for Mrs. Lovett in "Sweeney Todd," was "terribly nervous," she said. "I have confidence in myself but I was uneasy."

Some of her nervousness was from appearing before her peers — the directors and their staffs, who also are teachers, she said.

Emily Botts, 21, and her father, Sherman Botts, 57, both of Overland Park, have performed together in "Titanic, the Musical" and decided to audition again this year because, Sherman said, "It's fun to be onstage together."

Emily is majoring in voice at UMKC. "I hope to make opera singing my career. And no, I'm not nervous," she added.

Michael Raftery, 27, who moved to Grandview this year from Oklahoma City, where he'd

been active in community theater, was disappointed in his audition. "I didn't do very well. I wasn't prepared when they called me, so I just put on my game face and hurried in."

A majority of the auditioners were youngsters hoping for roles in the Disney double feature "Jungle Book" and "Sleeping Beauty" directed by Tammy Ruder. "I was looking especially at 13- to 17-years-olds with younger ones for the ensembles. It's going to be difficult to select casts of only 35 for each show from so many talented kids."

Twins Ryan and Kellen Hulla, 7, students at Lakewood Elementary School in Overland Park, auditioned for the first time. Both said they were "a little nervous at first" but got over it by the time they finished. They were followed by their sister, Katie, 10, who thought the judges were nice.

Their 12-year-old brother, Brendan, who has been in three shows at The Theatre, smiled at their reactions. It didn't bother him at all, he said.

The summer season opens June 8 with "Sweeney Todd."