

ENTERTAINMENT

Theatre in the Park plans fresh 2012 season

FAST FACTS

- The 2012 Theatre in the Park season:
- June 8-10 and 14-17, Sweeney Todd
 - June 22-24 and June 28-July 1, Sweet Charity
 - July 6-8 and 12-15, Disney Double Feature including Disney's The Jungle Book and Disney's Sleeping Beauty
 - July 20-22 and 26-29, Urinetown
 - Aug. 3-5 and 9-12, You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown

ed in August with "Seussical." On average, about 1,200 to 1,500 people came each evening during the four-production season. Attendance was, however, hindered a bit by the weather.

"Sound of Music" performances were interrupted by thunderstorms. Other shows ran in the middle of a heat wave.

"Once the heat index gets over 100, people don't want to go outside," Bair said.

But a few changes also helped boost the experience, he said. A new online ticketing system was used by about half of Theatre in the Park audiences. Instead of an on-stage presence, the pit orchestra was covered and off-stage during several performances.

"In the professional world it is typical," Bair said. "It was a change for us."

Set designs were moved downstage to help increase sightlines for members of the audience.

"There wasn't a blade of grass in our seating area that could not see what we were doing on stage," Bair said.

With the 2012 productions announced, Theatre in the Park will change the process for hiring directors. Instead of a sit-down interview, Bair said he will choose directors after viewing their work.

"It's one thing to 'talk' about how someone might direct..." he said. "It's another thing to see the fruits of their labor."

Auditions will begin for the 2012 season in late winter or early spring.

"I think we have a number of shows that have really great roles for actors," he said.

Directors interested in working at the park for any season can contact Tim Bair at tim.bair@jocogov.org.

KRISTIN DABCOCK

STAFF WRITER

Next season, The Theatre in the Park at Shawnee Mission Park will do its best to shake a reputation of being "recycle" theater, said Producing Artistic Director **Tim Bair**.

Since starting work for the theater in November, Bair said he's been asked too many times what show the park will present yet again next season.

"It made me cringe the tiniest bit," he said.

So, for the 2012 season, the theater will present four shows never before seen at the park. A fifth show, "Sweet Charity," will be presented for the first time in 33 years.

The success of the 2011 season, which included "contemporary" shows including "Les Miserables" and "AIDA," indicated there is a "hunger" for shows other than "big, old-fashioned" musical theater, Bair said.

"We really have something for everyone in the 2012 season," he said.

The newest show in the 2012 season is the musical "Urinetown." The comedy received three Tony Awards in 2002. In the musical theater world "it's old news," but it will be presented at the theater for the first time, reaching new audiences, he said.

In an attempt to reach out to new demographics, the theater will open the season with "Sweeney Todd," the **Stephen Sondheim** musical about a murderous barber. The show, according to a press release from the theater, is rated R.

"Sometimes adults want to go out and just not have the kids in tow," Bair said. "We want to go to a nice dinner and have some wine and then go see something that stimulates our mind beyond cartoon characters or flying confetti in the air."

While family shows are often successful for the theater, presenting a more broad selection of theater is in line with The Theatre in the Park's mission statement, Bair said. The statement includes a charge to provide a variety of entertainment.

"The days of four, giant kid shows - I don't think we're living our mission statement if we go down that road," he said.

The 2011 season concluded



MEMBERS of the company of 'Seussical' perform in the 2011 season at Shawnee Mission Theatre in the Park. Next season there will be four shows performed that have never been seen at the park.