

Dr. Seuss attracts an animated cast

By **JOE HENDERSON**

Special to The Olathe News

Kirk Koczanowski likes playing The Cat in the Hat in the musical production "Seussical" because "the Cat keeps the show moving and he's zany and goofy like I am."

"Anyone who knows me will tell you I'm that way, zany and goofy," Koczanowski, 20, said with a laugh. "That's me!"

"The Cat continually changes emotions. One moment he's happy, then sad, but always goofy," he said. "That's what I love about him. He's the epitome of a Seuss character."

"Seussical," the musical adaptation of Dr. Seuss children's books, opens Friday at The Theatre in the Park and is the final production of the 2011 season. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m.

Koczanowski of Overland Park is a graduate of Blue Valley Northwest. He's now a sophomore at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, majoring in theater. This is his first Theatre in the Park appearance.

"Like most kids, I read Dr. Seuss books when I was in elementary school and now I'm playing The Cat in the Hat. It's an awesome experience. "When I auditioned, I just wanted to be in the show and then I get my favorite role. That's really cool," he said.

Director Jim Shelton says, "Kirk has more energy than anyone I've ever seen. He's ideal for the Cat in the Hat." This is the second show Shelton has directed at Theatre in the Park since he moved to Overland Park. He directed "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" in 2009.

Shelton said "Seussical" is the type of show he enjoys directing. "It's fun for everyone — kids, teenagers and adults. We've revamped it a little and come up with a fresh approach. We have a cast of 50 and everyone is involved. It's a rare show, funny, silly with laughter throughout, and the music is unbelievable."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Kirk Koczanowski plays The Cat in the Hat in "Seussical."

Britney McLeod, 23, is Gertrude McFuzz, whose love interest is Horton the Elephant. "I hoped to be Gertrude when I auditioned, but I would've taken anything. I just wanted to be in the show."

"I like Gertrude because she's fun. I'm having a blast playing her. She can be sweet and good and also she can get angry...like I enjoy doing," said McLeod, who graduated last year from Kansas State University, where she majored in theater. This is her first Theatre in the Park show.

Horton the Elephant is played by Matthew King of Leawood, 22, a graduate of

The details

"Seussical" runs Friday, Saturday and Sunday and again July 28-31 in The Theatre in the Park, 7710 Renner Road in Shawnee Mission Park. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m. Call 913-236-1237 or go to www.theatreinthepark.org.

Lee's Summit North High School. "Seussical" is his Theatre in the Park debut. He was in shows in high school and he was in "Rent" at The Barn Players.

"I like playing Horton. He's very stable, kind of warm and fuzzy. He never has a problem with anyone and everyone likes him. When I was reading the Seuss books as a kid he was my favorite character. Now I'm playing him," King said.

Mike Sampson has been performing at The Theatre in the Park since 1990 and won a Demi Award for best supporting actor for his portrayal of Benjamin Franklin in "1776," his favorite show. He's playing Yertle the Turtle in "Seussical."

"It's a generational flip-flop for me, totally different. Actually, it's pretty exciting. I'm having a blast," said Sampson, who lives in Lenexa.

Mayzie LaBird is portrayed by Jessica Alcorn, 20, a graduate of Olathe East High School who lives in Shawnee and is making her 13th appearance at Theatre in the Park. Her first show was "Evita" when she was 9. This is the third time she's performed in "Seussical."

"Mayzie is one of my favorite characters," she said. "She's a free spirit, not afraid to take risks. She's also a diva, which makes it fun to play. I love it."