

Community

Summer season gets off to a 'demonic' start

By JOE HENDERSON
Special to The Star

This season Robert Hingula goes from a fiendish murderer in "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street," Theatre in the Park's opener, to lovable Snoopy in "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," the finale.

How's that for contrast? He'll step before the audience in Shawnee Mission Park with 8:30 p.m. shows next weekend that begin Friday and run again June 14-17.

"I've always wanted to do a Stephen Sondheim show," Hingula said. "Sweeney Todd is one of the few real horror musicals — a story of lost love, revenge and tragedy. It's a complex role, the most difficult I've ever done.

"Snoopy, on the other hand, is an iconic cartoon character. It's a great role, a lot of fun. I wanted to do it because there's nothing greater than hearing kids laugh. It's a high-energy show. Anytime you're playing a cartoon character you have to maintain a high level of energy."

"Sweeney Todd" is Hingula's seventh show at Theatre in the Park. "It's the first time I've played a really bad guy, although I was kind of a villain in 'Aida,'" he said.

THE 2012 SEASON

"Sweeney Todd" runs June 8-10 and 14-17; "Legally Blonde," June 22-24 and June 28-July 1; Disney's "Sleeping Beauty" and "The Jungle Book," July 6-8 and 12-15; "Urinetown," July 20-22 and 26-29; "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," Aug. 3-5 and 9-12.

Ticket prices are \$8 for adults, \$6 for children 4-10, and children 3 and under are free. Tickets for Thursday performances are 20 percent off at the box office the day of the show.

Curtain time is 8:30 p.m. all productions. Gates open 7:20 p.m.

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he said.

Victor Castillo plays Turpin, who sends Todd to prison. The actor says it's a fun role in his favorite show.

"He does get to sing some marvelous songs, but he certainly is a nasty one," Castillo said.

Castillo's wife, Teddi Castillo, is in the women's ensemble in the show. They live in Independence.

Pam Sollars of Kansas City, plays Mrs. Lovett, Todd's lover and partner in crime.

An Oklahoma native, Sollars made her first appearance in Kansas City in 1985 at the old Waldo Astoria dinner theatre.

"I fell in love with the city. I decided I wanted to put down roots there," she said. After a professional career that took her to New York City, Miami and cruise ships, she and her family did just that.

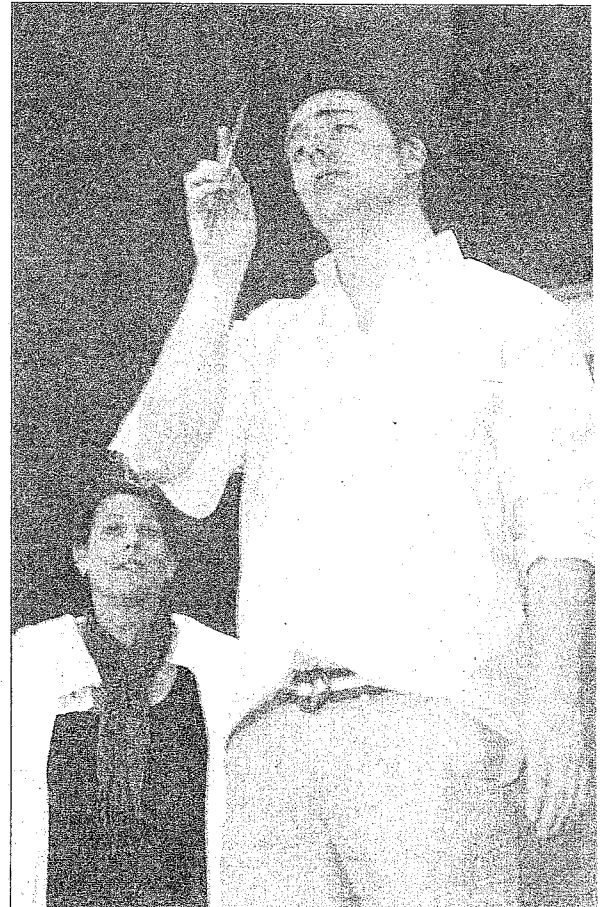
"Mrs. Lovett brings humor and a sense of vulnerability to the plot," Sollars said. "She is motivated to commit the grisly acts she does through her love for Todd."

Tim Bair, in his second year as the theater's producing artistic director, is enthusiastic about the 2012 season.

"We're stepping a little outside the box by reaching out to a much broader audience than might be typically thought of for The Theatre in the Park," he said. "We're presenting six shows this season that have never been seen before on our stage."

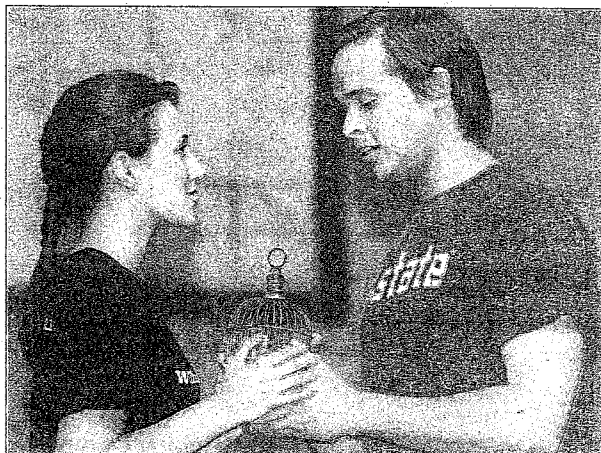
The theater also is modifying its rainout policy. In past years rain checks were not issued unless the show was terminated in the first act. "I believe anyone who buys a ticket should get to see the entire show. So if there is a weather interruption any time during the show viewers get a rain check," Bair said.

The theater is offering "thrifty Thursdays" this year with 20 percent off tickets purchased at the box office and used the same Thursday evening.



PHOTOS BY SUSAN PFANNMULLER | SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Robert Hingula (right) as Sweeney Todd and Pam Sollars as Mrs. Lovett rehearsed recently for the Theatre in the Park production of "Sweeney Todd."



Taylor Harvey as Johanna and Adam McAdoo as Anthony.



Pam Sollars plays Mrs. Lovett in the upcoming Theatre in the Park production of "Sweeney Todd."