

# Father and son share the stage in 'Urinetown'

By JOE HENDERSON  
Special to The Olathe News

It took some maneuvering, an agreement between directors and the right timing for a Grandview dad, Christopher Geil, and his son, Eric, to perform together in the same show.

Eric has the leading role of Bobby Strong, and his father plays Senator Fipp in "Urinetown," a satirical musical comedy about a drought-stricken community where private toilets are banned and people must pay exorbitant prices to the one company that controls all the public ones.

The show opened Friday at The Theatre in the Park in Johnson County.

The collaboration almost didn't happen.

Eric, 20, a sophomore at the prestigious Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, auditioned by videotape because he couldn't be at The Theatre's auditions in March.

"We were so busy with live auditions we almost overlooked the videotaped auditions that came in earlier in the month,"

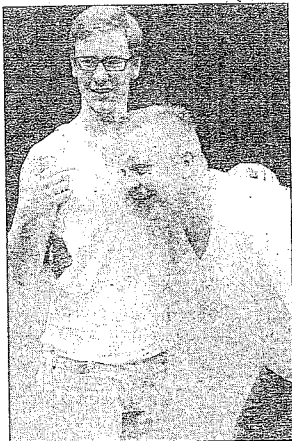


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THEATRE IN THE PARK |

**A father-son team, Christopher (right) and Eric Geil, perform together the next two weekends in a Johnson County production of "Urinetown."**

said David Hastings, director of "Urinetown."

"When I watched the tape and realized how talented Eric is — he has a phenomenal voice — I immediately wanted him

## The details

"Urinetown" runs through Sunday and July 26-29 at The Theatre in the Park in Shawnee. Mission Park, 7710 Renner Road in Shawnee. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m.

For more information go to [www.theatreinthepark.org](http://www.theatreinthepark.org) or call 913-236-1237.

for Bobby," Hastings said.

Meanwhile, Christopher Geil, a longtime fan of the music in "Sweeney Todd," tried to land a part in that show, the 2012 season opener at The Theatre in the Park. He was selected for the ensemble by "Sweeney Todd" director Mark Swezey.

Turns out Hastings, director of theater at Olathe South High School, also wanted Christopher.

"He has a good voice and I thought was a good fit for Senator Fipp in 'Urinetown,'" Hastings said. "I told him Eric was going to play Bobby and asked if

he'd like to be in 'Urinetown,' too. Of course, he did."

The directors conversed and decided the elder Geil could be in both shows.

"I'm grateful it worked out like it did. It was very important to me to be in a show with my son. It's the first time we've been in the same show. It's really great. We go over the script together, talk about how the show's going. It's an opportunity that's not likely to come along again," Christopher said.

"So I had the pleasure of singing in 'Sweeney Todd' and I'm playing Senator Fipp, a crooked politician, in 'Urinetown' with Eric. I've always thought I was a good person so it's a nice change to play a weasel. The last time I was a bad guy was 25 years ago when I was at Truman State and played a lecherous old man."

The Geil family moved to Grandview from Nashville in 2006 when Christopher was hired as special education coordinator at Grandview High School. "I was a songwriter and vocalist and played the keyboard and guitar in Nashville," he said.

Eric relishes being in a show with his dad.

"We have a similar sense of humor. We have a good time together and we both like 'Urinetown.' It's fun for both of us."

"Bobby Strong is definitely the most hilarious role I've played," Eric said. "Bobby is naïve. He sees everything as positive, thinks everything will turn out okay, thinks he knows everything when actually he knows nothing, and he wants to lead a revolution against the bad guys. He's a real character."

Though he was homes-

chooled, Eric took 15 hours of voice training at Metropolitan Community College-Longview.

"I learned a lot there. I had a great teacher. I also had good directors during the four years I did shows at Christian Youth Theatre. Right now I'm more singer than dancer, but I hope to improve on that. My goal is to make musical theater my career," he said.

Alyssa Cooper, 20, Lee's Summit, is a graduate of Lee's Summit North High School and a junior at Southeast Missouri State majoring in musical theater. She portrays Hope Cladwell, who becomes Bobby's love interest.

"There's a little Romeo and Juliet in it," she said. "We fall in love while we're singing 'Follow Your Heart.'"

This is Cooper's fourth appearance at The Theatre in the Park. She also has performed at Starlight Theatre and Blue Springs City Theatre.

"I like being Hope. She's bubbly and energetic and very naïve. Kind of a girl next door type. She's just returned home after graduating from the Most Expensive University in the World and falls for Bobby," Cooper said.

Their romance is complicated because Hope's father is Caldwell B. Cladwell, the greedy CEO of the Urine Good Company, played by Eric Magnus, of Roeland Park. Cladwell's company controls the town's public toilets.

Little Sally, a precocious, thoroughly irreverent, but very intelligent street urchin who continually outsmarts the police, is played by Jennifer Cannady of Leawood. Kipp Simmons, Kansas City, Kan., portrays Officer Lockstock.

## Seeking a different kind of roll

Bob Hamilton Plumbing, Heating and A/C is sponsoring "Urinetown" and teaming with The Theatre in the Park in asking patrons to bring a four-pack of toilet paper to be donated to Giving the Basics, a non-profit organization, and distributed to needy families.

"This is the first time The Theatre in the Park has joined with a sponsor in asking patrons to make a donation," said Jill Geller, superintendent of recreation with the Johnson County Parks and Recreation District. "This seems like a good connection with the show 'Urinetown' and we're always happy to assist the needy."

The donations may be left at the Bob Hamilton table at The Theatre.