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Foothill relaunches live theater with a ‘Good’ musical



The cast of Foothill College's "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" rides the school bus. The musical runs through Aug. 1 at Foothill's Smithwick Theatre. (Photo by David Allen)

By [JOANNE ENGELHARDT](#) | For The Daily News

PUBLISHED: July 27, 2021 at 7:01 a.m. | UPDATED: July 28, 2021 at 3:25 a.m.



Foothill College's "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" is just what the doctor ordered for a theater-starved public. It's a frothy, whimsical and pastel-filled 90 minutes of cuteness, bubbly musical numbers and Lucy-fueled crabbiness delivered by a half dozen winsome actors.

Actor Max Mahle is innocence personified, playing good old Charlie Brown with a wide-eyed expression of joy and wonder. Though his vocal talents are a shade thin, he brings out the audience's compassion as he sits all alone at lunchtime eating his peanut butter sandwich and announcing, "Peanut butter sandwiches are for lonely people."

The audience pulls for him when he keeps hoping that the little red-haired girl will look over at him and smile. And everyone knows he doesn't have a glimmer of a chance to ever be called "Flash," though he wishes mightily.

Director Milissa Carey has wisely chosen a cast that seems perfectly in tune with the quirky characters that Charles Schultz first started drawing in 1950 in his comic strip "Peanuts."

It wasn't until 1967 that this show made its off-Broadway debut, where it ran for more than 1,500 performances. Though it didn't fare well on Broadway, it's since been performed all over the world and had an acclaimed revival on Broadway in 1999. Kristin Chenoweth won a Tony playing Sally, Charlie's little sister, in that production.

At Foothill, a tiny mite named Danielle Mendoza plays Sally, channeling Chenoweth in voice, mannerisms and attitude. While Mendoza does an excellent job, it might have been nice if she had put her own personal stamp on her performance rather than just cloning the Broadway actress.

Melissa Momboisse as Lucy Van Pelt is a force to be reckoned with. Attitude? Check. Sassiness? Check. Bossiness? Double check! Momboisse boasts a strong, clear voice to boot. In short, she's everything a Lucy is supposed to be and more.

Both Dan Cardenas as Lucy's little brother Linus and Juan Castro as Schroeder are fine in their roles. Cardenas generated several laughs while wielding Linus's signature blue blanket, and it was hilarious watching Castro play a piano that was likely only five or six inches above the floor.

That leaves Snoopy, Charlie Brown's beloved beagle, played here with a perfect blend of 'tude, slyness, innocence and delight by Bri Bramanti.

Whether scrambling up the back side of Snoopy's red doghouse, lying languidly atop it or sniffing around for food or other doggy smells, Bramanti is close to perfection.



There is a slew of songs in this show—15 to be exact—so a small orchestra is a prerequisite. Here, music director Dolores Duran-Cefalu and musicians Dana Bauer, Emily Chiet, Russ Gold and Danny Min bring Clark Gesner and Andrew Lippa's musical score to life.

Five stars go to the two costume designers for the show, Julie Engelbrecht and Lisa Rozman, because it's the perky, bright dresses worn by Lucy, Sally and the ensemble that shout "Happiness" at every turn. Bright primary colors, in fact, are everywhere in "Charlie Brown," from the long drapes on both sides of the stage to the bright yellow school bus and Charlie's signature yellow shirt.

Engelbrecht also is credited as the scenic and properties designer, with Jomar Martinez handling choreography and Andrew Heller running sound (extra credit for spot-on sound effects).

The one problem on opening night was that Lily McLeod's lighting was all over the place, sometimes leaving the entire stage in darkness during a song and several times missing the spot where an actor was singing.

You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown is quite simply a feel-good, fast-paced musical performed without an intermission. The show runs through Sunday, Aug. 1 at Smithwick Theatre at Foothill College, 12345 El Monte Road, Los Altos Hills. COVID-19 protocols are in place for seating, and masks are required.

Tickets are \$10-\$40 at 650-949-7360 or www.foothill.edu/theatre.

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