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Brown is the insecure boy who owns a somewhat intellectual dog Snoopy, has a domineering friend Lucy, and an unrequited crush on a Little Red-Haired Girl. Lucy's younger brother Linus goes through life clutching his security blanket while singing about it in songs like "My Blanket and Me." Lucy wants to be treated like a queen and pines for an aloof musician Schroeder, who, in turn, has a "reverential mission" — he wants to dedicate a day to Beethoven, "the newest face on Mount Rushmore," but insists it mustn't be too commercialized.

Far from being stereotypes, the characters survived the decades, in part, because of Schultz's brilliance in layering nuance into their comic but pithy dialogue. (Many U.S. newspapers continued to rerun his strips years after his death in 2000.)

The musical was devised in the 1960s and ran for four years Off-Broadway with a cast of a half-dozen adult actors. After it became a TV cartoon, it became a staple in the high school drama repertoire, featuring a chorus that could be expanded to allow more student involvement. A 1999 Broadway version, which won the Drama Desk Award for best revival of a musical and Tony Awards for two featured actors, boosted its visibility.

The characters fly kites, play baseball and write book reports about Peter Rabbit in a series of episodic musical scenes, some completed in less time than it takes to read a comic-strip punchline. Lucy doles out advice from a bright yellow psychiatric advice booth for 5 cents. Snoopy lays on the roof of his doghouse dreaming he is a World War I flying ace chasing the Red Baron.

"It is very much a family musical," said Smith, who is a retired elementary school teacher. "It's done in a lot of high schools and community theater. It's kind of neat to have mature people playing these parts."

Mature has many definitions.

Just about all the cast members who gathered before an early rehearsal to share their stories admitted they are just "big kids." Some even bragged about it.

"I am kind of a kid and joke around a lot," said Scherrer, 55, a tall, bald fellow with a persistent goofy grin whose confident singing voice fills the theater. His performing talent developed with high school experience, swing choirs and singing as an adult with folk groups and in church. "I have sung all my life," added Scherrer, who had a long career in the grocery business.

His employer, John Adams, moved to Washington's Long Beach Peninsula in 1999 where he and his wife, Diana Thompson, operate Harmony SoapWorks, a business that creates and ships products as far away as Japan.

As director Smith's next-door neighbor on the northern Peninsula, Adams was inevitably lured in. "I started in the chorus, and I was



'YOU'RE A GOOD MAN, CHARLIE BROWN'

7 p.m. March 24, 25, 31, April 1, 7 and 8

2 p.m. March 26, April 2 and 9

River City Playhouse

127 Lake St., Ilwaco, Washington

There will be a champagne reception at 6:15 p.m. on opening night, March 24.

Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$10 for children 12 and under, and are available at Okies' Thriftway in Ocean Park, Washington, Stormin' Norman's in Long Beach, Washington, and Olde Towne Café in Ilwaco. Call 360-665-0028 for will-call tickets to be picked up at the theater. Tickets will be sold at the door, if available.

hooked," said Adams, who has played Merlin in "Camelot" and the much-sought-after role of the sadistic dentist in "Little Shop of Horrors." "It's a bit of a joke around here that my characters all get killed off."

Now 65, he is cast as Linus, complete with his go-everywhere security blanket. "He's kind of a philosopher with a little bit of a deeper meaning, although his older sister, Lucy, terrifies him," said Adams, one of two actors who shaved off their beards to play the kids' roles.

The cast and crew of "Charlie Brown" double as behind-the-scenes helpers and board members for the Peninsula Players. Scherrer plays the title role and has just been named the group's president; director Smith used to be in charge of membership recruitment and has just become vice president. Penny Bierly, who plays Pigpen, is the board secretary.

Another key leader, Melissa Goldberg, who plays the crabby Lucy, is serving as producer for the first time. She admits she is greatly aided by game plans provided by prior producers. A significant part of that duty involves coaxing other people, during visits to the senior center or elsewhere, to perform tasks like painting the

gold banner above the entrance is surrounded by photos and programs from past shows. It proclaims: "12th Anniversary: Peninsula Players Congratulations."

It's all amateur. Other than applause, the only paycheck is happiness — the title of the final song before the curtain call in "Charlie Brown." Scherrer, who sings parts of it, acknowledges many rewards from the time spent. "You get cast in the show, and it's a major commitment of time," he said. "For the musical, it's the worst time of year with the weather, but we are in the warm, with friends, all having a good time. Only two hours and we are done, and then we are looking forward to the next time."

Similarly, Rose Power savors her latest role as the tomboy Peppermint Patty. "I was painfully shy as a kid," she said, her English-New Zealand accent more pronounced with her excitement. "I thought I would rather have a root canal than appear on the stage. Then I got a small part in 'Annie Get Your Gun.' I found out I could pretend to be someone else. It's a lot of fun playing bad people, or scaring people, even vamping as a French maid — you become a whole different character."

When her husband, George, died five years ago, she discovered a new support system. "This is my new family — people on the coast I can have a good time with."

The animal characters are played by the cast's youngest two actors. Snoopy is Matthew Warner, an Ilwaco High School senior, and Woodstock, his bird pal, is played by 8-year-old Keith Clarson, whose mother, Ayu Clarson, plays Violet, an enthusiastic member of the chorus. Other actors are Kevin Perry as Schroeder, Bette Lu Krause as Charlie Brown's sister Sally, Russ Jones as Shermie and Joyce Jones as Marcie.

Warner embraces the opportunity that community theater offers for an older teenager to bond as equals with people who are considerably older than he is. "These actors have a child inside them — in fact, these people are more childlike than some of the people at my high school," he said.

He has appeared in "Camelot," one-act plays with the group, plus numerous school productions. He clearly has the acting bug and shows no surprise about being asked how he approaches the challenge of portraying such a famous canine. "I like dogs. It's kind of easy for me to play one. I bark a lot and sing," he said. "He is a lot more grown up than the children."

As the likable dog who wants to make mealtimes "a joyous occasion," Warner moves effortlessly across the stage during rehearsal, with Clarson fluttering behind him, both sets of eyes glued on Smith as she directs their actions.

Smith hopes the show will delight children, yet appeal to adult audiences, too. "There's a lot of adult humor in it. One line from the play is, 'The past has always interested people. . . . I don't know much about it. I wasn't here when it happened!'"

Bette Lu Krause playing Sally, center, dances and sings with others characters during a rehearsal.

brightly colored sets, organizing reader boards, or doing hair and makeup. "I am scavenging the neighborhood for help," she said.

The group is eager for new blood, onstage and off, and is looking for someone with mechanical skills — and available time — who can better maintain their building, which 10-year member, writer-director and publicist Joe Paliani, calls an "intimate, wonderful, tiny place." The genesis of the Peninsula Players followed a common story with community theater. Someone places a meeting invitation in a newspaper or newsletter inviting anyone interested in putting on a play. Those who show up become lifelong friends, creating a group that is refreshed with newcomers when careers or health issues cause some to move or lose interest.

Wilma Vardsveen wrote that notice, and the meeting was at the fire station in Ocean Park, Washington, in 2004; a talent show the following year was the impetus for a group to form. Momentum took hold.

Fast-forward 12 years, and the troupe appears to be thriving with a core of actors and directors, including a handful of original members. Several stalwarts joined in after attending the group's first few shows. Paliani even wrote his first play and learned to direct, a change of pace for the retired government investigator.

The players produce an annual season, including a musical, a murder mystery and a late-summer opportunity to showcase local one-act play-writing talent. Recent larger productions have included "Camelot," "Little Shop of Horrors" and "Mame."

After the annoyance of having to secure a location for each production, a home base was established in 2010 when the River City Arts and Crafts gave them the old American Legion hall, a blue building opposite the Ilwaco Post Office. The group has staged many shows since, some in partnership with Ocean Park Lutheran Church. The theater features a raised stage with a backstage area, a large room for the audience with space for serving refreshments, plus a raised mezzanine suitable for lights. A black and