

# Character Portrayal Strong in 'Good Man'

By DEVIN BROWN

## A Review

CHARLESTON — "You're A Good Man Charlie Brown" has remained one of the most popular musicals of the seventies.

It has been done in Charleston alone four times in the past five years. Eastern Illinois University Theatre's summer production of the show is one of the best versions I have seen.

Due to the play's great exposure, it has taken on the aspect of a modern classic. The character traits of Charlie

Brown, Snoopy, Linus, and Lucy are as familiar to modern theatergoers as those of much older dramatic figures like Hamlet and MacBeth.

The plot, or narrative, of this modern classic has become secondary. Character portrayal is the primary interest, and it is the aspect of character portrayal

that is the strength of the Eastern production.

Having seen Duke Bagger do a wonderful job last month as a bearded Italian gentleman in "Scapino", I was very curious, and just a little doubtful, about how he would do as the bumbling blockhead Charlie Brown. To my delight, he was excellent. His rich voice and underplayed mannerisms were perfect. Whether on stage alone or interacting with others, Duke Bagger as Charlie Brown was consistent, convincing and captivating.

Equally as good is the show's other star Randy Haege, who plays Snoopy. How does a human actor portray a dog? Go and see Haege's collection of barks, kisses, jumping and dancing for a good example. Although his singing voice is not as strong as Bagger's, Haege's excellent stage movement and limitless zany energy make him a wonderful Snoopy. Interestingly, I liked him best in his short one-liners, rather than in his lengthy, more famous numbers like "The Red Baron" and "Suppertime."

Dana Grigoroff's remarkable

cuteness and intimidating voice are her greatest assets as Lucy. Of all the players, I found that she was most like her comic strip counterpart. Her unrelenting crabbiness is very well done and makes her reconciliation with Charlie Brown at the end of the play a great moment.

Bill Pierson and Chester Davis complete the list of major characters as Linus and Schroeder. While neither is as memorable nor as convincing as Bagger, Haege, or Grigoroff, they do have their moments. Pierson is best as he waits out in

the pumpkin field with Snoopy for the Great Pumpkin. Davis' best scene is the book report on Peter Rabbit.

Director, E. Glendon Gabbard, has added some extra scenes and characters to the original script. While creating a few problems, Gabby's "extras" add, rather than detract from the production and were a good idea.

Like the comic strip itself, some of the play's "strips" struck me as funny while others didn't. Three of my favorites were "The Crab-In", "The Safety Patrol", and "Trick or

Treat." Two strips that did not work as well were "Snoopy's Novel" and "Sally's Valentine."

Technical aspects were generally fair. The costumes, set, and combo were good, especially the combo. The spot lights lacked accuracy at times, and I would not have included the use of a sign Snoopy held up that said "later." It was distracting and was not needed.

Some of the parts have been double cast. The show I saw had Barbara Dunn, Laura King, and Kris Salamone doing some nice supporting acting as Sally,

Violet, and Frieda. Gabby's use of a larger cast makes the group musical numbers, which were directed by Delbert Simon and superbly choreographed by Alice Stoughton, much fuller and more enjoyable.

"You're A Good Man Charlie Brown" is a show for adults that children would enjoy. In it the company portrays children, but not in a childlike manner. Everyone will see a little of himself in the peanuts gang. The play runs again tonight and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. in the Doudna Fine Arts Center.