

LET THERE BE LIGHT, AND SONG, AND DANCE

Actors Cabaret enters the holiday fray with Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

Verily, the Old Testament is many things to many people, believers and skeptics and repudiators alike; but one thing it decisively is not is fun, or funny. From a merely literary standpoint, the Pentateuch itself, the first five books of the Bible, is a dour affair, full of the grievous and bloody growing pains of a new nation.

But, you know, ashes to ashes and fun to funky — leave it to a young Andrew Lloyd Webber, along with lyricist Tim Rice, to turn a torrid chunk of Genesis into a florid bit of pop pageantry, full of warbling characters in garish costumes singing impossibly catchy songs.

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat takes the story of Jacob's son Joseph — betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery before he becomes Pharaoh's main man in Egypt, thereby saving his long-lost family from ruin — and somehow turns it into a feel-good fable of crisis and renewal, heavy on the renewal.

Currently at Actors Cabaret of Eugene (ACE) under the capable direction of Anthony Krall, *Joseph* makes for solid holiday fare. Squeezed onto ACE's stage, the show is a robust and rollicking musical that moves along lickety-split. As usual, Joe Zingo's set and costume design are delicious to behold, florid and sparkly, and Krall's staging and pacing, despite the crowding, give the show a feel that is at once cozy and grand.

As *Joseph's* Narrator, Ashley Apelzin presides over the action like a ray of light; as she saunters in and out of the story, occasionally coming to the fore to provide narrative stitching, Apelzin is a captivating presence, and her strong, rich voice works like a warm hand weaving us into the broad sweep of this abbreviated biblical tale.

In the lead, Chad Lowe projects a grinning, cherubic innocence that befits the gee-shucks attitude of Joseph; ACE veteran Donovan Seitzinger captures the patriarchal splendor of Pharaoh (he also plays Zebulun); and Chris McVein offers strong comic chops in the dual roles of Levi and Potiphar.

Rounding out the cast are Jerad Covert (Asher); Abigail Frazee (Child); Cameron Graham (Simeon); Cortney Grant (Gad); Garrett Poncho (Issachar); Rene Ragan (Judah); Brooke Rane (Dan); Christopher Ridgley (Nephalti/Baker); Rob Roberts (Jacob/Butler);

THE CAST OF JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT



Samuel Rose (Benjamin); Joshua Sayre (Reuben); Ashlee Winkler (Mrs. Potiphar); and Hillary Humphreys and Lauren Moore in the ensemble.

As is so often the case when community theaters attempt to mount Broadway-level musicals even in reduced scale, volume is a problem. Obviously, budgeting for innumerable microphones is out of the question, but in the case of *Joseph*, a lot of the audience's hearing issues could be overcome by smoothing out the relative unevenness between and within songs: Tamper the ensemble a bit, and get some of those soloists to more forcibly project themselves.

Minor concerns, really, compared to the show's many strengths, not least of which is the universally upbeat spirit of the entire cast. I'm not the biggest Andrew Lloyd Webber fan, but I thoroughly enjoyed this charming and smart production. *Joseph* is pretty to look at, it moves at a playful clip and, in the end, you won't be able to get that damn song "Go Go Go Joseph" out of your head.

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat plays through Dec. 16 at Actors Cabaret of Eugene; tickets are \$15-\$48.98 at ActorsCabaret.org or 541-683-4368.

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