

Songs shine in colorful 'Dreamcoat'

Musical: 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat' has biblical origins but a universal story

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Published: January 22, 2010

If it seems like a lot of the shows in town have religious inspiration - and if that seems strange in a state where relatively few people attend church - there might be a logical reason.

“Theater began in the church,” said Troy Arnold Fisher, who’s directing the Old Testament tale “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat,” opening next week at Capital Playhouse. “We can trace theater and musical theater back to the Catholic Church in medieval times. Oratorios led to opera.”

“Joseph” began not as a full-fledged musical but as a children’s cantata. It was expanded into a Broadway production after composer Andrew Lloyd Webber’s “Jesus Christ Superstar” – which the playhouse put on last season – became a smash hit.



That’s not to say the story of Joseph would appeal only to church- or temple-goers. The story’s biblical origin isn’t obvious.

“I grew up with the story,” Fisher said. “It was part of my religious culture. But people aren’t church people the way people were when I was a kid.

“I’ve known people who come to ‘Jesus Christ Superstar,’ and it gets done, and they say, ‘I don’t know what that was about,’ ” he added. “And I say, ‘You’re kidding me – the story of Jesus Christ up on the cross being crucified?’ ”

The story of Joseph – based on the biblical story of Joseph, found in the Book of Genesis – can be a bit harder to follow in a musical, Fisher added, especially because “Joseph” is all music.

“There are some people who will come to the show and just think that it’s really fun music,” he added. The show is all music, and each song has a different style.



That suits the show’s choreographer Richard Hinds of New York City just fine.

“Yesterday, we worked on a big country-western hoedown number; the day before that, we were doing a ‘Blues Brothers’-style number, and the day before that, we were doing sort of a Jackson 5 number,” Hinds said last week.

“The show demands everything, and it’s a lot of fun for the audience. You never know what’s going to be the next thing,” he added.

His broad background has qualified him well for the position, said Hinds, who worked on the choreography for national and international touring productions of Disney’s “High School Musical.”

“I have been dancing my whole life,” Hinds said. “My training and knowledge are all over the place. That was something I could bring to this production.”

Fisher said the choreography suits the different plot points. “For the brothers who sell Joseph into Egypt, he’s given them this sort of street-dance quality that I call boyography. It’s very athletic, and it looks rough and tough. Part of the brothers’ identity in this production will be the way that they dance.”

Another example of the show’s variety: The Pharaoh is written as a kind of Elvis. “There’s a big rock ’n’ roll number called ‘Song of the King,’ ” Fisher said.

The story of Joseph has a universal quality, he said. “It’s the story of a dreamer but it’s also a great love story, a story of forgiving, and a story of how sometimes even in the darkest hours, we’re walking toward the light.

“The forgiveness at the end is potent,” he added. “The reward for this love is that Joseph gets his amazing technicolor dreamcoat – and, in the Broadway spectacle, a big number.”