

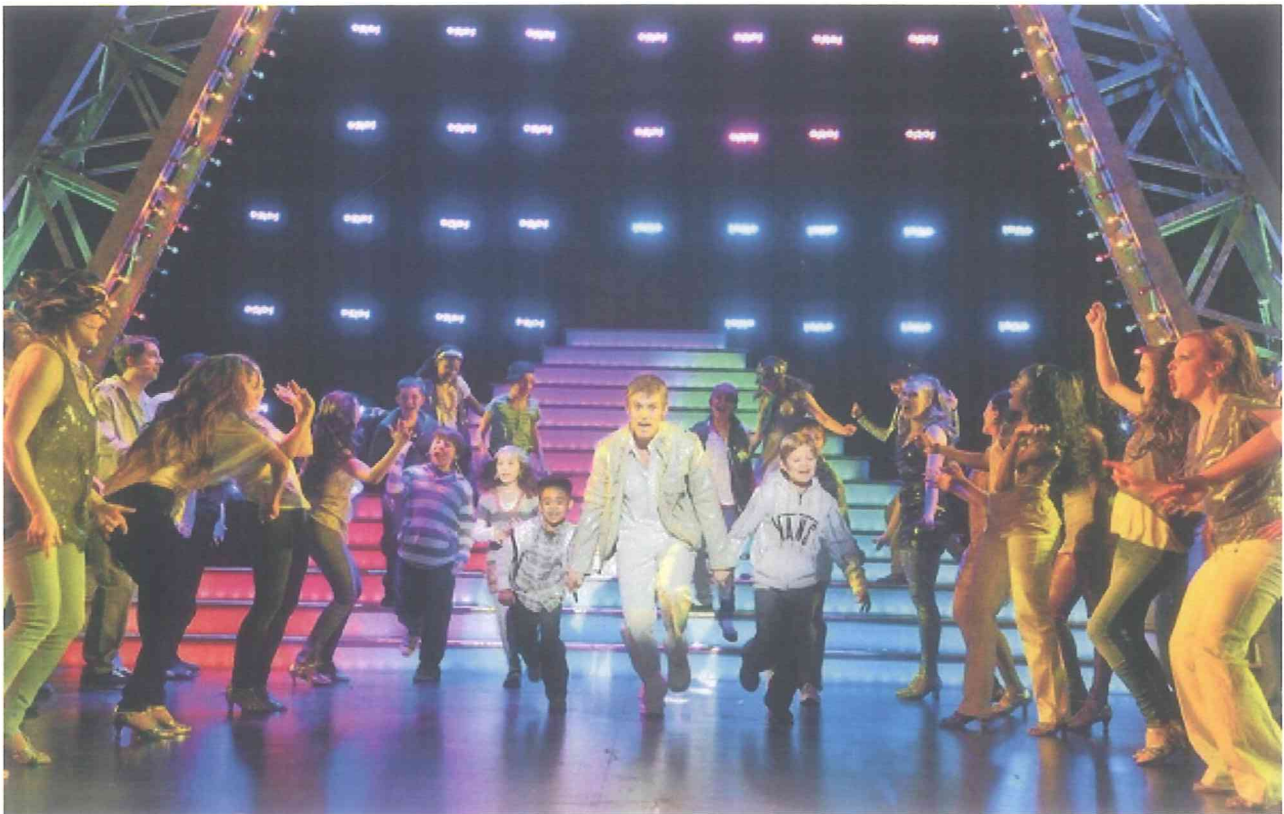
THEATER REVIEW:

Here's 'Joseph,' go, go going again at the Paramount Theatre

THEATER REVIEW: "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" ★★★ at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora

November 07, 2011|Chris Jones | Theater critic

•



"So is this with David Cassidy or Donny Osmond?" asked one of the audience members headed into the Paramount Theatre on Friday night. It was a telling remark — a reminder that the historic roadhouse known as the Paramount Theatre puts folks in mind of stars, and that anyone producing "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" has to compete with a show that has played in downtown Chicago for years, a potent title in the affections of Chicagoland theatergoers.

Alas for that gentleman, neither Cassidy nor Osmond donned the coat of many colors in Aurora this past weekend. Those honors went to a handsome and delightfully guileless young actor named Brian Bohr, still a student at Northwestern University but a formidably voiced and enigmatic Joseph, especially when bathed in a shimmering, glittering light, and one significantly more age-appropriate for the role of son of

Jacob's most awesome son. He's like a younger version of Michael C. Hall ("Dexter"). And he kills.

And while you might share my view that "Joseph" — a Biblical pastiche penned back when Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber were still in short pants — commands more of the affections of those aforementioned theatergoers than it ever really deserved, you couldn't reasonably argue against the Old Testament truth that the Paramount has knocked its second self-produced musical out of the park and halfway to Egypt. That is if (and only if) you like this kind of boppy, wholesome, family-friendly thing and you can find it your heart to smile as such classic Rice lyrics as, "I shall now take them all for a ride / After all they have tried fratricide."

Or, just to throw another classic your way, "All these things you saw in your pajamas / Are a long range forecast for your farmers." Take that, Stephen Sondheim!

Verily, the place went nuts Friday night. Here's why. The skilled director Stacey Flaster is in charge of a fun, warm and eye-poppingly huge show — an Equity-dominated adult [company](#)



of 26 and a children's choir of 12, featuring a diminutive but zestful young fellow named Matthew Uzarraga, whose cute moves nearly brought the house down on opening night. You can get away with a couple of synths with this particular show — many do and few notice — but the Paramount also has a whopping 16 live musicians in the pit. You might not *need* that oboe on "Any Dream Will Do," but it surely improves the sounds. And I saw lots of impressionable young faces staring down at real acoustic instruments and understanding that they were at a real theater watching a spectacular show. And what parent wants more from "Joseph?"

I saw the famous Donny version many, many times at the Chicago Theatre and I'd say Flaster's choreography delivers more visual pizzazz and *joie de vivre*. Certainly it delivers a more impressive coat, a piece of outerwear that is right there on the marquee, so I'm all for that. Kevin Depinet has designed quite the spectacular metallic world of trusses, towers, staircases and faux-Egyptian backdrops — I'm not quite sure where we are, but then the show is never sure either, so that works very nice.

I wouldn't say the sound quality was the equal of the exquisite mix at "My Fair Lady" (storyteller Lara Filip sounds a tad shrill and overpushed), but both the mix and the storyteller settle down in the second act.

Flaster's production is brimming with fresh ideas. "Those Canaan Days," wherein the infamous brothers don berets purely so Rice and Lloyd Webber can make fun of the French (a perfectly adequate motivation), has never been funnier, thanks mostly to Flaster's decision to add an unscripted mannequin to the shenanigans. James Earl Jones II bounces around the stage doing the "Benjamin Calypso" like a spring-loaded toy. And Vasily Deris' sweaty Pharaoh winds up every last reprise like it's the last night of the Sands. Everyone is having a very good time and it is most infectious; the Paramount is insane to close this show right before the Thanksgiving holiday. The post-turkey hoards will be tenderized and

ready.

To her great credit, Flaster loads the show with more dance than it has surely has ever seen. And instead of trotting out the expected campy megamix, retro "Mamma Mia"-style, she freshens it all up with a hip-hop motif. Best of all (if, like me, you remember the sweet but predictably regimented choirs of the Donny days), she lets her kids be kids and find their own ways into her show. I was smiling all the way back through the tollbooths: "No ifs, no buts, Benjamin's as honest as coconuts."

Twitter@ChrisJonesTrib

When: Through Nov. 20

Where: Paramount Theatre, 23 E. Galena Blvd., Aurora

Running time: 2 hours

Tickets: \$34.90-\$46.90 at 630-896-6666 or paramountaurora.com