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Politicians, a pharaoh and pyramids: Annisquam Village Players stage 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat'

By Gail McCarthy

Casting for this year's annual Annisquam Village Players production, a theatrical summer tradition, was a task of biblical proportions, and something of a historic quest as well.

So, as the group prepares to stage "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," quirky stories surrounding the annual production abound.

The community theater group is one of the longest-running community theater programs in the nation, and this cast includes about 50 locals, from the usual cameos by local politicians to young children who are getting their first taste of live theater.

Those locals includes lawyers, businessmen, teachers and students, though organizers concede the struggling economy has affected who has and hasn't been available this year to dedicate the time for production and its rehearsals.

Terry Sands, the director, said this year there are many new faces along with the veteran actors.

One of the new faces is Tierra Bosner, the stage manager, who recruited as part of a college internship of sorts that the Annisquam Village Players started a few years ago. Bonser is a sophomore at Emerson College in Boston.

When it came time to choose the lead part of Joseph, the youngest of the 12 sons of Jacob, there was no one person that jumped out during auditions. But Bosner casually mentioned she knew an Emerson student who may be available. He put together an a cappella version of the two audition songs, "Any Dream Will Do" and "Close Every Door." After call-backs the next night, again with no consensus of choice, Bosner pulled out the laptop and played the e-mail that contained the video of Gabriel Rodriguez singing.

"We started watching this and in 10 seconds, we all said wow!" Sands said.

With that, Rodriguez got the job. Gloucester's Andrea Liacos won the play's lead role of the narrator.

"She also blew us away, and she's new to the group too," said Sands.

Another task was trying to find enough men to play Joseph's 11 brothers, the next group of lead parts, and word was sent out to find some candidates.

"We thought this may be tough, because they are on stage 50 percent of the time with huge songs and demanding parts," said Sands. "A number of the men who have been with us couldn't do it because of the economy and job-related issues. So we didn't have the bunch we normally have. So we called around. Trying to find 11 was going to be a major thing."

Again, through some more serendipity, the men — and one woman — were cast. So there will be 12 "brothers" along with Joseph.

Rockport's Paul Hurst, who is now sporting actual Elvis-style sideburns for his role as Pharaoh, called Rick Kasten, a Rockport dad and assistant Boy Scout leader, and he was among the many fortunate surprises the directors had in casting the brothers.

"We arrived at finally having nine brothers," said Sands, "and we cast one woman as one of the brothers — Lia Parisi, a really talented woman who said she'd rather be a brother with a lead than be a woman in a lesser role."

"So now we (had) 10 brothers and we needed one more," said Sands. "On the same night, two people showed for auditions, one was 16 and one was 70, and they were both fabulous and brought different things to the cast."

Those two were Aedan McCarthy, a Rockport High student, and Roger Hussey, a semi-retired former computer consultant and merchant seaman who is running for Gloucester's Ward 2 City Council seat.

Hussey has a tenor voice that wowed the directors. And Sands explained to Hussey that an appearance with the Annisquam Village Players is a political tradition.

"I told him how the mayor, state senator and state representative always have a role, and what better exposure than to do something like this," said Sands, a land court judge.

Although Anthony Verga did not win re-election as state representative, he will still appear, albeit in a new role; as one of the biblical brothers.

"This is the first time he has had the opportunity for a larger role and he is loving it," Sands said.

So in its own take on the scripts, the Annisquam Village Players have 13 brothers ranging in age from 13 to more than 70 years old.

"In the biblical story, it says Joseph lived to be 117, so the 70-plus brother is a spring chicken," Sands said with a chuckle.

"In the Bible, Joseph had a sister, but Andrew Lloyd Webber left her out. But we have a cast that's more historically accurate than any 'Joseph' that's been done," added Sands, who codirects the show with Mary Curtis.

The other brothers are Keith McCarthy, Asher Weiss, Sam Driscoll, Chris Deering, Mike English, Nat Gorton and Dean Harrison. Jacob, the father, is played by Dick Brown.

The musical, written by the same British team of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice who also created "Jesus Christ Superstar," evolved from the story based in the Book of Genesis. The music is varied, including a Western hoedown, French cabaret and calypso.

Sands, in addition to directing, also has a role, with a twist. He plays the a brother to a millionaire slave trader who made his money selling pyramids. In Sands' role, he made his money Bernie Madoff-style from selling "Ponzi pyramids."

The show also has a choir of 14 children, as well as a children's dream sequence, which the directors added to the show.

"We also have a chorus of nine women who are terrific singers and dancers who play the wives of the brothers and the harem for the Pharaoh," said Sands.

Other Cape Anners prominent in the production are the musical director, Susan Taormina,

choral director Patty Pike, and choreographer Deej Viau, a dancer from Gloucester.

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SEEING 'JOSEPH'

What: The Annisquam Village Players present "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat"

When: Aug. 4 through Aug. 9. Show times are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30; Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 8 p.m.

Where: Annisquam Village Hall, 32 Leonard St., Gloucester. For more information, visit www.annisquamvillageplayers.org.