

Dreamcoat score irresistible on the level of pure bounce

BY RAY CONLOGUE
(From yesterday's late editions)

THE O'KEEFE Centre this week and next is offering Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. It is a jolly, ingratiating show, as long as you don't ask too much of it.

First of all, don't ask it to be a grown-up show, even though its promoters carefully don't mention that it was originally aimed at adolescents. This is a shame, because once you know that, you can make allowances for the overly broad humor, and maybe even enjoy it. A moronic joke such as Joseph's 11 brothers holding a note as long as possible and then noisily gulping a fresh lungful of air goes over much better seen through the eyes of a 12-year-old, as does a sight gag like Potiphar having his robe ripped off to reveal a pair of Ptolemaic boxer shorts underneath.

And the Andrew Lloyd Webber-Tim Rice score is much more fun if you don't expect it to be a *reprise* of Jesus Christ Superstar or Cats or Evita — with the emotional tug of the scores for those shows. No, Technicolor Dreamcoat is a bagatelle, the kind of thing a composer knocks off when he's not feeling bluesy enough to work up a real gut-grabber. The melodies are bouncy and infectious, but really, how much can you expect from a show that presents the Pharaoh of Egypt as Elvis Presley, or has Joseph's brothers worrying their way through the seven years of famine in cute little berets, singing with French accents? Neither episode makes much sense but, hey, are you having a good time, or what? (I had this dream the other night about how we would have seven decades of original musical artists, and then seven decades of Broadway musicals that would feed off them.)

Anyway, you'll have a good time. Even if the score doesn't make much sense dramatically, it is irresistible on the level of pure bounce (like a large beach ball). And it has a stellar exponent in David Cassidy, whose Joseph might be described as The Sex Symbol that Went Down into Egypt. I am sure the dreams he inspires are much easier to interpret than the ones he has himself. And I am dead sure that wearing a little pleated Egyptian mini-skirt as tight as that must inspire dreams of tortuous complexity.

Cassidy sings beautifully, and he throws himself entirely into the show. He's not much of a dancer, but he's a trouper.

Almost outclassing him, because of a terrific voice and an original personality that can best be described as the squashed grapefruit that didn't give up, is Robin Boudreau. She first appeared as Linda Ronstadt's homely younger sister in *Pirates of Penzance*, but she shoulders a much larger dramatic responsibility in this show, and does it wonderfully. Dressed in a little fez and vest like a carpet-riding genie, she is the Narrator of Joseph's tale. Her arms dance about, her voice soars, and a surfeit of warmth and mischief marks her as a master storyteller.

Karl Eigsti's road-show set is also clever and ingratiating. It consists mostly of painted drops that have lambs floating on hillsides à la Chagall, and bright golden-orange pyramids, one of which conceals behind it an Egyptian version of a Playboy bedroom.

Joseph is best enjoyed in the company of an adolescent who is just beginning to get into irreverence.