

'Joseph' retains a childlike appeal

By Bob Dyer

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Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat has the longest title and the shortest running time of any Kenley Players production this summer. It also may be the season's oddest presentation at E. J. Thomas Hall.

Joseph, which opened Tuesday night, was originally written as a half-hour work to be performed by children. It then was expanded to an hour and turned into an adult musical, which debuted in England in 1968. It opened off-Broadway 13 years later.

In some ways, *Joseph* still is looking for a home. The musical is short enough and light enough to be labeled children's entertainment, but it's eccentric enough and murky enough to require strong concentration, even by adults.

The main character is based squarely on one of the leading figures in a well-known earlier work, the Book of Genesis. Here, as in the Bible, Joseph is his father's golden boy, getting so much attention that his 11 brothers become brutally jealous and sell him into slavery in Egypt.

Soon Joseph displays an ability to read dreams, and becomes the favorite of the Pharaoh. Promoted from the dungeon to Pharaoh's deputy, Joseph leads Egypt to prosperity.

Finally Joseph's down-and-out brothers show up, and the noble fellow forgives them and doles out food.

REVIEW

This being a hip, modern-day version of the tale, however, there are some new twists. When Joseph is sold into slavery, the transaction is made with a credit card. The Pharaoh is an Elvis Presley clone and says things like, "You shall be my No. 2, baby."

It's a strange brew. The music ranges from rock to a cappella

hymns. Dance numbers include the samba and the limba. The religious slant is mixed with such things as a sight gag involving a phallic symbol.

Large doses of corn are scattered throughout. During the limbo segment, for example, the fattest brother lowers the bar close to the floor, studies it, then lifts it up and walks past. If you like those kinds of jokes, you'll probably love the show.

If nothing else, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* is a good excuse for longtime teen heartthrob David Cassidy to parade around in short pants and solicit drools from the audience.

He plays his superstar role to the hilt. During the second number, he hops off the stage and shuffles his way past the front row of patrons. He wears a perpetual grin and a look that says he knows the audience loves him.

But Cassidy seems right for the part. Joseph is the squeaky-clean hero who does all the right things, the image Cassidy has cultivated.

Cassidy also brings along a hearty singing voice, which was particularly impressive in the finale, *Any Dream Will Do*.

Rosalyn Rahn, as the Narrator, sings well in a major role.

Tom Carder, playing the Pharaoh, does a good visual impersonation of Elvis, but his lyrics are all but undecipherable.

The production supplies several good laughs and clever scenes. However, everyone tries awfully hard to be cute. How often they succeed depends on your definition of cute. If you liked Cassidy in television's *The Patridge Family*, you'll view this as a winner.

The biggest mystery of the evening is why the hour-long *Joseph* needs a 15-minute intermission. Maybe the people who run the concession stands know something about it.



David Cassidy (left), Dick Fuchs in *Technicolor Dreamcoat*

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat plays at E. J. Thomas Hall on Akron Hospital through Friday at 8:30 a.m., Saturday at 2:45 and 8:30, and Sunday at 2:45 and 7:30. For information, call 371-8531.