

STAGE

Pied Piper Players theater group debuts with 'Joseph'

By Paul Freeman
CONTRIBUTOR

A NEW community theater group is coming to northern San Mateo County with hopes of attracting some followers. The nonprofit, family-oriented company is the Pied Piper Players, and their debut production, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," opens tonight.

This Andrew Lloyd Webber-Tim Rice musical, a Broadway hit, recounts the Biblical story of Joseph. After he receives a rainbow-colored coat, his jealous brothers sell him into slavery. But the young man's gift for dream interpretation enables him to rise to power.

"Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" has terrific music, lots of roles to offer and flexibility to personalize the action," says the show's director, Leslie Stuppel, who's also the company's founder and artistic director.

The performers are just as excited as the director.

"Audiences love the upbeat take on a 3,000-plus-year-old story and its merging with 20th century pop culture," says San Mateo's Bill Brissman, who plays Joseph's brother, Simeon.

Susan Melanson of Burlingame, one of five narrators who musically navigate the audience through the story, says of the show's appeal, "The music is full of clever lyrics, beautiful melodies and engaging rhythms. There's something for everyone in the fabulous variety of musical styles including western, Calypso, French, Elvis, a beautiful ballad and a fun go-go number."

Pied Piper's arrival is going to be significant to the north Peninsula, particularly to South San Francisco and Daly City, which have been underserved in terms of community theater.

Stuppel, a San Francisco resident originally from New York, has an extensive theater background. She helped initiate the company's formation last August. She says she believes those participating in Pied Piper benefit, as does the community.

"Working together on a theater arts project exposes participants to respect, tolerance and commitment," she says. "Besides the entertainment



JOSEPH (JOHN BROWN) gets tossed down a well by his brothers in the newly formed Pied Piper Players' "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" at El Camino High School.

MATHEW SUMNER — Staff

value and skill-building challenges, everyone can benefit from a shared experience. It brings a community closer together."

In the future, Pied Piper Players plan to mount all kinds of productions — dramas, comedies and revues, as well as musicals. With the community's help, members hope to set up their own rehearsal and office spaces, as well as a comfortable

performing arts theater facility.

The company will be involved in education, offering acting workshops and hands-on theater craft classes. They are working with the Daly City Park and Recreation's assistant director, Ed Barney, and the Daly City Peninsula Partnership Collaborative to bring theater arts to local after-school care programs.

"This project will expose

children to theater who might otherwise not have the opportunity," says Stuppel.

In July, the Pied Pipers plans to offer a theater arts summer camp, co-sponsored by Peninsula YMCA. Brissman believes children will profit from the classes in many ways.

"Being in a production takes discipline, responsibility and courage," he says. "It puts kids together with others who have a

IF YOU GO

"Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat"

■ **Presented by:** The Pied Piper Players

■ **Where:** El Camino High School, 1320 Mission Road, South San Francisco

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, 2 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays; closes May 12

■ **Tickets:** \$8-\$15

■ **Call:** (650) 992-PIED

similar goal, allowing them to pool their efforts toward something that's positive for both them and the community."

The Pied Pipers' potential excites Melanson.

"It's a collection of extraordinarily talented, compassionate and dedicated people," she says. "The goals are to help children develop self-esteem, to create a sense of teamwork and community, as well as to support high standards of learning and performance."

On both sides of the footlights, Pied Piper proves to be a family affair. Many adults in the "Joseph" cast are joined by their offspring. Brissman's daughters Jennifer and Allie perform; and Melanson's daughter Kristin plays Joseph's sister-in-law.

The audience will find the production family-friendly, with its lavish sets and costumes, infectious energy and two-hour length, including intermission.

To Stuppel, the themes of "Joseph" reflect those of the company.

"The show is about a dreamer whose dreams are realized throughout the play. The Pied Piper Players' theater company began as a dream and is being realized now," she says. "I see Pied Piper Players, Inc. becoming a centerpiece of the community in the Northern Peninsula."

"Ultimately, I see Pied Piper lending its name and philosophy as a model to other communities, until we are like the Red Cross of the theater world, healing communities around the world through theater arts."

Big dreams? As Stuppel asserts, quoting from the musical, "If you think it, want it, dream it, then it's real."