STAGE HamiltonLIVE

Opinion | Hamilton is staging a two-hour musical spectacle that feels like Cirque du Soleil, Formula 1 and a Las Vegas revue

Kaden Brett Forsberg and Kaleigh Gorka lead larger-than-life production

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Kaden Brett Forsberg with the children's chorus and the company of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" at Theatre Aquarius.

Dahlia Katz

By **Jeff Mahoney** **Spectator Reporter**

Jeff Mahoney is a former reporter and columnist at The Hamilton Spectator.

Theatre Aquarius, with its new production, has launched a dreamboat of a "Dreamcoat," a great lit-up ship of spectacle, colour and shivaree, sailing full speed ahead.

It is, of course, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," and the first among the play's abundant procession of spectacles and effects comes from the magnificent machinery of the human body. In the form of a solitary figure developing into view at centre stage near the start.

WELCOME
TO Fabulous
EGY

Kaden Brett Forsberg as Joseph with Kory Fulton as Pharaoh and the company of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

Dahlia Katz

That would be Kaden Brett Forsberg in the title role. There's his hundred-mile smile, which must be considered part of the crew's lighting equipment. And then there's his physique. He looks like something drawn into real space by Leonardo, to illustrate the ideal proportions of a man, presumably after some barbell time at the gym.

But it's not just Forsberg's looks. He commands with his voice and his presence, his agile physicality and the charismatic rhythms of his performance.

Kaden Brett Forsberg as Joseph and the company of brothers in Theatre Aquarius' "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

Dahlia Katz

Actually, before he arrives, the very first spectacle in order of appearance is the equally impressive — and impressively costumed — Kaleigh Gorka as Narrator. The Narrator in "Joseph" is called upon to be even more of a propeller for the show's movement than Joseph himself, advancing every scene and powering together — sometimes with magic — the continuities of action, theme and feeling, such as they are.

Gorka's remarkable vocal versatility and projection of gentle authority are more than equal to the task. She and Forsberg have to be this good and strong to withstand being overwhelmed by the enormity of the overall talent and spectacle of the rest of the show.

Kaleigh Gorka as the Narrator with the children's chorus in Theatre Aquarius' "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

Dahlia Katz

Buttressing the efforts of Forsberg and Gorka are a relay team of uniformly fine character actors, too numerous to mention, who figuratively hand the baton back and forth to each other from scene to scene over a course of several vividly entertaining set pieces.

There are, among them: Kory Fulton, wonderfully multidimensional as Pharaoh in his various phases; Christian Bellsmith as Potiphar and Jacob; Tama Martin, wildly, sensuous as Potiphar's wife and — I wish I had room — a host of fine performers playing Joseph's brothers and various other roles.

Kaden Brett Forsberg as Joseph, Tama Martin as Mrs. Potiphar, and the company of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

Dahlia Katz

Many of the scenes are playful parodies of different musical genres, from Elvis-style rock 'n' roll and country-western, to the European accordion/French chanson cabaret of "Those Canaan Days."

All of this makes for a very busy, fast and often loud two hours of theatre and through it all, through the numerous set and costume changes, the overarching spectacle of spectacles is the choreography and orchestration. Not just the dance. The dancing is superlative, almost beyond the reach of praise — it is acrobatic, energetic, playful, manic and all with a precision that is all the more startling for the speed and locomotion and frenzy being harnessed.

WELCOME
TO Fabulous
EGYPT

The company of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" at Theatre Aquarius.

Dahlia Katz

But the dancing and all the nondance and blocking movement in the play do not just cohere and hold together within themselves and with each other, but they are beautifully conjoined with the excellently performed music and with the costumes, the changing sets and the flow of the action and acting. This is a tribute to the performers of course, but especially to the vision of the play's director/choreographer Robin Calvert, and the teamwork of the entire group.

The company of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" at Theatre Aquarius.

Dahlia Katz

What does get overwhelmed in this production — as in any production that captures the deliberately hyperbolic, kitschy and carnivalesque sweep of this show — is a driving sense of story that engages us with the characters emotionally. It's hard to attach here with anything deeper than casual conviction.

Kaden Brett Forsberg as Joseph and the company of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" at Theatre Aquarius.

Dahlia Katz

The story is there, arguably foolish as are so many stories in opera and musicals, but it is far from being the central business of the enterprise. The tale, very loosely rooted in Genesis, is of a lad, father's favourite, sold into slavery by his brothers but then emerging from Egypt with new-found purpose. If that is a fault, it is a fault of the script and the score.

But, consider, this is meant to make us feel, after all, as though we're watching — at the same time — vaudeville, Cirque du Soleil, Formula 1 racing and a Las Vegas revue with a Dubai vibe. Overstatement? Oh, yes and loving it. Unapologetically so. There's no time or place in "Joseph's" crowded agenda for modesty, humility or psychological nuance.

Kaleigh Gorka and the company of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" at Theatre Aquarius.

Dahlia Katz

You don't expect modesty from a show that bills itself with words like amazing, technicolor and dreamcoat. It's not Eugene O'Neill.

The play is set mostly in the land of the pyramids, which the terrific opening set conveys with its upward thrusting diagonals. The pyramids — a wonder of the world, the original "Oh, isn't that extra."

Kaden Brett Forsberg as Joseph with the children's chorus in "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

Dahlia Katz

This show places Theatre Aquarius where it needs to be as a development centre for new musicals. "Joseph" shows that a company in little old Hamilton can produce this kind of wonder, the kind of fare, at the very highest level, to rival anything anywhere in the world.

Special mention to Calvert's team — Patrick Bowman, music director; Brandon Kleiman, set and costume designer; Imogen Wilson, lighting designer; Ranil Sonnadara, sound designer; Grace Batten, stage manager; Jamie Woods; Grace Lamarche; Michele Shuster; Jessica Looper; Brianna Unger; Logan McNutt and Ava Robitaille.

And a very special mention to the wonderful children's chorus.

'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat'

Where: Theatre Aquarius, 190 King William St., Hamilton

When: Until Jan. 3

Tickets: From $31.64 to $110.74, including fees.

Info: Call 905-522-7529 or visit theatreaquarius.org.