



NICK BRANNAM
DIRECTOR | CHOREOGRAPHER

PRODUCTION	<i>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor® Dreamcoat</i>
COMPANY	BATS Next Gen
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When Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice decided to write a 20-minute cantata for schools, based on a story from the Old Testament, I doubt if they ever thought that it would become one of the most performed pieces of musical theatre in history.

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat's enduring appeal has to be that it is packed with great tunes in a variety of styles from country and western and calypso to pop and rock'n'roll – and of course, it also has a clear and witty script.

The award-winning BATS Next Gen invited 24-year-old Nick Brannam to direct this 2015 production – an inspired choice. As director and choreographer he has so much flair and imagination. The casting of the brothers was impeccable; I especially like the way they were brought to the front of the stage, during the scene with the artist painting, and with the whole company behind them; they sang their hearts out and it was one of the many special moments.

Connor McGrane gave a strong performance throughout as one of the brothers – as did James Davies, Ollie Johnson, Matt Roberts, Harry Hall and Ben Clay. They supported the younger brothers so well that they shone too and I was reminded that the age-range for BATS Next Gen is seven to 17 years.

Jack Baldwin as Joseph captured the character's innocence and vulnerability. His performance of *Close Every Door* was particularly poignant. Hazel Baldwin has very good diction when singing or speaking and was absolutely right for the part of the narrator.

There was some fine acting from all the principals: nine-year-old Charlotte Schooling played Pharaoh with suitable chutzpah and Sean Granahan as Jacob gave a very touching performance as an old man. Rebecca Hamer had a small cameo role as Potiphar but what a gem of a performance, and Eleanor Winterbottom and Katie Rust should thank their versatility too.

The wives in particular and the ensemble generally showed how imaginatively the show was choreographed. How hard they must all have worked to perfect so many dances. The tango dance sequence especially caught my eye; the three glamorous couples drew a roar of appreciation from the audience. The amazing costumes must have helped – many of them hand-stitched by Teresa Hollingshead and her team.

I have seen numerous productions of this musical, where the choirs sit or stand either side of the stage, but not in this production! Here they had to keep singing whilst remembering their dance routines and if they did miss a beat or two, they made up for it with their exuberance and sheer enjoyment.

Musical director Rachel Glover has convinced me at last that you can achieve wonderful sound effects with electronic keyboards supported by guitar, bass and percussion. The exciting lighting design and very effective set made it difficult to believe that we were in a hall at Queen Mary's College.

Its does not surprise me that 150 young-performers registered to be involved. There were 56 performers, which is about the maximum that the stage will take. What does this tell you?

Hannah Williams