

A R T S

MTG production is poor choice and fails to showcase talent

JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT

Presented by the MIT Musical Theater Guild
At the Sala de Puerto Rico, Jan. 29 to Feb. 1.

By JULIAN WEST

JOSEPH, IF YOU DO NOT KNOW by now, is a biblical story about a young Hebrew man who is too perfect for his own good. He also has a sort of mutant power to interpret prophetic dreams. This generates extreme sibling rivalry and his brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt.

When in Memphis, learn to walk like an Egyptian, figures Jo, and his is soon a rising star. One day he sorts out the Pharaoh's troubling dreams, to everyone's relief, and a miniature Camp David ensues. Finally he is elevated to a position where he can deal with his brothers in a New Testament sort of way, proving he really is ahead of his time.

If you want any more detail than that, look up Genesis 39. The important thing is that much singing is generated by the whole process.

Although it is difficult to fault the Musical Theater Guild's execution of the task at hand, I wonder why exactly they chose to do this show, in this particular way. I love "Joseph" and it has some wonderful moments. But there are two problems which are hard to make vanish. One relates to the cast, the other to the material.

The first difficulty is that the musical simply does not showcase all of the talent which MTG traditionally has at its disposal. There is no dancing to speak of and very few roles for women.

As one might expect from an Old Testament story, there are almost no women involved in the whole production. I fully expected to see half a dozen female brothers, and why not? But the few women in the show were by and large relegated to a row of legs at the back of the stage, high-stepping forward to deliver brief solos.

The only female principal was the narrator, Pam Denning, who sang clearly and with a lot of spunk. Her costuming, with a yarmulke tilted to one side as a fashion accessory, reflected her character and immediately gave the show a contemporary look.

The second difficulty is that some of the music just does not belong. "Joseph" was originally a short piece to be performed by schoolchildren. I firmly believe that it once had a pleasing cohesiveness, but the addition of later material destroyed that. So we are treated to the cast singing like cowboys, singing like Jamaicans, singing like Frenchmen. (If you want to imagine how

awful this is, try singing the word "Joseph" with an artificial French accent.) The musical is too short without these numbers but with them it seems too long by half.

Those songs also must be hammed up. The spectacle of second millennium Hebrew farmers singing calypso is just so campy that it turns the whole production into a camp extravaganza. Realizing this, MTG rightly went for sight gags and silliness all the way.

Judged by these standards, the show does rather well. It was certainly better, for instance, than the production which has been touring Britain since the 1970s. That is billed as "a show the whole family can enjoy." In other words: if you have kids, bring them along; otherwise, stay home.

There was no reason to stay home from this "Joseph." There were plenty of laughs, and most of the singing was good. Several principals had real problems on opening night, but the chorus and orchestra carried the day. In light of this, we will overlook some of the timing difficulties, especially as the choreography was set at the last minute.

Rix Marino sang the role of Jacob — wrongly — as an old and frail man. But he was better as Potiphar, neatly done up as a toff in a straw boater. His wife (Linda Dulaney) was a corn-rowed flapper who stepped out of the chorus, did her stuff, and retreated with wig and costume in complete disarray. If anyone noticed, she also had an excellent voice.

Pharaoh (Saul Resnikoff '88) was very indistinct, and I have seen many better Elvis Presley impersonators. But his was an entertaining song. I do not contradict myself: I think it is fine to have characters who wander along from different eras, but I do not like songs tossed in to lampoon various genres. Only the latter should be cut.

The other thing I would cut is the annoying prologue — however fetchingly sung — which makes the point that we are all dreamers, and that this might explain the universal appeal of the story. True, we all have dreams, but not like these. Joseph made his way in life through two things: innate political tact, and that mutant dream power.

Stephen Gilman was not as strong-voiced as a Joseph should be. His "Close Every Door" was sung with the pain of a convict rather than the strength of a believer and would not have made a suitable finale for the first act. Fortunately, narrator Denning was there to step in once again, with the upbeat "Go, go, go Joseph." The second act wrapped up just as well with the appealing "Any Dream will Do."

Carl Kraenzel '87 invited to Irene Ryan scholarship competition

By JULIAN WEST

SHAKESPEARE ENSEMBLE MEMBER Carl Kraenzel '87 will take part in the Irene Ryan scholarship competition as part of the Keene Regional Festival. On Sunday he played Oberon as the sensual, controlled presence watching over fairyland in the Ensemble's production "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

The "Dream" fairies were making careful, sudden motions of fingers, limbs, eyes and heads. Kraenzel's motions were precise and deft, and from his position perched at upstage center he seemed to control the action of the play.

Kraenzel took a break from playing puppet master, and I caught him in the hall outside the production room. I told him I would be seeing the Ryan competition, travelling up on Thursday morning.

"I hope I'm still there on Thursday morning," he replied, explaining that the Ryan competition begins on Wednesday. "That would mean I'm in the finals." Seventy actors were invited to take part in the competition, from which 12 will be chosen as finalists.

Kraenzel will be given a six minute audition to impress the competition judges. The time must be divided between a monologue and a scene with another actor, he explained. For his monologue, Kraenzel has selected a speech by Dopey from "Balm in Gilead" by Lamford Wilson, which he describes as "a very depressing comedy, well pseudo-comedy."

Kraenzel will also perform a scene from "The Elephant Man," together with Anne LaFlamme '88. He plays the title character, a Victorian called John Merrick who was born with serious physical deformities and became popular in London society where he was regarded as a freak.

Merrick is conventionally portrayed on stage, Kraenzel explained, with "some

kind of physicalization . . . to represent the deformity." He demonstrated, thrusting out his chest, dropping one side and pulling back his twisted hands in a frozen posture which almost parodies Oberon's fluid, stopmotion sequence of poses.

The abstraction of stance and voice provides for the audience "a window to Merrick's soul," he said. "They can look at my face and see what I'm thinking."

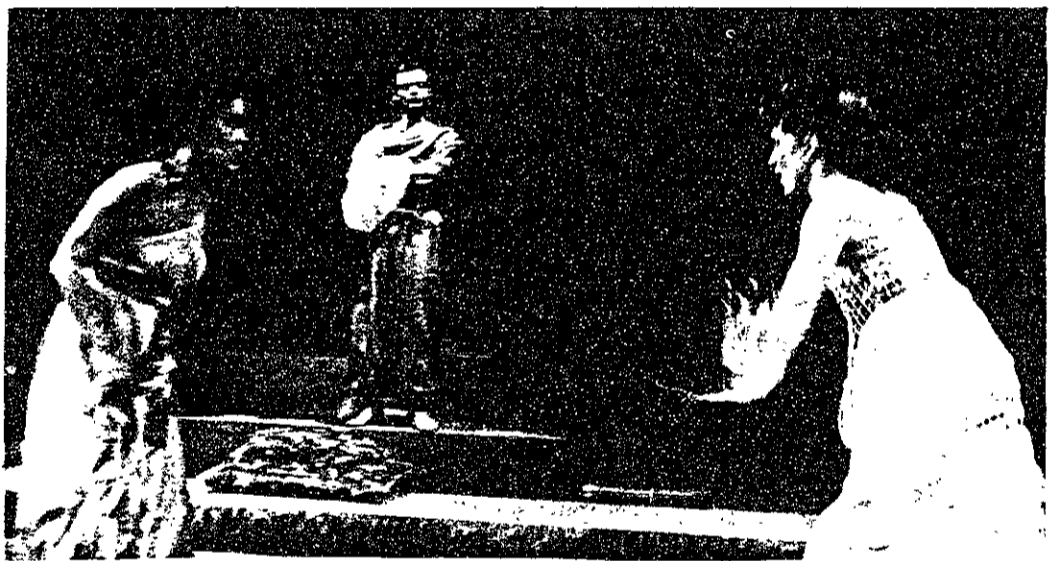
"It's kind of an artistic choice, representational art instead of realistic art."

Although he will not be obviously deformed, "the other actors react as if they see the deformity." La Flamme will provide the reactions as Mrs. Kendal, a famous actress who becomes Merrick's only true friend. During the scene, she claims to be showing her true self, although she really is acting to control her revulsion. She realizes that she is maintaining a facade, and so is able to see through Merrick's facade to his true self.

Kraenzel decided that he wanted to do this scene to provide a contrast to the humorous Dopey scene. Dopey is a character whom Kraenzel describes as "on the slightly dim side." He elaborated, "The monologue is on cockroaches and how they are going to take over the world — and this is very important to him." Although it is not entirely offbeat, he thinks it will provide a "contrast to the heavy, depressing and somewhat distressing" "Elephant Man" scene.

Kraenzel also spoke of the upcoming Ensemble production of "King Lear" which will be performed this month in Ashdown after being in the works most of last year. By contrast to the polished and delicate "Dream," it will be done in an experimental style, he said, and will "not be presented as a full, technically supported production."

"The idea is to come and see what we've done," he declared.



Carl Kraenzel '87 (center) as Oberon in "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

On the Town

Ongoing

"Mensch Meier," by Franz Xaver Kroetz, is a play which dramatizes the explosive disintegration and renewal of a family in the face of economic strife. Presented by Theaterworks at the Suffolk University Theater, 55 Temple Street, Beacon Hill, Wed-Sat nights until Feb. 14. Tickets: \$8 on Thursdays, \$10 on Fridays, and \$12 on Saturdays. Telephone: 720-1988.

"End of the World with Symposium to Follow," by Arthur Kopit, is a darkly funny play about how our nuclear strategy can thrill us to death — a comedy of annihilation where show business contemplates the Big Sleep. At the American Repertory Theater, 64 Brattle Street, Cambridge, until March 15. Tickets: \$12-\$15. Call 547-8300 for times of performances and reservations.

"Curse of the Starving Class," by Sam Shepard, is a contemporary drama chronicling the life and death of an American family. At the New Ehrlich Theater, 539 Tremont Street, Boston, until Feb. 7. Call 482-6316 for times of performances, ticket prices, and reservations.

"Miss Julie," by August Strindberg, is a classic psychological study of the conflicts that are inherent between the sexes. Presented Thur-Sun at 8 pm by the Stage Company of Boston at the Paramount Penthouse Theater, 58 Berkeley Street, South End, until Feb. 8. Tickets: \$10. Telephone: 387-4474.

"Sophie Makes Good," by Rae Edelson, is a play about a young "grande dame" of the old world and a thoroughly modern girl, finding themselves under the same roof amidst an entourage of admiring young men. At 8 pm at the New Ehrlich Theater, 539 Tremont St., through Feb. 3. Telephone: 482-6316

An exhibit of delightful and amusing portraits of the British by Neal Slavin, entitled "Britons," is presented at the Clarence Kennedy Gallery. A collaboration of the Polaroid Corporation, the *London Times*, and the National Museum of Photography, Film, and Television of England. Through Feb. 21 at 770 Main Street, Cambridge. No admission charge. Telephone: 577-5177.

The *Magna Carta* is on display at the Boston Public Library until February 10 and can be viewed in the Abbey Room of the downtown Boston branch during normal Library hours. Special presentations accompany the exhibition of the *Magna*

Carta including a ten-minute film adjacent to the document entitled "Liberty: Legacy of the *Magna Carta*" and also, in the Puviv de Chavannes Gallery, other documents showing the effects of the *Magna Carta*.

The **Bauhaus exhibition**, a collection of buildings, paintings, tables, teapots, weavings, sculptures, metal work, graphics, and advertisements envisioned and created by a small group of students in the famous workshop/school in pre-Hitler Germany, continues at MIT Museum until Feb. 28. No admission charge. Telephone: 253-4444.

Power & Gold: Jewelry from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, an exhibition of jewelry from Southeast Asia presented in the context of village cultures where ritual jewelry embodied a deeper cultural significance, continues at the Museum of Fine Arts until March 22.

70s into 80s: Printmaking Now, an exhibit emphasizing certain dominant themes of the last decade of printmaking, continues at the Museum of Fine Arts until Feb. 8.

Krzysztof Wodiczko: Counter-Monuments, a presentation of large photographic documentation of projected slides on buildings, continues at the Hayden Gallery at the List Visual Arts Center, 20 Ames St., until April 12. Telephone: 253-4400.

Out of Eastern Europe: Private Photography, a selection of "semi-official" contemporary photography by independent artists from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, continues at the Reference Gallery at the List Visual Arts Center, 20 Ames Street, until April 12. Telephone: 253-4680.

Tony Smith: The Shape of Space, an exhibition celebrating the monumental painted steel sculpture "For Marjorie," continues at the Bakalar Sculpture Gallery at the List Visual Arts Center, 20 Ames Street, until April 5. Telephone: 253-4400.

Images for Survival, a poster exhibition commemorating the 40th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, continues at Compton Gallery until March 20. No admission charge. Telephone: 253-4444.

An exhibit of **Light Sculptures** by Bill Parker, MIT '74 continues at the MIT Museum Building, 265 Mass. Ave. No admission charge.

The **"Installation Project at Mobius,"** with works by Polish emigre Ewa Kuryluk and Bart Uchida of Boston, continues through Feb. 21. The Mobius gallery at 354 Congress St., Boston, is open Wed-Sat, 12-5 pm or by appointment. Telephone: 542-7416.

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