Insights

A Study Guide to the Utah Shakespeare Festival

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat
The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival’s stages.

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Cover Art for Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat by Cully Long.
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

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Synopsis: *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*

The play opens with the Narrator finding an old book, picking it up, blowing off the dust, and starting to read. The story she relates is of a young dreamer, a man named Joseph—the same Joseph whose story is told in the Book of Genesis.

Joseph, as you may remember, was born into a family of twelve boys, all the sons of Jacob. Joseph is Jacob’s favorite son, and, to show everyone that he is pleased with him, Jacob gives Joseph a splendid multi-colored coat. However, this coat, along with Joseph’s talk of dreams he has had showing he will be the ruler of his brothers, arouse the jealousy of the other eleven. They decide to kill him, but before they get the chance, they meet up with the group of Ishmaelites traveling to Egypt. A plan is hatched, and they sell their brother as a slave instead.

So Joseph is taken off to Egypt, and his brothers return to tell their father that his favorite son is dead, producing his wonderful coat—which they have stained with the blood of a goat—as proof.

Potiphar, a powerful man in Egypt, takes Joseph into his household as a slave. While there Joseph works so hard and is so honest, that Potiphar begins to admire him greatly. Unfortunately, he also catches the eye of his master’s wife, who tries to seduce him. When Potiphar catches them together, he assumes the worst (even though Joseph is innocent) and sends Joseph to prison. While there Joseph meets two of Pharaoh’s servants, a butler and a baker, both of whom have had strange dreams. Joseph interprets their dreams, correctly telling their future.

In the meantime, Pharaoh, the most powerful man in Egypt, has also been having unusual dreams. No one can interpret these dreams, so Pharaoh is intrigued when he hears of the young slave’s ability. He immediately has Joseph brought before him to interpret his dreams.

Joseph offers his interpretation, that seven years of bounty will be followed by seven years of famine, and Pharaoh is so impressed that he appoints Joseph to a post in the government. He will be in charge of storing food for the upcoming hard times.

When the famine does hit, Joseph’s father and brothers in Canaan are ill-prepared. They hear that there is food available in Egypt, so the brothers travel there to beg for assistance. Once there, they are brought before Joseph who recognizes them immediately even though they do not know him. He tests their honesty and humility by planting a golden chalice in the sack of his brother, Benjamin, to see what they will say. When confronted with the supposed evidence of theft, the brothers maintain the boy’s innocence and offer to let themselves be taken prisoner instead.

Joseph sees that his brothers have changed, so, to everyone’s great joy, he reveals his true identity. Finally, Jacob is brought to Egypt to join his family and to again see his beloved son at last.
Characters: *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*

**Narrator:** A woman, not of the time or place of the action, the Narrator tells the story through word and song, guiding the audience gently through the story of Joseph and his brothers.

**Jacob:** The father of the twelve sons, Jacob definitely favors Joseph. At times he may appear unfair and shallow, but he is, more importantly, the prophet who recognizes the future and the calling of Joseph, thus saving the House of Israel.

**Joseph:** Obviously his father’s favorite, Joseph early on shows a talent for interpreting dreams and telling the future. This gets him into trouble with his brothers when he predicts his future will include ruling over the other eleven. However, it saves his life when in Egypt he correctly interprets Pharaoh’s dreams. In the end he has risen to a great position of power, but he still forgives his brothers and brings his family to Egypt to partake of the bounty he has accumulated there.

**Three Ladies:** These multi-talented women appear in the play as many characters: Jacob’s wives, saloon girls, dancing girls, and so on.

**The Eleven Sons:** Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Napthali, Isaacher, Asher, Dan Zebulun Gad, Benjamin, Judah—although acting usually as a group—have their own different personalities, talents, and flaw. As a group they sell Joseph into slavery, but as individuals they deal with the following years and how they can make amends. They sing and dance their way through many situations and places, and also double as Egyptians in many cases.

**Ishmaelites:** Men of the desert, they buy Joseph as a slave, take him to Egypt, and sell him to Potiphar.

**Potiphar:** A powerful and rich Egyptian, Potiphar purchases Joseph and puts him to work in his household, where he soon realizes that Joseph is honest, hard-working, and a great addition to his pool of help. When he grows suspicious of his wife and Joseph, however, he grows angry and has Joseph thrown into prison.

**Mrs. Potiphar:** Beautiful and scheming, Mrs. Potiphar tries to seduce Joseph (unsuccessfully). However, she does manage to rip off much of his clothing just as her husband comes into the room, thus condemning him to prison.

**Baker:** One of Pharaoh servants, the Baker is in prison with Joseph who correctly interprets his dreams and predicts that he will be put to death.

**Butler:** Another of Pharaoh servants, the Butler is also in prison with Joseph who also correctly interprets his dreams, this time that he will be released and taken back into Pharaoh household. It is the Butler who tells Pharaoh about Joseph and his uncanny ability with dreams.

**Pharaoh:** The most powerful man in Egypt, Pharaoh is considered a god on earth. When Joseph interprets his dreams, he promotes him to one of the highest positions in his government.
About the Playwrights:
Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice

By Lynnette Horner

Like many musical partnerships, the collaboration of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice brought together the essential elements of musical creation: a passion for their art, astronomical talent, and enough diversity to keep things interesting. Andrew Lloyd Webber attacked his career with a single-minded vision that produced dramatic spectacles such as Cats (1981), Starlight Express (1984), and Phantom of the Opera (1986). Tim Rice, as a modern Renaissance man, has shown an amazing ability to diversify his interests. In addition to collaborating with Lloyd Webber on Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat (1968), Jesus Christ Superstar (1971), and Evita (1976), he has been a successful non-fiction writer, publisher, cricket player, pop song writer, radio show host, and collaborator with other music heavyweights such as Alan Menken, Aladdin and Beauty and the Beast, and Elton John, The Lion King.

Andrew Lloyd Webber’s biography reads like the reincarnation of historic music geniuses. He was born into a musical family on March 22, 1948, and was raised in South Kensington, England. His father was a professor at the Royal College of Music and taught music theory and composition. His mother, also employed at the Royal College, taught piano and was a singer and violinist. At the age of three, Lloyd Webber was playing the violin; at six, he was composing music, and at nine, he was published in the magazine Music Teacher.

At the age of seventeen, Lloyd Webber received the following letter from the then twenty one-year-old law student, Tim Rice: “Dearest Andrew, I’ve been told you’re looking for a “with it” writer of lyrics for your songs, and as I’ve been writing pop songs for a while and particularly enjoy writing the lyrics I wonder if you consider it worth your while meeting me. Tim Rice.”

He obviously did consider it “worth his while” and thus began the collaboration of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Tim Rice was born November 10, 1944, in Amersham, Buckinghamshire, England. He briefly studied law, then ended up working for EMI Records while Lloyd Webber was studying serious music.

After their meeting in 1965, they began working on their first musical, The Likes of Us, which was never performed. After this time Rice wanted to compose pop songs, but Lloyd Webber, true to his vision, wanted to work on another musical. It was during this impasse that they were contacted by Alan Doggett, the head of music at Colt Court, a small preparatory school in West London. He commissioned them to write an end-of-term religious concert. During the next two months a twenty-minute “pop-cantata” version of Joseph and his colored coat was born. (Today Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat is a two hour stage spectacular.) The play made its debut on March 1, 1968, and its immediate popularity demanded repeat performances in May and November of the same year. With each performance, “Joseph” got bigger and better. An early review notes that Tim Rice sang the part of Pharaoh in several of the early performances. The success of “Joseph” led to a record deal with Decca for an album that was cut in January of 1969.

Perhaps Lloyd Webber and Rice felt they had really hit on something with their Bible theme and once again raided the Good Book to write Jesus Christ Superstar which premiered in 1969. In 1975 they began another venture based on the classic tales of P. G. Wodehouse and began writing the musical Jeeves. However, Rice soon lost interest and dropped out of the project. It wasn’t long, however, before they got back together to collaborate on Evita, which premiered successfully in 1976.
These two enormous talents parted ways at this time to “recharge their batteries,” as Rice said, away from each other. However, unlike many other musical collaborations, both men went on to phenomenal success in solo careers.

With his unique ability to mold music from disparate genres into music with wide popular appeal, Lloyd Webber’s other credits include Sunset Boulevard (1993), a rewrite of Jeeves titled Now Jeeves (1996), and his most current work, Whistle Down the Wind. In October 1982, Lloyd Webber made history by being the first person to have three smash hit musicals running simultaneously in New York and London. With the opening of Phantom of the Opera he repeated that accomplishment in 1988. He has also worn the hats of music composer for British film, producer at the London Palace Theater which he owns, and record producer.

Andrew Lloyd Webber has accumulated countless awards, and his smash musicals have generated astounding box office revenues. Therefore, it is not surprising that he was named the most powerful person in American theatre in a list compiled by Theater Weekly. He was knighted in 1992 by Queen Elizabeth for services to the theater not only in the United States and the United Kingdom, but throughout the world.

Tim Rice’s other musical theater credits include Blondel with Stephen Oliver, Chess with Benny Andersson and Bjorn Uvaeus (from the pop group Abba). In 1986 he co-wrote the smaller scale Cricket, again with Lloyd Webber. In 1991 he produced Tycoon from his translation of the hit French musical, Starmania. In 1993, Rice replaced the late Howard Ashman as Alan Menken’s lyricist on Disney’s Aladdin. Their song, “A Whole New World,” won them a Golden Globe and Academy Award. He also was awarded, with Elton John, the Golden Globe, Academy Award, and Ivor Novello Award for his work on Disney’s Lion King and the song, Circle of Life.

As a journalist, Rice has written regular columns for national newspapers and cricket magazines, reflecting his abiding interest in the game. His continued passion for popular music not only won him the BBC Radio’s title of “Rock Brain of the Year” in 1986, but led him to co-author The Guinness Hit Singles series with Paul Gambaccini, Mike Read, and his brother Jo Rice. In 1994, Rice was granted knighthood for services to the arts, particularly music, and sports.

The biographies of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice are as yet unfinished. With the universality and diversity of the upbeat “Hakuna Matata” to the poignant “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina,” to the passionate “Music of the Night,” their music is almost omnipresent. Hopefully, there are still many songs to be written.
Andrew Who?
By Robert Brewer
From Midsummer Magazine, 1998

He is the only composer to ever have three musicals running in New York and three in London at the same time. He has been awarded six Tony Awards, four Drama Desk Awards, three Grammys, and, oh yes, five Olivier Awards. He runs the Really Useful Group that produces not only his own but other writers’ work such as Ken Ludwig’s Lend Me a Tenor. Oh! Did I mention that he wrote the music for Cats, the longest running musical in Broadway history, as well as Jesus Christ Superstar, Evita, Starlight Express, Aspects of Love, Song and Dance, By Jeeves, and Sunset Boulevard?

He was awarded a knighthood in 1988 and became a lord in 1996. He was inducted into the American Songwriters’ Hall of Fame and given the Praemium Imperiale Award for Music in 1995.

He is also working on a new musical about a group of children meeting Christ called Whistle Down the Wind, set to open July 1 in London.

Oh! I almost forgot. He also wrote Phantom of the Opera. Did I mention that?

He, of course, is Andrew Lloyd Webber who is nothing more than the most successful composer in modern musical theatre history.

Historically, the musical has always been thought to be part of our American heritage, at least so it seemed. However, several years ago, producer Cameron Macintosh, in his acceptance speech for one of his first Tony Awards, looked sheepishly at the audience and warned: “The British are coming.”

Of course, it can be argued that the musical was never truly American. I mean Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Fritz Loewe, although thought to be American, were all born in Europe and immigrated here at a young age. And their inspirations were the great European opera and operetta composers.

Andrew Lloyd Webber came from this cloth. Inspired by the classicists, particularly Puccini, his music always seems to stir strong emotional response. Songs like “Memories” and “Music of the Night” are poignant examples of his brilliance. Of course, Andrew Lloyd Webber is not without his critics who call his work “derivative” and “forgetful.” In fact, his work has not had the same critical reception in America that it has had in Europe. I guess that is the price one pays for success.

Currently, Andrew Lloyd Webber has twenty-three professional productions of his work going on in the world. This does not take into account college, stock, or amateur productions around the world which number in the hundreds.

This summer the Utah Shakespeare Festival is presenting Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. There are two things that are distinctive about this work—that separate it from the others.

First, this is the first piece Lloyd Webber ever wrote.

And second? Of all of Lloyd Webber’s musicals, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat is the composer’s personal favorite.

March 1, 1968, saw the first performance of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at Colet Court School in London. The head of music of the school wanted to create an original musical piece for the schoolboys to perform at the end-of-term concert and commissioned the composer (in collaboration with Tim Rice who penned the words) to write something. The result was the first version of the piece which ran all of fifteen minutes.

Soon after, the piece was performed again in a new twenty-minute version by the Colet College Choir with an orchestra. Still performed as a concert, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat started to be noticed and received favorable comments in the press.

The first recording was made in January 1969, further expanded with additional songs and
music. “Joseph-mania” was building, and schools all over the United Kingdom and in America wanted to perform the new work.

In London, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat was given further concert performances at St. Paul’s Cathedral and Central Hall. The huge success of these led to the first fully-staged production of the musical.

The Young Vic Theater Company presented a new production at the 1972 Edinburgh Festival, which then transferred to the Young Vic Theater in London. It was now forty minutes long.

Finally, after further expansion, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat opened in the West End at the Albery Theater in 1973. Following this production, more music was added to create the performing version that we see today.

I personally believe this to be Lloyd Webber’s best musical work. Unlike the later shows that seem to rely heavily on extravaganza, this play’s magic is in its simplicity and its overall eclectic musical design.

Webber calls the piece a “pop cantata”—there’s country (“One More Angel in Heaven”), there’s Elvis (“Song of the King”), there’s disco (“Go, Go, Go, Joseph”), and there’s even calypso. And there are now the famous standards: “Any Dream Will Do” and “Close Every Door,” made famous as theme songs for Donny Osmond who toured with the show for years.

To understand an artist, one needs to study his beginnings. There is probably no other piece that exposes this composer’s heart better than Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. The piece is genuine, wholesome, spiritual, and, in the end, quietly powerful. It is about the power to endure, the ability to change, and the strength of the family.

The piece has somehow been labeled a “kids” show. But I think that it speaks to both old and young; to both father and son. Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat is no more a children’s show than Falsettos is a show for adults. More and more this wonderful piece shows us how we must stop labeling and judging the world we live in. Joseph, a young dreamer, embraces all the colors. Sounds pretty adult to me.

By the way. Did I tell you to bring the kids?
A Springboard Called “Joseph”

By Robert Burgan

The careers of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, and thus the musical Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, were almost non-starters.

Lloyd Webber was nineteen and lyricist Tim Rice twenty-three when Alan Doggert, an acquaintance of Lloyd Webber’s father was appointed director of music at Colet Court, a school whose training parallels that of the Vienna Boys’ Choir. Doggert wanted a unique opportunity for his students, one that would advance their training and simultaneously appeal to their interest in pop/rock music. His idea was to commission a short cantata based on a Bible story. (Tim Rice later admitted that he “got most of it out of The Wonder Book of Bible Stories, which takes about four minutes to read!”)

The first performance was at a school concert on March 1, 1968—and it was all of fifteen minutes long!

The piece impressed Lloyd Webber’s father, who used his influence to arrange for it (now expanded to twenty minutes in length) to be performed at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, as part of a Sunday concert in May 1968.

Two important milestones for Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice occurred that day: first, an audience paid to see it; and, second, a critic from a major newspaper, The Sunday Times, attended.

When critic Richard Jewel’s review appeared on May 19, 1968, it was titled “A Springboard Called ‘Joseph’.” (Considering the hugely successful careers that awaited both of its youthful creators, the word “springboard” seems a happily apt choice.) Jewel praised the “happy bounce of lyrics” as “irresistible”; called the song “Close Every Door to Me” a “very beautiful melody” and concluded: “Throughout its twenty-minute duration, it bristles with wonderfully singable tunes. It entertains. It communicates instantly, as all good pop should communicate.”

As Time magazine noted “[Jewell’s] unexpected rave led to a recording. Lloyd Webber’s deft gift for parody (the Elvis homage of ‘Pharaoh’s Story’) and melodic invention (Joseph’s moving anthem ‘Close Every Door’) captures a wide audience. ‘Without realizing it,’ recalls Rice, ‘we were breaking new ground by forgetting about Rodgers and Hammerstein.’” (Rice’s sense of humor is in evidence in some of the titles he proposed for the work, including Pal Joseph and How to Succeed in Egypt without Really Trying!)

“We found,” Lloyd Webber said, “That you could switch styles crazily throughout the whole thing, mixing up musical comedy numbers with calypso, country/western, and Elvis Presley. And the basic story is such a good plot.”

A rush of events followed quickly. An expanded version was presented in St. Paul’s Cathedral (the second of five leading to the Broadway version, in which Andy Gibb and David Cassidy were among the actors who played Joseph), and, based upon the successful Decca recording of the work, impresario David Land offered the team a three-year contract paying each of the young artists 3000 pounds (then approximately $6000) a year. The record-breaking music opened at the London Palladium on June 12, 1991 starring Jason Donovan ran for over two years, was seen by over two million people, and the box office took in over forty-seven million pounds.

Within twelve months, they created Jesus Christ Superstar. Then, in 1976 the team was to join forces with legendary American Theatre director Hal Prince and create the enormously successful Evita.

Following Evita, the pair have only occasionally worked together, and they have been successful in their individual careers. (“Andrew was obsessed by being Richard Rodgers,” Rice said in a 1981 ABC interview. “I wanted to be Mick Jagger.”)

In the meantime, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat has continued to be an amazing
success, in London, on Broadway, and touring around the world. It is hard to pinpoint the exact reason for the success of this play, but Lorin Maazel, the famed conductor, may have come close in a recent discussion when he asked Lloyd Webber about the composer Philip Glass and his work in minimalism:

“Please,” Lloyd Webber asked, “explain it to me.”

“There’s no point in trying to explain to you what minimalism is,” Maazel responded. “You are a maximalist.”