



**DIRECTOR'S CONCEPT
SCOTT D. PAFUMI**

HERNDON HS THEATRE - SPRING 2020

A “coming of age” story is universal to the analogues of theatre literature. Whether it be the Greek tragedies, the classic plays of Shakespeare, the modern dramas, or the cannon of American musicals, we should all be able to relate to the trials, tribulations, and moments of discovery that are inherent to growing up and finding our path towards adulthood; towards self-actualization. One of my favorite Shakespearean soliloquies to teach and to quote is on the stages of man. It chronicles the beats of birth, childhood, young love, soldiering, the age of wisdom, and the elder years of second childishness. I believe that Stephen Schwartz was in tune with all of this when he first penned the music and lyrics of *Pippin*, *Pippin* (original title) when he was at Carnegie Mellon University in the late 1960's.

From his online forum on the genesis of *Pippin*, we can learn many things about his inspirations for this musical. *Lion in Winter* was a popular movie at the time, following the royal family of 13th century England. Indeed, Pippin is based on an actual character in history from that same era – Pepin, a hunchbacked prince, who tried and failed to overthrow his father King Charlemagne. The character of the Lead Player was a creation by Bob Fosse (a seasoned choreographer), who was introduced to the young Schwartz as he was looking for producers to mount his first Broadway creation. In 1972, this epic royal tale of finding oneself went on to have a successful seven-year run and a near 2,000 performances. It was no secret that Stephen Schwartz and Bob Fosse had many creative differences in creating this show, and we need not look further than the chemistry between the aggressive Leading Player and the wide-eyed innocence of Pippin, who are indeed Fosse and Schwartz incarnate, as quoted by Schwartz.

There's a pretty substantiated theatre rumor that the original *Pippin* was the production that Fosse wanted, and the revival show, post year 2000, is the show that Schwartz always wanted to do. The differences in these productions can be found in some of the added songs and tones of the show, but most definitely in the revised ending. At this point, the revival score is the only one available for production, which I happen to artistically agree with. The revised ending is most poetic to Pippin's answer to what life is all about. Instead of going out in a blaze of glory, in an epic pass of fire and self-destruction, he chooses the simple life of love, marriage, and family. As the curtain is pulled away and the bare theatre is exposed, the audience sees behind all the spectacle and glitz that the player troupe worked so hard to create. That is, until young Theo presents himself as ready to begin *his* journey, and the players return to get their hooks into their next progeny.

There are many ways to imagine the spectacle of this show. Obvious themes include a circus troupe, a classic royal court of players and soldiers, and perhaps even as a Vegas style theme. I will endeavor to pay homage to the historical player troupes of Europe, performing at the King's will. Important to me are the vibrant colors of a spectacle musical juxtaposed against the darker moments of war, patricide, and self-doubt or depression. This show is an artistic mirror of life, held up to our nature and nurture, and all the joys and sadness that comes with that journey of discovery. As we mount this Broadway classic within our teen ensemble, it

seems quite apropos that we all find our inner Pippin. This is indeed a coming of age story, and who better to relate to that than our own student body. As you all ceremoniously march towards commencement, which path will YOU choose – the one towards fire or towards simplicity.