

Special performers get into the act

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — Andrea Brown has been hard at work lately, committing three evenings per week to rehearse for an upcoming musical.

"I want to get everything perfect," the 16-year-old said.

That's an admirable goal considering that Andrea has multiple roles in "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." She's part of a 45-member cast that will give six performances of the popular Andrew Lloyd Webber-Tim Rice production, beginning Nov. 8 at the German House in Rochester.

The production is a unique initiative: All the performers have special needs. Andrea, for instance, is a fourth-year student at Henrietta's School of the Holy Childhood, a center for developmentally disabled children and adults. Along with Holy Childhood, the agencies involved in "Joseph" are ARC of Monroe County, Job Path and Lifetime Assistance.

Cathy Brown (no relation to Andrea), who serves as Holy Childhood's clinic program supervisor, said the venture sprang from a growing awareness that, in many cases, people with special needs are talented in the performing arts but don't have opportunities available to prove it. With the assistance of Ed Schram, co-owner of Ridge Productions in Greece, the pieces came together in the last few months to launch "Joseph." Rehearsals began in June and have intensified to two, then three days per week at the German House.

The story is a modern-day account of Joseph of Canaan, as described in the Book of Genesis. Joseph has the ability to interpret dreams and is envied because of his beautiful coat. His jealous brothers sell him into slavery, but he eventually rises up to become a leader of Egypt as the Pharaoh's right-hand man. Later, his brothers who abandoned him come looking for employment — but must answer to the brother they sold away.

Andrea will employ dancing, singing and acting talents in her performances. In one sequence she plays Mrs. Potiphar, the wife of Joseph's slave master who tempts Joseph. "She's boy-crazy," Andrea commented. Among her other roles, Andrea is in the chorus and even plays a corn on the cob.

Having all these responsibilities is quite a step forward for Andrea, who got off to a slow start in rehearsals.

"She had a little bit of stage fright to begin with, but wanted to be in 'Joseph' so badly she auditioned a second time and practiced hard,"



Andrea Brown (center) listens to choreographer Susan Ware (right) during an Oct. 24 rehearsal for "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," being staged at the German House in Rochester by School of the Holy Childhood, ARC of Monroe County, Job Path and Lifetime Assistance. At left is Ware's daughter, Josie McAdam.



said Brown, who is a coordinator of the production.

Brown said Andrea has displayed obvious talent, and that Holy Childhood is hoping to place her in acting classes. In fact, Brown noted that proceeds from "Joseph" are being earmarked toward establishing a performing-arts scholarship fund for people with special needs.

Having this financial support is important, Brown said, because performing "teaches them responsibility and they also find out what their talents are." She added that such activity raises the individuals' feelings of self-worth.

Andrea has become comfortable in front of crowds by serving as a regular lector for the Thursday Mass at School of the Holy Childhood. Therefore, Andrea — who attends Holy Apostles and Blessed Sacrament parishes in Rochester — thinks the anxiety leading up to "Joseph" will only be temporary.



Andrea (right) and Josie rehearse a scene.

"I'll be nervous and then I'll forget about it," she predicted.

EDITOR'S NOTE: "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" will have six performances at the German House, 315 Gregory St., Rochester. Show dates are Nov. 8, 9, 10, 14, 15 and 16. All shows begin at 8 p.m. with the exception of the Nov. 10 performance, which begins at 3 p.m. Advance tickets are on sale for \$10 at all ESL Federal Credit Union branches. Tickets are \$12 at the door.



One of Andrea's roles in the production is that of Mrs. Potiphar, the wife of Joseph's slave master.

