

Director's Vision

by Darko Tresnjak

CARNIVAL!

How did you become interested in *Carnival!*?

I became interested in *Carnival!* because of Marge Champion. In 2001, after seeing the production of *A Little Night Music* that I directed at Goodspeed, she suggested that I take a look at this show. Her late husband, Gower Champion, directed the original production. It took me nine years to get around to it. Earlier this year, I went to visit Marge. She had just turned ninety but her memory is better than mine. She told me a great deal about the original production and lent me a file with all of the original reviews, articles, pictures, and production notes. She also let me play with Carrot Top and Horrible Henry, the puppets from the original production. So I owe her a great deal and I hope that she will enjoy our production.

Tell us about your production of *Carnival!*.

My first instinct was to relate the production to the period right after the Second World War. Francine Pascal, the sister of Michael Stewart who wrote the book, thought that this was a good idea. She lives in the south of France, where *Carnival!* takes place, and she mentioned a WWII cannon that's still on the beach. She said that it always makes her think of *Carnival!*. Paul, the male lead, has lost his ability to dance due to a wartime injury. Lili, the ingénue, has lost her parents and her home. The circus has fallen on hard times. Marco and Rosalie are looking for a better gig. And Schlegel, the owner of the circus, is trying to hold it all together as best he can. So the world is a little shabby, bitter, and haunted. During the course of the show, we see the characters searching for a new home, family, and purpose. We also looked at some great images of circus life, not just on stage but backstage: the rehearsals, the bruises, the icing of the feet, the setting up and the tearing down, performers waiting in the cold to receive their paychecks, etc. The first line in the show is "Direct from Vienna, for seven days only..." So that struck me as rather important: the transient nature of the characters' lives.



Why do you think Goodspeed audiences will enjoy the show?

Acting, singing, dancing, puppetry, magic, juggling, trapeze, and tumbling, all on the intimate Goodspeed stage. It's a rewarding show to work on under any circumstances, but even more so at Goodspeed.

Tell us about the cast -- how you chose them and what the audience can expect to see.

I think that performers, ideally, cast themselves. You look for that moment in an audition when the skill and the connection with the material are so great that there is no need for discussion. And I am happy to say that this happened again and again in our *Carnival!* auditions. The role of Lili is especially tricky, because the actress playing the part has to be believable as a teenager, convey both strength and fragility, and have an astonishing voice. Vocally, it is a rather taxing role. I am very happy that we have Lauren Worsham as our Lili.

Photo: Carnival! director Darko Tresnjak showing the set model to the cast during the first read-through. Photo by Diane Sobolewski