

Do You Hear The People Sing?

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The longest running musical in the world has, at long last, come to Hilton Head!



A year after presenting the regional premiere of “The Producers,” the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina has scored another major theatrical coup, landing the rights to the extraordinarily popular “Les Misérables.”

The longest running musical in the world, “Les Mis” is still playing in London’s West End 23 years after it opened. The first Broadway production ran for 16 years and won eight Tony Awards, including Best Musical, Best Score and Best Book.

“It’s a huge honor to be among the eight or nine theaters in the country that will have the opportunity to stage ‘Les Mis,’” said Arts Center President and CEO Kathleen Bateson. “The show was chosen by our own theater audiences as the musical they most wanted to see this season.”

Although a student version of “Les Mis” was released in 2002, regional theater companies have been waiting years for the professional rights to become available. Last spring, producer Sir Cameron Mackintosh personally approved a short list of U.S. regional companies allowed to stage the mammoth musical.



To ensure the epic tale would be presented as originally intended, he is requiring theaters to use a minimum of 24 actors, the same size as the Broadway revival. The Arts Center production will exceed those casting requirements by a dozen actors, most of them professionals from New York.

“It’s a big, big show,” said director Casey Colgan, who auditioned more than 850 actors for the production. “We’re going to fill the theater with huge singing voices.”

Among them is Jason Kraack, who performed in the national tour of “Les Mis,” Meghan Moroney, the understudy for all three leads in the Broadway production of “Mama Mia,” and British actor Sam Underwood, who recently finished a three-month run in the off-Broadway musical “My Vaudeville Man!”

“The music is what hooks people,” said Moroney, cast as the shamelessly unscrupulous Madame Thénardier, one of the show’s comedic characters. “It adds beauty to the book.” Set in early 19th century France on the heels of the revolution, “Les Mis” follows Victor Hugo’s timeless novel about a paroled convict who tries to mend his ways, only to be relentlessly pursued by a police inspector obsessed with returning him to prison. Almost all of the story is told in song.

“It has Puccini’s grand operatic structure with lots of big, singable tunes,” said Musical Director Frederick Willard. “The power of the music goes right to your soul. If you’re alive, you can’t help but be moved by it.”

To create the large orchestral sound required of thunderous anthems like “Do You Hear the People Sing” and “One Day More,” the Arts Center will use the cutting-edge technology of a virtual orchestra, supplemented by a live trumpet, trombone, electric bass, clarinet, saxophone and percussion.

"It's very close to the initial conception of the show," Willard said. "There's a raw, emotional power to it."

The set also has been designed to resemble the Broadway production. Production designer and six-time Emmy winner Bob Phillips used a dark, stylized color scheme that allows the actors to stand out from the scenery.

"It suits the play better," Phillips said. "It's the people that make the show. We're going to back light them with two follow spots on the stage, so they'll glow like never before."

Equally impressive are the 150 costumes, handmade by the costume shop staff. The Arts Center went so far as to hire theater artist Cynthia Cermak to distress some of the pieces to give them a weathered look.

"We're going all out with this production," said Colgan, who directed last year's musical extravaganza, "The Producers." "Expectations are huge, and we're not going to disappoint."

"Les Misérables" runs now through May 24 in the Elizabeth Wallace Theatre. Performances are at 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday with Sunday shows at 2 p.m. April 26, May 3, 10, 17 and 24 and 7 p.m. April 26 and May 24. Tickets are \$54 for adults (\$50 for April 22 and 23 previews), \$37 for children ages 4 to 15 (\$35 for the previews) and may be purchased at the Arts Center box office or by phone with a credit card by calling 843-842-ARTS (2787). As a special "economic stimulus," the Arts Center is offering \$3 off tickets for opening week performances April 22-26.