Musical comedy kicks off Cabrillo Stage season

‘La Cage Aux Folles’ opens Friday at Cabrillo’s Crocker Theater

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APTS — Thambeyance meets conservatism in Cabrillo Stage’s musical comedy that stresses the importance of family.

The stage will be lit for the start of the theater company’s 32nd season Friday with “La Cage Aux Folles.”

The musical, by Jerry Herman and Harvey Fierstein, follows the gay couple Georges and Albin. It won many Tony awards, including best musical and best musical revival.

Janie Scott returns to Cabrillo Stage after she directed “A Chorus Line” last year to strong response.

When the time came to determine next season’s group of shows around December, Scott immediately thought of “La Cage Aux Folles,” but not because she had experience with it.

In fact, she had none. “I don’t know why it popped into my head, but for some reason it jumped out to me,” Scott said. “It was a show I have had no connection with.”

What she did know was that it would be a “perfect fit for Cabrillo audiences,” she said, and now, with the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling regarding gay marriage, is very timely.

The next steps would be challenging. Some of the main characters in the performance, the “Cageisters,” are actually an ensemble of nine drug queens.

Having the group of men (although one is a woman) pull on drag mannequins, as well as wearing 18th-century costumes, in a believable way proved to be a challenge during rehearsals, according to Scott.

Luckily, Scott said she was able to get her first choice of cast, a decision she said was “very fortunate” to be a part of.

Among that cast is Tony Panighetti, who has worked with Scott on previous Cabrillo Stage productions, including “Some Like It Hot” in 2002.

Panighetti plays the role of Albin, the character he describes as “very rewarding and challenging.”

Albin, the star performer at the fictional nightclub featuring drag entertainment, has an entrance that is “no less than dramatic,” Panighetti said.

“This is easily the biggest and most fantastic production I’ve been a part of,” he said. “This is not easily said.”

Panighetti, now in his fifth production with Cabrillo Stage, graduated from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. His passion for theater began in the fourth grade, when he performed as the shank in “The Frog Prince.”

His career choice was cemented when, as a senior in high school, a director of his encouraged him to pursue it, noting his talent.

“La Cage Aux Folles” made its debut on Broadway in 1983, and saw a revival in 2010. Besides expanding one of the dance numbers and a few other tweaks, Scott said her version of the show won’t see any major changes.

Both Scott and Panighetti said the story of “La Cage Aux Folles” addresses family issues that anyone can identify with.

“We’ve made a connection on a personal level,” Scott said. “There is so much to identify with.”

Intertwined with the message of family is a truly entertaining experience, both Scott and Panighetti agreed.

“We have these amazing dancers that are doing these wonderful things that you don’t expect to see on stage,” Panighetti said.

The audience can expect a truly wonderful, entertaining evening of theater with terrific production values, gorgeous sets and incredible costumes,” Scott said.

“La Cage Aux Folles” opens Friday at 7:30 p.m. in the Cabrillo College Crocker Theater, 6500 Soquel Drive in Aptos, and runs through Aug. 11. Wednesday through Saturday performances are 7:30 p.m., with Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. Tickets are $25 to $48.

For a complete schedule and to purchase tickets, visit www.cabrilostage.com.