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Annapolis Summer garden embraces the bright side of 'Spamalot'

Monty Python's irreverent classic closes 49th season

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Center top, Lady of the Lake, played by Alice Goldberg, and below her, King Arthur, Ruben Vellekoop, with other cast members singing "Find Your Grail" in "Spamalot," continuing through Aug. 30 at Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre. Photo by Bud Johnson For The Baltimore Sun (Bud Johnson For The Baltimore Sun / February 28, 2010)

By **Mary Johnson, For The Baltimore Sun**

6:22 p.m. EDT, August 14, 2014

Related

Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre is capping its season with "**Monty Python's Spamalot**" an irreverent retelling of

the quest for the Holy Grail.

The silliness of "Spamalot" is totally at home in Summer Garden's outdoor theater, where a lively cast delivers a production of zesty dancing guys and girls, lusty choruses and zany comedians.

The 2005 musical, with book and lyrics by Eric Idle, who also composed the music with John Du Prez, is based on the 1975 movie **"Monty Python and the Holy Grail."**

Jeffery Lesniak makes his Annapolis Summer Garden debut as director with his milestone 100th theatrical production, presenting the outrageous antics of King Arthur's entourage so briskly that we hardly have time to catch our breath between laughs.

Lesniak is assisted by choreographer Rikki Howie Lacewell. Lacewell also makes a strong Annapolis debut, demonstrating her expertise with an extraordinary troupe of dancers.

Also contributing their talents are members of a set construction crew that created stone facades for royal buildings. Costume designer Linda Swann does equal justice to royalty, peasants and dancing choruses.

No musical would succeed without strong musicians, and under music director Steve Przybylski, Annapolis Summer Garden has the classiest group in memory. They excel in interpreting the "Spamalot" score, with pianist Ken Kimble conducting.

The seven musicians enliven a score filled with catchy tunes, including the zesty "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" and others such as "He is Not Dead Yet," "Come With Me," "The Song That Goes Like This," "Diva's Lament" and "Find Your Grail."

Clearly every member of this polished cast is having fun — and they draw in audience members.

King Arthur's faithful servant, Patsy, becomes his steadfast steed, complete with sound effects created by banging coconuts together as he gallops close behind his master. In his Annapolis debut — and in his first stage role since elementary school — Steven Baird seems destined to play Patsy. Comically overlooked by Arthur in his solo "I'm All Alone," Patsy shyly announces he has the heritage needed to help Arthur achieve his goal — providing a comic high moment.

Netherlands native Ruben Vellekoop, who was last seen in Annapolis Summer Garden's "Avenue Q" in 2012, returns to portray Arthur with gentle dignity and offbeat deference as he gathers his knights of the Round Table. Vellekoop delivers off-beat passion in his duet "The Song that Goes Like This" with Lady of the Lake, played by Alice Goldberg.

Also making a Summer Garden debut, Joshua Mooney is a hilarious Lancelot and is even funnier as a haughty French Taunter and a believable Scotsman as Tim the Enchanter.

David Merrill displays impressive vocal ability and a deft comic touch in roles including Sir Galahad, the Black Knight and Prince Herbert's father.

As Sir Robin, Fred Fletcher-Jackson contributes to several knightly choruses and adds comic high jinks, shining brightly in his exuberant "You Won't Succeed on Broadway." As Sir Bedevere, DJ Wojciehowski copes with comical problems that result in potty humor; he also portrays a number of other unusual



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Annapolis Shakespeare Company's "Tempest" [Pictures]



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characters.

Goldberg reflects major vocal talent and versatility as the Lady of the Lake, summoning a number of styles in "Diva's Lament." She knows how to deliver her lines with comedic expertise.

Austin Heemstra is a standout with his athleticism, energetic dynamism, comic and vocal talent, especially in the role of Not Dead Fred. Heemstra is also a standout dancer, as is fellow troupe member Nick Carter.

Another fabulous dancer here is Tabitha Thornhill — the youngest member of the local Thornhill family's dancing dynasty and an alum of the Edgewater-based Talent Machine. She's now a student at Anne Arundel Community College.

With lively dance, spirited singing and irreverent humor that avoids any semblance of political correctness, "Spamalot" provides fun entertainment — though it's not suitable for folks who would be offended by irreverent treatment of religious subjects and unflattering sexual references.

Continuing to Aug. 30, running Thursdays through Sundays, "Spamalot" closes the 49th season at Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre, 143 Compromise Street. Tickets are \$20 and available at summergarden.com or call 410-268-9212.

2015 season

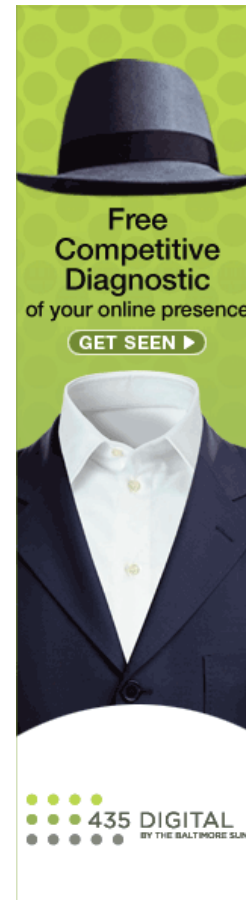
Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre's 2015 season has been announced, with subscriptions now available. Offerings will include "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," "Catch Me If You Can" and a third show, described as "a creepy, kooky, and spooky musical," whose title cannot yet be announced.

Contributions are also being solicited for Annapolis Summer Garden's continuing Stage 2 renovation project, launched to upgrade the stage, seating and lobby of the theater. Donations may be made online at summergarden.com.

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