

'Pippin' Enchants Audiences During Run at The Studio

The latest installment of The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol's ninth season runs now through March 1.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND
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It's said that "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players," but "Pippin" asks what happens when one actor steps outside his role.

The latest installment of The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol's ninth season, "Longing to Belong," sweeps audiences away into a world of magic and endless possibility. "Pippin" is Roger O. Hirson and Stephen Schwartz's darkly comedic medieval musical about King Charlemagne's son and his quest to find his true identity and purpose. Full of fourth-wall breaks, bawdy humor, violence, romance, magic and miracles, the anecdotal revue is a festively staged exploration of life's endless search for fulfillment and self-actualization.

"This is the best production I've ever seen here," said Nancy Dispenza, of the Village of Sunset Pointe. "That cast was fabulous."

Determined to find his "Corner of the Sky," Pippin, played by Aidan Levinson, is

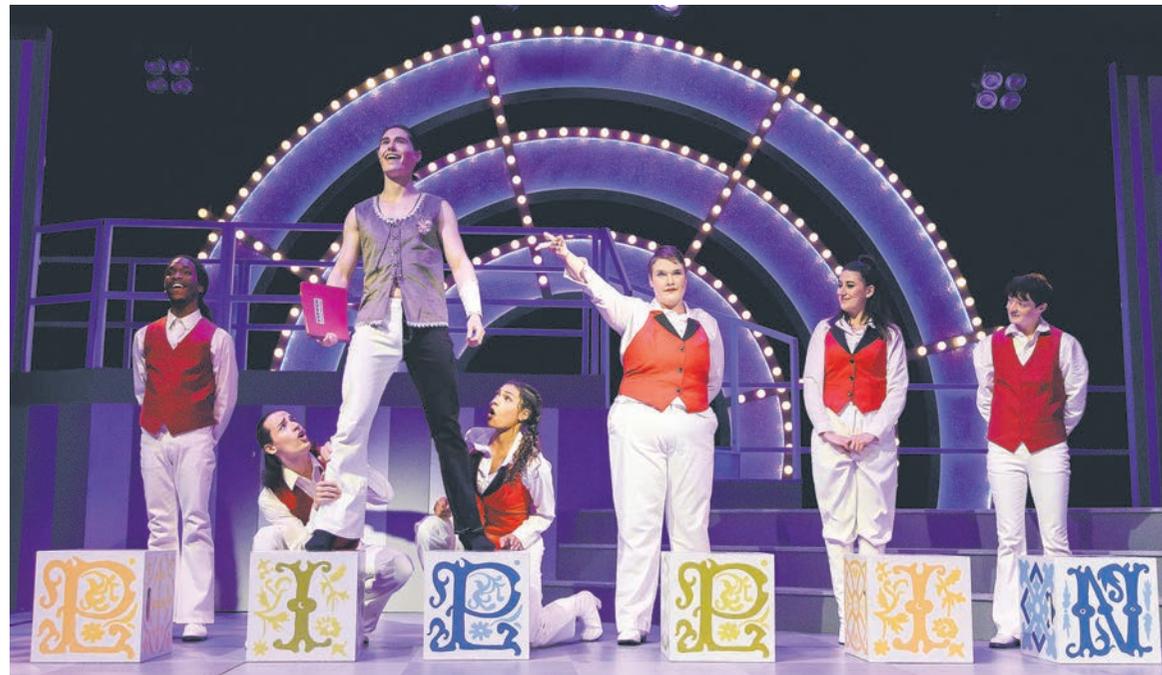
the unwitting star of a mysterious performance troupe full of nameless players. Studio newcomer Michelle Alves is the show's Leading Player, who acts as the troupe's emcee, narrating Pippin's life and promising the audience a finale they will never forget.

"I would have watched her right along with Ben Vereen, who was the original Broadway actor," Dispenza said. "She was amazing, then so was Pippin."

The Studio's production of "Pippin" foregoes the typical circus staging for a more Las Vegas-style set and wholeheartedly embraces the show's anachronisms in terms of plot, music and costume design.

Featuring every color of a 64-count Crayola box, characters wear a mix of Carolingian court dress, skin-tight pantsuits and shiny show girl outfits. Bloody battles are interspersed with Bob Fosse's toe-tapping jazz routines, and Viking and Christian soldiers wield an armory of swords, maces and automatic rifles. Heads roll, limbs fly and jazz hands abound.

The court of Charlemagne, played by Central Florida favorite Kevin Kelly, is comically incongruous with the rest of the stage with its medieval trappings and brutal politics. Studio artistic director Whitney Morse plays Fastrada,



Aidan Levinson stars as the titular character in The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol's production of "Pippin," a dark musical comedy.

Submitted photos



Michelle Alves takes on the role of Leading Player in "Pippin," which runs now through March 1

Charlemagne's conniving wife and mother to Pippin's flamboyant younger half-brother Lewis, played by Radamés

Medina Meléndez.

Eager to please, Pippin begs to join his father's army as they embark on an ironic campaign

to spread the word of God by killing all of the non-Christians in other nations. In the midst of battle, Pippin starts to consider that pilfering and pillaging might not be the life for him.

Instead, he pays a visit to his saucy grandmother, Berthe, played by newcomer Tamarin K. Ythier, who tells him that "it's time to start livin'" because his life will pass by in "No Time At All." Emboldened, Pippin rebels against his father, claims the title of king and fails miserably during his reign.

Dejected and listless, Pippin passes through the world seeking greatness and finding none. He turns to the arts, then to the church and is dissatisfied with both. Instead, he settles with a widow and her young son, grieving his failures and lamenting his wasted potential. All the while, the performance troupe dogs his heels, assuring him greatness will come.

Samm Carroll makes her

Studio debut as the widow Catherine, who she also played in the Garden Theatre's 2024 production. Ciara Hickey, another Studio newcomer, plays Catherine's son, Theo. Both received praise for their comedic timing and heartfelt performances alongside Levinson as Pippin and Alves as the Leading Player.

"Every single one of (the performers) was Broadway quality," said Linda Davis, of the Village of Mallory Square. "We're so lucky to have this theater here in The Villages. We've been coming since day one of the first season. I can't say it keeps getting better and better because it's been good the whole time, but this was one of the best."

"Pippin" runs through March 1 at The Studio. Tickets for the show are \$45 and up. To purchase, go to thevillagesentertainment.com.

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