



Courtesy photo

Injoy Fountain, left, and Sophia Hillman star in "The Color Purple" at Roxy's Downtown.

'The Color Purple' finally makes it to Roxy's stage

BY DAVID BURKE
Eagle correspondent

Getting "The Color Purple" on stage at Roxy's Downtown has been a long time coming.

The stage musical version of Alice Walker's 1982 book and the accompanying 1985 movie was supposed to be staged a year ago but was delayed by COVID. It opens this weekend and continues through Feb. 27.

"The moment (artistic

director Rick Bumgardner) told me that the rights were being sought, I was elated. My little heart jumped for joy," said Jasllyn Alexander, who plays Sofia. "I was obsessed with the movie when I was a kid. It was one of those movies my mom would let me watch as a kid. It was absolutely gut-wrenching, and I loved it so much."

Bumgardner said the show is ideal for Roxy's, especially during Black History Month, for the subject matter it touches,

including its depiction of overcoming adversity, "rising up and finding your voice."

Wichita theater veteran Huron Breaux plays Mister, who marries the much-younger Celie, the female lead.

"He's got some twisted ways about him, which was about the norm for that time, and passed on generationally from his father. He's really a hurting man, who was a successful man in the community with a farm and a

store. He's part of the 'haves' in the community, but there's a lot he's missing internally," Breaux said.

"I've had to really dig inside and find this darkness that needs to be portrayed in Mister," he continued. "The show to me is about redemption. Mister comes to himself and sees himself later in the show and he's basically taught by his son as well as Celie."

"The essence of this show is that the life you save may be your own," Bumgardner added. "That is a wonderful element."

"The Color Purple" ran on Broadway from 2005 to 2008, with 10 Tony Award nominations and a

win for actress LaChanze as Celie. A 2015 revival won best musical revival and best actress for Cynthia Erivo as Celie.

Playing Celie for Roxy's "Color Purple" is Injoy Fountain, already a long-time performer in Wichita and known for her competing on NBC's "The Voice."

"We all know that Injoy is a powerhouse of a singer. She not only has fortitude and intensity, but she has grit and chops, and it comes from inside her heart," Breaux said. "Man, the contrast of her voice and singing is a showstopper."

Alexander added, "She's one of the hardest-working people — and I

don't say that because she's a friend of mine — from start to finish. When she starts, she commits."

Bumgardner said Fountain was convinced she was going to play Sofia, the daughter-in-law of Celie.

"She thought she was Sofia," he said. "She kind of campaigned and lobbied and did all sorts of things until about three months ago when I went, 'No, I'm not doing that.' She thought she wasn't going to be cast in the show."

Fountain was surprised she was given the lead role, Bumgardner said, and has even requested separate individual rehearsals so she could perfect the character.

Her climactic song, "I'm Here," had set designer Michael Downs in tears in a rehearsal last week, Bumgardner said.

Casting a 17-person show with all Black performers proved to be more difficult than Bumgardner thought. He was grateful for the connections Breaux had with local church choirs and the ARISE Ensemble for filling the roles.

"I've been blessed because of that to have exactly the right kind of voices, exactly the right kind of style," Breaux said. "In a lot of respect, this show is like going to church."

Of the eight newcomers cast for "The Color Purple," five have never been on stage before, Bumgardner said.

"They are taking over, let me tell you," he said. "The pros are having a hard time keeping up with them."

"THE COLOR PURPLE"

When: Feb. 3-27; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays

Where: Roxy's Downtown, 412 ½ E. Douglas

Tickets: \$30, from 265-4400 or roxydowntown.com