

Another aspect of love

HAZEL THOMPSON



Richard Haley

JOHN BROCKLISS



Tabitha Webb

RICHARD HALEY and TABITHA WEBB tell Philip Halcrow about their new musical

AUDIENCES at a musical want to see a love that is torn apart and then to discover whether it is restored, says Tabitha Webb, who has played the parts of Christine and Cosette in the West End productions of *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables*. And, sitting in a room in Romford, above the space where people are rehearsing the new musical she has co-written, she explains: 'Our musical includes the tension of a relationship that has been pulled apart and is longing to be put back together.'

Love Beyond – which will be staged at Wembley Arena for two nights next week – explores a particular story.

As co-writer Richard Haley says: 'What we're drawing out is the love story of the whole Bible.'

Love Beyond does not, he points out, provide a detailed trawl through the Scriptures but is about 'God's love for humankind'.

Tabitha explains: 'We start with the perfect relationship between Adam and Eve and the Trinity. It's a beautiful scene of how everything's the way it's meant to be. Then the relationship is painfully broken. But God plans to bring humankind back

to himself and the only way to do that is by Jesus sacrificing himself.

'So audiences will see the broken relationship being made whole again through what Jesus did.'

At the same time, Richard says, the storyline shows the significance of episodes in the Bible. 'For example, it contextualises the Nativity. Many people are familiar with the Nativity but perhaps do not fully understand what it is about. But when they see it take place at a point in history, it becomes much clearer.'

He insists that the story of *Love Beyond* 'stands on its own merit' whether the audience members are Christians or not. He says that he and Tabitha were 'careful to write so that anyone from any background can understand it'. The costumes are vaguely modern rather than ancient. And the characters have been drawn so that they are 'relatable'. For instance, Saul – whose life was changed by his Damascus road experience – is not pinpointed as a Pharisee, but portrayed as someone who understands and loves the law. So he would fit as a Pharisee, but I hope he would also fit some modern situations.'

The desire for the musical to have a broad appeal was in Richard's mind when he first dreamed a dream of creating such a show. 'Fifteen years ago, I was at Wembley Arena to watch a school choirs concert,' he says. 'The lights dimmed and I saw



