Knocking it outta the park

WCT opens the season with a crackerjack production of 'Damn Yankees'

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The bases are loaded with potential musical magic: Wagner College Theater's "Damn Yankees" has hit the Main Hall Theatre.

Based on Douglass Wallop's novel "The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant," this Tony-winning musical features a home-run score by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross with book by George Abbott and Wallop.

WCT's production opened Wednesday night and runs through Oct. 11.

"It's a great family show," says director Mickey Tennenbaum, who also helmed WCT's production of "Spamalot," in February. "It's not just for people who like baseball. That's the situation, but the story is really about heart. It's about love."

Set in the diamond days of the 1950s, "Damn Yankees" is a middle-aged baseball fan Joe Boyd trading his soul to the Devil (aka Mr. Applegate) for a chance to lead the New York Yankees to the pennant over the hated Yankees, only to realize belatedly the price of the life he has left behind.

"Whatever Lola Wants" and "Heart" are just two Broadway standards featured in the fast-paced, fast-pitch score penned by Adler and Ross ("The Pajama Game").

New Springfield native Joe O'Malley knocks it out of the park as Applegate, Tennenbaum said. "He's a tremendously talented actor. He's smart and he just takes direction really well."

The featured WCT cast: The aforementioned O'Malley (Applegate), Jeanine Pimpanella (Joe Hardy), Emma Fittman (Lola), Chris Zita (Joe Boyd), Stainton native Taylor Bankie (Meg Brann, Island native Joshua Sottile (Rocky), Nick Marcus (Simon), Courtney McGowan (Elinor Thunkel), Greg Spielberg (Van Buren), Noah Bridgesnock (Vernon), Adam Goldenberg (Mr. Walsh), Bree Swart (Stever) and Katie Quinn (Doris).

The WCT ensemble includes Nicholas Burack, Bobi Baricic, Addi Berry, Brianna Brice, Jacob Cowan, Tatiana Erskine, Kyle Johnson, Sabrina Kolman, Dean Martin, Nick Montalbano, Jonathan Quigley, Alex Reyes, Tyler Roberts, Sydney Sennett, Mackenzie Sheby and Cline Madden Thompson.

The WCT creative team: Remy Caruso (choreography), Matthew Hosmer (music director), Richard Kendzik (set design), Staci Alger (costume design), Nick Neal (lighting design), Richard Kreth (sound design) and KT Sanders (production stage manager).

"Damn Yankees" opened on Broadway's 46th Street Theatre on Feb. 5, 1955, winning seven 1956 Tony Awards, including Best Musical, starring Kay Walsh, Stephen Douglas and Gwen Verdon, with choreography by Bob Fosse. Warner Brothers' 1955 film version starred Gig Young and Ray Walston, with heartthrob Tab Hunter as Joe Hardy. A 1994 Broadway revival starred Victor Garber, Jared Eamick and Bebe Neuwirth, and was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical and the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Revival of a Musical. WCT previously presented "Damn Yankees" in 1979 and 1998.

Co-composer Adler was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Music and Theater by Wagner College in 2003. Adler's stepson, Charles Shipman, says that Adler particularly treasures that degree, which hung on his wall for the rest of his life. Adler passed away in 2012.

In the end, "Damn Yankees" Tennenbaum stressed, is just as much about love as it is about sports. "When this older man becomes a young baseball player, he lives baseball, but he really misses his wife."