

## 'King Tut' performance shines like gold

By George Rawlinson

SPECIAL TO THE COURIER NEWS

ELGIN — It was quite a neighborhood, a kind of golden hideaway where residents remained rooted for centuries.

But by 1922, more than 30 tombs had been unearthed in the Valley of the Kings, part of ancient Thebes, the capital from which the Egyptian empire was ruled during its glory days.

English Egyptologist Howard Carter believed at least one tomb remained. He found it on Nov. 26, 79 years ago.

*The Mystery of King Tut*, staged Wednesday morning and afternoon at Hemmens Cultural Center, tells of Carter's search and eventual discovery of the boy king's final resting place.

An engaging musical, the 75-minute play was another in Hemmens' Performing Arts for Young People series.

"This is a spectacular show," said Blythe Rainey-Cuyler, Hemmens manager. "It's meant to both entertain and educate ... a very ambitious and imaginative pairing."

Apparently so. ABC News assigned a team to tape several scenes for an upcoming morning broadcast, to be aired later this month or in early December.

Using the stage as an educational instrument is nothing new at Theatreworks USA, which presented Wednesday's programs, attended by more than 2,000 local kids on school-sponsored field trips.

### Digging the boy king

Based in New York, the national touring company regularly uses the arts as a teaching tool.

While Tut's story line largely involves Carter's determined digging, the play juxtaposes time, also telling of the boy who became king at about age 9.

Though obviously simplified and stylized, the story of Tutankhamen's reign is of a moderate ruler who was fair and kind and tolerant of others, particularly in terms of religion.

King Tut died suddenly at about age 18, and mystery surrounds his death.

Theatreworks makes much of the theory that he was assassinated. Historical documentation does indicate that his skull shows some damage, but it's entirely possible that this injury occurred after his death.

No matter, the story makes for good the-



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Shawn J. Davis (left) portrays archaeologist Howard Carter, discoverer of the tomb of Egyptian King Tutankhamen, and Arthur Delos Santos portrays King Tut in the production, *The Mystery of King Tut* at Hemmens Cultural Center in Elgin. The 75-minute musical is part of the Hemmens' Performing Arts for Young People series.

ater.

As does Carter's, who is portrayed as an idealistic archeologist interested more in history than treasure.

Though not mentioned in the plot, perhaps that's why he died a disillusioned and exhausted man in 1939, having spent nearly two decades devoted to clearing Tut's tomb and studying its contents. A meticulous worker, Carter made notes on every aspect of his discovery.

There also were discoveries Wednesday, not the least of which was the astonishing acting of the Theatreworks ensemble.

As King Tut, New Jersey native Arthur Delos Santos was broad and likable, traversing Tutankhamen's youthful geography with an energized bravado.

As good, Shawn Davis was sharp and modulated as Carter, an Indiana Jones forerunner, demonstrating again that

there can be great power in children's theater.

Theatreworks USA returns to Hemmens on Nov. 27 and 28 with *Boxcar Children*, about a loving family trying to stay together through the Great Depression. The play, which is open to the public, is recommended for grades 2-6. Show times both days are 9:30 a.m. and noon. Tickets cost \$5.

For further information call (847) 931-5900.