

John Paul II: The Musical to debut in Poland next year

Show will combine pop, rock and the story of the life Karol Wojtyla, who grew up to lead the Catholic Church



Polish theatre producers have announced they are working on a pop and rock musical of the life of John Paul II, the former pope and the nation's beloved native son.

“We’re trying to create something big,” says the show’s writer Michal Kaczmarczyk. “We will tell his whole life story, from his infancy until his death.”

Like many in Poland, 35-year-old Kaczmarczyk adored the pontiff, who was canonised a saint two years ago. Kaczmarczyk queued for 15 hours in Rome after John Paul’s death in 2005 just for a chance to bow at his coffin.

Now, he wants to pay homage to the late pope in song and has penned the script and lyrics for the musical, which will be called Karol after the pope’s original name Karol Wojtyla.

Polish hit-maker Filip Siejka is taking part in the project, which will revisit the pope’s life in musical form, from his boyhood to his rise to the top of the Roman Catholic Church.

Not only was John Paul II the first non-Italian pontiff in four centuries but as a strong advocate for human rights, he was a source of strength for many behind the Iron Curtain and seen as a catalyst in the collapse of communism.

Due to premiere in February 2017, Karol could well prove a hit in a country where 90% of the residents are Roman Catholic. Promoters said 500 tickets have already been sold.

Fifteen actors will play the main roles, including a teenage version of the pope dressed in a t-shirt and

shorts. Along with dancers, backing singers and extras, the cast runs to almost a hundred.

Polish pop diva Edyta Geppert will sing several of her own hits, integrated into a soundtrack that runs from upbeat pop-rock to tender ballads.

There are light-hearted moments in the tale of a pope who was well-known for his sense of humour – like the time when an Italian priest, in a bad attempt to speak Polish, tries to ask “How is the pope?” but ends up asking “How’s the little dog?”

The pope, played by popular Polish actor and television personality Jacek Kawalec, replies with a cheerful woof.

Karol Wojtyla lived in Krakow for almost four decades, training as a priest in the city during the Nazi occupation and eventually rising to become its archbishop.

Affection for John Paul II runs deep in the city, and the audience may be moved to tears as well as laughter as the show turns to his life’s more serious moments.

One song, *Someone Has Ordered Me To Run*, inspired by one of his own poems, recalls his doubts about the difficult mission he felt God had bestowed upon him.

“I asked for a drop of water and got the Atlantic, I asked for a stone and got diamonds,” sings Kawalec.

“I always have doubts but someone has ordered me to run... and never look back.”

The show opens with music evoking the “roaring” 1920s of the pope’s birth, before switching to pop-rock as he becomes pope in 1978.

The script also deals with the pontiff’s relationship with his mother, who died when he was only nine years old.

Some biographers maintain this explains John Paul II’s particular devotion to the Virgin Mary.

Agata Nizinska, playing his mother Emilia, sings a song called *Conversation With My Son* – an emotional premonition of the pope’s vocation, in which she tells him she dreamt she had seen “a palace with a view of a thousand cities”.

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