

Joseph and his amazing fans

Mad or sad? The star groupies confess to CAROLINE PHILLIPS

CHRISTINA DAVIDSON, 44, and Jean Selby, 52, have seen the musical of Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat 74 times and 64 times respectively. They went both to the matinee and evening performance one day last week, as they do so often.

This means they spent four hours watching the production in just one day, before catching the show on the following three nights and the Saturday matinee. To most people this would constitute a fine form of torture.

But they stalk an appreciative Richard Swerhun, 29, who plays a sinewy Joseph in a gold-lame loincloth, like lovelorn teenagers. They send him a dozen red roses (£25 a bunch) every opening night and ply him with presents.

They've gone backstage endlessly, met Richard more than a hundred times, got his autograph each night and cherish, with post-adolescent hysteria, their autographed pictures of him.

"He gave me a photograph signed, 'To my other woman'. That was wonderful," laughs Jean, whose husband David, a plumber, died nine years ago. "But I think the other woman

was probably his mother."

"I love being stalked," says Richard later, when they visit him in his dressing room.

We meet at the Theatre Royal, Nottingham, not far from their home in Stapleford. Jean, a shop assistant, is wearing a plain Joseph badge and another with a photo of her and Richard, on her amazing waistcoat.

It has a mere 12 colours because she doesn't want to detract from Richard's coat of 27 colours.

Christina, a riding instructor who was divorced from her husband Brian, a joiner, 13 years ago, is wearing just two badges.

Jean cried the first time she saw the show. "It was the Close Ev'ry Door bit that did it," she recalls. Christina felt moved to go home and read the Bible: — "Genesis 39, isn't it?"

The two women went first to the show with their (now grown-up) children and have been going for the ensuing 15 years, always sitting in the front row. "It's just brilliant," is their only explanation of behaviour that seems akin to compulsive hand-washing.

Their obsession has cost these two unlikely groupies

about £5,000 each, not just the cost of tickets at shows from Leatherhead to the Isle of Man, but travel expenses and overnight hotels for long-haul Josephs.

Then there are Joseph T-shirts, tapes, albums, scores, heat-sensitive mugs, watches, baseball caps or whatever to be considered. "I've got five T-shirts," boasts Christina.

"I've only got three because I don't wear T-shirts," explains Jean. "I just get Richard to sign them for me."

They'd go to Australia to see

the show if Richard were in it. (Not for them Jason Donovan, Phillip Schofield or Donny Osmond.)

Christina says it's love "And a bit of lust," adds Jean. Would they like to marry Richard? "Ooh, yes please." They have become friends with Richard's mother Joyce. "We talk about all sorts of things, but Richard always comes into it."

Last summer Christina and Jean went to Jersey, a Lourdes and Mecca for Joseph groupies when Richard was doing a summer season there. They went

with some other Joseph regulars to see the show that launched the careers of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber. There is Bernie who keeps a boarding house, Ann the beauty therapist and James the builder. But none so attentive to Richard as our two ladies.

I manage to buy the last seat for the show at the Theatre Royal. The two ladies have probably acquired the rest. They've bought 40 of their friends with them.

"I mouth the words the whole way through," says Jean, "and

STAR-STRUCK: Jean (left), Christina and their sexy Joseph



Christina hits me and says, 'I don't like you doing that.' But we both get carried away. I'm perfecting my scream."

"And I'm learning to wolf whistle," says Christina. It takes little to imagine the usherettes having to rush to the front to stop the fans clambering on stage.

The show starts with Richard wearing white dungarees without a shirt. The duo seem appreciative. After five minutes there's a mighty explosion, which isn't an act of God.

WEARING Biblical robes, Jacob apologises for the power failure. They start the show again from the beginning, nirvana for our ladies, who cheer appreciatively. They've now heard the opening song three times today.

Afterwards they meet Richard in the bar. They do so most nights. He says hello and hugs them.

Currently they're booked for shows in 28 other venues from Darlington and Wolverhampton to Edinburgh and Belfast ... the entire Joseph 1997 tour. "Some people think we're mad," explains Christina.

"Other people think we're sad," counters Jean.