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A Spirited *Godspell* Takes Over THEATRE THREE

by Barbara Anne Kirshner February 24, 2026

The musical *Godspell* conjures up another day, another time, but with its universal theme of rising above conflict to embrace peace, love and community, it is just as relevant today.

The Vietnam era marked by social unrest produced a counterculture that demanded to be heard. Artistic expression, especially music, sent out messages against war and political oppression. It was during this time that Woodstock happened and theme driven musicals like *Godspell* and *Hair* were all the rage. “Love not war” was the creed resonating off the lips of the youth at that time.

It was during this age of national division that John-Michael Tebelak wrote his first version of *Godspell* as his master’s thesis at Carnegie Mellon University. It was performed in 1970 by students from Carnegie Mellon’s Theatre Department then moved to La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in the East Village of Manhattan. Musical composer, Stephen Schwartz, another Carnegie Mellon alumnus was brought in to rescore the show before it opened as a musical at the Cherry Lane Theatre on May 17, 1971.

Godspell contains musical genres of pop, folk rock, gospel and vaudeville. A centerpiece of the show is the folk-rock ballad “Day by Day” which reached #13 on the pop singles chart Billboard Hot 100 in the summer of 1972. Schwartz went on to score some major musicals (*Wicked*, *Pippin*, *Children of Eden*) and won three Grammy Awards and an Academy Award.

In June 1976, *Godspell* opened on Broadway at the Broadhurst Theatre, then transferred to The Plymouth Theatre then to the Ambassador Theatre where it closed in September 1977. The Broadway revival opened on October 2011 at the Circle in the Square Theatre. The musical was adapted to film and released in 1973.

The title *Godspell* is derived from an archaic spelling of the word gospel meaning good news. The show is based on the *Gospel According to St. Matthew* and is structured as a series of skits with songs interspersed. Jesus and his disciples are presented as loving clowns and the passion of Christ happens near the end. The names of the characters are the names of the cast which is the usual practice in this show. Thus, for this Theatre Three production, Jesus is called Keith and Judas is Will.

The delicate task of doing a show like *Godspell* with a cast of young actors who weren’t even born during the turbulent Vietnam era was taken on with gusto by director **Jeffrey Sanzel** and the result is an ensemble of 12 actors who perform with a passion as if they lived through those fractured times. This is most obvious through their approach to the score, embracing each song with fervor. Sanzel makes the most of the Theatre Three space having actors run down the aisles stopping along the way to connect with the audience making them part of the action and the communal nature of the show.

Presiding over this glorious musical celebration is the exuberant band conducted by Jeffrey Hoffman who is also on keyboard with John Dericco on guitar, Dave Grudzinski on bass and Don Larsen on drums and percussion.

This merry band of 12 actors are multi-talented. They deliver strong performances while moving gracefully and maintaining bright vocals. Will Logan takes on some main roles. He starts the festivities as John the Baptist who together with the Company performs an uplifting “Prepare Ye (The Way of the Lord)” thus introducing Jesus portrayed by Keith Jones. In the final scene, Logan as Judas sends chills when he pantomimes striking out against invisible walls that lead him to only one exit and it is to Jesus whom he must betray. Jones is charismatic in the role of Jesus drawing his followers in to hear the word of the lord in “Save the People” and “Alas for You.” We are with him throughout and cringe when he must succumb to the masses in the end.

Sadie Mathers is adorable and so animated. When she belts out “Learn Your Lessons Well,” we get the feeling that the stage is exactly where this little powerhouse belongs. Sophia del Carmen gets the prize song “Day By Day” which she performs with a sweet, rich mezzo-soprano. Angie Barrientos Gomez shows off her equally rich mezzo-soprano on “O, Bless the Lord, My Soul.” Jared Wofse closes Act I with a high-energy and joyful “Light of the World.” The fast-paced patter style in “Learn Your Lessons Well” brings together the artistry of Julianna Osburn, Amanda Egenberger, Angelina Miller and Noah Ryan. Ryan returns with a sensitive rendition of “All Good Gifts” while Miller returns as a magnetic force strutting down the aisle draped in a red feathered boa belting out “Turn Back, O Man.” The duet of Haley Saunders and Amanda Egenberger on “By My Side” brings their sweet voices together seemingly like sisters beckoning Jesus to stay and guide them. Kiernan Urso with his strong tenor delivers a showstopper on “We Beseech Thee.”

The technical team of scenic design by Randall Parsons, lighting design by Steven Uihlein, sound design by Tim Haggerty and technical design by Steve Barile, Jr. supports the actors by adding to the spirit of the show. This technical team is adept at creating the necessary contrasts like in the first scene referred to as the “Tower of Babble” which is represented by a somber gray set comprising low steps stage right and stage left, pedestals placed center and up stage with a backdrop of long, narrow gray columns. But upon the entrance of Keith (Jesus), the set explodes in brilliant colors. Lighting continues to change on those columns to emphasize the tone of each song.

Josie McSwane’s choreography keeps the show moving with even a few summersaults thrown in for good measure. Jason Allyn’s costume design adds to the early ’70s vibe with tie dye shirts, bright colors, gauze shirts and dresses, and the prominent “S” on Jesus’ shirt signifying him as a superman.

Godspell at Theatre Three is a grand celebration of sight and sound that leaves us with some profound messages to ponder. Now playing through March 22.

Theatre Three at 412 Main Street, Port Jefferson. 631-928-9100. ***theatrethree.com***

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