The Good News is Theatre Three's 'Godspell' Is a Soulful Treat!

As winter melts into spring, let Theatre Three's triumphant revival of "Godspell," with its omnipresent theme of the power of community and human connection, grace you and yours with peace, love, and joy. Saturday night's electrifying opening night performance had the audience on their feet, giving a long, loud standing ovation!

Under Jeffrey Sanzel's skillful direction, genuine camaraderie and heartfelt fellowship emerged among the young, vibrant, and vivacious cast, allowing them to spread goodwill and good vibes throughout the evening. This stellar ensemble mesmerized the audience with their strong vocals, energetic dance moves choreographed by Josie McSwane, and expert musical timing, as they played a variety of instruments, including drums, maracas, triangles, tambourines, bells, ukuleles, washboards, and kazoos. The live onstage band, conducted by keyboardist Jeffrey Hoffman and featuring John Dericco on guitar, Dave Grudzinski on bass, and Don Larsen on drums and percussion, added another layer of theatricality to the production.

With book and original concept by John-Michael Tebelak and music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, this beloved musical brings the Gospels of Matthew and Luke to life as a modern-day series of parables set to an eclectic, upbeat, and celebratory score that blends pop, rock, folk, vaudeville, gospel, and soul.

From Tebelak's master's thesis project at Carnegie Mellon University, the original "Godspell" was conceived and premiered in 1970 at the La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in Greenwich Village. After Schwartz cast his musical magic on the show, their joint effort, also entitled "Godspell," opened Off-Broadway in 1971 at the Cherry Lane Theatre. The revamped show made its way to Broadway, opening on June 26, 1976, at the Broadhurst Theatre, and it had a 2011 revival at the Circle in the Square Theatre.

Tebelak's vision for this show was inspired by theologian Harvey Cox, a Harvard Divinity School professor who penned the groundbreaking 1969 book "The Feast of Fools," which included a chapter depicting Christ as Harlequin and envisioning a joyful, festive approach to religion rather than a severe, solemn one. Even the title "Godspell," from the Old English *godspel*, meaning "good story," reveals the musical's divine mission to share the "good news" of the gospel as a loving and exuberant experience. Therefore, this counterculture-inspired musical does not portray Jesus as an inaccessible icon; rather, he is depicted as a likable, relatable teacher, blending humor, magic, and theatrical tricks to present his teachings in a down-to-earth yet sublime way.

In Theatre Three's production, Keith Jones was perfectly cast as Jesus. Jones, a charismatic and versatile actor, brought warmth, playfulness, and strength to this challenging role. One of the show's high points was Jones's impassioned delivery of "Save the People," a ballad that sets a traditional hymn to an upbeat pop-rock score. At the conclusion of Act II, as Jesus is taken down from the cross and carried by his devoted followers through the theater, the scene was so profoundly moving that it brought tears to my eyes and chills down my spine.

Will Logan delivered award-worthy performances portraying both John the Baptist and Judas. As John the Baptist, Logan is inspirational and charming, calling the community to awaken, as he sings with spiritual conviction, "Prepare Ye (The Way of the Lord)." When Logan reappears as Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, he is convincing and captivating in his interpretation of this enigmatic, complex, and troubled man.

Sophia Del Carmen's moving rendition of "Godspell's" signature song, "Day by Day," is one of those unforgettable stage moments that stay with you long after you exit the theater. Angie Barrientos Gómez lit up the stage with her emotionally charged delivery of "O, Bless the Lord, My Soul." Other notable performances included Noah Ryan's "All Good Gifts," Kiernan Urso's "We Beseech Thee," and Jared Wofse's "Light of the World." One of my favorite group numbers was "Learn Your Lessons Well," featuring Julianna Osburn, Amanda Egenberger, Angelina Miller, and Noah Ryan.

Act II opens with Sadie Mathers, a rising superstar, commanding the stage with her riveting reprise of "Learn Your Lessons Well." "Turn Back, O Man," based on poet Clifford Bax's 1916 heartfelt hymn, was reimagined by Schwartz as a jazzy cabaret tune. Angelina Miller, sexy, sultry, and spectacular, delivered a showstopping performance of this iconic show tune, vamping down the aisle from the back of the theater up to the stage like a vaudeville temptress.

Amanda Egenberger and Haley Saunders stole the show with their angelic, pitch-perfect vocals, delivering a heartrending rendition of Jay Hamburger and Peggy Gordon's poignant folk-pop ballad, "By My Side."

Theatre Three's unforgettable performance of "Godspell," a spiritually significant show spreading the good news about the healing power of unconditional love, forgiveness, tolerance, and acceptance, is a must-see! The show runs through March 22, 2026. For tickets, call the box office at 631-928-9100 or visit www.theatrethree.com.

Cindi Sansone-Braff is an award-winning playwright. She holds a BFA in Theatre from the University of Connecticut and is a member of the Dramatists Guild. She is the author of "Grant Me a Higher Love," "Why Good People Can't Leave Bad Relationships," and "Confessions of a Reluctant Long Island Psychic." Her full-length Music Drama, "Beethoven, The Man, The Myth, The Music," is published by Next Stage Press.

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