1970s musical returns with a message of hope

The Mandow Brook Theatre stage is deserted as if waiting for the lively musical Godspell to bring it to life on opening night to high grant to hear the lively musical Godspell to bring it to life on opening night Sturday, April 27. It's lunchime and one of the crews is taking a break from laying the floor, the first step in setting the scene. They've been working around the clock since Cat on a Hot Tin Roof closed on April 14.

Debra Wicks isn't worried about it coming together for previews Thursday-Friday, April 25.26. This is her second time directing the musical after acting in it four times. She knows Stephen Schwartz's musica and lyries. In fact, she'd probably still be performing in the John-Michael Tebelak musical if not for the realization that this is a show for

young actors. The last time Wicks acted in the play was in a 1985 summer stock production in Mis-souri where she was working as a

souri where she was working as a freelance actress.

"I got down in one of the dance positions and couldn't get up," and Wicks, who also serves as Meadow Brook Theatre's interim artistic director. Wicks hesitates to say how old she is but has spent the last 28 years acting and directing professionally and teaching at universities. "You have to be physically fit to do Godspell.
"I fove this musical. It makes me feel good. It's one of those musicals that resonates with people my age, baby bomers. We grew up with it. As human beings we like to go to musicals. We're familiar with it. It's humanalie and something parents can share with their kids."

Meadow Brook Theatre
What: Present the 1970's musical Godspell with music and lyrics
by Stephen Schwartz
When: Previews 8 p.m. Thursday-Friday, April 25-26, opens 6 p.m.
Saturdoy, April 27, and continues through Sunday, May 19. Curtain 8
p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. Wednesday, 6 p.m. Saturday, and 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Sunday
Where: In the theater at Wilson Hall, Ookland University, Rochester

ms. Tickets: \$26-\$38, \$17-\$26 previews, call (248) 377-3300

not important. He is someone with a message of hope and will-

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THE OTHERS (PC)3
YAMBLA SET (E)

Wicks chose the musical about
the last seven days of Jesus' life
because of its popularity since
opening Off Broadway in 1971,
and on Broadway in 1976. The
underlying theme appeals to peple of all faiths.

"What the play gives you is
hope," and Wicks. "There's no
resurrection in the play. Whether
the character is Jesus or not is
not important. He is someone

Ensemble

Ensemble

This is truly an ensemble piece and Wicks is grateful the casting was right before choreographer David Marquez and music director Leo Carusone, both New Yorkers, came on beard. Wicks worked with Carusone last summer at Chery County Playhouse in Muskegon where they put on South Pacific in seven days.

"It can be set anywhere – a junkyard, subway or play-ground," said Wicks who lived in the Bronx for three years while working as an actress in New York. "What you need is an open

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area and debris. I grew up on a farm. There's a different stress level in the city. People are looking for something or someone to make sense of it all. In a city if you're going to go someplace to think it's up on the reoftop."

After rehearsing the cast six to eight hours a day, six days a week for the last three weeks, Joey Bybee agrees with Wicks that the reoftop is the place to be. The 21-year-old Pontiae actor enjoys moving around the stage as Herb, one of the characters. This is his first professional production, one he can list on his resume after graduating with a degree in musical theater from Oakland University in May.

"I wasn't familiar with Godspell," said Bybee who wasn't even born when the nusical took Broadway by storm. "My roommate has every musical on the planet and I was playing it and fell in love with the music. Then we began rehearsals and I found it's a process of founding up with bits a process of Musica Chevaliar.

Like Shannon Locke, Bybee thinks the reason the musical so miprovisation.

Artistic freedom

Artistic freedom

'It's really an exercise in imagination," said Locke, who's understudying all the female roles.

'There's more artistic freedom because we're playing ourselves and get to improvise," added Bybee. 'I like climbing around lots of levels on stage. I get to explore them all. I leap and perch. It's liberating.'

It's the exact opposite for Denise Costello who's cast as the introverted Peggy. The West Bloomfield resident's been acting arts program at Abbott Middle School and then at West Bloomfield High School where she did three shows a year and was president of the Thespian Society. She furthered her talent at Interlechen Arts Camp for five summers before earning a bachelor degree in musical theater performance at Western Michigan University.

'Tim not a shy person so I have to be reserved until the point where she breaks out of her skin," said Costello. "What excites me about the show is the words are for everyone. It has a

message of faith. For some it might be a message of hope. It's fun for two hours and keeps the audience asking more questions at the end."
While Alonzo Luzod appreciates what the musical is saying, he's more impressed with the quality of the production. The-Farmington resident plays Jeffrey, an insightful character. In the past Luzod's performed with the Plymouth Canton Ballet Company and Tinderbox Productions based in Redford.
"The caliber of the cast and directors is unparalleled with

The caliber of the cast and directors is unparalleled with; anything else I've done," said; Luzod. "It's the most intense rehearsal process. There's so much to learn in such a short; time."

New season

New season

The professionalism of the cast is what Wicks counts on your after your. It will be especially important to find the brightest talent next season when Meadow Brook Theatro presents a variety of productions including The Forieigner, Wait Until Dark, the latest musical comely Meshuggah. Nuns by Dan Goggin, and Agathan Christics Witness for the Proscution which opens on Oct. 15. While Wicks is very excited about the Shaw Festival's January residency for a production of Candida, she can't stop talking about A Thousand Cranes which kicks of the theater's now Family Series on Sept. 28. The family-oriented shows continue with the return of the popular A Christmas Caral Nov. 28 to Dec. 22.

"It's a true story about a young

the popular A Christmas Card
Nov. 28 to Dec. 22.

"It's a true story about a young
girl who gets leukemia after surviving the bombing of Hiroshi,
ma, said Wicks explaining the
plot of A Thousand Cranes. "Sha
learns of the legend that if a person folds a thousand cranes a
wish will be fullfilled and begind
folding the paper birds. Even
though she doesn't complete
them, it turns into a wish for
peace when school children finish
to task. It's an exciting piece of
theater for now. This is a lesson
to be learned and relearned, a
lesson from 60-years ago we
haven't learned yet. It's about the
children - that they can make a
difference. You can achieve anything if you put your mind to it."



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