

Captivating musical approaches cult status

By CRAIG REYNOLDS

If ever a world was beleaguered by the tidal wave of historical short-sightedness, it's this one.

If ever this world needed joy and refreshment, "Godspell" may provide it—for some.

Though this captivating little musical by John-Michael Tebelak and Stephen Schwartz is now approaching cult status with at least four local versions on stage in the next six months, it is

not for anyone who takes philosophy or theology seriously.

"GODESPELL" trumps all over 5,000 years of Judeo-Christian history with calculated cuteness in a coloring-book rendition of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew.

When the show does get down to specifics in the second act, "Godspell" falls flat for lack of honesty in its very real and needful virtues of child-like joy, simplicity and discovery.

The success of "Godspell" springs from its patently refusal to confront the

real world, to probe any deeper than those attributes common to moderately intelligent eight-year-olds.

Just as Christmas supplants Easter as the West's most important religious holiday, so "Godspell" is a parti-colored treatment of Biblical parables and events, an Elysian view of pre-Paulist Jesus.

But what the world needs at 8:30 p.m. or weekend matinees is love and joy and hope, and "Godspell" supplies those in abundance, as in the production now at The Theatre of the University of Detroit—Marygrove College.

DIRECTOR DOMINIC Missini and designer Timothy R. Dewart have layered "Godspell" to the Detroit area with a staged of into parts backed by posters of familiar gas-guzzlers. A giant spotlight dominates the proceedings, and the opening sequence is presented by the cast in assembly line dress whites.

It's all very colorful, but the show sometimes gets lost in the crowded montage.

The Theatre's "Godspell" company is sparkling, too, though a long string of performances had ever so slightly

tarnished this extremely demanding production by Saturday night. Missini's staging is slick and sure, from kick lines to soft show. It is perhaps too showy and not organic enough for the very human material in the songs and stories, but it always works at an elemental theatrical level.

A BAKER'S dozen of familiar performers at U. of D.—Marygrove comprises the "Godspell" company, with Dennis Bailey a standout as Jesus and Owen J. Anderson of Southfield notably strong.

Mary Callaghan of Birmingham also takes part and even finds an opportunity for a reprise of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow."

Many of the musical numbers in "Godspell" have deservedly become popular favorites, like "Day by Day" and "All Good Gifts."

U. of D.—Marygrove's "Godspell" shows how they all fit together and suggests that just maybe, things can come together more simply, more joyfully, more completely than they do from 8 to 5 on weekdays.

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