MTG's Godspell resembles professional production

By Kathy Hardin

The talented and highly spirited cast of the MIT Musical Theater Guild's Godspell is very well directed and choreographed in a performance comparable to that of any professional production. The show is funny, original, moving, and deserving of the highest possible praise.

Written by John Michael Tebelak as his master's thesis, the musical found its way to an off-Broadway theatre in 1971 and was subsequently taken to Broadway, where it became one of the most highly acclaimed musicals of the early seventies. Godspell, based on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, transforms religious material into a lively pastiche of slapstick, vaudeville, song, and dance. The cast uses almost every trick of the theatrical trade to act out various precepts and parables.

The show demonstrates that they can exist without solemnity. Alan Scott as Jesus presides over this lively group, benevolently guiding his followers and preaching his wisdom with jubilant bokim. His characterization is gentle, sincere, humorous, and very touching. Yet the show does not emphasize the teaching of Christian doctrine; instead, it creates a sparseness and festive liveliness that reflects an awareness of the ideas and originality for improvisational theatre.

The most cleverly presented parable is that of "The Good Samaritan" in which the cast members transform themselves into puppets for a humorously narrated puppet show, complete with an appearance of a gold-time piano machine accompany the text.

At the end of the play, the characters wash off their make-up to perform the tragic scenes of Judas' betrayal and the crucifixion. Their transition between joy and sadness is beautiful.

The members of the cast all deliver prize-winning performances. Lanter Lichtenstein '79 sings, dances, and moves about with joyous abandon. The audience even clapped and started to dance to his lively rendition of the Be with Me. Constance Heron '80 sings the popular Day by Day with power and stage presence. Mitchell Weiss '79 romps and clowns on stage in a wonderful manner, providing much of the narration for the parables. Rosalie Gerst enhances the most warm-hearted and friendliness in the cast: her singing and guitar playing in By My Side is beautiful.

Janice Avery Gold aptly proclaims "Eat your heart out, Farrah Fawcett" as she vamps the audience in Turn Back, O Man.

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The cast has a relatively small number of MIT students which is unfortunate in a school which stresses the importance of student involvement. According to the director, sever several students auditioned whose dancing and acting abilities were adequate but were unable to handle the demanding singing roles.

Steven Schwartz's music and lyrics, adapted from an old Episcopalian hymnal, create a balance between liveliness and reverence. The cast has a sincere and highly spirited cast which communicates with the audience at every possible moment.

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