

Mac-Haydn Theatre, Chatham, NY

**GODSPELL**, conceived and originally directed by John-Michael Tebelak;  
music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, Choreographed by Elizabeth McGuire.

Directed by Trey Compton.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

**“You better learn your lesson well.”**

“How do you solve a problem like Maria?” asked the previous show, “The Sound of Music,” at the Mac-Haydn Theatre in Chatham, New York. That seemed to be a large problem but now we have “Godspell” and I ask “how do you solve a problem like this Godspell?” This is a very different concept than any I have ever seen before. It works. It works very well but it never answers the questions that it poses: who are these people? why are they telling these stories? is religion the basis of it all or is it the stories themselves as stories? what do they want to achieve? It’s all a mystery. BUT, ah, sweet mystery of this life on stage. A beautiful company of very fine singers and actors tell the tale of Jesus in his latter days in a new and revolutionary manner and at the end you come away moved and glad to have been privy to the experience.



Conor Fallon as Jesus (center) and the company; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

A wonderful company of young, handsome people populate the nearly barren stage, dotted with suitcases. No two people are dressed alike; everyone is unique, different, identifiable as an individual. Each individual has a role to play, but what the role may be is hard to decipher. Conor Fallon is Jesus. That becomes clear almost immediately. Amber Mawande-Spytek ultimately become Mary Magdalene. Andrew Burton Kelley is soon identified as Judas and John, the Baptist. The rest are followers, acolytes, disciples. They are a chorus of choristers meant to

represent a thousand people including Pharisees and Romans. They are fabulous.

They are (alphabetically) Bella DePaola (who dances divinely), Cydney Gleckner, Jake Koch, Kassi McMillan, Stephanie Prestage, Matthew Harper Stevenson, Anthony Velez. They fill the stage, they fill the theater. They flesh out Stephen Schwartz's classic score with volume and meaning.

The score, if you have forgotten it, includes "Day By Day," "Turn Back, O Man," "By My Side," "Prepare Ye," "Light of the World," and "All Good Gifts." It is a classic from the year 1971. It was an enormous off-Broadway hit that opened in London that same year featuring a young Jeremy Irons as Judas. The original Jesus was replaced in 1972 by Victor Garber. The show hit Broadway five years later with Don Scardino as Jesus. It was revived on Broadway in 2011 with a new concept. The current Mac-Haydn cast is the equal of their forebears and possibly better for this version of the show has removed the cuteness of the original and replaced it with unusual passion.

The show tells parables from the Book of Matthew and brings us the last supper, the night in the garden and the eventual crucifixion. It avoids the trials of Jesus. Schwartz's score was the third one composed for this show which originated as a Master's thesis at Carnegie-Mellon University and it wasn't until Joseph Beruh and Edgar Lansbury decided to produce it off-Broadway that the score we all know was created for the show.



Amber Mawande-Spytek, Matthew Harper Stevenson, Stephanie Prestage, Anthony Velez; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Godspell has a very distinguished international career, with more than a dozen productions worldwide in the first couple of years after its New York opening. The production in Toronto, Canada introduced Victor Garber, Eugene Levy, Andrea Martin, Gilda Radner, Dave Thomas, and Martin Short, as well as the show's musical director, Paul Shaffer. I would hope that members of this company have the same sort of success with the show, although the run is limited to only two weeks.

Director Trey Compton has distinguished himself with his concept and direction of the

musical. He has delivered what is, for me, a unique experience. That doesn't happen very often anymore. Angela

Carstensen has created costumes that give each anonymous chorister a definite personality that distinguishes them visually. Set designer Tania Barrenechea has delivered an iconic space filled with portable props designed by Adriana Ayala that fill the room. The lighting by designers Eoghan Hartley and Andrew Gmoser stresses the stories and music honorably.



Conor Fallon and company; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

This is a show that must be seen for it brings this show out of its time and into a very certain future. I don't know of anything like it. It has removed the philosophies of the original prologue and replaced them with the concepts of future worlds. I heartily approve!

+ 08/02/2023 +

**Godspell** plays at the Mac-Haydn Theater, 1925 Route 203, Chatham, New York through August 13. For information and tickets call 518-392-9292 or go on line to [machaydntheatre.org](http://machaydntheatre.org).

