



Wednesday, April 17, 2002

## MBT's 'Godspell' runs through May 19

High-energy rock 'n roll transforms the human spirit in "Godspell," a joyous, life-affirming musical retelling of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Created by John-Michael Tebelak, with music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, "Godspell" opens Wednesday, April 24, and runs through Sunday, May 19, at Oakland University's **Meadow Brook Theatre**, Michigan's largest professional theater company.

One of the biggest Broadway successes of all time, "Godspell" is a unique reflection on the last seven days in the life of Jesus. Told through remarkable songs like "Day by Day" and "Prepare Ye The Way of the Lord," "Godspell" lifts the spirits of all faiths and ages. Its exuberant story celebrates tolerance, kindness, love and hope.

MBT's Interim Artistic Director Debra Wicks, directs the Meadow Brook Theatre (MBT) production of "Godspell." Familiar with the play's outstanding qualities from the stage and off, Wicks has performed in six productions of "Godspell" as an actor and has directed two productions of the work.

"The message of hope is as timely today as when the play opened 31 years ago," Wicks said. "This is a musical parable about a man who gives up his life for what he believes. Working together, the cast creates unforgettable music and characters to bring the audience into the joy 'Godspell' represents."

Musical Director Leo P. Carusone is recognized for his work with the "Nunsense" family of shows, including "Nunsense," "Nunsense Amen," "Nuncrackers" and "Nunsense Jamboree." His other musical credits read like a compendium of classics, including "Annie," "Peter Pan," "Cats," "Phantom of the Opera," "My Fair Lady" and "Little Shop of Horrors."

Choreographer David Marquez has choreographed for PBS Great Performances, including "My Favorite Broadway: The Leading Ladies starring Julie Andrews," "The Gershwins' Fascinating Rhythm," "Lets Do It — A New Cole Porter Musical" and "The House of Martin Guerre." He also performed in "Kiss of the Spider Woman" and a national tour of "Jesus Christ Superstar."

The ten roles in "Godspell," save Jesus and Judas, are all named for the original cast members. While the faces include those both new and familiar to MBT audiences, each actor is encouraged to draw on their unique talents and personalities to epitomize the brighter future.

An MBT veteran, Scott Crownover, plays Jesus. In addition to other area theatres, Crownover has performed in "A Christmas Carol," "All My Sons," "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and "The Rocky Horror Show" at MBT.

Larry Young plays Judas. MBT patrons will remember Young as Jackson in the popular musical "Pump Boys and Dinettes" earlier this season. He also played Jesus in "Godspell" at the Kalamazoo Civic Theatre.

Also returning from "Pump Boys and Dinettes" is Jennifer Joan Joy, who played Prudie Cupp. She has performed extensively in musicals both on Broadway and with national tours, including "Hello Dolly" with Carol Channing and "Cats."

Other faces familiar to MBT audiences include Stacy White, Shannon Nicole Locke and Denise Costello. White played in the musical "Tintypes," directed by Debra Wicks. She is an Oakland University graduate. Locke appeared in this season's "Murder on the Nile" and "A Christmas Carol." Her credits include many musicals including "Cole: A Musical Revue," "Bye Bye Birdie" and "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." Costello, a student of Western Michigan University, has appeared in "A Christmas Carol" at MBT and other musicals at the Wagon Wheel Theatre.

Theater students performing in "Godspell" include Joey Bybee from Oakland University and Jason Briggs and Lydia Willis, both from the University of Michigan-Flint. Bybee has acted in theatrical productions and was a member of OU's vocal jazz and dance group. Briggs' and Willis' are new to the MBT stage. Briggs played in "Godspell" at the Crob Theatre in Flint. Willis, who recently completed a summer workshop with the Michigan Opera Theatre, played in "Godspell" with The UM-Flint Theatre.

Also making his MBT debut is Alonzo Luzod, who has played at Stagecrafters in Royal Oak and Avon Players in Rochester.

Participating in their last MBT production as Oakland University acting interns are Cat Shoemaker and Daniel Amboyer. A graduate of Wayne State University, Shoemaker has appeared this season in the MBT productions "A Christmas Carol" and

"Murder on the Nile." She will go on to pursue other professional acting opportunities. Amboyer will graduate from high school this spring and enters Carnegie Mellon this fall. He also appeared in MBT's "Murder on the Nile" and "A Christmas Carol."

"Godspell" was conceived by then 21-year old John-Michael Tebelak as part of his Master of Fine Arts thesis project at Carnegie Mellon University. At the time, Tebelak had not met fellow Carnegie Mellon student Stephen Schwartz, who would write the music and lyrics at the age of 23. Tebelak also wrote the 1973 film version of "Godspell."

Composer Stephen Schwartz studied piano and composition at Juilliard School of Music before attending Carnegie Mellon. His first hit was the title song for the play and subsequent film "Butterflies are Free." He won the Drama Desk Award, the Variety Critic's Award, a Billboard Trendsetter Award, and two Grammy awards for "Godspell."

"Godspell" opened off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theatre in May 1971. It played at various theatres off-Broadway for three years before opening on Broadway in June 1976. The film version premiered in 1973 starring Victor Garver and David Haskell. An off-Broadway revival in 2000 was followed by a national tour.

Meadow Brook Theatre's production of "Godspell" is sponsored by Metaldyne Corporation. MBT is supported by the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts. Promotional support for the 2001-2002 season is from the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Tickets for "Godspell" can be purchased by calling the **Meadow Brook Theatre** Box Office at (248) 377-3300. New this season are "Couples Nights" discounts on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday evenings that entitle theatergoers a special "buy one ticket, get a second ticket at half price" offer. Discounts for group tickets are available by calling (248) 370-3316.

#### **SUMMARY**

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