

The Mummers' Production of *Godspell*

By Carlotta Rutledge

The stage at Mount Tabor Community Playhouse in Milford is really busy these days. Do you recall the song "Day by Day"? Highly hummable with easy words to remember. That song is from *Godspell*, the most recent musical production being mounted by the Marysburgh Mummers this April.

The short surface description of the show is that it is an entertaining story about Jesus and the conversion of his disciples using an array of the biblical parables portrayed in music, dance and word. It also includes the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, and the crucifixion.

"It goes up just after Easter. It would be easy to see it as a Christian play but it is so much more than that." says Monica Alyea, who is directing. "It's about building a community, a community with a common commitment about peace and love and understanding. I sense it as timely for some issues in the County right now. We didn't choose it for that reason but for me that element has been a new "discovery" about the play. The first time I saw *Godspell* was at the Bayview Playhouse in Toronto 40 years ago. I was raised Protestant/Baptist. Jesus certainly wasn't laughing in any pictures hanging in my childhood churches. I left the theatre that night with a whole new appreciation for this character. He cried; he laughed; he danced; he played with his friends and he had a sense of humour. I hadn't considered those possibilities. And it changed my faith experience."

Godspell is a mix of many theatrical and music traditions including clowning, pantomime, vaudeville, folk music and rock music. The early 1970s Toronto productions included some now famous professional performer folks including Victor Garber, Eugene Levy, Andrea Martin, Gilda Radner, Dave Thomas, Martin Short and the show's musical director, Paul Shaffer. The Mummer cast includes local stage veterans Hilary Fennell playing Jesus and Reverend Phil Hobbs playing Judas and the rest of the cast coming from all over the County. "It's quite a different experience for us and particularly a challenge for me," says Monica.

Usually stage musicals come pretty much

with full directions: Open the package of scripts and music; stir with a committed cast and crew; and wonderful things happen on stage. Well, wonderful things are happening again. The cast is amazing! But this show comes with very few directions on set, timing, costumes - so it has been much more of a collective creation. It's also a very high energy and physical show. Our cast ranges in age from 12 to early 60s and everyone is on stage all the time for the full two acts."

"I've chosen to set our production in an old abandoned church, not unlike the fate of the Mount Tabor building in 1967 when the United Church of Canada was downsizing," says Monica. "With each Mummer show here, a sense of community gets built; new friendships are formed; more creative energy is put out there for "re-creation". Yes, I think it's the right place and the right time for this play from the Mummers."

Show dates are April 12, 13, 19, 20 at 7:30 p.m. and an April 14 matinee at 2:00 p.m.

Ticket are available at Green Gables in Bloomfield (613-393-1494), Side Street Gallery in Wellington (613-399-5556), AV Frame and Photo in Picton (613-476-3112) and at the Quinte Art Centre in Belleville (613-962-1232).

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