

Review: GODSPELL at Players Circle Theater

playing through May 12, 2024

By: Fran Thomas Apr. 25, 2024



Musical theater performers must do it all and make it look easy. The actors appearing in *Godspell* at Players Circle Theater more than meet the challenge with exuberance. They act, sing, and dance and then add pantomime, funny accents, and playing musical instruments to the mix. And get up close and personal with the audience, making eye contact without missing a beat.

The play begins with the world in chaos and darkness and only the faces of the cast eerily lit by flashlights until Caleb Pless as John the Baptist strides in with a bucket of water to prepare them for what is to come. The effective lighting designer is Will Gibbons Brown.

The visual contrast between the long, flowing locks and hippie clothing of Pless and the close-cropped hair and Everyman appearance of [AJ Mendini](#) who plays Jesus was striking and foreshadows when Pless later becomes Judas. Costume designer Sallyanne Bianchetta garbs the rest of the cast in a variety of outfits that similarly reflect their personalities and the diversity of people needing a savior.

Each of the actors has impressive pipes, so it is difficult to single out anyone. These folks rock. I was particularly amazed at the big voices coming out of some of the petite female cast members like Darby Pumphrey and Ruthgena Faraco for example. Musician Shane Dinan plays the piano and delivers a solid guitar solo too.

Mendini is a good choice to portray Jesus as he even gently encourages audience members from their seats to participate in the show. His voice has a purity that fits the role.

While the first act of the show is fast-moving and joyful, filled with familiar gospel parables being brought delightfully to life, the second act darkens as the events of Holy Week unfold. The quiet moments are devastating. Here is where the versatility of the cast is most revealed. Their sorrow as they bid Jesus goodbye after the Last Supper brought tears to my eyes.

I could go on about how much I enjoyed this production directed by Ted Wioncek, III, but give yourself a blessing and go experience it for yourself while the liturgical season of Eastertide continues. *Godspell* runs through May 12. For tickets, call 239.800.3292.