



THE GOSPEL WITH A BAD CASE OF ADHD: The hyperactive cast of *Godspell* performs 'Light of the World.' Photo: Jeremy Daniel



Theater Review

***Godspell* revival:**

Lord, give them a Valium

GODSPELL

Conceived and originally directed by John-Michael Tebelak

Music & new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz

Directed by Daniel Goldstein

Choreographed by Christopher Gattelli

Open run

Circle In The Square Theatre

1633 Broadway at 50th Street

(212-239-6200), www.Godspell.com

By David NouNou

Since subtlety and nuances are not two of the commandments necessary on Broadway and good acting is not always a necessity, wouldn't casting "American Idol" cast-offs in the parts have been a more original and better idea than the bland cast that is currently assembled in *Godspell*? At least with that idea, there would have been people we could have associated with and recognized.

As originally conceived by John-Michael Tebelak in 1971, *Godspell* was a sweet and likable Off-Broadway musical that ran over 2,000 performances because of its innocent nature and an antidote to the more garish and then-vulgar-looking brethren playing on Broadway's *Jesus Christ Superstar*. *Godspell* was a rock musical based on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, with Jesus as a folk hero with innocent wonder in a stylized re-enactment of his life and death. *Godspell* is essentially a Passion play with a modern twist, and it is perhaps best known for its smash-hit song, "Day By Day."

The original score by Stephen Schwartz was a delight because it was simple and uncluttered. Now mixed with hip-hop, rap and every conceivable 21st century musical genre, it has been diluted to an unrecognizable mash-up. Granted, the original book had a hippie tone to it, but now every contemporary reference has been thrown in, whether they make sense or not. From

Steve Jobs, Donald Trump, Heidi Klum and Lindsey Lohan, all the way to iPhones and trampolines, everything is tossed into this hodgepodge mix. In its desperate attempt to be "hip and with-it," it has lost any charm and likability it once had.

In an ill-conceived attempt to make the show contemporary, Daniel Goldstein, the director, has filled the musical with any imaginable shtick to make the audience like it and feel an affinity to it. One would expect this from a college production or community theater (where *Godspell* has been performed to death for decades). Whatever happened to the adage of less is more? This is definitely one of the concepts that Mr. Goldstein misses here.

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