



"Look to the lilies of the field," urges Christ in a Superman T-shirt. His devoted listeners are members of the "Godspell" troupe performing this weekend in Schwab.

John the Baptist and a disciple clown it up as a lovely lady — track sneakers and all — tries to gain their attention in the production of "Godspell."

'Godspell': It's a far cry from Sunday Services!

By Regina Andriolo

Can a play based on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, performed by 10 people with scraggly clown costumes and few props survive in a world of slick production numbers?

"Godspell" has proven it can.

It first was presented in New York at a small off-Broadway theater, but now is playing in the Promenade theater on Broadway. Other companies have sprung up in Philadelphia, Toronto, Boston, Chicago, London, Paris, Australia and on many other American and foreign stages.

The Artist Series will present "Godspell" at 3 and 8:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday in Schwab. Members of the original New York cast and those from other troupes will join in the Penn State performances.

"Godspell", the old English word for gospel, is a hodge-podge of pantomime, song, choreography, mugging and slapstick, joyously tracing the life and teachings of Jesus Christ without the slightest bit of irreverence.

Created two years ago by John-Michael Tebelak as a masters thesis at Carnegie-Mellon University, the play first took form when he attended Easter Sunday services at Pittsburgh's St. Paul's Cathedral. Upon leaving the church, long-haired Tebelak was stopped by a policeman and searched for drugs. Shortly thereafter, the play crystallized.

"Godspell" was born in the wake of a surge of rock musicals such as "Hair" and increased religious interest as exemplified in "Jesus Christ, Superstar." Yet it is

more simplistic in its approach. Songs are warm, melodic and full of life. Stage props include colorful boards, a couple of sawhorses, bare lightbulbs and some wire school-yard fencing.

Jesus, dressed in a Superman T-shirt, striped pants and orange pom-pommed sneakers leads his clown-costumed disciples through lighthearted slapstick interpretations of parables such as the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, Lazarus, and the Sower and His Seed.

Stephen Schwartz wrote the music and lyrics for "Godspell", as well as the Broadway hit, "Pippin." He explains, "When the world is in such a mess, you can't take it too seriously; we make Jesus Christ into a music hall act, clowning about and doing a soft shoe dance with Judas. You simply have to like the man. Jesus amuses and delights you; he's the kind of character anyone would want to follow."

"Godspell's" popularity probably is due not only to the performers' fantastic talents and energy, colorful scenery and costumes but mainly to the show's warm, lovely lyrics. It won a Grammy Award, in the Best Musical category, for the original cast album which has topped the \$1 million sales mark. The ballad "Day by Day" has topped music charts across the country.

"Godspell" is advertised as a "joyous experience," a comment backed up by viewers and critics alike. Artist Series' members expect a top notch performance this weekend, and if past reactions are sincere, they will not be disappointed.

