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## Staging and Acting Highlight 'Godspell'

Walter Lazenby

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("Let's hear it for God!") is much to his credit. Omitting the opening number,

# Staging and Acting Highlight 'Godspell'

By WALTER LAZENBY

What makes Eastern's current production of the musical "Godspell" appealing is not the script, about which I still have the reservations expressed in an earlier review (April 8), but the aesthetic rightness with which the material is staged and the actors' uninhibited display of talent.

To begin with, Clarence Blanchette's set consisting of collapsible half-tent and three trapezes seems a perfect embodiment of what the script essentially says: the flippant show-business routines which make up the play's action and purportedly convey the gospel message demand this kind of atmosphere. (An incidental warning: Don't study the

implications of the show's format too closely, or you'll wind up drawing cynical conclusions about its point.)

And what E. Glendon Gabbard as director has done to a script which has all the taste of a pep rally on God's behalf "Tower of Babel," with its incongruous associations; plunging right into the processional "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord"; and opening Act Two with a reprise of "Learn Your Lessons Well" give the show a cohesive pattern (even what happens to the tent contributes to the pattern). He has also eliminated much of the silliness I found in the production reviewed earlier.

The most strikingly original aspect of the production is the finale, where the central trapeze becomes the focal point

for the most serious moments. It is decidedly an aesthetic plus here to have the mourners somewhat remotely turned away, making their laments to two shadows of the central event seen on the tent wall. In Saturday night's performance, the scene was more immediate

## A Review

and gripping than this device would perhaps suggest, since open sobbing was heard in the auditorium.

Alice Stoughton has contributed tasteful choreography, and to musical director Delbert Simon's coaching I attribute the fact that the singers' diston

is unusually pure — I heard about ninety-five per cent of the lyrics.

Though one singer at least sounded flat Saturday night and the chorus for "By My Side" was distinctly cacophonous (Was it intentional cacophony?), on the whole the singing was excellent.

I found Mike Madlem's voice pleasing and Jill Zakroff's style original. Bill Nicholls exhibited subtlety and nice variety in his three or four numbers, as well as bearing the weight of the major role commendably. His wistful smile was a positive asset in creating his character.

"Light of the World," a duet by Phil Wright and Jim Osborn, came across quite well; and Jan Lamos gave a blistering rendition of the torch song,

"Turn Back, O Man," while snaking her way across the stage and vamping an entire male chorus line.

Patrick Richardson and John Malkovich drew the most applause for "All for the Best," which is the least religious and one of the best songs in the score. Incidentally, I commend Malkovich for really blossoming in this show. In taking several different parts he revealed talents previously hidden and completely effaced his own personality.

And happily, B. J. Heft was up to his old tricks in adeptly handling several "character" parts.

You can see for yourselves by taking in one of the four remaining performances: tonight, Friday (the Fourth), Saturday, and Sunday.