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'Godspell' holds special meaning for director, young cast

By JURI LOVE FOR THE FOXBORO REPORTER Feb 20, 2019



Foxboro resident Peter Todd, 17, a senior at Xaverian Brothers High School in Westwood, stands on a platform in his role as Jesus during a cast rehearsal of "Godspell."

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Juri Love

For Laura Rotondo Canfield, the coming production of "Godspell" at the Marilyn Rodman Performing Arts Center will be bittersweet.

On the one hand, it's an opportunity for the company she founded and directs, LRC Stage Productions, to put on a show she has long loved and, she feels, holds special meaning for current times.

But on the other hand, it will mean saying goodbye to a group of young people who she says have come a long way.

"I feel both a deep sense of pride and great sadness that this is the last time we will travel down this road together," Canfield said. "However, I couldn't be more proud of the adults they've become, and I know that they will each make a positive difference in the world, in their own unique ways.

"I am deeply grateful for this opportunity and I will never forget it."

Canfield saw "Godspell," which will be staged March 8 and 9, as a child and really liked it, especially the music. She was drawn to its creative nature, the size of the cast, and its positive message.

"Four years ago, I had made a promise to a very special group of middle school students that one day I would do another show with them before they finished high school," she said. "They are graduating in a few months and moving on to college, and 'Godspell' seemed like the perfect show for us to do. Small, intimate, challenging and fun — and it's been an amazing experience."

The 14-member cast includes six seniors from four different high schools. Four are from Foxboro High, one sophomore and three freshmen, and there are four Ahern Middle School eighth-graders.

Peter Todd, 17, a Foxboro resident and senior at Xaverian Brothers High School, is playing the role Jesus.

"It's a fun role to play... and this is our last hurrah before we are going to college," said Todd, who has been involved in musical theater since third grade.

Canfield said that "Godspell" doesn't 'preach' religion, but does show through the leadership of one individual how a community can learn to get along — regardless of religion, race or political party affiliation.

"In this day and age, there is no more positive a message that we could convey," she said.

This is Canfield's first high school-level show and her first working with a live band, which will be on stage for the whole production.

"It's a very loosely structured show, so it allows for lots of creativity and interpretation, which is both very exciting and very challenging," she said.

Foxboro High senior Kendall Milender, 18, who plays one of the disciples, will be attending Dartmouth College in the fall as a pre-med student while pursuing a theater minor.

She said “Godspell” has been a really important part of her senior year because she took a break from musical theater for a while.

“It means more than anything to me to be back doing what I love so much and to be in ‘Godspell’ with my best friends from childhood,” she said. “As I leave for college with the hope of pursuing theater, it means a lot to do one last show with Mrs. Canfield and some of my favorite people. It’s been amazing. It’s been bittersweet.”

Milender added that she thinks it’s important not to misinterpret “Godspell” as being something exclusively Christian not for everybody.

“I think that now more than ever, we are living in a really divisive time and people are separated by what they believe in,” she said. “‘Godspell,’ above everything, is about people coming together — it’s about love and community.

“I think everyone should come and see it because there’s a takeaway for all of us. It’s a great family show, and I know people will love it as much as our cast does.”

Canfield said there is a lot of fun and audience involvement in “Godspell.” But for her, the best part of this show will be watching her students.

“I have been brought to tears more than once in our rehearsal process,” she said.

“Godspell” will be performed at 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 8, and 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, March 9, at the Marilyn Rodman Performing Arts Center. All tickets are reserved seating. They’re available in advance at brownpapertickets.com or by call the box office, 508-543-2787.