

Bedford woman joins crew of 'Godspell' in Windham

BY JANET THOMSON

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When Heidi Newkirk got the opportunity to work with the Windham Actors Guild production of Stephen Schwartz's "Godspell," she welcomed the challenge. Although this is Newkirk's first gig as an assistant stage manager, she's no stranger to musical theater. She has seen more than 100 Broadway shows and operas while attending podiatric medical school in New York. She even confesses doing some local community theater during the summers when she was young. Newkirk says that she always got the chorus line roles, while her sister, "who's a ham," got the lead.

"Godspell" is a musical written in the early 1970s. It's based on the parables from the Book of Matthew and the Catholic faith. The production is traditionally done with a cast of col-

lege kids in their 20s, according to director Jacob Zentis. However, in the Windham Actors Guild production, the cast members consist of kids in high school and early 20s, grad students, and more mature members who've seen the world, says Zentis. In this production, the cast exposes a community that's unstable, betrays, lacks leadership, yet thrives to rebuild. "Godspell" addresses these and other issues that concern any community, regardless of its religious affiliations.

The role of Judas, traditionally played by a man, was performed by Emily Mayne. She originally wanted a female part, but was asked to read for the role of Judas. However, she was "pleased as punch" when she got cast as Judas. Mayne was also grateful that her friend and fellow cast member, Jen Holbrooke, encouraged her to come and audition. Mayne works with the Majestic The-

atre in Manchester, but considers the Windham Actors Guild home. She studied theater at Salem State University in Massachusetts and describes performing as no "better high, it's wonderful."

"Godspell" was entertaining, comical, fun and definitely has the 70s influence throughout the production with its hippy theme of peace and love. But there were some more contemporary elements with a snippet from Taylor Swift's, "We're Never Ever Getting Back Together," which had the audience in stitches. And, then, the theme lyrics from "Gilligan's Island" during the Noah's Ark scene continued the audience's roaring laughter. Although there were times of laughter, Zentis, and the entire "Godspell" cast, delivered a message of the golden rule we learned growing up, treat others the way we want to be treated.

The lyrics to "Beautiful City"

were stunning and inspiring, says Newkirk.

"It speaks to the meaning of community as they struggle and hope. As individuals, we must share our talents, strengths as well as our weaknesses and at times our desperation."

According to Newkirk, this concept is illustrated in this multigenerational cast "coming together with different skills and backgrounds contributing to create something truly phenomenal."

Newkirk was surprised to learn how much work goes into a musical production. She enjoyed the experience so much and is ready to tackle her next project, but this time, as stage manager.

Heidi Newkirk of Bedford got the opportunity to be assistant stage manager for a Windham Actors Guild production of "Godspell." Here she's with director Jacob Zentis.

Janet Thomson Photo

