

Energetic, comedic romp through the scriptures

Theatre review by John Busbee

Children, don't try this at home. Leave it to the professionals – comedians, that is. “The Bible – The Complete Word of God (abridged)” is another work from Reduced Shakespeare Company (Adam Long, Reed Martin & Austin Tichenor, with additional material by Matthew Croke), creators of “The Complete Works of Shakespeare (abridged)” and other irreverent distillations of great subjects. Theatre ... for a change opens its season in its new digs, the Viking Theatre (2811 East 14th Street), thanks to a partnership with Grand View College. Their debut will not soon be forgotten as this hard-working trio of comic actors trampled from Genesis through Revelation in over-the-top grandeur.

Although opening night had more than its fair share of technical glitches, there were many hilarious gems scattered throughout the performance. While never seeming to achieve true comfort in delivering songs and action to the occasional canned sound track, the “Aw, shucks” appeal of John Cisar, Thatcher Williams and Matt Hanify was undeniable. Simply put, if the dysfunctional gang of Animal House’s Delta House Fraternity been challenged to portray the entire contents of the Bible in less than two hours, this production might easily have been the result.

From an opening parody of “A Space Odyssey” through major biblical stories, Cisar, Williams and Hanify jump from shtick, wordplay, sight gags and sophomoric antics with comedic dexterity. Audience reactions ranged from amusement to groans to unabashed laughter. Two memorable bits (‘scenes’ gives their action too much theatrical credence) were stories about David & Goliath and Noah’s Ark, complete with audience participation. The slow motion delivery when David slings the stone at Goliath is a stitch. And, Cisar’s incessant return to the missed story of Noah finally reaches a peak at the beginning of Act II, when the trio of biblical anti-scholars pulls several audience members to assist with the two-by-two antics.

Comedic chaos reigns supreme, and despite the occasional opening night delivery jitters, this skewed look at the Bible is sure to please. This is a great evening of good-natured fun. “Bible (abridged)” runs Wed-Thu at 7:30 pm, Fri-Sat at 8:00 pm, Sun at 3:00 pm, through December 18. And, with tickets only “\$10 cheap (an appropriate Mad Magazine reference – thank you, Alfred E. Neuman), \$5 for students/seniors, \$2 for Grand View College students,” this is a wonderful escape that supports locally produced theatre. www.iowatix.com or 515-277-3727. Info: www.thatcherwilliams.com/theater.