



## Actors' Summit season begins with clever comedy "Making God Laugh"

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Sean Grennan's "Making God Laugh" is a hoot as presented by [Actors' Summit](#), a [Knight Arts grantee](#). It's the company's season opener, and it's a great one to begin with – funny, cleverly written, a wonderful mixture of laughable incidents that have serious undertones that ultimately get worked out in the plot, and some gifted acting.



Sean Grennan, playwright. Photo from [peninsulaplayers.com](#)

The play takes its title ostensibly from a Woody Allen line, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans." Over the course of three decades (all set around family get-togethers at various holidays) with Ruthie and Bill (Chanda K. Porter and James L. Hill) and their three children, Maddie (Shani Ferry), Thomas (Adam Klusty) and Richard (Keith E. Stevens), you certainly leave the theater with the idea that life doesn't always turn out the way you planned for it to or wanted it to, or for that matter – and more dramatically covered in this play – the way your parents wanted it to. As you might expect, when the family joins up, the topic turns to how all their lives are going. Maddie is an aspiring actress, Thomas wants to become a priest, and Rick (as he insists on being called, though everyone prefers to call him Richie and Richard), is a former all-star football player determined to strike it rich through all sorts of insider knowledge. None of those things happens over the course of several years, much to their controlling, morally rigid mother's regret.

Thomas tanks as a priest and instead marries and has the grandchildren Ruthie always wanted, but not from whom she thought they would come. She always pestered Maddie about marriage and children (since she saw that as a womanly duty). Instead, Maddie comes out as gay, takes a lesbian partner, gives up acting and fulfills a career as a public school teacher. Rick falls for one losing scheme after another and drowns his sense of failure in alcohol.



“Making God Laugh,” cast. Photo from Actors’ Summit

It doesn’t sound much like a raucous comedy, but it gets played that way. The center of the storm, so to speak, is mother Ruthie. She had her own feelings way back when for women, but denied them for religious reasons, instead stifling her feelings in a tense and somewhat loveless marriage and hoping for what she repeats at every holiday – a perfect world and perfect children. The comic sections come from the children teasing each other as siblings will do even when fully grown adults, and from their relentless but comic reaction to Mom’s fantasia dip that she makes at every holiday and everyone hates. A lot of the laughs come from seeing three decades of fashion change – bad wigs and hairdos included. Pretty funny stuff, and it keeps the lighter tone for the darker story. Playwright Grennan’s script weaves well the wit, tension and wisdom of the play, tying together loose ends as the play winds up. He resolves it all in some poignant moments, showing that when it counts, even disputing families can come together and support each other. The actors are uniformly good, with Ferry as Maddie and Porter as Ruthie standing out. That probably is because the biggest tensions in the play are between them, and perhaps because they seem to have the most resilience and strength. Director Neil Thackaberry, co-artistic director of Actors’ Summit, kept the pace moving and the action visually interesting by having the characters constantly moving about the stage. There were no dead moments.

Actors’ Summit is off to a great start with this play. Go see it; you’ll leave the theater feeling glad you went. *Actors’ Summit will present “Making God Laugh” at 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday through November 2 at Greystone Hall, 103 S. High St., Akron; 330-374-7568; [www.actorssummit.org](http://www.actorssummit.org). Tickets are \$33 (\$28 for seniors and \$10 for students).*

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