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Plenty of good cheer in ‘Making God Laugh’

BY BETTY MOHR

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For those tired of the harsh dysfunctional family productions that leave one depressed (and which so many theaters love to mount), “Making God Laugh” is a gem of comic relief.

Written by Sean Grennan and playing at Theatre at the Center in Munster, Ind., to June 10, this new heartwarming comedy has everything going for it.

“Making God Laugh” has a dramatic and honest story of real people layered with a hoot of hilarity, yet the show is so meaningful that one has tears of joy by show’s end.

This upbeat look at family follows Jimmy and Ruthie as they celebrate holidays with their three children through three decades. “Making God Laugh” begins on Thanksgiving 1980 as the kids — Richard, Maddie and Thomas — arrive to celebrate the holiday. The next time we see the family, it is Christmas 1990, and Richard talks about how real estate is the best investment because it always goes up and how he plans to invest in the “dot-com miracle.” That look back at predictions is hilarious. It’s a riot to hear how mistaken so many of us were about the future.

By the time we get to New Year’s Eve in 1999-2000, everyone aged. Thomas is a priest; Maddie, who wanted to be an actress, is a teacher; and Richie is still trying to find himself. The scene in which Richie prepares for the Y2K scare is one of the funniest things I’ve seen in theater in a long time. The show’s final scene takes place in the present and is so poignant that you can’t help but walk out of the theater with a genuine fondness for the warm and delightful characters you’ve come to know.

This one of Grennan’s finest plays. In the past he has written somewhat cute comedies, but with “Making God Laugh,” the young playwright has come into his own. Instead of just throwing in laughs for laughs’ sake, he has written a moving story that combines laughter with serious humanity.

Of course, it helps this production immensely that Bill Pullinsi, the master of directing human comedy, is the skipper here. Also, Angie Weber-Miller created a picture-perfect set design.

And the cast couldn’t be better. Peggy Roeder, with a perfect-pitch delivery, comes through with a terrific portrayal of mother Ruthie, while Craig Spidle is a pleasure in the part of Jimmy, the thoughtful dad. Kevin McKillip is totally convincing as Tom, and Erin Noel Grennan steals your heart as Maddie.

But it’s Joe Foust who gets the best comedy moments as Richie. Foust elevates the playwright’s dialogue into the kind of riotous scenes that had the audience doubled over in laughter.

“Making God Laugh” is such a moving and funny show that it would, indeed, make Him laugh.

Betty Mohr is a local freelance writer.

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