



OFF BEAT

## OFFBEAT: 'Making God Laugh' a great play to make audiences laugh and think

Phil Potempa's daily entertainment news column



7 HOURS AGO • BY PHILIP POTEMPA  
[PHILIP.POTEMPA@NWI.COM](mailto:PHILIP.POTEMPA@NWI.COM), (219) 852-4327

**Sean Grennan** shouldn't be too worried when he fears audiences think his new stage comedy about the ups and downs of family is entirely based on his own family.

After watching his wonderful and thoughtfully funny "**Making God Laugh**" enjoy its Chicagoland debut Sunday at **Theatre at the Center** in Munster, I think most audiences will agree there's a little bit of his "created" family

in every set of relatives.

And I'm still trying to figure out what exactly the mother character used for her ever-ill-fated "Fantasia Dip," which she classified as a family tradition, while her husband and children secretly thought of it as a family tragedy.

The play was unveiled last year for a test run in Wisconsin, and is now here to run until June 10 at Theatre at the Center in Munster, produced in association with **First Folio Theatre**.

Beautifully directed by **William Pullinsi**, who has spared no time or talent to make these characters tick together, "Making God Laugh" stars Chicago favorites **Peggy Roeder**, **Craig Spidle**, **Kevin McKillip**, **Joe Foust** and the playwright's own sister **Erin Noel Grennan**.

"Making God Laugh" is a family comedy, following "empty nest" parents Jimmy, played by Spidle, and Ruthie, played by Roeder, as they welcome their children home over various holidays.

Roeder gives one of the best performances I've watched in recent productions at Theatre at

the Center. She gives her character depth, feeling, levels and a definite edge.

The story spans different decades during the two-hour stretch so the audience can experience the family as it grows and changes, starting with Thanksgiving 1980. It begins with all of the couple's children returning home and talking about their professional paths, with one now a priest, another an aspiring actress and the third a former football player.

As the audience learns of plans and dreams, the plot unfolds to share the next 30 years of life moments, while fast-forwarding to Christmas 1990 and then New Year's Eve 2000 before concluding with a present-time Easter.

McKillip works well in the role of the son following his priestly calling, while Grennan's sister is top-notch in her timing and reaction for so many funny and touching scenes, there are too many to list here.

And balancing it all out is Foust, who is dynamic in the role of the windbag brother always seeking a new opportunity for something better. His funny moments are many and memorable.

Running about 2 hours along with a 15-minute intermission, the bonus of a fantastic and fun wardrobe dreamed up by **Brenda Winstead** and a phenomenal "homey set" by **Angie Weber-Miller** makes this play everything entertaining theater should be.

Tickets are \$38 to \$42 at (219) 836-3255 or (800) 511-1552 or [TheatreAtTheCenter.com](http://TheatreAtTheCenter.com)

The opinions expressed are solely those of the writer. He can be reached at [philip.potempa@nwi.com](mailto:philip.potempa@nwi.com) or (219) 852-4327.

## Today's Celebrity Birthdays for Wednesday, May 9, 2012

Guitarist **Nokie Edwards** of The Ventures is 77. Actor **Albert Finney** and actress-turned-politician **Glenda Jackson** are 76. Guitarist **Sonny Curtis** of Buddy Holly and The Crickets and producer-director **James L. Brooks** are 75. U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft and singer **Tommy Roe** are 70. Singer-guitarist **Richie Furay** (Buffalo Springfield, Poco) is 68. Singer **Clint Holmes** and actress **Candice Bergen** are 66. Singer **Billy Joel** is 63. Bassist **Tom Petersson** of Cheap Trick is 62. Actress **Alley Mills** ("The Wonder Years") is 61. Actress Amy Hill ("All American Girl") is 59. Actor **John Corbett** ("My Big Fat Greek Wedding," "Northern Exposure") is 51. Singer **David Gahan** of Depeche Mode is 50. Rapper **Ghostface Killah** of Wu-Tang Clan is 42. Guitarist **Mike Myerson** of Heartland is 41. Singer **Tamia** is 37. Trombonist **Dan Regan** of Reel Big Fish is 35. Singer **Pierre Bouvier** of Simple Plan and actress **Rosario Dawson** ("Grindhouse," "Josie and the Pussycats") are 33.

[Top of Page](#)   [Home](#)   [Full Site](#)

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