

Habit-Forming Fun: 'Nunsense' at Peninsula Players

By Gary Jones at *Peninsula Pulse*



Those who once attended a parochial school taught by habited nuns especially enjoyed the 1985 appearance of the musical comedy *Nunsense* by Dan Goggin, just as they had been entertained by John Powers' 1975 novel (and subsequent stage/screen adaptations) *Do Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?*

Graduates of traditional Catholic schools often found their educational experience more intense than did those of public schools, and generally felt more ambivalence looking back on their schooling, hence the popularity of these light-hearted works. But in the case of *Nunsense*, the show continues to endure when fewer and fewer members of the audience were actually there.

The Peninsula Players current production of Goggin's musical comedy delights its audience not only because of the novelty of that bygone era, but also with the humor that results from the juxtaposition of staid looking nuns in full black and white regalia to their often less than devout antics, sometimes with risqué humor. In addition, the production takes imaginative liberties with the original script and song lyrics, adding double entendres and intentionally anachronistic contemporary allusions, all in good fun.

Nunsense is set in the auditorium of the Mt. Saint Helen's school where a student production of *Grease* has been in rehearsal. Unfortunately food poisoning previously sent 52 nuns to meet their maker, leaving only 19 to cope with the fact that the Little Sisters order from Hoboken, New Jersey had the cash to bury only 48, leaving the other four departed sisters in the kitchen freezer until sufficient moneys were raised for their interment as well.

This dark humor adds to the rollicking nature of the production, as five nuns take over the students' facility to rehearse their sister acts for a variety show that they hope will complete their fundraising objective. The dotty Reverend Mother Sister Mary Regina (played by Liz Pazik) and Mistress of Novices Sister Mary Hubert (Cassie Slater), along with three younger nuns, all sing and dance their way through a talent show practice session that includes stand-up comics, stories and sight gags.

Especially enjoyable are the antics of those three nuns: novice Sister Mary Leo (played by Ashley Lanyon) whose goal is to become a ballerina; Sister Robert Anne (Christine Mild) who is the trouble-making comedian; and Sister Mary Amnesia (Stephanie Wahl) who has seriously comic memory problems.

The production includes audience participation, the actresses joking with them in the aisles. But the singing and dancing of the five performers highlight the show. Under the goofy personas of the nuns, they offer impressive vocal talent and skillful footwork. The audience hears red-hot mamas, sister act harmonies, wailing blues, twanging country and soaring gospel. We watch ballet, tap, chorus line, and vaudeville hoofing. Musical director Valerie Maze and choreographer Gregory Patterson are to be complimented for their parts in the production.

The school gym/auditorium set with a pit band on the stage added colorful touches to the show. As a side note, in addition to *Nunsense* with its long production history, Goggin also has written seven spin-off shows. Coincidentally, Liz Pazik, who plays Mother Superior in this production, portrayed Sister Mary Amnesia in the Players' 1987 version, and this show's director, Karen Sheridan, also played that role in the Players' 1993 *Nunsense II*.

Nunsense runs through Oct. 18 with enough energy and edgy irreverent humor to keep an audience laughing and warm on cool autumn evenings. For information and tickets, call 920.868.3287 or visit peninsulaplayers.com.



Rev. Mother Sister Mary Regina (played by Liz Pazik) and Sister Mary Hubert (Cassie Slater) in Peninsula Players' production of Nunsense. Photo by Bruce Mielke.