

# the laughs

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musical  
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"HIGH SOCIETY" combines a  
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East Bay tonight  
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at Opera Com-  
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with new lyrics for  
Susan Birken-  
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the play and film  
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nd the film "High

has an excellent  
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the classic Amer-  
comedies. And  
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says Byron Pe-  
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's an excellent  
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opened on Broad-  
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Francisco. "What  
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**PAT CRAIG**  
One Hand Clapping

whole thing with the zaniness it had in the first place, rather than as a repository for Porter tunes, as the Broadway production occasionally became.

"It's a bigger-than-life kind of thing, done more like 'The Philadelphia Story' or 'Dinner at Eight,' where everybody is heightened and a little bit self-important," he says. "It is, after all, a musical comedy."

The show deals with the tense days before the second marriage of Tracy Lord, in the midst of a family circus complicated by the eyes of the press, a nearby ex-husband, a straying father, a drunken uncle and an assortment of other characters who make things just as difficult as possible.

Songs in the production include some of those from the Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Grace Kelly film from 1956, along with other Porter numbers. Highlights include "High Society," "Ridin' High," "True Love," "Let's Misbehave," "Just One of Those Things" and "Well, Did You Evah?"

The musical runs through June 16 at the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts. Tickets, at \$23, with student and senior discounts, may be reserved by calling 925-943-SHOW.

**SMILING AT JOB:** The story of Job, long-suffering as he maintains his faith in God, wouldn't be expected to laughs when it's discussed in the sanctuary of Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church. On the other hand, Neil Simon did write "God's Favorite," an updated version of the story, about the trials of Joe (Gary Mutz), who goes through everything from freezing to fire as forces from the other side try to punish him into renouncing his faith. And that gets big laughs in the Presbyterian Church sanctuary in the current production by the church's Contra Costa Christian Theatre.

This is the second production by the church-based company that plans to offer fare



**JOB RETOLD:** Joe (Gary Mutz) comforts Rose (Heather Lane) in "God's Favorite," as their children, from left to right, David (Vinny Ferraro), Sarah (Jennifer Wilson) and Ben (Joel Day) look on.

appealing to theater lovers in general. And with "God's Favorite," the company has proven it can produce exactly what it has in mind.

Director Reen Vogel has assembled a wonderfully goofy cast that speeds through a wildly slapstick version of the play. The script is mined for major laughs (although Simon's points about faith come through clearly).

Mutz, a familiar face to many local theatergoers, is terrific as Joe. He gives the role of the faithful and exasperated father a certain comic dignity that makes his tribulations all the funnier. His counterpart, Lipton (John Goodson), who plays a messenger (low-paid and without wings) from God, creates a delightfully daft character as he delivers the proposition to test Joe's faith.

The cast is rounded out by the goofy family: children Ben (Joel Day), Sarah (Jennifer Wilson) and David (Vinny Ferraro), who are all added in their own way; wife Rose

(Heather Lane), who manages to forget the world with earplugs; and the domestics, Morris (Jeff Lewandowski) and Mady (Barbara McKee), who try their best to hold things together when Joe's whole world literally burns down.

What is most unusual about the production is it takes place in a church sanctuary. The pulpit and choir area are behind the drop that serves as the walls of Joe's home, but the large cross above the stage makes it clear where you are. And laughter, it seems, is one of those joyful noises unto the Lord.

It all works, though. "God's Favorite" is a fun, funny, good-hearted production. The show plays through Sunday in the church at 1801 Lacassie Ave., Walnut Creek. Tickets, at \$12-\$15, may be reserved by calling 925-798-1300.

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## PAT'S PICKS

■ "BIG LOVE," C...  
Mee's wild ride on  
roller coaster of lo-  
and marriage, get-  
asionally preachy  
all in all, it's a wh-  
of fun at Berkeley  
510-647-2949.

■ "LOOK HOME-  
WARD, ANGEL" is  
good old-fashioned  
drama that is play-  
the hilt on a stunn-  
configured set at  
cord's Willows Th-  
925-798-1300.

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