

The Skin of Our Teeth at Minneapolis Theater Garage on 7/2/09

By: [John Olive](#)

For all the boundary-busting theatricality of contemporary American theater it would be hard to surpass the pure weirdness of **Thornton Wilder's** 1942 masterwork **The Skin Of Our Teeth**, now enjoying a crackerjack production by Girl Friday Productions (at the Minneapolis Theater Garage, 711 West Franklin, Th-Sun, through July 25, girlfridayproductions.org). GFP specializes in Wilder, having mounted a widely praised *Our Town* a year ago.

Is it possible to summarize a sprawling comedy like *The Skin Of Our Teeth*? In Act 1, George and Maggie Antrobus (George is an inventor – the wheel, the alphabet, the lever), along with their children Gladys and Henry (who has changed his name from Cain after slaying his kid brother Abel), their shrill maid Sabina (who delights in breaking the 4th wall to complain about the nonsensical script), their pet mammoth and dinosaur, 6 or 8 insane neighbors, deal with the ice age currently ravaging New Jersey. In Act 2, George is in Atlantic City preparing to give a speech to the Ancient and Honorable Order of Mammals, Subdivision Human. He and Maggie celebrate their 5000th anniversary while the wily Sabina does her best to seduce him. The rains begin and the Antrobuses board the ark. And in Act 3, a devastating war ends and Gladys and Maggie emerge from the cellar to greet the returning men, but, oh dear, some of the actors have ptomaine poisoning, so the stagehands take over...



You get the idea: the play careens and probes and dazzles, gorgeously crafted, never over-reaching, always surprising. That it was composed during the darkest days of World War Two makes it all the more amazing. It won (and richly deserved) the 1942 Pulitzer.

The Girl Friday production pleases on all counts. As Mr. Antrobus, **John Middleton** – tall, loose-jointed, almost simian – prowls the stage and carries the show, transitioning effortlessly from impish good humor to crazed rages. **Kirby Bennett's** Mrs. Antrobus, with her ever-present pearls, her June Cleaver brittleness, her determination to see the Antrobuses through every catastrophe, is just as effective. **Alayne Hopkins's** slinky and chirpy Sabina is great fun. **Ian Miller** and **Anna Sundberg** excel as the Antrobus children. The Ensemble (**George Muellner**, **Sam Landman**, **Mike Rylander**, **Amanda Whisner**, **Courtney McLean**, **Julie Weaver** and **Joel Grothe**) expertly create the myriad side characters who more than anything else propel this play.

The director **Benjamin McGovern** and his intrepid team of designers (**Erica Zaffarano**, **Kathy Kohl**, **Jennifer DeGolier**, **Katharine Horowitz** and **Anna Lawrence**) have mounted the play on a shoestring and made it work. McGovern uses every inch of the wide stage and expertly moves the large cast around. A solid production that in no way feels cheap or apologizes for itself.