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Girl's Skin



Photo courtesy of Minneapolis Theater Garage

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By Quinton Skinner

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If we happen to be cursed and blessed to live in interesting times, as the adage goes, our best bet is to learn from the changes around us and bear in mind that there isn't much happening that hasn't gone down before. Thornton Wilder seemed to think so, judging from his strange and sprawling *The Skin of Our Teeth*, staged this month by Girl Friday Productions.

"(Wilder) combines everyday domestic life with mythic events—the suburban American family, an encroaching ice age—with time frames crunching together," says Kirby Bennett, coproducer of Girl Friday. "They all collide in a hodgepodge."

The story concerns the Antrobus family, along with a bevy of other characters, who live in 20th-century New Jersey but also careen and ricochet through many of the disasters history has to offer (both natural and man-made).

Director Ben McGovern notes that Wilder's big-picture view of worldly calamity is hardly out of place today. "He started writing it at the tail end of the Depression," says McGovern. "And it opened in the middle of World War II, an incredibly difficult time for America." Thematically speaking, things haven't changed much. "The Antrobus clan basically survive economic crisis, environmental peril, war, strife, famine, and floods," says Bennett. "Then you look at the headlines, and there are so many parallels."

Girl Friday scored a small-theaterhit in 2007 with a smart production of Wilder's *Our Town*, seen by a total audience of more than 1,300. Like *Our Town*, *The Skin of Our Teeth* features a large ensemble cast, which is rare in these frugal times. Bennett describes her company as carefully picking its spots; rather than staging full seasons, it aims to stage "one larger-scale great effort every couple of years."

July 2–25. *Minneapolis Theater Garage, 711 Franklin Ave. W., Mpls., 612-729-1071*

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