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**STAGE**

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**THEATER: "Parenting 101: A Musical Guide to Raising Parents"**

By Eric Rezsnyak On Jan. 9th, 2008

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The baby is colicky. Your 4-year-old isn't adjusting to pre-school. You've just spent the last three hours running little Timmy from Cub Scouts to hockey practice to a pizza party. Your 12-year-old daughter hates you. Your 17-year-old son is spending too much time with the wrong kind of girl.

Raising kids is hard work, and often a thankless job. But you are not alone. Countless parents have come before you, and probably even more will follow. And most of them experience the same infuriating, depressing, exhausting, and occasionally delightful situations caused by those little gremlins running around with half of your genetic material. So we might as well all have some fun with it. That's the idea behind "Parenting 101: A Musical Guide to Raising Parents," now playing at Downstairs Cabaret.

"Parenting" is a cabaret show in the truest sense: it features singing, dancing, comedy, and acting, but no plot or real characters to speak of. Instead the show - written by Nancy Holson and Rochester's Jay Falzone - features unconnected scenes that follow parents from giving birth to marrying kids off. Just about every kid-related milestone or cliché is touched on, including potty training, Santa Claus, the birds and the bees, teaching kids to drive, and heading off to college. Most of the action is told through song, as familiar tunes are given parody lyrics to fit the situation. So for instance, "Your Son Will Come Out Tomorrow" replaces the classic "Annie" tune, and a babysitter croons "For Your Guys Only" in lieu of the Bond theme song.

**"Parenting" isn't designed** to give you deep thoughts or make you rethink the truth of the human condition, or any of that. It's meant to entertain, and it does so ably, thanks to a fantastic cast. Co-writer Falzone is joined by Jeff Brooks, Amanda Danskin, and Lindsay Quinn as the four actors portray every character in the show, undergoing unbelievably quick costume changes to transform from babies to awkward teens to harried parents to cross-dressing grannies.

While the song lyrics are often clever and the comedy bold, brassy, and manic (parts reminded me of skits from "MadTV," and that's a compliment), the show succeeds largely due to the strength of the cast. These are all fantastic performers, each one equipped with a strong voice, strong comedic chops, and a total commitment to putting on a great show.

Many of the numbers feature multiple characters, but each cast member gets a moment to shine, including Falzone's unhinged first-day-of-school plea "You're Gonna Play With Me" (more moving than the entire

"Dreamgirls" movie; sorry, Beyonce) and Danskin's retooling of the Dolly Parton-Whitney Houston classic into "I Will Always Hate You," a paean to bratty pre-teen girls everywhere.

**Brooks and Quinn** really stand out in the group numbers, and their energy is infectious. Brooks steals the show a little bit during the Act I closer as a cross-dressing, rollerblading, tap-dancing grandma, and again when he and Falzone commit fully to a cheerleading routine during the "Sideline Dads" bit. The entire cast brings it home in the painfully accurate "Puberty Hits" segment. (Remember being 13? Yeesh.)

The show also features interstitials between several of the "chapters," in which video is played of kids acting out whatever the next theme is. They're adorable, and show that a lot of smart people worked on this production.

The house was packed the night I saw the show. Many in the audience appeared to be parents themselves, and they definitely appreciated the show's humor. But it's broad enough that even if you don't have kids - and the show very well may make you rethink your stance on the matter (an announcer refers to it as "musical birth control" at one point) - it's still a hell of a good time. And best of all, the only kids around are the adults playing them on stage. Ah, bliss....

Parenting 101: A Musical Guide to Raising Parents

Downstairs Cabaret Theatre, 20 Windsor St.

325-4370, [downstairscabaret.com](http://downstairscabaret.com)

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