

Waiting for the End

By [Josh Hudelson](#)

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“We live in a time of enormous change,,,” says Jonas, a recent convert to the apocalyptic doctrine of William Miller. “We live in the end days.,,”

These words mean more than their immediate association with the contemporary political arena. *Burned Over* documents America’s history of preparation for the end of the world, and its continual evasion of disaster. The play parallels the ecstasy and irresponsibility of 1960s social upheaval with the religious zeal of the mid-1800s. But it all starts and ends in a quiet country home in Massachusetts.

Mikel Sarah Lambert, a Drama Desk nominee for her performance in *The Daughter in Law*, plays Kate, the grandmother who knows too much. She leads her grad-student granddaughter Robin (Laura Wolfram) on a treasure hunt through their family history while still pretending not to comprehend her granddaughter’s college wisdom. Their old-world meets new-school differences are apparent and delightful from the beginning, when Kate asks Robin of the post-feminist lens, “Which way does it curve?,,,”

Wolfram plays an over-achieving daughter of hippies, sniffing out the perfect thesis topic on which to grind her theoretical axe. Her rendition might be a little too obnoxious for comfort, but it is certain to resonate with undergrads and graduate students all too familiar with fawning e-mails to their thesis advisors and the perennial questions of the academic world (as Sarah puts it, “How big a blow job should we give de Tocqueville?,,,”).

The story oscillates between the present-day and 19th century through a series of discovered letters. Emily (Louise Flory) and her fiancé Jonas (Scott Clarkson) convincingly depict an 1840’s couple torn between the obligations of the homestead and the religious fervor of the day. But their difficulties would seem far less severe without the startling performance of Karie Christina Hunt, who plays Emily’s younger sister, Sarah.

As the emotional counterpart to commonsensical Emily, Hunt’s character begins as a lighthearted girl and ends as a forsaken mother. Along the way she deftly carries out an array of transformations: from being the seductress of her sister’s lover, to the doubting Thomas of her husband’s belief, then finally having a religious vision, only to be abandoned after the Great Disappointment—when the end of the world fails to show.

The play is written by Dorothy Fortenberry, who received a Michael C. Rockefeller Fellowship, and helped street children in Haiti perform theater and write fiction from 2003 to 2004. Though her story spans 150 years, Creative Place Theater managed admirably with limited space under the direction of Catherine Osborne, director and producer, Anne Coburn, producer, and Heather Weidner, stage manager. The play is punctuated with clips of shapenote music, a traditional American choral form, complemented during the intermission with a shapenote song by present-day indie-rockers, the Joggers.

Burned Over is the perfect performance for students seeking comic relief from their education. But along with its humor, the play is ultimately sobering and doesn’t give simple answers to the questions it poses. At one point Sarah explains her search for “an ordinary woman whose story hasn’t been told yet.,,” The audience grapples with the question of whether it’s a story of heartfelt idealism or foolhardy passions.

• Creative Place Theater •

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