

**Cedars 94  
Apartments**



*The stimulus package for your life.*

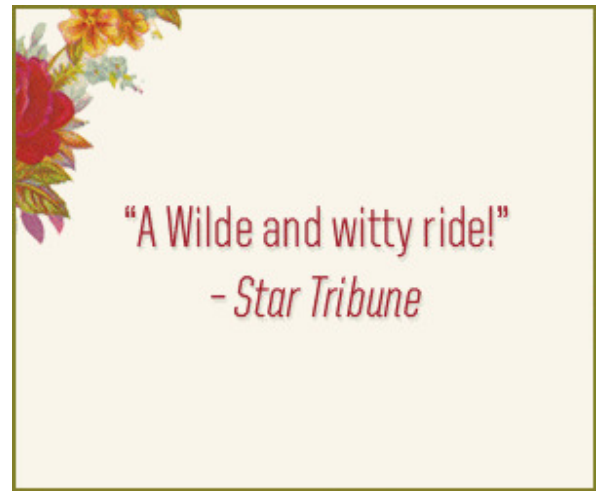
- ❖ Studios \$648+
- ❖ Business Center
- ❖ Game Room
- ❖ 1 Bedrooms \$699+
- ❖ Exercise Room
- ❖ Community Room
- ❖ 2 Bedrooms \$1,075+
- ❖ Indoor Pool/Sauna
- ❖ Underground Parking

# ***The Skin of Our Teeth* tells history's tale through 5,000-year-old family**

**Production of Thornton  
Wilder's ambitious play is a  
positively comic thrill**

**By Quinton Skinner**

published: July 08, 2009



**Richard Fleischman**



An impending ice age is the least of their problems: (clockwise from left) Anna Sundberg, Kirby Bennett, Ian Miller, Alayne Hopkins, John Middleton

Details:

**THE SKIN OF  
OUR TEETH**  
*Girl Friday  
Productions at  
Minneapolis Theater  
Garage  
through July 25;  
612.729.1071*

Stop me if you've heard this before: You're human, which means you will struggle, succeed, fail, love, and endure as best you can until your days are done. Countless others will do the same, on and on, with little clue indicating the point of it all, until all of us become extinct. And one day, there will be no trace to indicate that any of us ever existed.

It's a real knee-slapper, that one, and it underpins Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth*, a profoundly strange and paradoxically cheerful work that receives a vigorous and intelligent staging from Girl Friday Productions. As meditations on the Big Picture go, it's positively jaunty.

The action concerns the family Antrobus. The father of the nuclear clan (John Middleton) is mercurial, prone to rage, and the inventor of several useful things, including the wheel, the alphabet, and beer. His long-suffering wife (Kirby Bennett) is aces at trying to keep things together, which can prove daunting after a 5,000-year marriage such as she and hubby have pieced together.

Their son Henry (Ian Miller), meanwhile, is a perpetually violent and malevolent loose cannon who bears the mark of Cain on his forehead, while daughter Gladys (Anna Sundberg) struggles under the weight of being her father's perfect little angel. Everyone strains in each of the show's three acts, in fact, since they deal with an imminent ice age, a great flood, and the

aftermath of a long war.

So we're clearly outside the districts of convention, and it's a thrill to be reminded of the ambitious, playful, and positively cosmic vision contained at times in Wilder's work. In the first act, actors in fuzzy masks play the family's pet dinosaur and mammoth, and the second takes place at an Atlantic City convention in which Mr. Antrobus has been elected king of humanity for the year (though those storm clouds are looking positively biblical).

Alayne Hopkins turns in magnetic work as Sabina, a twitchy domestic maid in the early going, a

sexpot rival to Mrs. Antrobus in the middle act, then a cynical war vet in the final stretch. She is also the primary beneficiary of Wilder's fourth-wall-bothering passages, in which the actors play actors playing their roles (Hopkins's maid breaks character to declare "I *hate* this play"), although Middleton and Sam Landman, as the show's ostensible director pondering whether to muddle through a love scene intended for Antrobus and Sabina, also score the intended yuks.

Benjamin McGovern directs the proceedings in real life, and his strategy is evident: The work doesn't require reinvention, but it demands clarity and a faith that Wilder's story of humanity's qualities and travails is going someplace. And we get through three clear moods: the hunkered-down siege, the celebration and license before disaster, and then the pained aftermath. Wilder drew on geological history, the Bible, and the world war of his own time for inspiration, but he was getting after something more universal. Here, it makes palpable sense.

We're being asked to digest a lot, though, and devotion to Wilder's intent also results in the theatrical equivalent of museum fatigue. One moment we're contemplating the long run of humanity from the gardens of prehistory, the next we're worried about the effect of Gladys's fishnet stockings on the philandering Mr. Antrobus, then we're dealing with the validity of acting out on repressed emotions that might be self-generated crap. There may well be other plays to write, Thornton, no need to cram it all into this one.

But then the end comes, with humans looking for light, the way we do. If this is a testament to our spirit, it acknowledges how deeply flawed we are, although we have our moments. We pick up the pieces and carry on, after all, until we don't. Rinse, recycle, repeat.