

Capitol Steps masters of twisted satire

BY CHRISTINE DOLEN

cdolen@herald.com

THEATER REVIEW

It may be easy to poke fun at our fearless leader and commander in chief — you never run out of malapropisms, for instance — but few do George W. Bush as well as Andy Clemence.

Clemence doesn't look that much like the president, but he's got the squints and platitudes and mangled language down to a science. No, make that an art: The art of political (and cultural) satire is what Clemence and the other members of the Capitol Steps do as well as anyone.

At the Broward Center for the Performing Arts this week and next, the Steps gleefully skewer everyone from Osama to Bush's mama to those party-hearty twins. The Washington-based troupe, created when the Gipper was in the White House, consists of political types who abandoned government for showbiz. So Bob Dole wasn't the only one.

Parody songs are the 90-minute show's motor. As perky Laura Bush, a bewigged Bari Biern sings *Don't Go Fakin' You're Smart* (think *Don't Go Breakin' My Heart*) to the hubby who smilingly describes himself as "self-defecating." A turban-topped airport security guy croons *Pack a Knife* while patting down a hapless nun —

and waving through a parade of armed passengers. A trio of Bob Dylans — the original, a perfect copy and a misshapen nightmare version — groans *Everybody Must Get Cloned*.

Accompanied by pianist Howard Breitbart, members of the first week's cast — Mike Carruthers, Mike Loomis, Ann Johnson, Porter Koontz, Biern and Clemence — zestfully make utter fools of themselves (not to mention the extended Bush family, the Supreme Court, Tom Ridge, terrorists, a still-shameless and ever-on-the-make Bill Clinton, Gary Condit, Strom Thurmond — well, who isn't a target?). Loomis and Carruthers will stick around for the second week of the run, with four other members of the Capitol Steps' large company joining them.

That Loomis is staying is a good thing. He becomes a droning, deadpan serious Ridge when he reads an altered series of beloved children's stories that should now scare the bejesus out of the kiddies. And he manages to wreak havoc with the history of the 20th century in a monologue called *Lirty Dies*, switching the first letters of neighboring words so that they all become somehow suggestive. Dyslexia was never so funny.

IF YOU GO

"The Capitol Steps" is at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, 201 SW Fifth Ave., Fort Lauderdale, through April 7; 7:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 3 p.m. Saturday-Sunday; \$27 and \$29; 954-462-0222 or www.browardcenter.org, Ticketmaster or www.ticketmaster.com.