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CHANGE THE TROPIC

TODAY: Clouds and sun. Breezy and humid. High 82 to 87.
TOMORROW: Variably cloudy, breezy, and humid. High 74 to 79.
HIGH TIDE: 12:44 a.m. 1:26 p.m.
SUNRISE: 5:09 a.m. Sunset: 8:25 a.m.
FULL REPORT: PAGE B8

Comedy Review

For Capitol Steps, all politics is fair game

By Katie Johnston Chase
GLOBE STAFF

The fact that Mayor Tom Menino was outside the Cutler Majestic Theatre Saturday night, shaking hands and looking tan in a peach polo shirt and dark suit jacket, gave the Capitol Steps show he was about to attend an added air of authenticity. Many of the political comedy troupe's performers have worked on Capitol Hill at one time or another, but here was a real-live politician in the flesh!

The mayor of Worcester was also reportedly part of the sold-out crowd, a mostly dressy bunch save for the middle-age woman in pig-tails and an anti-Bush T-shirt sitting near the front.

The five Steps staffers did their thing almost flawlessly, belting out countless snappy numbers about Democrats, Republicans, and world affairs. With the help of a pianist, the performers delivered each song in big, theatrical voices, changing wigs and jackets backstage in a matter of seconds between each number.

With a new skit coming as often as every 20 or 30 seconds it was impossible to take any of them too seriously. When Dick Cheney rapped about tax cuts or an Iraqi minister of tourism sang "On the Sunni side of the street," the doom and gloom we read



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about in the news was dispelled, at least for a little while.

Maybe that's why political comedy is a hot ticket these days, thanks to Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart, and Bill Maher; even Chris Rock has been known to work Iraq into his act. The fact that the Bush administration is such an easy target certainly helps, but today's world-events-weary audiences are also eager to find something to laugh about, if only for 90 minutes at a time.

The Capitol Steps, founded in 1981, tapped into this need long ago. And there's no way they're ever short on material.

On the nonmusical side of

The Capitol Steps

At: Cutler Majestic Theatre,
Saturday night

things Saturday night, George W. Bush and a squinty, puffy-haired John Kerry engaged in an amusing joke-off, each taking a stab at "Why did the chicken cross the road?"

Kerry: "I've had one position on this chicken all along. Did the chicken cross the road? Yes! Did he get to the other side? No!" And so on.

Bush: "It's hard work being a chicken. . ."

It's not all stellar stuff. Mick

and Keith crooning "Hey, you, get off of my lawn" seemed out of place, and attempts at mocking airport security, avian flu, and PBS didn't have the same sting as other skits.

Still, even though the songs are unapologetically cheesy and the puns flow fast and thick, you have to admire the nimble minds behind the wordplay. The tunes the Capitol Steps use are incredibly catchy, too, which means they really stick. The day after the show I couldn't stop humming the tune that accompanied two United Arab Emirates businessmen doing a Frank Sinatra takeoff: "Strangers in the dock . . . Dubai Dubai du."