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One hit, two misses

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THE KID WHO WOULD BE POPE

Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-352-3101. Through Friday.

Even the most ardent musical-theater lovers would be hard-pressed to catch all 25 shows at the New York Musical Theatre Festival, running through Oct. 16. Here are a few of the more intriguing entries playing this week.

Adorable. That pretty much sums up everyone involved in the brothers Tom and Jack Megan's new show, about a parochial schoolboy who falls in love with a nun and decides to become Pope just to change the rules so they can wed.

It's easy to see why Billy (Kyle Brenn), the new kid at Our Lady of Perpetual Motion, falls for Sister Katherine (Jillian Louis). The pretty young nun's first appearance is heralded by the strains of "The Sound of Music," and the song she sings to the animals she meets on her morning jog seems lifted straight from a Disney movie.

Smitten, Billy tries to perform the three miracles that would qualify him for sainthood and put him on the fast track to the papacy. He gets close enough for a private meeting with the pontiff (James Judy), who offers some fatherly advice.

The eight kids in the cast, including a pair of identical twins, are delightful, particularly Rachel Resheff, who at age 11 has the comic timing of a pro. Director Gabriel Barre leavens the sweetness with a sly wit, playing up the kids' attempting a production of "Fiddler on the Roof" with maximum comic effect. And the score, featuring such numbers as "My Son the Pope" and the opening "Ad Nauseam Excelsis," is a hoot.

F---ING HIPSTERS

Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101. Through Saturday.

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Its unprintable title notwithstanding, this rock musical is an old-fashioned show-business tale. Set in Williamsburg -- where else? -- it depicts the complications that ensue when Lars (Brandon Wardell), the lead singer for the successful indie band Mark Twain's Moustache, falls for sexy Asian-American Josie (Emily Borromeo).

His bandmates -- a keyboardist (Heather Robb) who's secretly in love with Lars, and the gay, born-again couple who make up the rhythm section (Luke Smith, Kyle Lamar Mitchell) -- aren't happy. They fear that the pushy Josie is "getting all Yoko Ono" on the band. Only when they realize she's gravely ill do they rally to help her.

Directed by "Urinetown" choreographer John Carrafa, the show boasts an eclectic score by Lori Scarlett and John Ballinger, whose best numbers aren't the rock songs. They include the sweet ditty "Hypothetical Girl" and "Sure Enough," about Lars' pondering the possibility of Josie having his baby, which plays like a modern equivalent to "Soliloquy" from "Carousel."

Too bad the book, by Keythe Farley ("Bat Boy: The Musical"), has a melodramatic plot twist that can be seen a mile away. Not hip, dudes.

OUTLAWS: THE BALLAD OF BILLY THE KID

McGinn/Cazale Theatre, 2162 Broadway. 212-352-3101. Through Sunday.

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Cross "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" with "American Idiot" and you get "Outlaws: The Ballad of Billy the Kid," which turns Billy, Pat Garrett and their gang into young rebels without a cause. As they sing in the show's best, hardest-rocking number, "We Do Whatever We Want," they cut a swath through the Wild West even while acting like poor, misunderstood teens.

Although set in 1880s New Mexico, the book by Perry Liu, Alastair William King and Joe Calarco has its characters speaking contemporary dialogue.

Corey Boardman's Billy swaggers convincingly enough, and has clearly practiced his gun twirling. David Murgittroyd has a

compelling presence as Pat, and Isabel Santiago brings a sultry sexiness to her role as a young woman who falls in with the gang. But the show and its score, by Liu and King, gets bogged down with repetition: One number, "That's What They Said," is performed no fewer than four times. Enough already.

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