

Fort Wayne Civic Theatre
IN THE WINGS Arts-In-Education Program

Presents
A study guide of



Conceived and Originally Directed by John-Michael Tebelak
Music and New Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz

IN THE WINGS Performance for Schools & Social Services
Thursday, May 12, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Written by Hadley Todoran
Additional Material & Editing by Eunice Wadewitz

FORT WAYNE CIVIC THEATRE
CAST OF GODSPELL
MAY 7-22, 2011



KERRY ASHTON AS JESUS



**ENNIS BROWN AS
JOHN THE BAPTIST**



**EVAN HART
AS JUDAS**



ANNIE ROBINSON



C. LOVEY MARSHALL



COURTNEY McMEEN



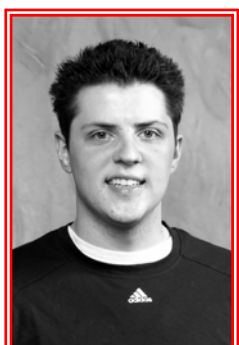
HALEE BANDT



JULIA GOODALL



LISA RAMOS



MATT ROBINSON



PRENTIS MOORE



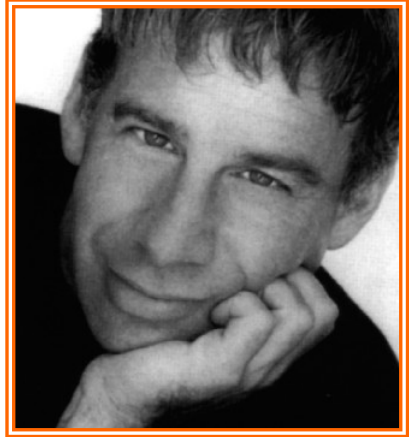
RANDY GLANDER



SYLVIA DENICE

MUSIC AND NEW LYRICS BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Stephen Schwartz was born in New York City on March 6, 1948. He studied piano and composition at the Juilliard School of Music while in high school and graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in 1968 with a B.F.A. in Drama. Upon coming back to live in New York City, he went to work as a producer for RCA Records, but shortly thereafter began to work in the Broadway theatre. His first major credit was the title song for the play BUTTERFLIES ARE FREE; the song was eventually used in the movie version, as well.



In 1971, he wrote the music and new lyrics for GODSPELL, for which he won several awards, including two Grammys. This was followed by the English texts in collaboration with Leonard Bernstein for Bernstein's MASS, which opened at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. The following year, he wrote the music and lyrics for PIPPIN, and two years later, THE MAGIC SHOW. At one point, GODSPELL, PIPPIN and THE MAGIC SHOW were all running on Broadway simultaneously.

He next wrote the music and lyrics for THE BAKER'S WIFE, followed by a musical version of Studs Terkel's WORKING, to which he contributed four songs and which he also adapted and directed, winning the Drama Desk Award as best director. He also co-directed the television production, which was presented as part of the PBS "American Playhouse" series. Next came songs for a one-act musical for children, CAPTAIN LOUIE, and a children's book, THE PERFECT PEACH. He then wrote music for three of the songs in the Off-Broadway revue, PERSONALS, lyrics to Charles Strouse's music for RAGS, and music and lyrics for CHILDREN OF EDEN.

He then began working in film, collaborating with composer Alan Menken on the scores for the Disney animated features POCAHONTAS, for which he received two Academy Awards and another Grammy, and THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME. He also provided songs for DreamWorks' first animated feature, THE PRINCE OF EGYPT, for which he won another Academy Award for the song "When You Believe." He most recently collaborated with Alan Menken on the songs for Disney's ENCHANTED.

Mr. Schwartz provided music and lyrics for the original television musical, GEPPETTO, seen on The Wonderful World of Disney and recently adapted for the stage as MY SON PINOCCHIO. He has released two CDs on which he sings new songs, entitled RELUCTANT PILGRIM and UNCHARTED TERRITORY.

Mr. Schwartz's most recent musical, WICKED, opened in the fall of 2003 and is currently running on Broadway and in several other productions around the United States and the world. In 2008, WICKED reached its 1900th performance on Broadway, making Mr. Schwartz the only songwriter in Broadway history ever to have three shows run more than 1900 performances.

His first opera, SEANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON, premiered at Opera Santa Barbara in the fall of 2009.

Mr. Schwartz has recently been given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame and the Songwriters Hall of Fame. A book about his career, "Defying Gravity," has recently been released by Applause Books.

Under the auspices of the ASCAP Foundation, he runs musical theatre workshops in New York and Los Angeles and serves on the ASCAP board; he is also currently President of the Dramatists' Guild. For further information, please visit <http://www.stephenschwartz.com> or <http://www.musicalschwartz.com>.

WORKS OF STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

BUTTERFLIES ARE FREE, title song (play and movie) 1969
GODSPELL, music and new lyrics 1971
MASS, English texts (in collaboration with Leonard Bernstein) 1971
PIPPIN, music and lyrics, 1972
THE MAGIC SHOW, music and lyrics, 1974
THE BAKER'S WIFE, music and lyrics, 1976
THE PERFECT PEACH (children's book), 1977
WORKING, adaptation, four songs, direction, 1978 (co-directed television adaptation with Kirk Browning for PBS-TV, "American Playhouse" 1981)
PERSONALS (music, three songs), 1985
CAPTAIN LOUIE (children's show), music and lyrics, 1986
RAGS, lyrics, 1986
CHILDREN OF EDEN, music and lyrics, 1991
POCAHONTAS, lyrics 1995
THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME, lyrics, 1996
RELUCTANT PILGRIM, CD of eleven songs, 1997
THE PRINCE OF EGYPT, music and lyrics, 1998
GEPPETTO, music and lyrics, 2000
UNCHARTED TERRITORY, CD of eleven songs, 2001
WICKED, music and lyrics, 2003
MIT EVENTYR/MY FAIRY TALE (music and lyrics, 9 songs), 2005
ENCHANTED lyrics, 2007
SEANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON music and libretto, premiered September 2009



STEPHEN SCHWARTZ'S AWARDS

- **3 OSCARS:** *Pocahontas* (Lyrics by Schwartz) for Best Score and Best Song "Colors of the Wind"; *The Prince of Egypt*: Best Song "When You Believe"
- **4 GRAMMYS:** *Godspell* (2 - producer and composer), *Pocahontas* "Colors of the Wind", *Wicked* (producer and songwriter for Best Musical Show Album)
- **4 DRAMA DESK AWARDS:** *Godspell* (Most Promising Composer and Most Promising Lyricist); *Working* - Director; *Wicked* - Outstanding Lyrics (also nominated for music)
- **1 RICHARD RODGERS AWARD:** Stephen Schwartz was chosen to be the 12th recipient of the Richard Rodgers Award for Excellence in Musical Theater. The Award was presented May 9, 2009 in Pittsburgh.
- **6 TONY NOMINATIONS:** 1973 - *Pippin* Score, 1977 - *Godspell* Score, 1978 - Two nominations: *Working* Book (Musical); *Working* Score (shared credit), 1987 - *Rags* Score (lyrics), 2004 - *Wicked* Score
- **1 GOLDEN GLOBE:** Best Song written specifically for a Motion Picture or Television -- Winner, 1995 - Colors of the Wind (*Pocahontas*) - Alan Menken, Stephen Schwartz
- **THE LAURENCE OLIVIER AWARD** - *The Baker's Wife* was nominated in 1989 for "Musical of the Year"
- **2009 – SONGWRITERS HALL OF FAME**
- **2010 – THEATRE HALL OF FAME**

CONCEIVED AND ORIGINALLY DIRECTED BY JOHN-MICHAEL TEBELAK



Tebelak originally produced GODSPELL at age 22 as his masters thesis project, under the tutelage of Lawrence Carra, at Carnegie Mellon University in December 1970. He had been studying Greek and Roman mythology, with the deadline for his thesis two weeks away, but became fascinated by the joy he found in the Gospels. He attended an Easter Vigil service in 1970 at Pittsburgh's St. Paul Cathedral, wearing his usual overalls and T-shirt. A police officer frisked him for drugs after the service. He wrote of this experience, "I left with the feeling that, rather than rolling the rock away from the Tomb, they were piling more on. I went home, took out my manuscript, and worked it to completion in a non-stop frenzy." Though he never completed his coursework at the university, Carnegie Mellon nevertheless awarded him a

degree. All of the original cast members contributed to the playful script that evolved under John-Michael's direction.

Subsequently, Tebelak directed productions of *Godspell* at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, the Cherry Lane Theatre, the Promenade Theatre, and on Broadway. He was named Theatre Man of the Year by Elliott Norton of the *Boston-Record American*, and Most Promising Director of 1971 by the New York Drama Desk. He was also named an Outstanding Ohioan by then-Governor John J. Gilligan. John Michael Tebelak graduated from Berea High School (Berea, Ohio) in 1966.

After GODSPELL

Though GODSPELL was his first brush with the New York theatre, it was by no means his first venture into theatrics. His theatrical career started when he "walked into a theatre at the age of nine and stayed there."

In 1972 Tebelak directed the Broadway play ELIZABETH I, the off-Broadway play, THE GLORIOUS ONE in 1975, and KA-BOOM in 1980. He also directed Lope de Vega's FUENTE OVEJUNA in Madrid in 1975. Tebelak co-authored the screenplay for GODSPELL (1973) for Columbia Pictures with David Greene.

He was a lifelong member of the Episcopal Church, possibly thought about becoming a priest, and may have attended an Episcopal seminary for a time. He was dramaturge (a professional position within a theatre company that deals mainly with research and development of plays) for the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York and staged liturgical drama there. According to Rev. James Parks Morton, "whether it was a sermon series or a two-day conference on the environment, he turned it into theater."

In 1980, Tebelak was sued in State Supreme Court in Manhattan by his former live-in companion, Richard Hannum. At that time, Hannum was represented by famed divorce lawyer Marvin Mitchelson and was working with noted writer Norman Mailer on a stage adaptation about Hollywood icon Marilyn Monroe called STRAWHEAD.¹ The lawsuit was an early effort to define the rights of cohabiting homosexual couples.

John-Michael returned to his native Berea, Ohio to direct the 10th Anniversary production of GODSPELL at the Berea Summer Theater, Summer of 1980. He subsequently directed CABARET there, Summer 1981.

Tebelak died on April 2, 1985 of a heart attack in New York City at age 35. He was survived by his parents, John and Genevieve Tebelak, his sister Trudy Williams and niece Abbey Williams.

HISTORY

Based on The Gospel according to St. Matthew, GODSPELL was originally a senior thesis directing project for Carnegie Mellon University Master of Fine Arts candidate John-Michael Tebelak. Using a profound experience at an Easter Sunday church service for inspiration, Tebelak wrote the first version of GODSPELL in 1970.

Tebelak - Story of GODSPELL's conception

Excerpt from interview in Dramatics Magazine, January 1975:

...Finally, I turned toward the Gospels and sat one afternoon and read the whole thing through. Afterwards, I became terribly excited because I found what I wanted to portray on stage.

BARKER: Which was...

TEBELAK: Joy! I found a great joy, a simplicity—some rather comforting words in the Gospel itself—in these four books. I began immediately to adapt it. I decided to go to Easter sunrise service to experience, again, the story that I had gotten from the Gospel.

As I went, it began to snow which is rather strange for Easter. When I went into the cathedral, everyone there was sitting, grumbling about the snow, and the fact that they had already changed their tires. They weren't going to be able to take pictures that afternoon. Snow was upsetting their plans. As the service began, I thought it might be a little different. Instead, an old priest came out and mumbled into a microphone, and people mumbled things back, and then everyone got up and left. Instead of "healing" the burden, or resurrecting the Christ, it seems those people had pushed Him back into the tomb. They had refused to let Him come out that day.

As I was leaving the church, a policeman who had been sitting two pews ahead of me during the service, stopped me and wanted to know if he could search me. Apparently he had thought I was ducking into the church to escape the snowstorm. At that moment—I think because of the absurd situation—it angered me so much that I went home and realized what I wanted to do with the Gospels: I wanted to make it the simple, joyful message that I felt the first time I read them and recreate the sense of community, which I did not share when I went to that service. I went to my teachers at Carnegie and asked if I could work at my own special project for my masters' degree, and they agreed. That following fall, in October, we began rehearsals at Carnegie.

This first version included a score comprised mostly of lyrics from the Episcopal Hymnal set to music by the student cast. After a chance meeting with Ellen Stewart of Café La MaMa in New York, GODSPELL transferred to La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club for a two-week, ten performance run where it was brought to the attention of producers Edgar Landsbury (brother of Angela Landsbury) and Joseph Beruh. Excited by what they saw, the duo approached Tebelak with the opportunity of an off-Broadway run if he would agree to a new score. Tebelak agreed and the producers hired Stephen Schwartz, another alumnus of the Carnegie Mellon theatre department, to write new songs for the show. Schwartz's score featured a variety of styles including pop, folk rock, gospel and vaudeville. "By My Side" was the only song kept from the original production. The new Schwartz / Tebelak musical GODSPELL opened off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theatre on May 13, 1971 and its success was immediately evident. The critics raved unanimously and in August of 1971, GODSPELL moved to the larger Promenade Theatre where it ran for 2,124 performances making it one of the longest running Off-Broadway musicals in history.

After five years of sold-out audiences Off-Broadway, GODSPELL made its Broadway debut on June 22, 1976 at the Broadhurst Theatre. Critics found the show to be just as fresh and exciting as it was when it first opened at the Cherry Lane. The show would move to the Plymouth and the Ambassador before closing on September 4, 1977 after 527 performances. In all, the musical achieved more than 2,600 performances both on Broadway and off.

GODSPELL has entertained audiences the world over for decades. Major sit-down productions of the smash hit musical were produced in most all major cities including Boston, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Chicago and Toronto. During much of 1972, these seven companies performed simultaneously. Productions also opened abroad in Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg and Melbourne. A London production, which opened in 1971, ran for nearly three years. In the last four years of its New York run, there were 25 companies performing GODSPELL around the world with eight resident companies and three touring companies. GODSPELL has been credited for establishing Toronto as a major theatre center that could support its own productions with its own actors. The

legendary 1972-73 Toronto production cast local actors for the record-breaking production providing the first paying jobs for actors Victor Garber, Eugene Levy, Andrea Martin, Gilda Radner, Dave Thomas and Martin Short. Paul Schaffer served as musical director.

A film version of GODSPELL was released in 1973 set in modern New York City. The cast featured Toronto alum Victor Garber as Jesus, David Haskell as John the Baptist/Judas and Lynne Thigpen in her first film role. John-Michael Tebelak co-wrote the screenplay and served as the creative consultant. The song "Beautiful City" was written for the film and has subsequently been performed in major stage revivals of the show. GODSPELL permeated pop culture when its song "Day By Day" reached #13 on the Billboard Top 100 list.

NOTES ON GODSPELL FROM STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Above all, the first act of *Godspell* must be about the formation of a community. Eight separate individuals, led and guided by Jesus (who is helped by his assistant, John the Baptist/Judas), gradually come to form a communal unit. This happens through the playing of games and the telling and absorption of lessons, and each of the eight individuals has his or her own moment of committing to Jesus and to the community. When Jesus applies clown make-up to their faces after "Save the People," he is having them take on an external physical manifestation that they are his disciples, temporarily separating them from the rest of society. But the internal journey of each character is separate and takes its individual course and period of time. Exactly when and why this moment of commitment occurs is one of the important choices each of the actors must make, in collaboration of course with the director.

In the second act, after an opening number that continues the sense of playfulness and includes some good-natured teasing of Jesus by his followers, Jesus announces: "This is the beginning." By this he means that now that the community has been formed, they are ready to move through the challenging sequence of events leading to the Crucifixion. When Jesus removes their make-up, just prior to the Last Supper, he is saying that they have assimilated his teachings into themselves and no longer need the outward trappings that brand them as disciples. And when Jesus is taken from them at the end, the rest of the company remain fused as a community, ready and able to carry forth the lessons they have learned.

We used to tell cast members in the original production to imagine that the audience was composed of half adults and half children, some of whom were blind and some of whom were deaf. The parables had to be made clear and entertaining to each of these groups. Thus the use of both sophisticated verbal humor and broad physical comedy, to appeal to all the age groups, and the reliance on acting out the stories visually (for the 'deaf' members of the audience) and through the use of different voices and sounds (for the 'blind' members of the audience).

AWARDS/NOMINATIONS

1977 Tony Awards:

- Best Original Score - [nominee]
 - Music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz

1973 Cannes Film Festival

- Film nominated for Golden Palm Award

1974 Writers Guild of America

- Best Comedy Film Adapted from Another Medium – [nominee]

1971 Drama Desk Awards:

- Most Promising Composer – [winner]
 - Music by Stephen Schwartz
- Most Promising Lyricist – [winner]
 - New lyrics by Stephen Schwartz
- Most Promising Costume Design – [winner]
 - Costume Design by Susan Tsu
- Most Promising Director – [winner]
 - Directed by John-Michael Tebelak

CHARACTERS

(In the script, other than the characters of Jesus and John the Baptist/Judas, the characters are called by the first names of the original cast members. For purposes of the program, the first names of the actors in each individual production may be substituted.)

- JESUS – The most charismatic individual. High energy, charming, funny, gentle but with strength. He is the sort of person others instinctively follow.
- JOHN THE BAPTIST/JUDAS – He has attributes of both Biblical figures: he is both Jesus' lieutenant and most ardent disciple and the doubter who begins to question and rebel. Like Jesus, he is also charismatic, but in more of an overt revolutionary way. He is the most 'serious' and intellectual of the group.
- JEFFREY – Very high energy; impish and playful.
- LAMAR – Not the brightest in the bunch; he is a little slow on the uptake, but there is a great sweetness and innocence about him.
- HERB – The comedian – the class clown.
- ROBIN – A bit of a tomboy, but basically open and sweet. She is the first to commit to following Jesus in 'Day by Day.'
- JOANNE – The confident one – the show-off. The first one to volunteer, sometimes she jumps in before she really understands what's going on.
- PEGGY – The shy one. Sometimes a little slow to get things, but when she does, she commits all the way. Has an 'earth mother' kind of warmth about her.
- SONIA – Sassy and slightly cynical; the most urban of the group. Also the 'sexy' one, but her sexiness contains a large element of put-on, in the manner of Mae West or Madonna (who in fact once played this role).
- GILMER – The female equivalent of the class clown. Goofy and a cut-up.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT ONE:

- 1) Prologue – Company
- 2) Tower of Babble – Company
- 3) Prepare Ye – John the Baptist, Company
- 4) Save the People – Jesus, Company
- 5) Day by Day – Robin, Company
- 6) Learn Your Lessons Well – Gilmer, Jesus, Company
- 7) O, Bless the Lord, My Soul – Peggy, Gilmer, Company
- 8) All for the Best – Jesus, Judas, Company
- 9) All Good Gifts – Lamar, Company
- 10) Light of the World – Company

ACT TWO:

- 1) Learn Your Lessons (Reprise) – Lamar & Company
- 2) Turn Back, O Man – Sonia, Jesus, Company
- 3) Alas For You – Jesus
- 4) By My Side – Peggy, Gilmer, Company
- 5) We Beseech Thee – Jeffrey, Company
- 6) Day by Day (Reprise) – Peggy, Gilmer, Company
- 7) On the Willows – The Band
- 8) Finale – Jesus, Company
- 9) Bows - Company

Beautiful City – written for the movie version; then re-written in 2001

So frequently requested by community theaters that it is now offered by MTI as an additional song for the show.

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE:

GODSPELL begins with Jesus declaring himself as God and King in whom there is no beginning and no end. The company takes on the roles of different philosophers (including Socrates, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Leonardo Da Vinci, Frederic Nietzsche, and Jean Paul Sartre) who debate the existence of the God. The debate disintegrates into babble where ideas become only fragments.

John the Baptist enters and brings order as he sings "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord." John the Baptist baptizes the company who quickly exit. When Jesus wishes to be baptized, John kneels and wishes to be baptized by him instead. Jesus brings John back to his feet and tells him that he is here to save mankind in the song, "Save The People."

The company returns in clown costumes. They begin to put clown make-up on their faces. Jesus assures them that he has come not to abolish the law of the prophets but to complete it. While the company moves like stylized marionettes, Jesus informs them that those who keep to the law of God will earn the highest place in heaven. To illustrate this, he tells the story of the widow and the judge. The story shows that God is a good judge who will vindicate those who cry out to him day and night.

The company then takes over and acts out the story of the Pharisee and the tax gatherer praying in the temple to illustrate that every man who humbles himself before God shall be exalted.

Jesus preaches the law of offering gifts at the altar before God as the company acts making offerings. Then, as they all clap in rhythm, they all act out the story of a Master who had a servant who owed him debt. The servant asked for the Master's pity, and the Master remitted the debt. However, the servant had a fellow servant who owed him a debt. When the servant did not show the same pity that the Master had shown, the Master condemns the servant to prison until the debt is paid. Jesus tells the company that the moral of the story is that one must forgive as God forgives. If one does not forgive, then God will condemn one to prison.

One of the company members sings "Day By Day" which is a prayer for clear vision. The company joins into the song. After the song ends, Jesus preaches that if one part of the body offends, better to lose it than to have the whole of it thrown into hell.

The company then plays charades to answer such questions as "if a man sues you for your shirt..." or "if a man asks you to go a mile with him..." posed by Jesus. The company then does a pantomime of the Good Samaritan story for Jesus who then tells them to love their enemies and not to make a show of religion. If good deeds are done in secret, the reward will come from God.

The company performs the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus is a poor man who goes to heaven, and the rich man goes to hell. The rich man begs God to let Lazarus rise from the dead in order to warn his rich brothers of their eventual fate. One of the company members sings "Learn Your Lessons Well" in which he warns of eternal doom if one does not learn the laws of God.

Jesus tells the company that no one can be devoted to two masters, and that no man can serve God and money. One of the company members tells a story of a man, who spends his life accumulating things and then dies before he can enjoy it. She then sings "Oh Bless the Lord, My Soul" in which she praises a patient and wise God. Jesus bids the company to put away thoughts of material things and anxieties about tomorrow.

The company recites The Beatitudes (Blessed are the poor in spirit, etc.), and Jesus answers them in a call-and-response manner. However, Judas recites the final beatitude about persecution and directs it at Jesus. The company freezes with fear about what events to come. However, Jesus quickly changes the subject and sings "All for the Best" through which he assures everyone that even if life is bad, their reward will be in heaven. Judas sings a verse of the song as well, and he and Jesus perform a soft shoe dance. The company joins into the song as well.

After the song ends, the company does various bits of stage business. One company member sings "Jesus Loves Me" like a school girl. Another company member pretends to have stage fright. Jesus organizes them all to tell the parable of the sower and the seeds which represent the word of God. To further illustrate the parable, one company member sings "All Good Gifts."

The company then pretends to be soldiers in the military, and Jesus pretends to be their drill sergeant. The company then acts out the story of the prodigal son. They sing "Light of the World," a song which encourages everyone to be shining beacons in the world. Jesus announces that they are taking a ten minute break and thanks the audience for coming.

ACT TWO:

While one of the company members sings a reprise of "Learn Your Lessons Well," the company sets up the stage for Act II. When the song is over, another company comes up through the audience and sings "Turn Back O Man" in which she encourages mankind to give up its foolish ways and turn to God. Jesus joins her in the singing of the song, and they dance.

Company members then become Pharisees who question Jesus' authority. Jesus questions their questions with a story and tells them that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart and to love thy neighbor as thyself. In the song, "Alas for You," Jesus scorns the Pharisees and calls them hypocrites. Some company members join in the song and throw garbage at the Pharisees.

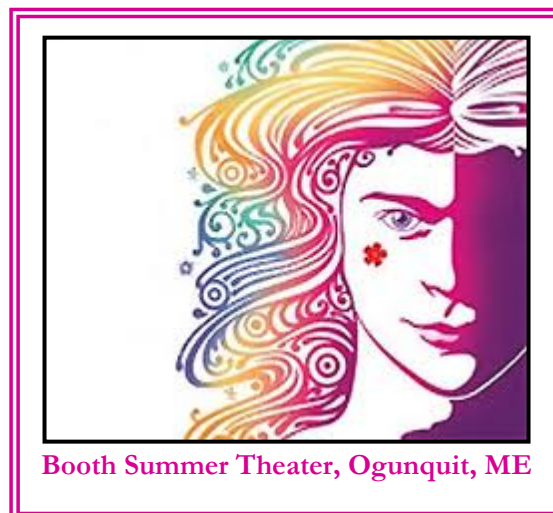
At the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, Jesus predicts that he will not be seen again until a future time. He remembers the time of Noah when the flood swept over the land and drowned mankind. He predicts that when he comes again, only one man and one woman will be taken with him. The rest will be left wailing outside the kingdom of God.

One of the women company members is thrown down onto the stage and called an adulteress. Jesus tells the company that the one who is faultless can throw the first stone at her. When no one condemns her, Jesus tells her that he will not condemn her but that she must not sin again. The woman sings "By My Side" in which she asks Jesus to travel with her.

As Judas betrays Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, Jesus tells of a time when he will sit in glory and divide men into two groups like a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. His righteous sheep will enter heaven while the cursed goats will face eternal fire. The goats beg for mercy and sing "We Beseech Thee." When the song is over, the company sings a reprise of "Day By Day" as they remove their clown make-up.

Jesus announces that one of the company will betray him and tells Judas to do what he has to do quickly. Judas runs off. Then, in a recreation of the last supper, Jesus gives the company bread and wine and announces that it is his body and blood. They will all eat and drink together again in the kingdom of God. Jesus bids farewell to his followers and prays in the garden. In a moment of uncertainty, he begs for the burden to be lifted from him and is tempted by the devil, but he orders the devil to be gone.

Judas returns and embraces Jesus who is crucified on the fence upstage while the company climbs the fence and wails. In the "Finale," Jesus sings as he dies. Then there is no movement. The company removes Jesus from the fence and carries him off as they sing "Long Live God" in harmony with "Prepare Ye The Way of the Lord."



Questions pertaining to the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre's production of GODSPELL

Since its premiere in 1971 many things have obviously changed and certain cultural references and items can be considered quite dated. So, the director has to make choices that "update" the show without losing its original message, charm and appeal. Much of the play is improvised and the script of GODSPELL encourages the director and cast to make the show and characters their own, even to the extent of not using the actual printed words but dialogue that they deem appropriate to their characters.

1. Compare the synopsis with the Civic Theatre's production of GODSPELL. What kinds of things were different?
2. The show has sometimes been referred to as "Clowns in a Trash Can," pertaining to the original concept of the characters who are dressed and face-painted as clowns and obtain additional pieces of their clothing from on-stage trash cans. Why do you suppose John-Michael Tebelak chose the "clown" idiom for his play? What direction did Guest Director Doug King go with the characters? What choices would you have made?

There are several recordings available of GODSPELL: the Original 1973 Broadway Cast, the 1974 Movie Soundtrack, the 1993 London Cast Studio Recording, the 2000 Off Off-Broadway Cast, and the 2001 Touring Cast.

According to Alex Lacamoire, who wrote the NEW orchestrations for the 2001 Touring Cast of GODSPELL: "When Scott Schwartz approached me about updating the music for GODSPELL, I was immediately excited. I've known the songs since my teens, having done a production of it in high school. Scott's concept was this: When Stephen wrote the score in 1971, he was influenced by the rock and folk music of the time. But what if he had written it today, using the rock and folk influences of our time? I thought it was a great concept, and one that I was up for trying. Listening to the 1971 cast recording has always been a great snapshot of the show and its era, but it's always sounded dated - it's certainly the sound of the '70s. We wanted to revive the music, to present the same songs and lyrics with a contemporary feel.

I honestly love all types of music - pop, R&B, jazz, heavy metal, country, musical theater. . .you name it. But what's always resonated the most with me is rock 'n' roll, particularly alternative rock from the '90s. So I found it really easy to infuse the music of Godspell with the sounds of today's rock. The whole arranging process was basically me taking each song and thinking: 'Wouldn't it be cool if we did things this...'

'Bless The Lord' was originally a piano-rock song in the style of Laura Nyro, and I wanted to make it sound like a piano-rock song in the style of Tori Amos. In the movie, 'Beautiful City' sounds very '70s, with an easy shuffle feel. I wanted to kick it up and make it funkier, almost like a Dave Matthews Band song. 'By My Side' originally evolved around folk acoustic guitars, and I wanted to revolve it around an acoustic piano, perhaps like Jewel's 'Foolish Games.' 'Save the People' felt like it could've been a great Blink-182 song. 'We Beseech Thee' sounded good to me in a gospel feel as opposed to a hoe-down. On 'All Good Gifts,' I made a cello feature and added electronic drum sounds, as if Fiona Apple recorded it." *Originally published as part of [The Schwartz Scene newsletter](#).*

3. Civic Theatre Music Director Eunice Wadewitz, after listening to all the different versions, wanted to go back to the original notes in the score while trying more energetic tempos and fuller accompaniments. Compare/contrast the Civic Theatre's version to the different recordings and explain your thoughts on the differences.
4. The production team for the Civic Theatre decided they wanted to include the "Prologue" and "The Tower of Babble" in the show, which was left off of the original cast recording and movie soundtrack in the hopes of appealing to a wider audience. Find a later recording that includes these two songs and tell why they are or are not an important part of the show.

FROM THE MUSICAL THEATRE INTERNATIONAL GODSPELL STUDY GUIDE

GODSPELL AS DRAMA

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- The title, GODSPELL, is the Old English word for “gospel” and means a “good tale.” What is the theme of GODSPELL? In what ways is it a “good tale”?
- Is GODSPELL a comedy or a tragedy? Why? What is the source of its tragedy? Its humor?
- Did you recognize anything that reminded you of yourself in any of the characters?
- How do JESUS and the CLOWNS change by the time the play ends?

ASSIGNMENT, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- List the elements of the plot and theme of GODSPELL which you believe to be universal.
- Make a list of details about the clown characters. Where did you learn this information? From dialogue, lyric, music or design elements such as costumes?

THE OPENING OF GODSPELL

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- How does a play, musical, or movie grab your attention?
- What is your favorite opening scene in a play, musical, or movie? Why?
- Exposition is defined in the dictionary as “explaining.” We refer to the opening moments of a dramatic work as exposition. List all the things you learn in the first scene in GODSPELL.
- The opening moments of GODSPELL contain several declarations by Jesus and the philosophers. There is no dialogue between characters. Instead, the performers speak directly to the audience. Were you engaged by the opening moments of GODSPELL? Why or why not? Did you feel the performers were speaking directly to you?
- Does what someone says determine their character? Can someone lie in their declaration?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Read Jesus’ opening speech from GODSPELL. Then, read Dionysius’ opening speech from the Greek play THE BACCHAE by Euripides. In both cases a god is declaring himself. How are the two speeches similar? How are they different? In what ways does Jesus reveal himself as “God and King” in the course of GODSPELL?
- In the course of the opening the words of several famous philosophers are spoken. The philosophers include Socrates, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Leonardo Da Vinci, Frederic Nietzsche, and Jean Paul Sartre.
 - Pick one of the philosophers and research his life and times, How did his time influence his philosophy?
 - Why do you think the authors of GODSPELL wanted the philosophers to speak?
 - Is there anyone alive today that you believe should be included with the philosophers? Why or why not?

STORYTELLING IN GODSPELL

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

GODSPELL is presented as a story being shared with the audience by a group of storytellers.

- What is a story? What is the function of storytelling in a society? Between generations?

- 📖 What is the first story you can ever remember hearing? Read for yourself?
- 📖 What was the role of the storyteller in a primitive society?
- 📖 Who are the storytellers in modern life? List all the ways in which stories are transmitted from one person to another in contemporary culture.
- 📖 Why do you think the authors of *GODSPELL* chose to relate their musical through the voices of storytellers? Who do the storytellers represent in the piece?
- 📖 What is the role of the internet in conveying stories in contemporary America? In what ways does communicating stories over the internet resemble the way in which our ancestors used to trade tales?
- 📖 What is the value of relating tales from the Bible through the medium of musical theatre? What is added in the process of experiencing the tales in this way?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

Stories that are meant to teach lessons from one generation to another are told in a variety of forms including parables, fables, and allegories. A parable is usually a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle.

- 📖 Tell the story of one of the parable in *GODSPELL* presenting a different interpretation than the one presented in the show.
- 📖 What is a fable? Create a fable of your own which addresses one of the aspects of human behavior dealt with in *GODSPELL*.
- 📖 What is an allegory? Create an allegory of your own which addresses one of the aspects of human behavior dealt with in *GODSPELL*.
- 📖 Orally retell a story from the Old or New Testament of the Bible in a compelling and dramatic way. Write the same story down. How are the experiences of telling the story and writing it down different? Which is the more powerful means of expression? Or, can you choose? Good oral storytellers can be outdone by masterful writers and vice versa.
- 📖 Read a collection of folk tales from another culture. Write a contemporary folk tale of your own that you can imagine being told several centuries from now to portray something that took place on New Year's Eve 2011.
- 📖 Tell a continuous story. One person begins a tale and tells it for two minutes. Then another person picks up the tale and adds his continuation of the story for two minutes. Then the rest of the people in the group each adds his two minutes. What happens to the story as it is passed from one mind and voice to another? Discuss ways in which the Gospel of St. Matthew could have been transformed over time in a similar way.
- 📖 Read about the history of the Bible. When were the Old Testament stories first written down? What do we know about the people who wrote them down?
- 📖 Read and listen to other musical theatre treatments of literature for the Bible including *JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT*, *JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR*, and *CHILDREN OF EDEN*.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- 📖 What is the impact of the entry of John the Baptist in *GODSPELL*?
- 📖 Why does John the Baptist sing "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord"? What do those words mean to you?
- 📖 Why does John the Baptist baptize Jesus? Why does he kneel before Jesus?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- What is baptism? What is its function in the Christian religion? What does it symbolize? What are its origins?
- Do research on the life of John the Baptist. What eventually happens to him?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND GOD

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- How is God portrayed in GODSPELL?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- How do you think of yourself in relationship to God? Do you think of God as benevolent? Do you envision God as a physical being? What does God look like in your mind?
- Write down a dialogue you might have with God. Is there anything that you and God might disagree on?

LIFE AFTER DEATH & ETERNITY

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What do you think happens to you after you die?
- What do you want to have happen to you after you die?
- In GODSPELL Jesus refers to eternal life after death. How do you define eternal life?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a one paragraph description of heaven. Write a one paragraph description of hell.
- Write about a time when you experienced "eternity." This could be when time seemed to stop or when a moment lasted forever. How did that experience change your perspective on eternity?

JESUS AS A CHARACTER

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What does Jesus want to do in the course of the musical GODSPELL? What are his goals?
- Does Jesus achieve what he wants to achieve? Or does he fail? Does he ever have a moment of doubt?
- Do you care about Jesus as a character? Do you feel empathy for him? Do you see any of yourself in him?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a description of Jesus' costume. Why do you think he is dressed this way?
- Make up your own costume for Jesus. In your production of GODSPELL, how would you dress him?
- How did the character of Jesus in the production of GODSPELL fulfill, surpass or fall short of your expectations?

COMMUNITY AND CELEBRATION

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Where was the production of GODSPELL held? Had you ever been in that space before? If so, when? How does the space make you feel? How did the production change the space?

- How many people were in the audience? Were you able to see the stage well? Did you see anyone you knew at the performance? Did you meet anyone before or after the performance?
- Did any parts of the musical make you happy or sad? Was there any part of the show where everyone in the audience reacted at the same time?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Is going to see a musical like going to see a sports event? Or is it different? Be specific.
- How is going to a musical like going to the movies? How is it different? Be specific.
- Describe a celebration. Then, write about how the performance of *GODSPELL* is a celebration.

JUDAS

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- If someone is called a “Judas,” what is his or her main characteristic?
- Why does Judas betray Jesus? What was their relationship before the betrayal?
- Why doesn’t Jesus stop Judas?
- When do we first see Judas on stage? What does he say?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- The actor who plays Judas also plays John the Baptist at the beginning. How are Judas and John similar? How are they different?
- Write a new scene between Jesus and Judas. Have the scene happen after the betrayal but before the crucifixion.

THE END OF GODSPELL

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What happens at the end of *GODSPELL*?
- What are the last words spoken or sung in the play?
- What happens to Jesus after the musical is over? What happens to the company?
- Did you feel the play ended in the right place or did you want more?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Write a resurrection scene in which Jesus rises from the dead. Write the scene in the style of *GODSPELL*.
- Describe your favorite ending in a movie or play. Why is that ending your favorite?

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS IN GODSPELL

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Props are objects which are used in performance. Usually, they are things which are held or handled by actors. What are the props used in *GODSPELL*?
- How are the props treated? Are they tossed around held with respect?
- Are objects ever given a different use? For example, is a shoe given a more significant purpose?
- How do the props draw you into the world of the musical? Are they ever distracting?
- Do the objects onstage ever seem to have more power than they would in every day

existence? Do they ever seem magical?

- The production design for *GODSPELL* is usually minimal in nature. Why is this appropriate to the story?
- The design frequently includes a nine-foot high cyclone fence. What does this represent in your mind?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Research the origins of the word “props.”
- Design your own sets and costumes for *GODSPELL*. Explain the reasons for your choices.
- Draw costumes for each of the ten clowns which depict their individual personalities. Be sure to include shoes for each of them. How can you differentiate Jesus and Judas from the rest of the clowns?

THE CREATION OF MUSICAL THEATRE

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- The musical *GODSPELL* was created by two collaborators: John Michael Tebelak, who wrote the book and Stephen Schwartz who wrote the music and lyrics.
- What is collaboration? In what other fields does it play an essential role?
- What is the role of the individual in a collaboration?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Read a biography or autobiography of another famous musical theatre collaborator or collaborative team. Report on their creative and/or collaborative process.
- Read and listen to other works by Stephen Schwartz to obtain a broader view of his approach to his craft and a deeper understanding of his artistic sensibilities.
- Write about a positive collaborative experience in your own life. Write about a negative collaborative experience in your own life.
- Would *GODSPELL* have been as successful as a straight play without music? Why or why not? How does the score heighten the basic storyline? How does it move the action of *GODSPELL* forward? What do we know because of the music that we might not know otherwise?
- How does the music contribute to our understanding of the larger themes of the show?
- Discuss the ways in which music and lyrics can compress and elevate the importance of information.
- What role does music play in your life? If you were to choose moments in your life worthy of being set to music, what would they be?
- Find examples of duets or shared songs in *GODSPELL*. How do these duets help to define relationships?
- Select two songs from *GODSPELL* from the following:

“Prepare Ye The Way”	“All For The Best”	“Alas For You”
“Save The People”	“All Good Gifts”	“By My Side”
“Day By Day”	“Light Of The World”	“We Beseech Thee”
“Learn Your Lessons Well”	“Turn Back O Man”	“Finale”
“Oh, Bless The Lord, My Soul”		

1. Summarize the contents of these songs. Discuss:
 - a. What do we learn about the character or characters who sing the songs and their personal philosophies?

- b. What do we learn about the larger themes of the show from the songs?
- c. What makes the character or characters sing at these moments? Why do they sing instead of talk? What is the emotional energy of the moments that push them into song?
- d. What do the songs accomplish in terms of the plot? Where is the action when the song begins and when it ends?
- e. Every dramatic scene has a “main beat” or central moment of importance. Do the songs you chose become the “main beat” of the scenes in which they appear?
- f. Do the songs exist in real time, suspended time, or compressed time? In other words, do they represent the amount of time that it would really take to express their contents? Do they magnify the moment? Do they speed up time?
- g. What is the physical action of the character or characters during the songs?

- Imagine you have been asked to create a new song for the show. Who would sing it? Where in the show would it take place? What would it be about? What kind of music would it involve?
- Why do some theatre song lyrics rhyme? Write a few verses in prose about something you are wishing would happen and then write it in rhyme. How is the experience of writing in the two forms different?

ADAPTATION AND MUSICAL THEATRE

- GODSPELL was based on the gospel according to Matthew in the New Testament. Musical theatre works are frequently adapted from sources such as films, plays, novels, tales, short stories, and television shows. How many examples of musical theatre works that were adapted from such source materials can you name?
- Name five musical theatre works that were original and not based on any other sources.
- What does a team of musical theatre collaborators add to a work from another medium in the process of adapting it for the musical stage?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Read the Gospel According to Matthew. Think about the important ways in which the show differs from the Gospel. What were the qualities of the Gospel According to Matthew that make it a good source for a musical?
- What were the source works on which the following musicals were based:

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF	CABARET
HELLO DOLLY	GUYS AND DOLLS
SWEET CHARITY	A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC
THE KING AND I	SOUTH PACIFIC
- Select a film, non-fiction book, satirical book, play or group of short stories that you think would make a strong musical theatre work.
- Why do you think this piece “sings”? What about it is inherently musical? What can music add to its existing form?
- What elements of the source will be hard to transfer to musical theatre form?
- Write a two-page description of a musical theatre work based on your sources.
- What role will music play? Will the work be all sung? Will it include dialogue? What role will dance play in your work? What will the musical style of your adaptation be?
- Create your own New Testament Musical.
- Write a story based (as GODSPELL is) on a section of the New Testament. Use this story as the basis for a musical.
- Outline your musical scene by scene.
- Make a list of the characters.

- 📖 Make a list of musical segments you might include.
- 📖 Will your work include dance? How will dance be used?
- 📖 Try to write the first scene, a turning point scene, and the final scene of your musical.
- 📖 Try to write a lyric or melody for one for the musical segments.

GODSPELL As A REVUE

A revue is a musical cycle of songs and scenes which work around a certain theme.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- 📖 Is GODSPELL a revue? Why or why not?

ASSIGNMENTS, RESEARCH AND WRITING PROMPTS

- 📖 Read the libretto and listen to the score of one of the following revues: BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK; SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ; THE WORLD GOES ROUND; and A...MY NAME IS ALICE. Why is each song or moment important to work as a whole?
- 📖 Create a concept of your own for a revue. What will your theme be? Why would this idea work better as a revue than as a "book" musical – a show which tells a story from start to finish? Make a list of segments – songs, sketches, etc. Outline how the show would build on itself to add up to a coherent evening. Divide the segments up among yourself and some other members of your group and create the revue.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

ASSIGNMENT/WRITING REPORT

1. Write a review of a performance of *GODSPELL*. You may wish to include any combination of the following elements in your review:
2. Did the show hold your interest and why?
3. Describe the manner in which the story was presented to the audience. What was the dialogue like?
4. What was the structure of the story? Was there a simple story or multiple stories? Was anything about the story unexpected? How did the story begin and end?
5. Describe the way music and lyrics worked in the show.
6. Describe the sets, costumes, lighting, and musical accompaniment. How did these elements add meaning to the show?
7. Discuss the effectiveness of the performers.
8. Discuss the ideas presented in the show. Analyze their importance to your reader.

Explain why your reader should make an effort to see the show.



QUOTES

- **Jesus:** Now, do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to complete.
- **Company:** *[singing]* Oh, dear Lord, three things I pray – to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day.
- **Herb:** Yeah, but she's...she's so...she's got a weak back.
Jesus: Since when?
Herb: About a week back.
- **Jesus:** When you do some act of charity, don't announce it with a flourish of trumpets, as the heathen do in the synagogues and in the streets. I tell you they do it just to win admiration from men. No, when you do some act of charity...don't let your right hand know...what your left hand is doing.
- **Gilmer:** *[as Abraham]* Remember, my child, that all the good things fell to you while you were on earth and all the bad to Lois...
Judas: *[correcting her]* Lazarus...
Gilmer: Abraham. Nice to meet 'cha.
- **Jesus:** Therefore, I bid you: Put away anxious thoughts of food and clothes to cover your body. Surely life is more than food, and the body more than clothes...
Herb: *[indicating Sonia]* Her body is more than clothes. Look, I'll show ya!
- **Jesus:** Did I ever tell you I used to read feet? No, it's true. Some people read palms or tea leaves, I read feet. *[picks up Jeffrey's sneakered foot and looks at the bottom]* Look what this foot says. It says: "Rejoice!"
Jeffrey: It says "Ree-bok."
- **Jesus:** Now, how can you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, when all the time there's this great plank in your own?
Judas: I don't know. How can you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, when all the time there's this great plank in your own?
Jesus: Or – how can you take the speck of sawdust out of your brother's eye when all the time there's this great plank in your own?
Judas: I don't know. How can you take the speck of sawdust out of your brother's eye when all the time there's this great plank in your own?
Jesus: You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye so you can see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's.
Judas: Wait a minute! That's no answer to the question!
Jesus: Did I promise an answer to the question?



Uptown Theater, TX



jennyweaver.net

REVIEWS

Reviewed By: Michael Portantiere · Sep 25, 2006 · New Jersey

GODSPELL is the playground of musical theater. Actors, directors, and other interpretive artists love it because of the freedom it allows them in terms of production style, musical approach, and comic ad-libbing. Of course, such license can lead to an unwatchable show in the wrong hands. Fortunately, the new Paper Mill Playhouse staging is among the best of the best I've ever seen of the beloved Stephen Schwartz and John-Michael Tebelak musical.

As originally conceived and presented more than 35 years ago, *GODSPELL* is the story of Jesus and his disciples as retold by a bunch of folks in circus-clown-like makeup and costumes. At Paper Mill, director Daniel Goldstein instead has chosen to let the show unfold as if on the basically bare stage of a theater that seems to be undergoing reconstruction. Accordingly, David Korins' minimalist set largely consists of scaffolding and some strung worklights; there's a wonderful effect towards the top of the show when John the Baptist uses water from a leak in the roof to baptize the disciples, and Jesus' crucifixion is handled in a way that's simple but striking.

The production is enhanced by Ben Stanton's expert lighting and Miranda Hoffman's highly creative costumes, masks, and puppets. (The Act II appearance of the huge, monster-like Pharisees is awesome.) Dan Knechtges' fabulously show-bizzy choreography incorporates everything from ballet positions to soft-shoe to jazz moves.

No matter who's on your creative team, there's little point in presenting *GODSPELL* unless you have an extraordinarily talented cast -- and Paper Mill does. Dan Kohler possesses the requisite warmth and sweetness for Jesus, along with a lovely lyric baritone, although he did sound vocally under the weather on opening night. (He had missed two preview performances.) As Judas/John the Baptist, Joshua Henry sings beautifully and neatly makes the tricky transition from Jesus' loyal friend to his cold-blooded betrayer in the second act.

The rest of the ensemble cast members are so good that they deserve individual mention. Uzo Aduba has the audience in stitches during Act I and breaks hearts in Act II with her soulful rendition of the one non-Schwartz song in the show: "By My Side," by Peggy Gordon and Jay Hamburger. Sarah Bolt is so funny and adorable that she even makes an impression with the throwaway number "Learn Your Lessons Well." Sara Chase raises the roof with "Bless the Lord, My Soul," and Robin De Jesus leads "We Beseech Thee" with great energy.

Patrick Heusinger manages to be simultaneously hilarious and sexy at several points during the proceedings. Anika Larsen offers a moving performance of the most famous song in the show, "Day by Day." Telly Leung, who has shone in the ensembles of several New York productions but whom I've never before heard sing an extended solo, does a beautiful job with "All Good Gifts." Julie Reiber has many good moments, though her ad libs in her solo number "Turn Back O Man" aren't especially amusing. (On opening night, she got the audience laughing during the song only when she vamped a little boy seated in the front row. That brought the house down.)

Loren Toolajian's musical direction is notable for the fact that, though the band arrangements are largely traditional -- with the nice addition of woodwinds and a cello -- the vocal arrangements are quite different from what you hear on the original cast recording or the 1972 movie soundtrack, and the ensemble sings more extensively. All of this is effective for the most part, but it has led to the one major misstep in the production. In order to allow the ensemble to join in the ineffably sad "On the Willows" near the end of the show, the disciples' goodbyes to Jesus have been staged in such a rushed manner that they seem perfunctory. As a result, what is usually the emotional climax of *GODSPELL* nearly goes for naught. (Perhaps to compensate, the cast members cry so much during the finale that they have trouble singing.) It's unfortunate that this stumble comes so near the end of the proceedings and mars slightly the impression made by this overall excellent, wonderfully theatrical production.

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A 70's Musical Revival Sheds Flower Children But Keeps the Faith

By BRUCE WEBER

The hippies are gone, and so is Jesus' Superman jersey (it's been replaced by a white T-shirt with a sunlike emblem on it), but "GODSPELL," in its newest incarnation at the Theater at Saint Peter's Church in Midtown, still has the giddy rapture that made it a hit both off Broadway and on in the 1970's.

A musical set in Manhattan as a retelling of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, it's a show that has always had a cultish following -- not surprising, given that its spirit is an amalgamation of flower child and fervid Christian. And this production, directed by Shawn Rozsa to a tirelessly enthusiastic pitch, takes the attitude that you're a fool not to believe. To judge from the adults singing along at a recent performance in the company of their young children, the show's allure remains strong among the converted.

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If, however, you are like me -- that is, someone whose teeth are set on edge by the show's most famous song, "Day by Day" -- this revival may bring on the same feelings evoked when the Jehovah's Witnesses ring the doorbell. There's no reason to be mean about it, but it does try your patience.

There's some cosmetic updating here: the characters are dressed in contemporary clothing and given contemporary locutions and cell phones; there are several references to familiar advertising slogans; and Kevin Lock's junkyard set has a prominent discarded computer.

But like the original, this "GODSPELL" is a good-humored work without being particularly witty. It's never irreverent, only adolescently naughty. Its message, presented with earnestness and care, is pretty simple and familiar, after all. And the music, by Stephen Schwartz -- he has done a smattering of rewriting -- is of the ilk that Broadway and only Broadway has ever thought of as rock. It's anthemic, rhythmically comforting, melodically on the saccharine side.

That said, Mr. Rosza has done a nice job keeping the cast of 10 in peppy, perpetual motion and he has invented some clever gymnastics for them to suit the theater's small stage.

The youthful cast members are a cheery, good-looking lot, and almost all of them can really sing, though they're disconcertingly wearing headset mikes to battle the four-man rock ensemble. I particularly liked Eliseo Roman, whose mellifluous tenor brought quiet life to the prayerful song "All Good Gifts."

Interestingly, maybe purposely, the weakest voice belongs to Barrett Foa, who plays Jesus. He's a slight, blond young man with a killer smile and eyebrows that arch as if he's been exercising them; they're the kind of looks that are made to charm, and he does come across as a modern-day missionary, but I kept wondering whether he was supposed to be slightly untrustworthy or was just overacting.

In any case, the whole is staged and performed with hyperbolic zeal, theatrical even more than spiritual, which is probably why the children in the audience I saw it with were kept so involved.

Absent the Crucifixion, which closes the show on a discomfiting downbeat note (it always has, of course), "GODSPELL," with its energy and its jokey exhortations for people to behave well in the world, ends up creating an atmosphere that recalls nothing so much as "The Muppet Show."

Reviews of GODSPELL

- GODSPELL On Tour--Phoenix Productions
- GODSPELL NYC

GODSPELL On Tour—

Spell-bound: Stop now and get tickets to GODSPELL

BILL HIRSCHMAN, Staff writer for the Sun-Sentinel, contributes this review as previously published by the newspaper. His review of the GODSPELL Touring show is from its second stop on the road in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Copyright Sep. 20, 2000. The show is directed by Scott Schwartz.

Stop reading this review. Put the paper down. Now. Go to the phone and order the best tickets you can get for the road company of GODSPELL playing at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts. It's OK, I'll wait here until you get back.

Done? Good. Trust me on this one: You'll thank me later because it's only here through Sunday.

This second coming of the resurrected GODSPELL is a minor miracle. Who would have thought it possible to inject this much vibrant exuberance, artistic imagination and contemporary relevance into a beloved old war horse nearly done to respectable death by high schools and church groups for almost 30 years?

GODSPELL's timeless message has always been about finding your quiet, unshakable faith amid a very loud, very cold, very shallow modern world. So it shouldn't be a surprise that the style of this complete overhaul is as current as 'N Sync, Survivor and Jerry Springer, all of which get a nod in the heavily revised script.

How current? The fable of the prodigal son is narrated in part by South Park's Cartman.

But a contemporary setting and a relevance to modern life has always been GODSPELL's secret, even when this folk-rock take on the Gospel according to St. Matthew was dressed in flower-child clothes and Vietnam was still searing America's consciousness.

So where the original played out in an urban junkyard/playground, GODSPELL 2000 is appropriately played out in a world of technology surrounded by high walls of television monitors and with much of the action captured live on video cameras.

Alex Lacamoire's brilliant arrangements intentionally suggest yet subtly surpass the sound of an album rising on today's Top 40 charts. It's not a stunt; it's the point of the show. Using modern musical idioms, he has made Stephen Schwartz's venerable score accessible to a new generation without losing the old one.

The highest praise is due the musical direction by Christopher Gattelli and stage direction by Scott Schwartz, who is coincidentally the composer's son. With unbridled imagination, the two have revived GODSPELL's freshness, irreverent humor and unapologetic decency.

Their inventive twists will delight those overly familiar with the show. Many of the parables used to be portrayed as children's fables. Now they are related in broadly satirical skits that skewer social icons.

The Good Samaritan tale is now an episode of a reality cop show. Jesus is crucified on a bank of video monitors, his arms bound with thick electrical cables. These sound like contrived artifices, but they are staged and performed with naturalness.

About the only fault is that the creative staff is so self-consciously trying to update itself that the substance of each parable occasionally gets buried under the nonstop topical references and ingenious staging. As a result, all that Saturday Night Live feel undercuts what is usually a profoundly moving and cathartic finale.

The 10-member ensemble -- every last one a talented performer -- exudes life, energy, humor and joy with full-throated voices that raise goose bumps a dozen times during the show.

To unfairly single out a few: Michael Yuen as John the Baptist heralding Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord, Joseph J. Carney's Jesus leading the entire company in the anthem Save the People, Natalie Joy Johnson fronting the revival-like Bless the Lord, and Sal Sabella's exquisite All Good Gifts.

Oh, what the heck, they deserve it. Here's the rest: Todd Buonopane, Jessica Carter, Esteban Giron, Sarah Hubbard, Lauren Lebowitz and Sharon Francis, who has appeared in other Broward shows.

The backstage talents are equally impressive, from the flawless sound of Mark Norfolk's crew to Jim O'Connell's band. And most notable is Scott Pask's techno-scenery and Rick Belzer's evocative lighting that use the video monitors to comment on the action.

Aside from minor technical glitches, the entire production is unbelievably tight for a company that has only given three previous performances in a shakedown bow in Nashville.

Far more than RENT, this production is most likely to make lifelong theatergoers of teens lucky enough to get dragged to this show kicking and screaming.

GODSPELL NYC 2000

This review by Caroline Davina Barnard describes the Off-Broadway GODSPELL Revival of Fall, 2000 and gives a perspective on the show in general. Used by permission. Copyright by Caroline Barnard.

Certain expectations surround a musical about the Passion of Christ. One expects (well, hopes) that there will be some kind of message about humanity, goodness, love, God, any or all of the above. One does not expect Eminem. But in the new Off-Broadway revival of GODSPELL, directed by Shawn Rozsa and currently playing at the York Theatre, the traditional meets the 21st century, creating a production with energy, humor, and, ultimately, meaning.

GODSPELL, with music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and book by John-Michael Tebelak, is a loose account of the life and death of Christ. It was originally presented in 1971, and lives on in the minds of many as one of the "hippie" musicals. Unlike "Jesus Christ Superstar," which also premiered in 1971 and was revived in New York this year, GODSPELL takes a non-linear approach to its familiar subject matter.

It is structured as a continuous stream of parables and stories, many directly taken from the Gospel According to St. Matthew. The book of GODSPELL is sketch-like in nature, meaning that the show is particularly suited to improvisation and adlibbing.

Rather than shy away from this aspect, Rozsa and his talented cast have embraced the casual nature of the script, keeping Tebelak's basic parable structure, but updating the pop culture references and language. They refer to sources ranging from silent movies to '80s TV shows, Broadway shows to Budweiser ads. In so doing, they have created a production which is equally appealing to theater devotees and to younger audiences more used to MTV than musicals.

This revisionist spirit also permeates the music. Schwartz's credit for GODSPELL has always been "new lyrics," referring to the fact that many of the words to the songs were taken directly from the Episcopal hymnal, but in this production, some of the lyrics are new to GODSPELL itself. Schwartz worked with the cast and crew of this revival, and his most evident contributions are in the form of new lyrics which bring certain songs up to date for the current generation of theatergoers. This is most apparent in the Prologue of GODSPELL, in which a group of philosophers - some more modern philosophers than those in the original production - express their conflicting views on life, God, and humanity.

The melodies themselves have undergone a renovation. Although the much-loved songs - including "Day by Day," "All for the Best," and "By My Side" - are still familiar, music director Dan Schachner incorporates elements of punk, rap, and reggae, adding a contemporary edge to the good old "rock opera" style of the score. Playing with the tried-and-true can be dangerous, however, and one feels that some of the songs would have been better left alone. Specifically, a punk rock rendition of "Learn Your Lessons Well" falls flat, despite actress Leslie Kritzer's energetic channeling of Gwen Stefani.

The "hey-kids-let's-put-on-a-play" vibe which pervades GODSPELL means that the success of the production depends heavily on the chemistry of the actors. This young ensemble, most of them recent college graduates, has the strong voices which Schwartz's heartfelt songs demand, combined with the acting ability and vitality needed to enliven the biblical subject matter, which can be overly genuine for a cynical New York audience.

The actors acknowledge the existence of this skeptical attitude, at times poking fun at the homilies they proclaim, but never overshadow the sincere message of GODSPELL. As Jesus, Barrett Foa has the presence and control which GODSPELL needs in its central figure, combined with a slight dorkiness, which adds humanity and fallibility to a character who in other hands could easily be more saintly and thus less interesting. Will Erat's John the Baptist/Judas (the GODSPELL script combines these two characters into one) is likewise a powerful figure. He is not the villain of the piece, but a foil to the Jesus character, and Erat's visible struggle with the inevitability of his fated betrayal adds pathos to the play's conclusion.

The other eight members of the cast portray the apostles, who in GODSPELL go not by their biblical names, but by the names of the actors who play them. They are a diverse group, without being easily definable "types" -after all, they're people, not teen pop group members. Standouts include Chad Kimball, as the least bohemian of the bunch, Shoshana Bean, whose voice soars through "Bless the Lord," and Capathia Jenkins, who starts the second act off with a bang with her lusty and hilarious rendition of "Turn Back, O Man."

The production design for GODSPELL is in keeping with the theme of reinventing a classic. Keven Lock's set is true to the show's original junkyard concept, but adds modern touches such as broken computers and walls full of peeling concert posters. William Ivey Long's costumes likewise stick to what was referred to in the 1971 script as "clown costumes," although these "clowns," in their brightly colored and mismatched clothing, look more like the young denizens of the Village than anything you would see in a circus. Herrick Goldman's lighting is generally simple and direct, but at times reminiscent of a rock concert - appropriate to the material. Smoke machines, used at sporadic intervals, are excessive in supporting the rock concert metaphor. The only excess this production should have is its excess of talent. Director Rozsa deserves much credit for harnessing this talent into a coherent whole.

The structure of GODSPELL makes it difficult for productions not to seem piecemeal. In Rozsa's interpretation, not only are the transitions between parables and songs seamless, but the narrative also flows naturally. Through blocking and other theatrical tools, Rozsa ensures that the play's ending - the Crucifixion - is present in the subconscious of the audience, so when the action becomes serious in Act Two, it does not come as a shock. The song "On The Willows," traditionally sung by the band as Jesus bids his followers goodbye, is here sung by Judas. This choice allows Judas's internal conflict to be clarified, adding further emotional resonance to an already powerful ending.

There are some who might shy away from GODSPELL because of its Christian subject matter. The messages of the play, however, are not limited to one religion: they are universal. GODSPELL does not stress the idea of Christ as the Messiah, nor does it focus heavily on the concept of God. Instead, the importance of community takes the fore. GODSPELL begins by stating the difficulties and confusion of existing in isolation, and shows how a group of individuals comes together to become stronger and more self-realized than they ever could be as separate entities. Such a message is surely relevant to today's society. As we become more and more self-contained, due to the ever-increasing scope of the Internet, it is important to remember the necessitude of human contact. GODSPELL is a powerful reminder of the joys of friendship and community, an oasis of sincerity in a cynical world.



NEW JERSEY

by Bob Rendell

GODSPELL Well Served at Paper Mill

GODSPELL, based on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, is largely a Story Theatre-like retelling of Christian biblical parables punctuated and amplified by a simple, melodic score by Stephen Schwartz. For the new production opening the 2006-2007 Paper Mill Playhouse season, director Daniel Goldstein has stripped away the detritus of flower children in clown make-up. This intelligent approach makes a timeless musical out of one which, when presented in its original staging, had become very dated.

GODSPELL has been immensely popular since its opening. It opened over thirty-five years ago in 1971 off-Broadway where it ran for 2,214 performances. After transferring to Broadway in 1976, *GODSPELL* continued its run for an additional 527 performances.



Dan Kohler and Joshua Henry

When we enter, we see two scaffolds on the curtainless stage. There are bars (possibly those designed to drop curtains and scenic elements from the flies) which suggest additional scaffolding further up stage. Light bulbs protected by metal casings are attached all about the scaffolding. There is a cloth ceiling and rear backdrop suggesting a large tent. There is a youthful cast of ten, five males and five females. Dressed in workaday street clothes, they adorn and change their outfits with colorful costumes and accessories which appear to come from a clothes rack which is rolled onto the stage a few minutes in. The costumes have the look of items that one might find in a costume shop or antique clothing store (one is a chest-covering men's black and white striped bathing suit out of a Mack Sennett silent). Director Goldstein has stated that his concept for this production is of "people coming together, out of a storm, and finding refuge in the theatre and in each other." It is when the rack is rolled out that we sense that events are transpiring in a theatre.

Initially, the actors, some employing exaggerated stage accents, spout words from the writings of various philosophers. These are dismissed as so much babble as in *Tower of Babble*. Actor Joshua Henry directs a stream of water come from the ceiling into a rain barrel and sprinkles the other actors with it. He is here John the Baptist, although in a minute or so, he will assume the role of Judas for the balance of the evening. Henry leads the company in singing "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord." John the Baptist defers to the entering Jesus (Dan Kohler) who asks in a musical setting from St. Matthew that "God Save the People."

For the balance of the first act, Jesus primarily illustrates his teachings with parables which are enacted in the vernacular with exuberant, comic style. Stories (parables) of the widow and the judge, the Pharisee and the tax collector, the master and the indebted servant, the Good Samaritan, Lazarus and the rich man, and the sower and the seed. There is no forward progression in the story. Although the other eight actors as a group are usually portraying disciples, there are no characters other than Jesus and Judas and neither one is given any character development.

However, *GODSPELL* cannot be held to conventional standards. It is a family show intended by its creator, the late John-Michael Tebelak, to counteract the lack of joy that he had encountered in an Easter service, and the hostility which he felt that his counter culture appearance engendered

in his fellow parishioners. When not rigidly adhering to the Gospel, it is designed to have an improvisational feel. These "improvisations" are developed by the director and actors during rehearsal (there are one or two instances in which actual improvisation appears to occur, but it seemed to me that they were planned and scripted). They are broadly played and elicit much laughter. It took me a while to warm to the presentations and their child pleasing puns. However, before long, aided by the exuberant music and cast, the comic enactments of these parables provide for delightful entertainment. And I'm certain that the fact that these parables are presented so deftly and made accessible to young children will make them absolutely irresistible to families and church youth groups. It must be duly noted that among the bright melodies here is Schwartz's breakout hit, "Day by Day."

The only moment of drama in act one occurs when Judas puts his arm around Jesus and hisses to him that he will be persecuted. Jesus quickly bypasses the moment and leads Judas into a good timey, honky-tonk, vaudevillian song that one should not be upset if one's life is rotten ("Don't forget that when you go to Heaven/ You'll be blessed/ Yes, it's all for the best").

Director Daniel Goldstein does his best work in his direction of the parables. His work and act one rise to a crescendo in the parable of The Prodigal Son. Performed in cowboy style, the son goes off for gambling and women to sinful Las Vegas. One actor is enrobed in a cloth mural which serves as a moving highway to Sin City as it is rolled off his turning body and onto the body of another turning actor across the stage about ten feet away. Not every invention is sure footed. As it is being used in SPAMALOT, the Las Vegas advertisement tag line should not have been used, and the joke intended by the inclusion of the end title, "The Passion of the Prodigal Son" directed by M. Night Shyamalan, eluded me (it is possible that I missed a visual clue). Also the inclusion of cross dressing rather than being clever or sophisticated is rude in these circumstances. Goldstein also keeps things lively by bringing his actors into the audience on several occasions.

During the second act some controversial writings of St. Matthew (which do not appear in any of the other Gospels) which this reviewer finds troubling come to the fore. Jesus, who heretofore has counseled all on the necessity of limitless love, forgiveness and generosity towards one's enemies, turns viciously on those who question him, particularly the Pharisees (the priests of a devout and leading branch of Judaism in the era of Jesus who have become reviled). For example in the song "Alas For You," the lyric sung includes the following:

You snakes, you viper's brood
You cannot escape being Devil's food! ...
Blind guides, blind fools
The blood you spill
On you will fall!
This nation, this generation
Will bear the guilt of it all! ...

The tender song "Beautiful City" written for the film and then rewritten for a Los Angeles production (it seems that Schwartz found the original lyric to be too sentimental) is included as a solo with piano accompaniment for Jesus after "We Beseech You" which it replaced in the film version. The musical then moves quickly to The Crucifixion ("On the Willows") and Jesus being carried from the cross to the words and music of "Prepare Ye, the Way of the Lord (Long Live God, Long Live God)." There is no reprise of "Day by Day" at the curtain call.

The enthusiasm and high spirits of the youthful cast are a definite plus. The voices are strong, although the high amplification employed for the small cast and orchestra make them sound strident and blur the lyrics. Over the years (and this was confirmed to me by a high source) the varying quality of sound at Paper Mill has been related to the success of the sound designer on a particular production. Hopefully, the sound for GODSPELL will continue to be fine tuned.

Dan Kohler is a sweet voiced, good looking Jesus, but there is little modulation in his performance. Not a major problem here. Joshua Henry brings an appropriate intensity and strong voice to his Judas. I was especially impressed with the singing of Telly Leung and Uzo Aduba, and the spunk of Julie Reiber. You can pick out your own favorites from the balance of the cast, all of whom make helpful contributions. Alphabetically, they are Sarah Bolt, Sara Chase, Robin de Jesus, Patrick Heusinger, Anika Larsen, and Kasey Marino.

The choreography by Dan Knechtges is exuberant and routine, kind of par for the course for GODSPELL. The set by David Korins (with effective lighting by Ben Stanton) gets the job done. No more, no less. One problem that producer Michael Gennaro is facing is that veteran Paper Mill audiences expect more. A major contribution is made by Miranda Hoffman with her felicitous costumes and whimsical and effective mask and puppet design.

The six-piece orchestra sounds very thin in the large playhouse. Amping up the volume does not compensate. Obviously, the orchestrations were designed for smaller capacity theatres. Although I must say that visual clues may have played a role here. I could only see two musicians on stage (to the rear, stage right), and this caused me to focus on "obvious" synthesizer sounds. The stage was built out over the orchestra pit, bringing the show which was played way down front closer to the audience. There is a hip hop arrangement early on, but, for the most part, the arrangements sounded as if they were the originals (I'm certain that my readers will correct if I am mistaken about this).

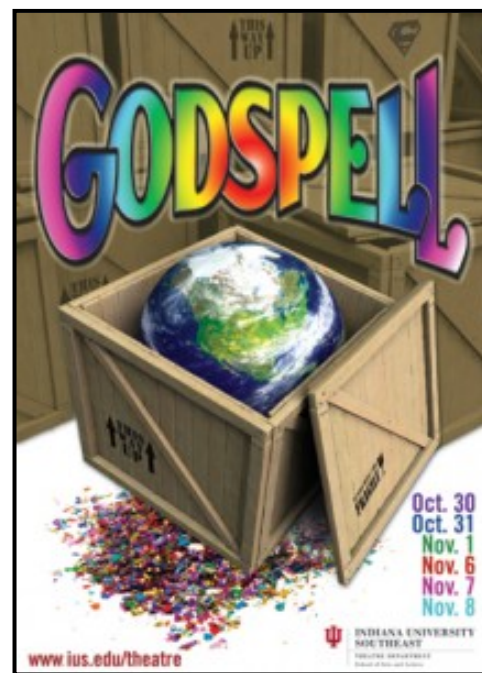
For all those interested in seeing GODSPELL, the Paper Mill Playhouse and director Daniel Goldstein have provided a GODSPELL definitely worth their time and attention. Individual ticket sales should be quite brisk.

GODSPELL based on the Gospel according to St. Matthew/ Conceived and originally directed by John-Michael Tebelak/ Music and New Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz ("By My Side", Music by Peggy Gordon/ Lyrics by Jay Hamburger), directed by Michael Goldstein

Cast (in alphabetical order): Uzo Aduba; Sarah Bolt; Sara Chase; Robin de Jesus, Joshua Henry (Judas/ John the Baptist); Patrick Heusinger; Dan Kohler (Jesus); Anika Larsen; Telly Leung; Julie Reiber.

- Bob Rendell

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