

Children of Eden Notes for DIRECTORS

The following questions and answers are from the archive of the StephenSchwartz.com Forum. Copyright by Stephen Schwartz 2010 all rights reserved. No part of this content may be reproduced without prior written consent, including copying material for other websites. Feel free to link to this archive. Send questions to office@stephenschwartz.com

This PDF includes
SECTION 1 – General
SECTION 2 – Casting
SECTION 3 – Sets, Props, Staging
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

SECTION 1 – GENERAL

Is Children of Eden ADVISABLE for High Schools?

Question:

Do you advise High Schools to do this show? My high school has an excellent music department but it's stage direction and choreography leaves much to be desired. We did Bye Bye Birdie this past year and with a lack of direction, the only thing that held up the show was the music. So, with those points, and also with High School students trying to "find themselves" so to speak, let me know what you think yea or nay and if you have suggestions for a production in the high school environment, that would be very appreciated.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

CHILDREN OF EDEN is very often presented by high schools, and indeed, I have seen an excellent high school production (at a high school in Las Vegas). So the question is: is it advisable for YOUR high school? You can answer that far better than I. The most difficult thing about the show is the music requirements, and it sounds from your description as if that is your school's strong point. But to do the show (or any show for that matter) without a director or choreographer seems to me pretty tough. I realize this is not a definitive answer, but it may at least help in your own thinking. Thanks for asking, Stephen Schwartz

Production costs

Question:

Stephen or whoever can answer it...I am looking at doing Children of Eden sometime in the coming year or two...and I am trying to get some area people to help sponsor the costs...I want to do the production right and well, and I am just curious at about what I am looking as far as Set, Costume, script books, and right costs...if you could give me an approximate I would be greatly appreciated! Thanx!

Answer from Michael Cole:

Dear Joel:

I've heard Stephen say that it is almost impossible to UNDER-produce Children of Eden. The most successful productions are the ones that use terrific imagination in telling the stories, so even though the show is big, I suspect with a little creativity you could pull off a wonderful show. Hope this is helpful in your decision and if you decide to do COE, have fun! (Let us know if you need anything else). Best, Michael

Answer from Carol:

Children of Eden costs probably vary with ambition and show design. Sets and costumes can be suggestive of the setting, animals, etc, rather than detailed, thus reducing some of the investment in time/money. Also the show can be staged with various cast and orchestra sizes. I saw a low budget production this fall with a cast of 20 plus an orchestra of about 5 (synths, drums,...) that was incredibly powerful because of the talent, and of course because of the book and score. In my opinion the most important thing is to have about 8 really strong singers in the leading roles and have a director who really understands the show. FYI - There's at least one theatre that rents costumes. Visit my (unofficial) Children of Eden page for that information, production photos, etc.
<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/children-of-eden.htm>

SECTION 2- CASTING

Children of Eden cast questions

For those of you who might know more about the show than I do (I've listened to the cast recording and read a synopsis but never seen/read the actual show), do you think it would work to have some of the traditional "doubled" roles doubled and others not? I know there are pros and cons for both doubling and not, but do you think, for example, that Eve/Mama Noah could be two separate actresses, while casting just one actor as both Cain and Japheth? Or would it be too confusing to not just go clear cut one way or the other? And I know this question is probably really variable depending on the circumstances, but what do you think would be the age ranges that each character would best be cast within? Thanks, I'd appreciate your insight.

Answer from Michael Cole:

I found this in the old archive (see below). Hope this helps clarify it for you. Best, Michael

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks for your message and for your consideration in asking about the double-casting in CHILDREN OF EDEN. I do consider it very important that the same actors play Adam and Noah, Eve and Mama Noah, Cain and Japheth, and Abel and Ham. The message of the show and clarity of the story-telling is definitely diluted if you split the roles. (Double-casting also has the advantage of having really good performers for these roles when the talent pool from which one is drawing is limited, though obviously that's not the reason we designed the show that way.) But if for your production you feel you must divide the roles, then I think your idea of costuming similarities is a good one, and I would recommend using "Generations" to make the transition really clear. But if you're asking my preference, I strongly recommend doing the double-casting as called for in the script. Thank you again, and best wishes for a wonderful production. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Children of Eden: Importance of Double Casting

Question:

I was wondering what you thought of having Eve and Yonah doubled and having mother Noah as a stand alone character?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I'm sorry to say that I really don't like the idea of Eve being doubled with Yonah. For one thing, I think it would make her relationship with Japheth seem weird, since he is her son in the first act. Also, it is important that Yonah be the NEW element added that changes the pattern when the potentially murderous fight between Japheth and his brother erupts again. If it is the same actress who played Eve, what's different this time? And I also think it vitiates the scene between Mama Noah and Noah on the

ark when she reprises "The Spark of Creation" if she isn't the same actress who played Eve in the first act. Experience has taught me that for CHILDREN OF EDEN to work at its best, the doubles as assigned are very important. I hope this doesn't ruin your plans too much, but since you asked, I have to express my honest opinion. Hope your production goes well. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

An actress as "Father" in Children of Eden?

Question not available

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I have occasionally been asked about the character of Father and the possibility of it being played by a woman or of double-casting so it would be less gender specific. I don't always insist on characters remaining the gender which they were written (the genders of the characters in GODSPELL, for instance, are often interchanged, and I have seen the Jesus character successfully played by a woman; similarly, I have often seen the Leading Player in PIPPIN played by a woman.) But in the case of Father in CHILDREN OF EDEN, I don't think it would work. He is called Father in the cast of characters, not God, because it is his feelings and behavior as a Father that we are talking about in this particular piece. It seems to me his attitudes and actions are so distinctly masculine that they wouldn't make sense otherwise. Mothers are different than Fathers and are, I feel, well-represented in the show, in the persons of Eve and Mama Noah. It is the masculine, autocratic, my-way-or-the-highway Father Figure that has to undergo a change in CHILDREN OF EDEN. But I thank you for your suggestion and the thought you gave it. All best wishes, Stephen Schwartz

Characters

Does anyone have a detailed character breakdown of CHILDREN OF EDEN? I am interested in producing the show and I have a cast list--but I need character descriptions. Please let me know. Thank you.SBS

Answer from Carol:

I assume you've seen the cast list on

<http://www.mtishows.com/> Children of Eden section that explains about needing storytellers as well as others.

You'll also want to listen to the wonderful recording. See info on

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/children-of-eden.htm> (also for photos of productions, etc)

The bulk of the action and emotion in the show is conveyed by the score and so you get a pretty good picture of what the show is and the nature of the characters if you listen to the complete album (not the highlights version). A lyrics booklet is included, so you'll know who sings what.

I'll give some opinions based on productions I've seen. I don't know if this is what you want but here goes. Note the double casting requirement/recommendation.

I think you need at least 6 strong singers.

Men: FATHER, ADAM/NOAH, ABEL/HAM, CAIN/JAPHETH

Women: EVE/MAMA NOAH, YONAH

I believe Eve is the most demanding singing role. You can refer to the cast album in this regard.

The others can be less strong.

Father, Adam/Noah, and especially Cain/Japeth need to be actors who can summon some internal anger that then gets expressed in certain instances.

Eve and Cain are especially strong seekers - questing for something more.

Note the parent/child relationships in case you want to cast actors of appropriate ages, although it's not necessary. Parents are Father, Adam and Eve, Noah and Mama Noah

Eve becomes the matriarch at the end of Act 1 and sings the lead in the lofty song "Children of Eden."

Bass Parts

Question:

I'm doing a production of Children of Eden and many bass singers are complaining because it is really high for them. Is Children of Eden supposed to have bass singers?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The lower male parts are more for baritones than basses, it's true, because that's a far more common vocal range for men and much easier for most productions to find. You may have to alter some of the notes for the basses -- drop them an octave in spots. But most of it should be OK. Thanks and I hope the production goes well, Stephen Schwartz

SECTION 3 – Sets, Props, Staging

Children of Eden: Overproduction

Question:

I've solved some of my technical problems for our show (which is being performed in a small venue), but I could still use some advice on rear-projecting my scenes throughout the show. I have found some beautiful biblical pictures I can scan and use Microsoft Powerpoint to run the slideshow, but if someone knows if there are actual slides or pictures available, I could use them, or find a place to buy them. I have built an electronic pyrotechnic tree of knowledge that's fabulous, but the scenery is still nagging me. I need to design it ASAP mainly because I'm Adam/Noah also and the rehearsals are really going good. I want the show to be as professional, technically, as our cast sounds and performs, and give the audience the entertainment and messages you have so beautifully created.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

All I can do is reiterate my feeling that you may be trying to over-produce the show. The more it feels to the audience that the Storytellers are creating the show for us with as little technological "help from above" as possible, the more the message of the show comes through. I appreciate that you want the show to be visually compelling, but I honestly don't think you need projections if they are too difficult for you to manage. The old cliché "less is more" applies to the design concept of this show more than any other show of mine, with the possible exception of GODSPELL. I'm delighted to hear rehearsals are going so well. Best wishes with your production, with or without projections. Stephen Schwartz

Rainbow

Question:

Hi, all. I'm just curious how those who've done Children of Eden did the rainbow at the end. According to our director, the cast is supposed to do the rainbow, but since he hadn't seen any pictures of how it was to be done, and since he was worried about people forgetting what color they were supposed to be, he had the rainbow done with lights. It was really great, but we had a problem doing it at the time the script called for, because the stage was so full of people that only people in certain rows got a clear view

of it. So I'm wondering, just in case we do the show again next year (which I hope we do, after all the work we did on sets this year), how other groups did the rainbow. Is there a picture somewhere of the proper way to do it? Thanks.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I have seen the rainbow done in many different ways. Often it is done with lights or a projection, but I agree with you it's not entirely satisfying. Sometimes, the cast have pieces of colored silk which they take out and wave, and since they're staged to be in a certain place, the colors don't get mixed up. I've also seen this effect with some cast members up on a level and dropping bolts of colored silk, and that can be pretty spectacular. I've seen it done with cast members taking off a white top to reveal colored sweatshirts. I think my favorite was in an outdoor production. They had colored helium balloons tied twice behind the stage. When it was time for the rainbow, they released the first tie and the balloons floated up behind the cast. Then at the very end of the show, they released the balloons entirely and they floated off into the sky, so that as you left, you could still see them disappearing into the heavens. It was fantastic! Obviously what I'm saying is that there is no "right" way but, like so much else in the show, a little imagination goes a long way. I'd be interested to hear about other ingenious solutions if anyone knows of any. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

COE, Rainbows and Political Correctness

Question:

Hi, guys. I've got a topic for discussion that I've been thinking about all afternoon, and I'd be interested to hear your opinions. It came to me because of the situation we had with our rainbow for COE this year. We'd intended to have everyone wear rainbow-colored vests, instead of doing lights like we did last year. But then one of the tech people said that might not be a good idea, since rainbows in our culture are symbols of gay pride, and people might come to various conclusions about the show based on their beliefs about gays. His opinion seems far-fetched to me, but apparently it alarmed the director enough that the vest idea appears to have been scrapped, and we'll have to do something else for our rainbow. So what do you guys think of political correctness, especially as it relates to shows, but even generally? I never have liked it, because, to me, it seems that it gives people an easy way not to face their fear and/or discomfort with those who are different. In my experience, those who go through all kinds of contortions to find the PC term for blindness ("differently abled", "handicapable", etc.), are usually those who are the most uncomfortable with it. So what are our responsibilities as performers/composers, etc.? Do we quench our creativity because of what interpretations someone might place on it that isn't what we intended? Or do we go ahead and do what will work for the show, and leave people to come to whatever conclusions they want, as long as we're not intentionally rude or disrespectful? I tend to side with the latter, but what if the paying audience gets offended by an offense to their PC sensibilities? And what about the audience? What are their responsibilities (and ours too, since we at times are audiences)? Should they blame their offendedness on the show, or perhaps use it as a chance to examine their feelings and beliefs, as I had to do last year when I felt anger toward Father in COE for trying to cover up the fact that the animals weren't really Adam and Eve's children, and then being shocked that I'd be angry at "God", even if he was just a character in a show. :) But I didn't condemn the show or anyone else; I learned from what I experienced, and love COE more than ever. So I'd be interested in hearing others' thoughts on this, and I'll let you know what happens to the rainbow.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

So now rainbows are the exclusive symbol of one group? Please. This tech guy sounds homophobic to me. He really needs to get his own life and stop worrying about others'. But while we're on the subject of "PC", if everyone will forgive my expressing a political opinion in this forum: I think there is a

substantial difference between being careful not to use language that is offensive to specific minority groups that have been targeted as victims in the past (Jews, gays, blacks, Asians, etc.) and worrying about whether a rainbow vest will offend some bigot. I'm tired of the term "PC" being given a bad name because of political extremists on both sides of the spectrum. The so-called PC movement began simply to add a little civility to our national discourse, something I still think we are badly in need of. Anyway, thanks for giving me a chance to spout off. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Children of Eden ARK

Question:

I am directing Children of Eden in the sanctuary of a church which we have transformed into a stage. By using multiple levels and ramps to work around the many immovable pieces of furniture sharing the stage with us, we have a very creative space to perform. So far, so good. The only trouble we are having is coming up with a satisfying ark. We need to keep the use of the whole stage for act II, but are having difficulty placing the ark where it would be obvious that the entire stage is on board. Do you have any suggestions beyond what is written in the stage notes found in the script? Thank you! Ken

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Ken: What about covering the immovable furniture in some way, so that the pieces look like crates and things being stored? Maybe some of the furniture could be used to stand for cages for animals who have been brought on board? It seems to me if you can make your stage seem like the Garden of Eden and a barren wasteland in the first act (not to mention Stonehenge), it can transform into a crowded ark deck. And what about a simple backdrop of some sort that helps to contextualize what you're doing on the stage space? I know these are obvious suggestions, and I'm sure you have already thought of them, but I offer them for what they are worth. Don't forget, the audience will supply a lot for you, since they know the story and will each bring their own visual conception of the ark with them anyway -- so they will extrapolate from whatever cues you give them. Good luck -- I hope your production goes well and that you have a great experience doing the show. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Staging of Children of Eden: "Generations" and "In Pursuit of Excellence" Snake

Question:

Dear Mr. Schwartz: I am a local NJ director planning a production of Children of Eden. First let me express how much I love your work especially in Eden. I have two questions concerning the staging of Children of Eden.

1) The Act II Opener Generations. I love this number but I'm in a quandary on how it should be staged? I'd like the Storytellers to stage out what happened with Cain and Seth leading up to the introduction of Noah. But that might take more people than we have cast. Especially with all the beget, begat, begot and begotten. Any suggestions?

2) The Snake and The Pursuit of Excellence. Is the number always performed with a snake puppet? I liked the puppet when I saw the show at Papermill Playhouse, but I'm worried about the number becoming too campy. I appreciate any insight you can offer. Sincerely, John Menter

Answer from Michael Cole:

Dear John: Stephen is unfortunately unable to respond to posts right now due to an extremely hectic schedule. I have a few thoughts for whatever they are worth to you.

In terms of Generations, I think it might get too "busy" if you try to act out what is being sung in the lyrics - not to mention racy if you consider DID A LITTLE LOVIN'/DID A LITTLE BREEDIN'! It's most often done with some kind of interesting movement that is inspired by the terrific beat of the music. Also, the costuming is often bright and fun to look at (I've seen it with African inspired fabrics, for instance). Seems to me some simple but effective movement and then let the song sort of stand on it's own. You might consider highlighting some of your better dancers? I'm not a director - but that's the way I see it. (As I say - for what it's worth to you).

In terms of the snake - you absolutely do not have to use a snake puppet. Stephen prefers this show when it is done with as much imagination as possible. He's on record as saying "it's almost impossible to under-produce Children of Eden". I've seen a very effective In Pursuit of Excellence done as a soft-shoe with snake-like movements and the storyteller's costumes are made to look like snake skin. I've seen it where they all wear long "snakeskin" gloves and do interesting things with arm movements.

The point is to be as creative with this show as possible. It's not necessary to have an actual ark for the second act, you don't need an actual rainbow at the end (colored fabric or flags or costumes or lights would work), etc. So have fun with it! I once did a Google Image search of Children of Eden and discovered a LOT of great pictures of amateur productions. You might find some inspiration there. You can also search this forum for Children of Eden - there is a lot of information here about it too. Hope it goes well! Best, Michael

SNAKE ideas

[Question missing]

Answer from Michael Cole:

Hey Corri: I've only seen a couple of productions of Children of Eden. One had a lead guy singing the song solo with a bunch of dancers dancing around him. I suspect they did this because the harmonies were too difficult for them to do? Not sure. But it seemed to work fine. I'm not sure what Stephen Schwartz would have thought of it, but it seemed to me like a good solution if that is indeed why they chose solo rather than harmony parts. The Papermill used a giant snake puppet and all of the singer/dancers used it as a boa (like a feather boa) and danced seductively, etc. I remember Stephen saying he thought it was too literal. I think Stephen likes it when the show is much more imaginative (and less literal). I've seen pictures of productions where the snake was suggested by faux snakeskin costume pieces. Stephen has talked about the rainbow at the end and how one of his favorite versions of that was an outdoor production that released colored balloons to represent the rainbow. I know you didn't ask about that, but I just wanted to let you know that Stephen feels the show works best when the story is told very imaginatively. I hope this is somewhat helpful. Anyone else have ideas to share? I would love to hear about them. Best, Michael Cole

Answer from a fan:

I have seen the snake done many different ways however one of the neatest ways that I have seen it done...was the snake itself was made out of green colored styrofoam circles and cylinders attached by ropes, with a cone shaped styrofoam on the end...and then a head which was made from cloth...then each actor/singer had a rope in their hands, which was attached to parts of the snake and thats how they moved the snake up and down..the actors/singers were dressed in green swing choir style glitter vests and top hats, very classy looking! They danced around eve, seductively...also when and if you have the Script..it gives a little bit of production notes as to what to do with the snake...I hope that this answered the question that you had...if you were asking differently please expand on your question!

Lightning Strike

Question:

I was wondering if anyone had ideas on how to do the lightening strike with can in CofE. I do not have the ability to do pyro, so I was wondering if anyone had any ideas?

Answer from Forum visitor:

Gobo?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Also see the other Children of Eden listings in this Forum archive.

Background information, cast album, sheet music, photos from various productions

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/children-of-eden.htm>

Licensing

http://www.mtishows.com/show_detail.asp?showid=000175

This page also lists local productions where you can see the show. (See the “Upcoming” tab on that site).

All About Children of Eden:

The complete history with photos from the London production and Paper Mill Playhouse can be found in “Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz, from Godspell to Wicked.”

www.DefyingGravityTheBook.com. The book explores the genesis of *Children of Eden*, from Charles Lisanby's conception and the early oratorio version by Schwartz, through the London production (including photographs), and revisions worked out in America. The *Children of Eden* chapter includes quotations drawn from interviews with Lisanby, Schwartz, bookwriter John Caird, and others that explore the philosophy behind the musical.

Notes from other productions, etc. – Children of Eden section of MTI show space

<http://www.mtishowspace.com/mod/shows/mtishow.php?showid=000175>