

Stephen Schwartz Answers Questions about the *Godspell* Movie

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

Godspell Movie question

Question:

What were your own feelings about the movie?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I'm not a big fan of the movie. I think the director over-cutesified the show and the disciples came off looking like flower children. It lacked the edge and anarchic humor of the show.

Godspell movie and "We Beseech Thee"

Question:

[Someone asks about why We Beseech Thee is not in the film.]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The song "We Beseech Thee" was replaced in the film by "Beautiful City" because the producers wanted a new song somewhere in the score and that seemed as good a place as any. Also, the high energy theatricality of "We Beseech Thee" was considered difficult by the director to translate to film. I'm not sure the decision was right, but at this point, I'm glad to have the song "Beautiful City", particularly now that it has better lyrics than the ones in the film. Thanks for writing. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Another We Beseech Thee question

Question:

Dear Mr. Schwartz, I am a huge Godspell fan, it is the best play ever! I was just wondering why the song "We Beseech Thee" was cut from the movie? And what was the deleted "Altar Scene" like? Thank you very much and God Bless you. -DJ

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear DJ: It was decided that they wanted a new song for the film, and I wrote "Beautiful City" (though not with the superior revised lyric with which it is now performed -- the original lyric I came up with for the movie is kind of treacly). Anyway, it was decided that "We Beseech Thee" might be the best one to replace. Nothing against the number -- it's just the kind of big high-energy number that tends to work better on stage than on film, and we had a lot of others like it.

I don't know what "deleted Altar scene" you are referring to. I don't remember the deleting of a specific scene that was shot for the film, but it was a while ago, and there may have been something shot that wasn't used that I'm simply not remembering. Thanks for your interest. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Godspell: Movie Rights

Question:

I am working on a screenplay for GODSPELL.....not everything is finalized yet, but I have some really cool ideas and am collaborating with a GODSPELL veteran on the script. It should be finished soon and up-to-date with the times. Computers and "power of the media" shall be slightly emphasized. Mr. Schwartz,

we would like your opinion on whether or not we should proceed and we would also like to know if you would consider playing the part of "Jesus" in the film.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thank you for the flattering invitation (to play Jesus), but I think my years of eligibility for the role have passed. I am a good deal older than the real Jesus was when his time on earth ended, and youthful and adorable as I think I still am, I fear it will have to be someone more age-appropriate.

This would also probably be a good opportunity to let you, and anyone else interested in doing a film of GODSPELL, know that the film rights are controlled in perpetuity by Columbia Pictures, who made the 1972 film version. Therefore, rights to do a new version would have to be acquired from them.

Thanks however for your enthusiasm for me and for GODSPELL. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Godspell and the World Trade Center

Question:

Stephen, Thank you for sharing your incredible talents with us all! Recently, I noted that the movie version of Godspell was available on DVD, and so I bought it, since I really wanted my children to have the show as part of their cultural experience.

I hadn't seen the movie in years, and so I had forgotten that the ending of "All for the Best" was filmed on top of the (then unfinished) World Trade Center. I found this as certainly ironic, to say the least! Upon reflection, I wondered, however, how families who lost loved ones in the WTC would react to watching the movie now. My guess is that they would probably be very pained, particularly in view of the song's lyrics (even though they are put forth in ironic jest). Obviously, this was never the intention of the film's producers. But I was wondering if you had heard any reaction to that scene from victim families, and if you had any reflections on this bit of historic irony and its possible contemporary impact. Given that scene, as well as the dated look of the '73 movie (hair-styles, opening scene clothes, etc), the time may be ripe for a remake in a post-9/11 NYC. Faithfully,

The Reverend Donald D. Binder, PhD
Rector, Pohick Episcopal Church, Va

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Dr. Binder: I would certainly be happy if someone wanted to do a remake of the GODSPELL movie. I think there are many ways in which a superior film could be made, and as you point out, the original is quite dated. However, I have not heard any negative response in terms of the scene on top of the WTC. In fact, shortly after 9/11, the song "Beautiful City" (albeit with new lyrics) became one of the most frequently sung numbers at fundraisers and memorial services. But thank you for your message, and again, anytime someone wants to do a new film of GODSPELL, I am very open to the idea. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Godspell - Resurrection/Finale

Question:

Why does Jesus stay dead yet the cast members are rejoicing at the end of the movie? Why does He not get up from the dead? Would you know the answer to this question? Except for this one part, we absolutely love the movie and will probably buy it. When I was young, it didn't bother me because I didn't understand. However, if the movie is based on the gospel of Matthew, Jesus should have gotten

up from the dead and then their rejoicing (done beautifully, I might add) at the end is understood. I would also like to add a big heartfelt thank you for the beautiful and infectious musical score. We can't stop singing them....Thank you in advance for shedding some light on this for us.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks for your message. I'm delighted to hear of your and your family's enthusiasm for GODSPELL. In answer to your question: The ending is meant to be ambiguous. GODSPELL is about the formation of a community that is going to carry on the teachings of Jesus and spread his messages, and that is what they are rejoicing about. Regardless of whether or not one believes in the divinity of Jesus, the gift of his messages is something everyone has cause to celebrate (one need only glance at the current state of the world to wish more people, including many who profess to be Christians, actually lived by those messages.) But in any event, the end of GODSPELL has always left it up to the individual viewer to decide whether or not Jesus rises from the dead -- I would argue that it can be interpreted either way. And I would think you would agree with me that it is the message and teachings he brought to the world that are most important in any event. Thanks again, and best wishes to you and your family, Stephen Schwartz

Merrell Jackson

Question:

I just love Merrell Jackson in the film of Godspell, and was wondering if he did other films/performances after Godspell, and what he's doing now?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Dexter: I'm sorry, but I have no information about Merrill's further career after GODSPELL or his whereabouts now. But I agree that he was charming in the movie. Sorry not to be able to help. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Comment from a forum contributor:

I am sorry to inform you that Merrel Jackson passed away. In the program for the 30th reunion of all the Godspell casts they listed all the Godspell performers that have died and Merrel was listed. I have no details about his death or his career. I do remember that he was in a "Godspell" inspired 7-Up soft drink commercial circa 1973-74.

Godspell Last Supper Blessing

Question:

Hi Stephen: Just a real quick question...I have the movie Godspell on DVD and was wondering what Victor Garber is actually saying when he blesses the wine and bread during the last supper scene? It sounds like something in Hebrew. Do you know what the Jesus character said? It sound something like (phonetically) - baruk hatoi elujaino or something. What did he say and what does it mean? Thanks!
jbguy

Answer from Michael Cole:

Dear JBGuy: This should answer your question:

HaMotzi Lechem -Blessing over bread: The HaMotzi is the blessing said before eating bread and is one of the most frequently said of the Hebrew blessings, used for Shabbat, holidays, and other occasions:

Translation: Blessed art Thou, LORD our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

Another post:

Dear Bradley, I thought I'd give this a try cause it sounded like fun. Please know that I am FAR from being an expert on this and I've asked for expert advise, which I'll post as soon as I get it. You can also go to a judaica store and look it up in a trans-literated prayer book. In the meantime, here's what I came up with. It's hard to describe the "k" sound as there doesn't seem to be much in the English language to compare it to. This should get you started in the right direction, but as I say, I'll post the other information as soon as I get it. Also, you may want to add an "Amen" after each blessing - sounds like "oh-main" - could even be under your breath...Best, Michael

Blessing for the bread: Boruch atoh Adonoybah-rook-uh-tah ah-doe-noi (rook rhymes with cook with a soft k/noi - like "noise") Elohaynu melech ho-olum, ehl-oh-hey-new melek ho-oh-lum (again, soft k) Hamo-tzi lechem min ho-o-retz.huh-moat-see-lehkem Meen-ho-oh-ritz (again, soft k - very far back in your throat) Blessing for the wine: Boruch atoh Adonoybah-rook-uh-tah ah-doe-noi Elohaynu melech ho-olum, ehl-oh-hey-new melek-ho-oh-lumboray p'ri hagofen. bow-ray-puhree huh-gaw-fen- Bradley

ADDED NOTES

A Jewish friend sheds some light on the accents and the "k" sound...the ch = a guttural sound like the ch in Bach .As far as accents go, most Hebrew words are accented on the last syllable. Where this is not the case, I will capitalize the syllable which receives the accent. Baruch atah Adonoy, eloHAYnu MELech ha-olamBORay p'ree ha-GOFFen. Baruch atah Adonoy, eloHAYnu MELech ha-olamha-MOTzee LEchem min ha-AREtz.