

## **Godspell Notes for Directors, Music Directors and Musicians, Producers**

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### **SECTION 1 - GENERAL**

#### **Directing Godspell**

Question:

Mr. Schwartz, I am applying to direct GODSPELL at a local community theatre and I have a lot of thoughts running through my mind. First of all, one of my concerns is that I am Jewish and wouldnt be able to give life to the gospels and parables as well as others could (I'm sure that shouldn't have anything to do with it), and I am just nervous not being able to get the comradery/togetherness idea of the show across. I have read all of your notes on the show (as many as i could get a hold of). How have the songs/parables been kept so "spontaneous" throughout different productions of the show (as opposed to being mechanical like robots)? I adore the music and the meaning of the show. Do you have any recommendations? And websites with good information that you may know of? Also, where did the 2000 Off-Broadway productions take place. I know it was going for the technological look, and I would really like to use that concept, but I just dont know where to "put" the show. Thanks for any input and any recommendations - they are so greatly appreciated. Also, any thoughts on where to begin? or where to go from reading your notes, etc.? Thanks, Jason

Answer from Michael Cole and Stephen Schwartz:

Hi Jason. Stephen has had to go back into writer hibernation, so he asked me to try and answer your questions. (He will still be responding to certain posts - as long as they don't require too much time and energy on his part) In terms of directing Godspell, he doesn't really have anything to add to the director's notes that he and I prepared a few years ago. Those notes are a really good road map and if you read them carefully, you shouldn't go wrong. If you haven't seen them, try searching this forum for "Director's Note". If you have trouble finding it, let me know. As to your being Jewish -- it didn't stop Stephen Schwartz (who is obviously Jewish) from writing the music to the show, I see no reason why it should hinder you in any way from telling this story. Remember, the emphasis of Godspell is really about the formation of a community, not a retelling of the Gospels. ...You should also check out Carol de Giere's website for additional Godspell information. "<http://www.musicalschwartz.com>" and other posts on this Forum.

## **"God" spell intent**

Question:

Does anyone know if Godspell was written with the heavily religious content in mind? I was in a production of it previously and was amazed at the spiritual impact it had upon my life. In listening to the 20th Anniversary radio spot, many former cast members say the same thing. The show is amazing on its own but has the power to do SO much in the right director and casts' hands. Was this the original intent? I will be directing the show this fall and the irony of Mr. Schwartz's comments in the front where it states "Godspell is a deceptively difficult show to direct" is highly ironic as I find it to be one of the most difficult. So many things to consider...It was written during a time of political tumult (much like we have today).

Should it be directed to give the same hope and direction that it did in the 70's or should it just be for the entertainment of the masses? It has always seem to me that it was a covert way to bring Christ's message to the masses. It's entertaining, uplifting and overall enjoyable and can either be overly "preachy" or mock the story that it presents. I obviously don't want to mock the Bible but am not sure if my religious beliefs should affect how the show is performed (i.e. Personally, I don't think an atheist could portray Jesus)... There's a very thin line that makes the show ultimately enjoyable while sending a very important message. Should I go into this show with the message in mind? I'm just scared of a potentially great show!

Response from Forum Visitor

Hi - You obviously are thinking carefully about this show. It's good to take care with it, but at the same time, I believe that what is actually communicated to the audience is the joy and love that the performers experience. Stephen Schwartz tends to speak of the show in terms of its community building message. That's what's happening in the subtext. It's also happening between the actors through the process of creating the show. By working together with the director to create their version of the musical (within the guidelines of the script), the message gets built into the fabric of the performance. So it's not all up to you. In a way, part of your job is to let the cast enjoy while holding them within some reasonable boundaries. The music itself and the antics provide a vehicle for the message of joy. The show was never intended as a mockery in any way. The clown aspect is about using that imagery to convey the real content of the original Biblical message.

## **Godspell Kiss**

Question:

What is the reasoning for having Jesus kiss Judas, rather than the other way which is more commonly accepted?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The point is that Jesus is forgiving Judas in advance for what he is about to do, and that this forgiveness is the hardest thing of all for Judas to bear. That is why the kiss "burns" Judas. In other words, GODSPELL is about forgiveness more than it is about betrayal (which is why GODSPELL is different than, say, THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST.)

## **Killing Jesus????!**

Question:

Well this is a strange one but...I'm hoping to get some flashes of inspiration! I know that in the original Godspell Jesus is killed on an electric fence (so the idea of a crucifixion is more visual than literal as he is outstretched, crucifixion style on the fence, rather than actually crucified). How did you 'kill' Jesus?!

How is it done without an electric fence?! The TV idea was very similar really. My setting is pretty different and I was going to have Jesus tied to a set of steep stairs so the image of the crucifixion is a good one, but that won't explain how he actually dies!!! Aaaaarrgh - help me out here, I'm going slowly crazy!!! Thanks!

#### Response from Visitor

What we did in two productions of ours was quite simple (although we had a fence) - we tied Jesus to the fence (and we did use red cloths to tie him to it so it had the image of him bleeding, and then he just had to act getting weaker and weaker, and almost dying after the instrumental part, gathering his final strength for "I'm dead" and then dying. It was simple and was quite effectual. There were some spasms of pain in it, of course, but we never considered them electric. It was like most of the show - the simpler, the better! At least it worked for us. And as to why he dies - he dies because he has to, and because he is crucified. No need to get too graphic, I think...Good luck with your production

#### Another response

In our production, we did not have a fence. We had him stand on a small wooden box and we pantomimed tying him up. The actor who played Jesus "acted" the pain through body movements. Then, we carried him through the audience. It was very effective because in our community I think anything more would have been too shocking for the audience.

#### Reply

No, but that's just evading the question. In the bible he dies because he is crucified. In the show he is electrocuted. You can't just stand him up on a box and have him die! People don't die that way - its passing the buck to say he dies because he had to! Even though he had to die in the bible, there still had to be a means of his death...

#### Another Reply

I always thought he died because they were shaking the fence and it cut off circulation to his wrists and other complications in between that I don't exactly know that made him die. Oh, well, silly me. Good thing I learned more about it this time. He got electrocuted on the fence!

#### Answer from Michael Cole and Stephen Schwartz

Hey gang - I checked with Stephen Schwartz regarding this thread as it seemed to me that these ideas are too literal for Godspell. Here is his response to me:

Stephen Schwartz: "I agree - they're being too literal. In the original, he stood on an orange crate against the fence and red ribbons indicating blood were tied to his wrists. The audience knows what happened - they just have to do something that is theatrical and looks good."

#### **Dramaturge request**

##### Question:

I have gone through every page of this forum reading your comments and suggestions about different aspect of GODSPELL. I found some of your comments interesting and enlightening and other sad but true. I am currently doing some dramaturge work for a production of GODSPELL and I wanted to ask you for a very simple favor. For several shows I have acted as dramaturge I have contacted the playwright and gotten directly from them inspirational and motivational messages that they wished to pass on about their shows, which was very helpful and interesting. You seem to have very strong ideas and opinions about GODSPELL and the way it should be received. I wanted to ask you if you had any such messages, as the ones I have described. A message that I could pass on to our actors. In the past these

have proven very powerful and a great inspiration to do the show with these messages in mind. Having read almost all your posts about GODSPELL I also wanted to comment, it seems you spend a lot of time defending the show and your positions on it, and it is sad. It honestly made me upset when you said you almost regretted having done the show because you had valid justification but I wish the situation surrounding the show was different. I am Jewish and GODSPELL is one of my favorite musicals ever! Any message or comments for the cast would be greatly appreciated, thank you.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

To the cast of GODSPELL: I hope you have a wonderful time doing your production. Subtextually, GODSPELL is about the formation of a community, and when the show fully works, every night the actors form a community and then include the audience. I think this is why many people who have been in productions of GODSPELL together become friends for life, far more than is the case with any other show I've ever done. I wish you that kind of experience. All (for) the best, Stephen Schwartz

### **GODSPELL: Alternate Lyrics and an Intriguing Possibility**

Question:

Recently, I was doing a search on some of the lyrics for the original hymns on which GODSPELL songs were based. I found the original lyrics for "All Good Gifts" (alias 'We Plow the Fields and Scatter'), "Turn Back O Man" (same name, with 'Forswear Thy Foolish Ways' tacked on), and "Bless the Lord" (often known as 'Oh Bless the Lord My Soul'). I found some intriguing little points in the first and final of the three songs that I was hoping Mr. Schwartz could resolve.

We'll start with "All Good Gifts." Those who have looked up the original version or found it in their hymnals have noticed that there is an unused second verse that is replaced in the script by the recorder solo and "treasures in heaven" monologue. I wish to know if Mr. Schwartz was even aware of this set of lyrics and also if these may be included in a future GODSPELL licensing package for potential use by more faith-based groups aiming to perform this musical.

ALL GOOD GIFTS MISSING VERSE (courtesy of the Oremus Hymnal)

He only is the Maker of all things near and far;  
he paints the wayside flower, he lights the evening star;  
the winds and waves obey him, by him the birds are fed;  
much more to us, his children, he gives our daily bread.

BLESS THE LORD ALTERNATE LYRICS (courtesy of Lutheran-Hymnal.com)

Oh, bless the Lord, my soul!  
Let all in me combine  
To aid my tongue to bless his name  
Whose favor is divine.  
Oh, bless the Lord, my soul,  
Nor let his mercies lie forgotten in unthankfulness  
And without praises die.  
The Lord forgives my sins,  
And he relieves my pain;  
The Lord has healed my sicknesses  
And made me whole again.  
He crowns my life with love,  
He ransoms from the grave;

He that redeemed my soul from hell  
Has sovereign power to save.  
He fills the poor with good;  
He gives the sufferers rest;  
The Lord has judgements for the proud,  
Relief for those oppressed.  
His works and laws and ways  
He made by Moses known  
But showed the world his loving heart  
In Christ, his only Son.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks for the information. Virtually all the Episcopal hymns used in GODSPELL have additional verses that were not used in the show. The length of the songs and the verses to be used were decided upon by John-Michael Tebelak and myself, based on what we thought would work best for the show. Therefore I wouldn't want, nor would I authorize, any changes to lyrics used within a production of the show.

In "All Good Gifts", the instrumental accompaniment gives time for Jesus to do his "Don't store up your treasures ..." monologue, which is an important part of the content of GODSPELL. However, for performances of the song outside the context of the show (in a concert or church, for instance), I actually wouldn't object to the performers singing the additional lyrics you cite in place of the instrumental, as long as the arrangement was interesting enough that the tune didn't seem redundant (for instance, the new verse could be sung as a solo by a different singer than the person who sang the first verse, and then the whole chorus could enter, as in the show, on "We thank thee then, O Father".) I looked at the additional lyrics for "Bless the Lord", but since there is no instrumental section or unsung section in that song, I don't see any way to incorporate them into any performance of the song, even one outside the context of the show. Plus, I think they are extremely clumsy to sing (try singing them to the tune used in GODSPELL -- they're pretty terrible.) So ... no to using these lyrics in the show, a split decision on using them outside the show. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Godspell - Act 2 opening - substitute song**

Question:

I have read that some productions of 'Godspell' begin the second act with a non-Godspell song, substituted for the reprise of "Learn Your Lessons Well"; something in the way of a camp-fire song. The song was apparently presented as just a bit of camaraderie between cast members, giving time to allow the audience to settle. Could you give your view on whether that is acceptable? Obviously there would be limits to what is appropriate. My interest would be in using a couple of choruses of "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine". Either way, thanks for your continued interest in this wonderful show.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks for asking. I actually don't know of any productions that have used a non-GODSPELL song to open Act Two, and I would oppose such a choice. To be blunt, it's illegal according to the licensing contract, and if I found out about it, I would see that the contract was enforced. The idea is to do a hip and fun arrangement of one of the songs from the show, using instrument-playing skills of the cast if any exist, plus some imaginative vocal harmony and rhythms, etc. In addition to "Learn Your Lessons Well", originally selected because it is the song given "shorter shrift" in the show, the song most often utilized (to my knowledge) is "Beautiful City". But any of the songs from the show could serve. I don't like the

idea of a song not from the score being used, and I appreciate your letting me know about the practice and giving me an opportunity to oppose it publicly. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Reply: Many thanks for the reply! And, respecting your view, I'll stick to the script

### **My Name is Known**

Question:

I'm directing Godspell this summer and I'm putting together my dramaturgical work. I've finished most of the script but cannot find where that first dialogue comes from. Is it old testament? "My name is known, God and King....." Could you let me know? Thank you so much.

Answer from Michael Cole:

Hi Betsi: I checked with Stephen and he has to profess ignorance on this question. He said John-Michael either found it or made it up. I tried looking it up online and couldn't come up with a definitive answer. In any event, Stephen doesn't know the answer. Sorry! Anyone out there have any information?  
Best, Michael

Answer from Forum visitor:

Glad to help, Michael. It's the first line in a cycle of medieval mystery plays. The actor playing God says a Latin phrase, and then says, "My name is known: God and King." The speech following, up to a certain point, is basically the monologue in King James English. Perhaps the comparison of the title to the Old English spelling of "Gospel" is not that far off the mark?

### **Godspell Resurrection**

Comment from Stephen Schwartz:

Over the years, there has been comment from some about the lack of an apparent Resurrection in the show. Some choose to view the curtain call, in which JESUS appears, as symbolic of the resurrection; others point to the moment when the cast raise JESUS above their heads. While either view is valid, both miss the point. GODSPELL is about the formation of a community which carries on JESUS' teachings after he has gone. In other words, it is the effect JESUS has on the OTHERS which is the story of the show, not whether or not he himself is resurrected. Therefore, it is very important at the end of the show that it be clear that the OTHERS have come through the violence and pain of the crucifixion sequence and leave with a joyful determination to carry on the ideas and feelings they have learned during the course of the show. Stephen Schwartz

## **SECTION 2 - Casting**

### **Godspell Casting - All as Jesus?**

Question:

This is really a question for Stephen Directly. It strikes me that the nature of the musical is such that the actors are playing the roles of characters who are telling the story rather than actually representing the actual people. That is, Jesus is not REALLY Jesus, but someone who is telling the story of Jesus, as if he were Jesus. I have a surprisingly strong cast across the board, from 14 years to 56, and am considering taking the role of Jesus and passing it from person to person. I would use a top hat or some such clear delineation that would physically pass from actor to actor through the show giving everyone a chance to play Jesus at some point. All the other actors would treat the bearer of the hat as if that person were Jesus. I know this is somewhat of a radical departure from the original staging, however, I believe it can

still keep true to the original intent. I would like to know your feelings on this idea. -- Much Thanks,  
Dave

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Dave: I have mixed feelings about this one. Pro: GODSPELL has been done so many ways, and this is one I have never heard of, so it has the benefit of being very original. CON: It goes against the basic structure and underlying subtext of the show, which is that a group of disparate people slowly become a community built around one charismatic individual (Jesus), who then leaves them and they have to carry on as a community without him. Without an individual actor to play the role, I'm not sure this underlying story can be told, and thus the show might become just a series of stories and lessons without any forward drive. It might be like having the chorus of MY FAIR LADY pass around a top hat and play Henry Higgins.

So my instinct is that it's likely to be not a workable idea. However, as I say, GODSPELL has been done so often and so many ways (and many of those ways didn't work either), I'm always curious if there's another one that could work. If you decide to go ahead with this, please let me know how it turns out. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Godspell Casting**

Question:

Hello Mr. Cole & Mr. Schwartz! I will be directing a production of Godspell next spring, so I read this thread with no little excitement. I sincerely hope that my theatre board gets the scripts from MTI as I would truly like to see the director's script.

I enjoyed reading the intro published in this thread. I have had trouble distinguishing the female characters from one another and this shows a direction. I question, however, how much of these character personality sketches was intended by the author and how much grew out of the personalities of the original actors. I am wondering whether to give my future cast these character types to work from or to try to develop the show using their own personalities.

I also have a bit of a problem with Lamar being described as not as bright as the others. In today's society, I would be scared to death to cast a black actor in this part in a predominantly white cast using this character description. - Vern

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Vern: Thank you for your thoughtful comments. The cast breakdown is merely intended for the director's information. It does reflect the personalities of the original cast, but since the show was developed by John-Michael Tebelak with this cast, it does also to that extent reflect his intentions. Of course in any production of the show, the cast should draw upon their own personalities, as the actors did in the original production. But these casting thoughts may be helpful if one is seeking to distinguish cast members from one another in productions done in relatively homogeneous areas. I take your point about Lamar, but this role, like all of the roles in GODSPELL, is non-ethnic specific. I have seen many white actors play Lamar, as I have seen many black and Asian actors play the other roles, including of course Jesus and Judas. I think the simplicity and sincerity of the actor playing Lamar help many of the moments in the show, including the Prodigal Son parable and his goodbye to Jesus during "On the Willows". And of course the original Lamar, who was a highly intelligent and rather "grand" individual, chose to play the character as described, under John-Michael's direction. I hope these comments have helped to clarify the intention and limitations of the casting suggestions, and I thank you again for raising the issue. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Godspell: Casting Help**

Question:

I have a really funny guy that would be great for herb, but he sings All Good Gifts really well and I have no one else that could sing it well...should I cast him as herb with that song...and so since I'm not looking for a lamar now that can sing All Good Gifts what qualities should I look for in lamar....thanxs

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Absolutely, cast him as Lamar and reassign some of the Herb lines to him. Since you now have someone who can sing "All Good Gifts", you can relax a bit in your casting, look for a Herb who brings something different in terms of ethnicity or energy or personality to the show, and as in the original, have him lead off "Light of the World", which doesn't require someone who can really sing. The point is that the specifics of line assignments in GODSPELL are flexible in many instances, so that the best use can be made of the talents and personalities of each specific cast. Best wishes with your production. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **GODSPELL: Jews performing the show**

Question:

I'm directing Godspell at a Middle School. One of my cast members is Jewish. His father does not want him to participate because he thinks Godspell is too Christian... Any advice on my communication with the father???

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

What's annoying to me is that some people think GODSPELL is "too Christian" and, in other communities, it gets banned from schools because fundamentalists complain it's "not Christian enough". None of this nonsense existed when it was written in the 70's; it just shows what a huge step backwards we have taken as a country and a culture in terms of our tolerance and willingness to accept one another. I could write a long response about how GODSPELL is not specifically "Christian", since it doesn't take a position one way or the other on whether or not Jesus is divine, but simply deals with his teachings of tolerance and the need for community, something it seems to me Christians and non-Christians alike could use a lot more of these days. But frankly I'm so disgusted with what's happened to "religion" in this country, I'm becoming sorry I wrote the show at all. Stephen Schwartz

### **Schwartz on Increasing the Cast Size of GODSPELL**

In terms of the GODSPELL cast size: In my opinion, it is not ideal for the cast to be larger than the ten original (or perhaps twelve), since part of the power of the show comes from the audience getting to know each individual and the possibility of this is inversely proportional to the size of the cast. Nevertheless, I have seen very effective productions with huge casts, as many as 50! These tend to be productions with kids, and the younger the kids, the less it matters how big the cast is. With college-age kids I think you're on the cusp. What you might want to do is to have ten or so "principles", who are the ones the audience gets to know and identify with, and then use your larger ensemble to beef up musical numbers vocally and choreographically (but that's probably what you were already thinking of doing.) In any event, GODSPELL is, as you know, a very flexible show, and an imaginative, witty, and heartfelt concept always seems to put the show across, no matter how different from the original. I wish you the best with your production.

### **SECTION 3 - SETTING OR SETS**

## **Godspell show in 2.5 months**

Hi Stephen,

I just found this site and believe it is absolutely wonderful of you to take the time out to do this for people like myself who are trying to do your show justice. We have been rehearsing now for a while, but are still having trouble grasping the characters roles in this production. I know many different people have done some wonderful adaptations to the show, but we would prefer to put a more modern day spin on the show, without doing it any injustice. We are contemplating having a 'nightclub' as our opening scene with the various characters playing the principles connected in some way to the club. e.g. a blues singer, bouncer, club owner, prostitute on the street, pimp etc.

Are you able to give me some insight into how we can best portray our characters with this type of beginning to the show. i.e. how they then develop to follow Stephen and begin their respective parables. Thanks for your valuable time. Regards, Gary W.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Gary W: Many productions, as you know, have been done with many different ways of portraying the characters in the beginning -- a bunch of homeless people, people on the Internet, people gathered in some post-apocalyptic setting, etc. Some of them, needless to say, work better than others. What I think is important, as I say in the Director's Notes in the script, is that these eight strangers are looking for answers to their lives and become increasingly hostile to each other's ideas and points-of-view, until John/Judas arrives and announces the coming of someone who will show them another way ("Prepare Ye"). Whatever the concept and setting, this basic idea needs to inform it. Hope this is helpful, and I wish you the best with your production. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

## **Godspell Setting**

Question:

I recently read a reply Mr. Schwartz gave regarding the "hippie-esque" look that usually ensnares productions of "Godspell". He referred to a fine revival of the show at the Lamb's Theatre. Does anyone know what the director (Don Scardino) did to give "Gospell" a fresh outlook? I am in charge of an upcoming production of this show and am hoping to avoid the frequent cartoonish or gimmicky treatments I often see without sacrificing the joy and whimsy. I would love to hear any ideas.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The concept Don Scardino used, which was somewhat more relevant during the 80's in New York City than it is now, was to start with the eight disciples as homeless people. So their garb continued the idea of "found clothing", as if they selected items they found discarded or lying around. (Nevertheless, of course, these were actually carefully designed to reflect their characters, in the same way that the costumes the characters in CHORUS LINE wear, while appearing to be what they threw on to come to a dance call, are actually carefully designed from a characterization standpoint.) The point of the costumes in GODSPELL, whatever their style, should be that these eight people are replacing their daily clothes with something hastily put together which sets them apart from society and becomes an outward manifestation of their decision to follow the Jesus character. In the original production, the characters were never intended to be hippies, but rather to have chosen to put on bright, more colorful and slapdash raiment to match the sort of "contemporary clown" look that Jesus had. This and other issues are discussed in the new director's script. Good luck with your production and thanks for asking. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

## **Godspell set in Washington DC**

Question:

Hi Stephen, First of all I just want to encourage you to always remember how special Godspell and all your works are. You have God-giving gifts that need to be shared and not regretted. Stand proud of your talents and work no matter if society is not living up to its potential

I am considering directing Godspell for my senior production (University) and am wanting to set it in Washington, DC. I was thinking of how beautiful it would be to have Jesus come into DC and sing songs and teach through parables in childlike manners during the ugliness and pharisees of politicians and administration. What a better place to stand up to the Pharisees and to promote peace, love and community?! Do you think this would work? My concern is the comedic script, there are a lot of funny things you can do with the script and our "leaders" but I don't want to go too far and have people look at it as "Bush Basher", "Antiwar", etc., while completely missing the point of Jesus coming as a revolutionary to promote peace and to teach us to love thy neighbor. It would be a delicate one, any advice.

Thank you and God Bless You! One Love, Noelle

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Noelle: It would certainly work for me. Do I think it would work for your audience? That's for you to decide. I don't think you can do it without a certain segment of your audience taking offense and thinking you're "Bush bashing" which, face it, you are. By the way, I reject the whole phrase "Bush bashing", which is just a right-wing way to get people not to criticize a president who deserves criticism more than any other president in history. The only advice I would give is that humor and satire are usually more effective than heavy-handed criticism. In other words, the funnier you are, the more I think you may be able to get away with. If you decide to do this, good luck, and let me know what happens. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

## **Godspell ?**

Question:

Do you feel changing the time period of Godspell to the present or future will work? If you had it all to do over again, now 20 years later, what would you have changed? Thanks

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I have definitely seen GODSPELL set in a present-day environment, and it tends to work very well that way. The recent production my son Scott directed, for instance, made the opening "Tower of Babble" number about people on the Internet and cell phones, etc., and made extensive use of closed-circuit cameras, green-screen techniques, etc. Part of the fun and immediacy of GODSPELL is the topical references. So in a sense, it is always set in the present. I have heard of productions that were set in the future -- a post-nuclear wasteland, etc. I haven't seen one, so I can't attest to how well they work, but I have to say that conceptually it sounds a little distancing to me. Hope these comments are helpful to you, Stephen Schwartz

## **Godspell on the Horizon**

Question:

Hello, I am an 18-year-old guy from Central Texas and entering freshman of Harvard College, and I am planning to co-direct an amateur youth production of Godspell upon my return next summer. Our wonderful group has just finished Jesus Christ Superstar this summer, and couldn't be more excited about next year's possibilities.

I don't think I need to tell you how much your work has inspired me, and continues to breathe life into the spirits of the actors and crew here. That would take too much time. I am sure I have only touched the surface of the show's intricate thematic design, and will continue to do my research - for it has been my experience thus far that there is always a new discovery waiting within each viewing or listening session.

I am still waiting for the arrival of my copy of Children of Eden - the absolute decision of next year's production is still tentative. As I look at our availability of talent in the area, I feel more drawn to Godspell, but once again, I have yet to thoroughly examine your other piece. I am sure it will be just as enlightening and spiritually renewing. Currently, my partner and I are writing a musical of our own, and I just want to thank you deeply for your music in that regard - it has been a wonderful model for us as we try to find the right way to go about the whole mess, losing all that sleep in the process.

Anyway, I apologize for rambling. I have two questions concerning Godspell at the moment. Even in the event that we perform CoE, or possibly our original show next summer, these questions will still hold their importance. It is one of my dreams to put on this show, and as long as I am alive and well, we will produce Godspell in the near future.

1) Though the town I live in is a small one, the community is rich in theatre, so there are up to six venues producing shows at any given time. Our dilemma is that next summer, Godspell will have been done only five years ago. Though I believe in keeping things fresh, and don't want this one to go stale, I *\*really\** would like to do Godspell with the talent we currently have access to. Our actors are based on high school and early college levels. The last production was a classic interpretation of Godspell, with everything from the polka-dots to the saw horses. I made sure to search the forums and FAQs before posting this question, but I think it is unique enough to ask. We are looking at different themes for the show, keeping in mind all of the core ideas, including, of course, the central concept of the forming community. Since the last production here was true to the original, we wondered if a stylized interpretation might serve to bring a new show to our local audiences. Nothing radical. One we are currently inspired by is a 60's theme. I took to heart that many mistook the original show for a hippy style, and that it is in many ways intended to be looked at universally. But I thought, if it was really true to a specific era or idea, it might work effectively. Perhaps the music could even be flavored accordingly. And what better period is there to present messages of simplicity, poverty, and urban blight? Not to mention unity, peace, and diverse communities gathering for a common dream. It seems that in many respects, the disciples and the flower children had some similarities here and there, as well. Anyway, we are still considering a lot of things and are keeping our minds and hearts open. What are your thoughts on possibly bringing a new and interesting light to this already amazing show?

2) Perhaps this isn't the right place to ask this, so I will make it short. We, like anyone in this line of work, of course run on a limited budget. We recently performed the School Edition of Les Miserables and used MTI's fascinating OrchExtra contraption, and it saved our show. They've created this for about eight or so (I forget exactly how many) of their shows, but not for Godspell yet. Is there anything I can do to push for the creation of one, or to find out when OrchExtra for Godspell will be released, or even something we could do to avoid having to search for and hire a live band? Thank you for your time and consideration, Mr. Schwartz. And if anyone else views this and has any helpful experiences or ideas to share, I would love to hear them. I just found this site today, and must say it has been extremely helpful so far. Thank you once again. Gratefully, Jonah

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Jonah: Thanks for your message and your enthusiasm for my work. To answer your second question first: As far as I know, MTI has no plans at this time to put together an OrchExtra version of GODSPELL. I think those versions are meant for shows which had big orchestras to begin with -- because GODSPELL is just a four-person rock band, most productions seem to be able to come up with local players. You could even get away with doing it with just a keyboard player and a drummer, though as I say, there are enough kids who play guitar and bass that you can usually find people to play all four of the instruments.

In terms of the 60's style: My concern is that it will make the show seem dated, rather than give it a contemporary edge. It would be one thing if you were doing it set in, say, the Civil War or something -- not that I'm recommending that, but it would be far enough away from the 70's original to be clearly a new approach. Setting it in the 60's seems to me may be too close to the original, which although it didn't premiere off-Broadway till 1971 was conceived by John-Michael Tebelak in the 60's within the context of the Vietnam war and the "generation gap". Therefore, if you're going to do it set in the 60's, you might as well do it more or less exactly like the original and let it stand on its own. What I'm saying (long-windedly to be sure) is that I don't think a 60's setting will accomplish your goal of "bringing a new light" to the show. Just my opinion, of course, but since you asked...Have a great time at Harvard. There are amazing extra-curricular theatre opportunities there. My son, Scott, directed seven shows in seven semesters when he was there, and it was fantastic training for him. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

#### **SECTION 4 – CREATIVE LIMITATIONS**

##### **Godspell Time period Setting**

Question:

Do you feel changing the time period of Godspell to the present or future will work? If you had it all to do over again, now 20 years later, what would you have changed? Thanks

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I have definitely seen GODSPELL set in a present-day environment, and it tends to work very well that way. The recent production my son Scott directed, for instance, made the opening "Tower of Babble" number about people on the Internet and cell phones, etc., and made extensive use of closed-circuit cameras, green-screen techniques, etc. Part of the fun and immediacy of GODSPELL is the topical references. So in a sense, it is always set in the present. I have heard of productions that were set in the future -- a post-nuclear wasteland, etc. I haven't seen one, so I can't attest to how well they work, but I have to say that conceptually it sounds a little distancing to me. Hope these comments are helpful to you, Stephen Schwartz

##### **Godspell Prologue / Jesus – Judas Relationship**

Question:

How important to you is it that

- 1) the Prologue not be cut, and
- 2) the character of John the Baptist/Judas be retained? (I speak as one who, long ago, was in a production that retained neither -- I was the other voice in All For the Best, while another performer had done Prepare Ye and a third would become the betrayer -- The betrayer-to-be was pushing me around the stage on a handtruck during the number, which had become my only solo.)

I also have never had the pleasure of seeing a production that was able to make the Prologue work, but one of those productions is among the worst productions of ANY play I have ever seen -- set aboard a futuristic starship with everyone in identical silver spandex unitards, and all the musical numbers reorchestrated to late 80s disco.) (Maybe my problem is with producers who choose a show because they think it's simple, not realizing that, in order to work, it must be simply perfect....) – Kevin

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Kevin: For reasons elucidated in the director's script, I think any production that cuts the Prologue and does not have John/Judas played by the same actor has not successfully done the show. Period. Briefly, this is because:

1) Since the show is about the formation of a community, the Prologue is the audience's only chance to see how the disciples-to-be function (or dysfunction, if you will) BEFORE they start to become a community -- the obdurate clinging to dogmatic philosophies, the inability to cooperate or admit other points of view, the descent into violence, the loneliness and despair, etc. (If this sounds rather like contemporary America, it's not coincidental.) Without the Prologue, what is their problem to be solved?

2) The relationship between Jesus and John/Judas needs time to be made more personal and special than his relationship with the other disciples, so that the betrayal really costs emotionally. If the actor playing the betrayer doesn't have the emotional arc of the Baptism, serving as Jesus' lieutenant, then "All for the Best", then the growing radicalism and disillusionment of the second act, and then finally the betrayal, whoever the "Betrayer" is simply becomes an empty device. I recognize that bad productions can make almost any show painful to sit through, but that doesn't mean that one should abandon the intention of the show itself. Thanks for your questions and giving me an opportunity to sound off about them. I hope everyone doing GODSPELL from now on will read the director's script carefully and at least have cogent and considered reasons for whatever fundamental changes they choose to make. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Is That Still Godspell?**

Question:

I'd like to ask you how much you can change a production of a certain musical so that it may still be called the same... I recently saw a production of Godspell in Graz/Austria. I have recently finished playing Jesus in it myself in Wr. Neustadt/Austria, so i was eager to see the differences between the productions...but when the show started, i felt betrayed: The producers cut out all of the original text, used new text in it. They changed the music too, so that even I had difficulties to get what song that one was. But what struck me hardest was that the philosophy of the show changed: In all productions I've seen there's a lot of fun, the audience is included into the show, the show is great fun. So is the movie. But in that production everything was sad and slow. I felt like jumping on stage and show them how to do it...it felt more like a betrayal to the musical than the musical itself...they even cut out the finale! Jesus died without it...and no reprise of Prepare ye the way of the lord as a way to show the hope...What came was an absolutly lame reaction of the audience (in our production and the others I've seen the audience demanded more and more afterwards...) and a feeling of a destroyed musical. But is that still Godspell? I mean, no Finale, changed parts in the score, cutting out the texts and replacing them with other texts, leaving out all the fun and just leaving a sad and boring mood...Do you think that still is Godspell?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thank you for alerting me to the unconscionable liberties taken with the production of GODSPELL you saw. I am already having the licensing agent look into this. Of course, GODSPELL is designed for each presenting group to put their own individual stamp on it in terms of the specific improvisations and the production design, but you are quite right, when it involves omitting or adding songs and text, that is emphatically NOT still GODSPELL. What if someone presented a production of MY FAIR LADY from which they cut Higgins' opening number and ELiza didn't return at the end; would that still be MY FAIR LADY? Of course not. It disturbs me greatly to think that productions are occurring, with my name on them as one of the writers, which do not represent the show. Thank you for taking the time to inform me of one of them. Stephen Schwartz

### **Godspell: Schwartz on how it should be presented**

Question:

I have an idea. All these GODSPELL productions are amateurs mostly. Do you have a set view of how the show should be? If you do, why don't you set up a production where you direct? You call the shots, you stage GODSPELL the way you want it to be. Yours, Gibby

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks, Gibby. But you know, I actually like knowing that all these people are doing GODSPELL their own way. Occasionally I see a production and enjoy a lot of the things directors and casts have done that are different from what I would have thought of (of course, I don't always like them, but that's part of what makes theatre interesting.) I feel I had my chance to do GODSPELL the way I saw it back in the 70's, when I oversaw the many sit-down productions that we did in various cities such as Boston, DC, LA, London, Paris, etc.). I've also provided notes in the script to let directors know what we did originally and why. Now it's up to them! Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Godspell and Jesus' Merry Men**

Question:

I was wondering what anyone's thoughts were about when the boundaries of ad-libbing should stop. I am finalizing plans to direct Godspell in November and my biggest concern is that I'll end up with a bunch of people onstage who enjoy improvising so much that you'll never end up with the same show on any given night. This proved disastrous when an actor threw in a dig at the prodigal son "riding the short bus" on a night that we had a local handicap group attend. In the thought that adlibs should occur in the production, should this be limited to the staging or should they be reigned in before tech week. I don't know if the intent is to have a show that "feels" improvised or if it should just have references that are current. Thanks.

Answer from Michael Cole:

The ad-libs are meant as a "theatre game" for developing your own production of the show. The show should ultimately not have an ad-libbed feel, though there certainly can be moments in the show that include ad-libs (the interjections in Turn Back O Man come to mind - if you have a very gifted comedienne singing the part - otherwise you may want to keep that set too). It is the directors job to shape and form what is created during rehearsals and by opening night, the show should be set. Hope this helps.

## **SECTION 5 – Music**

### **Godspell Tempos**

Question:

I'm working on the music for an upcoming production of Godspell. I am using the 1997 London studio recording in which Stephen participated as a guide to the tempos. Are these the tempos as they should be done? Some of them seem a bit fast. Were they perhaps speeded up in order to fit everything on a single CD? I'm curious, especially about the Prologue and All For the Best. I don't think Danny Kaye will be showing up at auditions and I am dubious as to whether my cast should even try to match these tempos.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I haven't listened to the London CD recently, and I don't have it out here in LA with me. Some of the tempos may be fast. But in my experience, one almost always want to take tempos on stage FASTER than the tempos that feel comfortable on a record. But obviously, each director and musical director will come to his or her own conclusions about tempos. (I realize this answer is pretty equivocal, but so be it.)  
Stephen Schwartz

### **Orchestrations**

Question:

May we use the new GODSPELL Orchestrations for our production?

Answer from Michael Cole:

Yes. To arrange for use of the orchestrations for the National Tour Cast version of GODSPELL by Alex Lacamoire, you should contact him at [ALacamoire@mac.com](mailto:ALacamoire@mac.com). To arrange for use of the orchestrations for the 2000 Off-Broadway Cast version of Godpsell by Dan Schachner, you should contact him at [danschachner@gmail.com](mailto:danschachner@gmail.com).

### **Godspell Band Question**

Question:

I've heard that a theatre in my area may be doing GODSPELL shortly. I'm going to try out for the pit band. I've been drumming since I was 11 or 12 years old. (I'm 28 now) I used to read music, but I haven't donw that in years, so I play everything by feel/ear. I also have Cerebral Palsy. I know the drum parts for the GODSPELL score, but does it matter if I don't read? What do you think? Do you prefer the musicians reading the stuff or does that matter?

Thanks, Andy.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Hi Andy: It will depend on the local musical director. But I think if you can play the feel of the songs, keep good time, and basically support the rest of the band and the actors, you are likely to be fine. A couple of the songs (like "Alas for You") require more specific cues and reading, so those you would have to learn by listening to the album, but again, that's very possible, if the musical director likes how you play and is OK with your learning the score by ear. Good luck! Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Godspell: Movie Orchestrations Used for Local Production?**

Question:

I am in the process of renting the rights to Godspell and I'm wondering where I can find both the original pit band book and the movie orchestrations? I'm intrested in both because I'm going to use pit band for most of the show however, there are some songs in the movie that i really like the orchestration to for instance, Save the People, Day By Day and a few others. Stephen Schwartz, Godspell is the BEST! (can't understand why the prologue isn't included on broadway and movie albums though)

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks for your enthusiastic comments about GODSPELL. I am afraid though that it's not possible to get a copy of the movie orchestrations, which I did myself for the movie back in the '70's. Sorry. (You might be able to fake them by listening to the album; they're not too complicated.) As for the inclusion of the "Prologue" on the recordings: I made the decision to leave it off the original cast album because I was hoping the album might "cross-over" into the pop market and sell better without it, and in fact, that's exactly what happened. It's not on the movie soundtrack because it wasn't in the movie; a different prologue, non-musicalized, in which we meet the individual characters, is in the movie. The Prologue does appear on the recent London album done for TER Records. Best of luck with your production. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Incidental music for Godspell**

Question:

Dear Mr Stephen Schwartz, Later this year I shall be performing as a musician in a production of Godspell. I'm aware that show is often performed with much ad lib in the script, but what are the rules governing the music? The director (a very good one), has suggested that I write incidental music for scene changes etc. Although I often write music for theatrical productions, I don't see that there is any need to in the case of Godspell. I would be grateful to know your opinions on the matter. Yours Sincerely, Richard John.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Richard John: Scene change music? Really? There aren't actually any scene changes in GODSPELL, and I don't think I've ever seen a production with an elaborate enough set to necessitate them. But many productions I have seen have had incidental music added for various parables ("Prodigal Son" and "Good Samaritan" particularly, plus the "There once was a king" narration, which is usually done as a rap or hip hop number these days). Obviously, if you're adding music, I think it should be based on one or more of the songs in the show, unless you're using amusing references to other well-known songs or pieces of music. I hope this response is helpful and doesn't confuse you further, and I wish you the best with your production, Stephen Schwartz

Dear Mr Schwartz, Thank you for your informative and useful response. Scene changes was the wrong phrase to use (apologies), I meant to say incidental music during the dialogue. Yours Sincerely, Richard John

### **Original Godspell band positioning on stage**

Question:

My name is Martin, and I am Musical Director for an upcoming production of Godspell here in Australia. We are using the small instrumental ensemble as originally used in the show. I have a question regarding the positioning of the band in the original off-broadway productions of the show. Were the band onstage, or in an orchestra pit? Our small theater has no pit, so I am interested in how this has been handled in the past. I recall reading somewhere that the band were behind the wire fence at the back of the stage in the original set..is this correct? Thanks so much for your help. God Bless, Martin.

Answer from Carol de Giere:

I interviewed Stephen Reinhardt, the original music director. He told me stories about sweltering under the lights because the band was on a raised platform, and yes, towards the back of the stage. Cherry

Lane had a very small theatre and so they did the best they could with the set up. Have fun with your production. Carol de Giere.

### **Godspell: Script Typo/Laura Nyro**

Question:

The instructions "a la Laura Lyros" begin the musical number "Bless the Lord" in Godspell. I've done a web search and come up with nothing. Could you help?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

"Laura Lyro" is an old, irritating typo, which would be funny if it weren't so embarrassing. It stems from the days when I did not proofread published music of mine carefully on the naive assumption that it would be done correctly; I have since learned to proofread at least twice. In any event, the direction should read "a la Laura Nyro" -- Laura Nyro was of course the famous singer/songwriter of the late 60's and early '70's whose hits included "Stony End", "Stone Soul Picnic", "Eli's Coming", and songs like "Wedding Bell Blues" and "Save the Country", the feel of which were very influential on me as a writer and particularly on "Bless the Lord". If you don't know her work, do yourself the favor of getting a copy of her classic album "Eli and the Thirteenth Confession" on Columbia Records. Also good are her eponymous first album, "Laura Nyro" and the third album "New York Tendaberry." Thanks for the question and the opportunity for me to clear this up; I'm going to take the liberty of posting this reply on the bulletin board, lest others misunderstand the same typo. Yours truly, Stephen Schwartz

### **Godspell Vocal Parts and updating lyrics**

Question:

Hi Stephen, I'm preparing Godspell for our high school production now, and I have a question. I've noticed that the vocal parts in the score I purchased are different from those in the script. The part I'm working on now is Save The People around m. 79. Which is correct? Is it the score I bought from Hal Leonard, or the script? Also: What is your opinion on updating the lyrics? (thy and thou etc...) A student just asked if that was possible, and I said I'd ask. Thanks for your time. Matt Koller

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Mr. Koller: I assume you are talking about the voicing (is the F# on top or not?) Because GODSPELL is performed by casts of such varying sizes and vocal abilities, I've learned it's most effective to assign back-up vocals based on the best possible ranges for that cast to make the best possible sound. Much is at the discretion of the musical director. In other words, use the chords as shown in the vocal parts, but let the abilities of your cast determine the exact voicing.

In terms of updating the lyrics: After thinking it over, I would prefer not to. The lyrics for the most part are directly from the Episcopal hymnal, and thus have a slightly archaic feel to them. If you start changing "thou" to "you" and "wilt" to "will", where do you stop? Do you rewrite words like "forswear"? Does the title of "We Beseech Thee" become "We Beseech You"? It sort of loses some flavor, don't you think?

Thank you for your attention to detail. I hope your production goes well; please give my best regards to your cast and staff. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Godspell - Day By Day**

Question:

I was wondering if you can tell me why the original Godspell recording of Day By Day is shorter than what is written in the score. Directing this show, would it be ok to take out one of the verses? It is in the near beginning of the song when the entire cast sings it twice in Unison - then they break into parts after that.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Lizzy: Stephen is out of the country and will not be able to respond to posts until after November 7th. In answer to your question: I don't have the music here at home, but my guess is that the version done for the recording was shortened for radio play. Stephen wanted the album to cross-over and become a popular hit (which it did). This is also why the Prologue wasn't included on the album. In terms of cutting the song for the show - I imagine Stephen would prefer the song to be done in its entirety. Since we can't get an answer from Stephen, I think it will be best to play it safe and do the all verses. Is there a specific reason why you want to cut it? The song works so well as is? If you have a compelling reason, maybe we could consider it - but my instinct is that Stephen would prefer that song to be done as is. Thanks for your understanding. Michael

Comment from Forum Visitor:

This is good advice. In voice lessons I was always told if I was singing the same thing more than once, I should figure out WHY and make different choices for each repetition. So in the case of Godspell, I would suggest making a choice for the repetition that supports the staging, the dramatic arc of the song, etc. Thanks for the good advice.

### **On the Willows / Judas**

Hi, I am directing Godspell for the second time and I was in it once. In doing a little research I have seen where Judas has in some productions sung On the Willows. I believe that the struggle that Judas has with betraying Jesus is not all about the 30 pieces of Silver but more about that they both have a common goal and Judas disagrees with how to go about it. with minor changes to the order and dialog, Judas can be kept on stage to sing On the Willows which to me, is a great vehicle for him to display that inner struggle. My concern is, have I over-thought this? Or do you think it will work? Frank

Dear Frank: I had a chance to ask Stephen about this. He said it works very well to have Judas sing On the Willows, but he will need to see what you have in mind in terms of making any changes to the order and dialogue. If you can do the script/dialogue as is and still have Judas sing the song, fine. But any changes must be approved by Stephen - so if you are still considering them, send them to me at [office@stephenschwartz.com](mailto:office@stephenschwartz.com)

### **All for the Best**

Question:

Hi there, I am a director about to start on a production of Godspell with my uni. I was wondering whether you thought it was vital that All for The Best was performed by Jesus and Judas or if it could be performed by other cast members. Also could the role of John the Baptist/Judas be taken by a woman? I'm keen to know your thoughts on this. Thanks so much! Princess

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Princess: Yes, I think it is important that "All for the Best" be performed by Jesus and Judas. The number was added to the show specifically to set up the relationship between them (the rivalry and the friendship), so that Judas' betrayal in the second act would resonate more deeply. Judas has to be slightly more important to Jesus than the other disciples (that's why the character doubles as John the

Baptist), and their doing the number together contributes to that. However, I don't have a problem with either Jesus, Judas, or both being played by females, if that's what the casting realities for your production demand. Good luck with your show, Stephen Schwartz

Princess responds asking if he changed his mind since this post:

Dear LM: I think some specific problems arise. For instance, the moment when Judas says "Oh, Jesus Chr ..." and Jesus slaps him across the face, during the "turn the other cheek" section. I don't think it will work if Jesus is slapping a woman across the face, so that moment will have to be given to someone other than Judas, which is a loss. Less importantly, Judas' slightly randy ad libs re the Sonia character ("Let me chastise the vixen", etc.) obviously won't work and will have to be reassigned or eliminated. I would also try to be very careful, in the playing of it, to make sure there is no hint of sexual tension between Jesus and Judas or of any physical desire -- particularly during the kiss at the betrayal. As you can see, I think casting Judas as a woman poses problems, and I don't recommend it. But if your production is determined to do so, I hope you will keep the above caveats in mind.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Hmmm. I see what I meant. OK, I guess I should have given this more thought. Maybe I was responding to the idea that they would both be played by females in this production. But actually, as I think about it more, I guess I feel that by now the show is well-known enough that a production where Jesus was male and Judas was female (or vice-versa) would be interesting, as long as no sexual or romantic subtext existed. I'm not sure I would go along with it for, say, a NY revival or a national tour, but for for a single specific local production, particularly at a school, I can see that it would be interesting. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

## **SECTION 6 - Magic Tricks**

### **Godspell magic tricks**

Question:

I am currently directing a high school production of Godspell, and I was curious if anybody out there has the props needed for the various magic tricks that Jesus performs and if you'd be willing to lend them out us for a couple months. If not, if there's anybody that can point me in a direction to get the magic tricks that would be great too. Thanks a lot Aaron Knudsvig

Answer from Carol:

The tricks that are called for in the script are available at most any magic store or from any one of several online merchants.

I just found a cool source for magic props, including the "appearing cane" and others. So this is for anybody who is looking: If you click through from the magic link at <http://www.musicalschwartz.com/godspell-productions.htm> I get a little credit.

### **Godspell: Magic Cane**

Question:

Hey... I'm doing a production of Godspell in Poughkeepsie, Ny. I went to the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and saw the original productions of Godspell on film. I had a question though in All For the Best how did Jesus' cane and John's cane just appear out of what seems to the audience like nowhere. Thanks for your time

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Ah, the old magic cane trick gets them again. These canes are standard magician/vaudeville items and can be purchased at magic supply stores such as Tannen's in New York City. (They are inexpensive.) Basically they are rolled up, small enough to fit in one's closed fist, and they have a trigger on them that makes them pop open. One simply pushes the trigger mechanism at the right time and Pop! A cane in the hand. (I don't think I'm giving away anything overwhelming to reveal it -- it's similar to the pop-up flowers that get used to illustrate the "lilies of the field" speech.) Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

## **SECTION 7 – School or Community Concerns**

### **Godspell in Public Schools**

Question:

I'd like to do the Broadway jr. version of Godspell at my middle school. This production is an extra curricular activity. First I was told I could do this production. Now it is being questioned because of the religious content. Is there anyone who has faced this kind of problem and could offer some words of wisdom to help me explain the reasons why it should be allowed?

Answer from Tom Sloan Peters:

To the teacher directing Godspell: I am a high school theatre teacher and in the past I faced those same objections. I was able to produce the show and eventually everyone loved it. To prepare my side of the situation I found a wonderful article in Dramatics Magazine dating back to 1974. The article had interviews with Tebelak and Schwartz and it talked of Godspell in terms of community building and of working as a group to achieve a greater good. It helped the school administration to understand the point of the show. Godspell doesn't have to be about religion, but about overcoming our differences to create a better world. Also when I was searching through Dramatics magazine I was able to check their high school play survey and I found that Godspell is one of the top ten musicals performed in high schools for the past 25 years. Godspell is a very mainstream show in American schools. The book that Stephen told you to look up is actually called FEAST OF FOOLS by Harvey Cox. It will help with your understanding of the play GODSPELL. There are some great ideas in the book about humor and the church. The chapter that is most relevant to Godspell is called "Christ the Harlequin." If the book is out of print, check with the Harvard Divinity School. That is where I purchased my copy.

Best of luck to you and I hope you have a nice production

Tom Sloan Peters

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Mr. Peters: I cannot begin to thank you enough for your contribution to this recent discussion about GODSPELL, particularly for supplying the information about the specific title of the book by Professor Harvey Cox. (Having written an entire number about the Feast of Fools for THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME, it embarrasses me enormously that I didn't remember the title.) This is a use of this "bulletin board" at its best, and I greatly appreciate your taking the time to supply this information. Yours gratefully, Stephen Schwartz

NOTE: In the fall 2008, the book "Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz, from Godspell to Wicked" was published, and now serves as a resource for background material on the intent of Godspell's creators.

## **SECTION 8 - OFFICIAL DIRECTORS NOTES FOR GODSPELL**

GODSPELL - Note from the director - this note is included at the front of all current scripts - if your script does not include this note, please contact the licensing company to request the current script.

Script Notes and Revisions by Stephen Schwartz 1999 AUTHOR'S NOTE TO THE DIRECTOR

GODSPELL is a deceptively difficult show to direct.

This is primarily because much of the dramatic action, and virtually the entire action of the first act, is sub-textual. The text of Act One is, after all, essentially just a series of lessons and parables in what appears to be no particular order. And while Act Two follows more typically the Passion story, with such familiar scenes as the interrogation of Jesus by the Pharisees, the Last Supper, Gethsemane, and so on, it is still interspersed with stories and teachings.

So it is easy for the show to appear formless, or worse, for the ten performers to degenerate into ten stand-up comics vying with one another for laughs and attention. This is the diametric opposite of what GODSPELL is about.

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. At the end of the first act, the audience is invited to join the community through the sharing of wine (or grape juice), mingling with the actors during the intermission.

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.

If this basic dramatic arc is not achieved, GODSPELL does not exist; no matter how amusing and tuneful individual moments may be, the production has failed.

A few other general issues: It is important that Jesus be the leader at all times, that the energy and attitude of each game come from him, particularly in the first half of the first act. Even when a game or parable is initiated by another of the troupe, there should be a clear sense that it is done for and with the master's approval. It is easy for the show to appear to be Jesus and his Nine Zany Friends; this is

wrong. If a misplaced reverence for Jesus causes him to be played as too serious or passive, the balance of the show is distorted. He is, if you will, the Chief Clown, and must drive the action at all times.

Since we are on the subject of the character and personality of Jesus, it seems appropriate to discuss issues of casting at this time. The original production of GODSPELL was performed by a cast of five men and five women. While many productions have been done with a different gender balance or with more or less people, the script reflects the original cast breakdown. 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.) In any given production, each actor will bring his or her own personality traits to the character, but it is important for the director to look for certain salient personality characteristics when casting each role. This allows the individual cast members to be different enough from one another for the audience to distinguish them, and it makes the specific assignments of lines in the script make sense from a personality and character arc point-of-view. Following is a brief description of each of the character types:

JESUS -- Must be the most charismatic individual in the cast. 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. Usually played by someone handsome and masculine, with an undertone of sexuality. He is the most serious and intellectual of the group, though as with all the actors, he must still possess a good sense of physical comedy.

JEFFREY -- Very high energy. Impish and playful. In the original, he played several musical instruments, including concertina and recorder.

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. Because he sings All Good Gifts, he must be a very good singer.

HERB -- The comedian, the class clown. The guy who can do a hundred voices and imitations. Can be a little older or more heavy-set. This is also the role that sings the least, so it is wise to cast it for a comedian rather than a vocalist.

ROBIN -- A bit of a tomboy, but basically open and sweet. She is the first of the group to commit to following Jesus in the song 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 to 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. This is the female role that sings least, and therefore should be cast with a strong comedienne.

In addition to each individual being able to stand out, it is important that all be able to function as an ensemble, without any feeling that any one (other than Jesus) stands out above the others.

The style of playing is also important to mention. 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.

A last issue to discuss here is that of level of production values and tone. When John-Michael Tebelak first conceived and directed GODSPELL, it was set in a distinctly urban and gritty environment -- a brick wall at the back and a high chain-link fence that enclosed the action and suggested an inner-city playground. Three unfinished wooden planks and two sawhorses provided the rest of the scenery. All of the props and costume add-ons used in the show came out of garbage bags on stage or were hanging on the fence at the top of the show. In other words, there was an emphasis on simplicity, on Theatre of Poverty, on theatrical magic created by the actors without production values. Above all was the sense of fun and beauty created from urban garbage, like the Watts Towers in inner-city Los Angeles. The lighting, while colorful, was deliberately rudimentary. In other words, if the set looks too pretty or designed, the lighting too elaborate, or the production too polished, the essence of the show has been lost. And while the setting need not be a graffiti-covered inner-city lot, a feeling of urban blight and poverty is integral to the mood of the show.

In the script that follows, I will attempt to include stage directions that describe what was done in the original production and discuss the underlying idea and purpose of the action. While a creative director is free to alter the specifics, it is important to remain true to the subtextual content, motivations, and dramatic structure. -- Stephen Schwartz

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

See also other Godspell sections, especially Godspell Songs for song details and the use of "Beautiful City."

Licensing agencies

[http://www.mtishows.com/show\\_detail.asp?showid=000217](http://www.mtishows.com/show_detail.asp?showid=000217)

and

<http://www.theatre-maximus.com/home.asp>

Video

The New York City Library for the Performing Arts has a couple of video recordings of early New York productions. Directors and scholars may inquire about viewing one of these to get a better idea of the original spirit and physical humor of the show. It is not available outside the library.

<http://www.nypl.org/locations/lpa/theatre-film-and-tape-archive>

A collection of stories behind each song from Godspell can be found in the “Extras” section - “Godspell Song Stories” included in “Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz, from Godspell to Wicked.” The book also includes the history of Godspell. <http://www.DefyingGravityTheBook.com>

Godspell info for productions including magic prop sources, karaoke for individual cast members to use, etc. <http://www.musicalschwartz.com/godspell-productions.htm>

For other resources including a description of cast albums and links to more information, see <http://www.musicalschwartz.com/godspell.htm>

MTI showspace for Godspell photos, rentals, etc.

<http://www.mtishowspace.com/mod/shows/mtishow.php?showid=000217>