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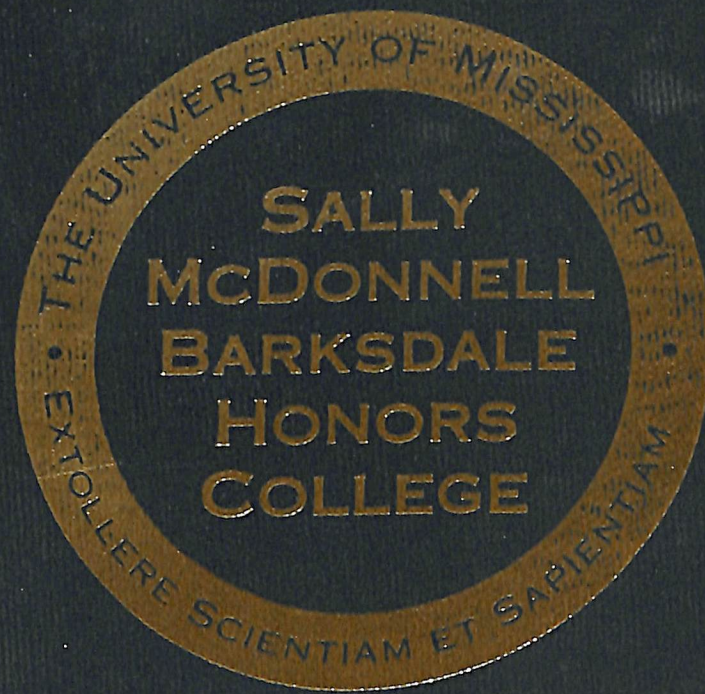
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SALLY McDONNELL BARKSDALE HONORS COLLEGE
SENIOR THESIS 2009



PRODUCING *GODSPELL*: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CONCEPT MUSICAL

by
Dana Joanne Clark

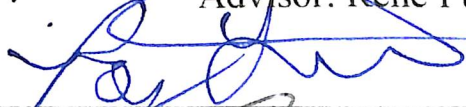
A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2009


Approved by



Advisor: René Pulliam



Reader: Professor Rory Ledbetter



Reader: Professor Dr. Charles Gates

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ABSTRACT

DANA JOANNE CLARK: Producing *Godspell*: AN EXPLORATION OF THE
CONCEPT MUSICAL
(Under the direction of René Pulliam)

In this thesis I will explore my direction of the production of *Godspell* produced January 16 through 18, 2009, in the Johnson Commons Ballroom on The University of Mississippi campus. *Godspell* is a concept musical based on the Book of Matthew from *The Bible*. This paper explores the use of different methods of directing, the use of integrated choreography, and the means it takes to produce a musical. In it I will discover which methods were successful and which failed to meet my expectations. It will conclude with a detailed analysis of methods explored, problems encountered, and goals accomplished, ultimately resulting in three successful performances of *Godspell* in January 2009.

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Chapter One: Director's Concept

I first saw *Godspell* in the spring of 2004 at the Alabama Thespian Conference. Its bright colors, up tempo music, and prolific message immediately spoke to me. To a high school junior who was beginning to become a little skeptical on the ideas of religion that had been forced upon her from birth, *Godspell* provided a way to find exciting ways to look at the social structure of my world that I had never thought about before. The basic premise of *Godspell* shows that if Jesus were to come to the world today, he would have to market himself as a celebrity in order to gain recognition and followers. I found this idea to be very intriguing as well as accurate. But upon further investigation of the original script, I realized that in order to produce a production of this play in today's society, some adjustments would have to be made. A lot of the games and impressions contained in the original script no longer speak to an audience which cannot comprehend the social and political turmoil that the country was undergoing in nineteen seventies culture. Upon deciding to use *Godspell* as the production for my thesis, I realized that I must not only present the play with the idea that Jesus must market himself as a celebrity, but I must also be able to update much of the message in order for it to speak to current audiences. In this thesis, I will explore how the original creation of the show both

inspired my concept as well as investigate the means in which I dissected the script in order to create a new and original production.

In order to create my own concept for the show, I first took a look at the original libretto from nineteen seventy-four and compared it with the revised nineteen ninety-nine version. I found not much of the script had changed, but I ultimately decided to use the newer version because it proved more relevant to current political and social current. I also knew that once I purchased the rights to the play, the scripts they would send would be the newer version. The main difference between the two librettos lies not in the lines being said, but rather there are minimal differences in who speaks the lines, often giving Jesus one of the lines originally spoken by another player in order to stress the significance of a particular message.

I began to create my concept through my exploration of the script as well as through my knowledge of previous productions I had seen on both stage and film. I knew from the moment I chose to use this musical that I did not want to create it as I had seen it done before. Several of the previous productions I had seen used the original script verbatim without updating some of the concepts. I wanted to keep the integrity of the idea of children playing presented by the original script, but I wanted to make it speak more to a college aged audience. I feel that having the players dressed as “clowns”, using face paint and colorful clothes to signify dramatic shifts in the plot, is an outdated concept that undermines the importance of the message *Godspell* presents. Scott Miller also identifies with this thought, “The clown costumes in the original production signified dramatic change, but was that change too instant, too easy? We have become a skeptical, cynical nation” (77). Young adults today cannot identify with the spirit of the nineteen

sixties that ultimately led to the creation of *Godspell*. In order to present the message of the show to a current audience, I chose to age the characters so that my target audience could identify with the characters that appeared before them. I felt that the way to do this would be to set the show in a high school. By making Jesus the “popular kid” that everyone wants to befriend, I could keep the original concept of the show while concurrently creating something a modern audience would understand.

I knew that in order for my concept to work, I would have to use broad characters that were somehow united by this one figure. This meant that I had to both find a way for Jesus to be an “everyman” character as well as make sure every other character onstage had something in their personality that drew them to someone so unlike themselves. I worked off a basic principal of “opposites attract” and tried to create something so inherently different in each character that it would ultimately draw them to Jesus as a central figure who could calm their differences. I also wanted to make Judas’s relationship with Jesus and the rest of the characters very different from any of the other relationships onstage to show his ultimate separation from the group. The realization of this concept would rely heavily on my ability to convey it to the actors as well as their individual ability to explore their characters. I would also have to find the means to create a community type atmosphere by the end of Act I that was then broken at the end of Act II. In the original libretto, the concept of community is exemplified through the application and removal of the clown makeup. Because I did not want to use this interpretation of the play, I knew I would have to find another way show this to the audience. Once I had decided to make each clown character into a stereotype associated with high school, I realized that the way to purvey this concept would be to make the

clown makeup an object that signified each character's psyche. I decided that I would let the actors choose what this object was based on how they understood their character and then make changes where necessary to enhance the message of the play.

Once I determined that I wanted the characters to be different stereotypes associated with high school, I knew that the cast I put together must also have a lot of differences. I knew that this would be difficult because I was limited on the actors that were available for me to use. I knew that casting the female characters would be easier because there are always more females not involved in main stage shows than there are males. I also wanted to create as diverse a cast as possible so that it would be easy to create the stereotypical high school persona that I envisioned for each individual character. This also meant that I had to cast a charismatic person as Jesus so that his personality would be able to draw all the other characters to him. Having these thoughts in mind ahead of time, I used callbacks to not only discover each actor's talent through improvisations and prepared songs, but I also looked at the relationships of each person to everyone else in the room. This really helped me to see that, if I could articulate my concept well to the actors as well as create it in an understandable fashion for the audience; I could pull the show off. What had seemed so daunting a task when I first came up with the idea of producing, directing, and choreographing a small musical, now seemed like a plausible reality. My biggest obstacle would be my own ability to convey my thoughts to the actors.

Because *Godspell* is a musical with dance interwoven into some of the songs, I also had to create my concept around making the dances believable. Each song in the show is written in a very distinct and unique style that makes it difficult for a director to

explore new ways to have the actors move. Each dance would have to arise without jarring the audience from reality and each would also have to make sense for the characters performing them. To go about this, I found that if I could create choreography simple enough for the abilities of my actors that still stayed within the constraints of the musical style of each song; I could create dances that hopefully enhanced the concept already expressed in the dialogue. I felt it would be easiest to create unison choreography that could then be varied by having each actor dance in character. This meant that I must create movement that each actor was capable of doing so that they understood it well enough to manipulate the choreography. I knew that when I cast the show, I would have to look for actors who could move well on top of their improvisational and musical abilities. I hoped that giving the actors unison choreography could help to enhance and strengthen my concept. I wanted to allow the actors to add character to their dancing so that, while the basis of the choreography was the same, the actors would simultaneously have to freedom to manipulate the movement. I thought this would be a good way to express the communal aspect which the libretto intends to create in Act I. In high school, school dances are attended by all cliques and I wanted the first large dance number (“O Bless the Lord”) to have this feel to it. In the libretto, it is suggested that because the females and males sing different parts at the beginning of this song, they be on opposite sides of the stage. I felt that this was perfect because, through bringing the groups together within this song, I could show the initial formations of the community that followed Jesus. I next worked from the notion that with each progressive choreographic number in the show, I could show more and more mixing of the characters. Hopefully this would read to an audience. Often historians show that community is formed through

social dance and I felt like much of the choreography written into *Godspell* follows this tenet.

I wanted to use this theory to also include the audience. With this thought in mind, I decided that I would require the use of a thrust stage design so that the actors could interact with the audience. I wanted the audience to feel as much a part of the show as everyone onstage and this would mean finding a way to involve them. I started to look for spaces that would allow me to realize this concept and determined that the Johnson Commons Ballroom would be the perfect spot. Not only would its stage allow me to create levels and permit me to place the band onstage so that they too could be a part of the action. It would also allocate the perfect place to arrange an audience so that the actors could involve them in the action of the show. I determined that I wanted to keep the set minimal, but that I could create aisles within the audience so that I could use them as part of the set. I knew that I wanted both Neill Kelly and Anna Donnell to make their Act I and Act II entrances, respectively, from the back of the audience so that this would involve the people sitting in the last rows as well as the people in the front. Also, by having aisles, I could have the actors expand their choreography and blocking out into the space and involve the audience with each story. My expectation was that this would also serve to draw the audience into the show and focus their attention on the importance of each of the parables told. It would also include them in the religious experience that each character undergoes. I felt that it was just as essential for the audience to be able to go through a religious experience as it was for the characters onstage. By including the audience in the action, hopefully I was allowing them to feel this as well.

With all these things in mind, I wanted to create a show that would excite my actors and audience just as much as the first production of *Godspell* I saw. I wanted to generate an experience for each participant unlike any other they may have felt before. I knew this would be a challenge, but I hoped the end result would justify the hard work and effort put into it by all.

Chapter Two: Research

Conceiving *Godspell*: The Intentions of John-Michael Tebelak and Stephen Schwartz

Godspell did not originally start out as a musical, but rather as a play with songs interpolated into the script to break up each of the parables told. It took many years for it to develop into a fully fledged musical, eventually calling upon the talents of Stephen Schwartz to doctor the libretto and create new songs that wove smoothly in and out of the spoken dialogue. The show would go through many transformations and rewrites, eventually developing from a play with music to a complete musical (Giere 50).

Today, the theatre world associates *Godspell* with the dynamic score written by Stephen Schwartz for the original Off-Broadway and eventual Broadway production. But in fact, *Godspell* was the brain child of John-Michael Tebelak. *Godspell* was performed in its original form in nineteen sixty-eight on the Carnegie Mellon campus. Giere shows, “The impetus for *Godspell* originated from Tebelak’s master’s degree thesis requirements for directing a show” (44). Tebelak wanted to give his contemporaries a way to relate to what the conservative churches were trying to preach through their outdated sermons.

Scott Miller explores this further, “Tebelak wanted to make the religious experience accessible once again to the masses. He saw that a religious service is theatre – the text/script, structure, use of ritual, and to a degree, standardized blocking and gestures...” (74). In the nineteen sixties, there was a decline in the religious fervor that had been so prominent after the Second World War. Tebelak recognized this and wanted to create something that would bring the message preached by the church to the large number of people who had lost their faith in religion as a result of the social and psychological shift of the past decade. Miller expresses how Tebelak intended to do this:

Tebelak’s intention was to recreate the situation of Jesus and his disciples in contemporary terms...Jesus teaches them through stories and, in this modern context, through other contemporary forms of storytelling, including puppetry, mime, improvisation, and sketch comedy. The main point of the biblical parables is to translate complex philosophical ideas into terms easily understood by lay persons...because *Godspell* is set two thousand years later, the details of the story are modernized. In both cases, he makes religious philosophy easy to grasp. People today can’t relate to masters and slaves...but they can relate to contemporary pop culture references, pop music, and modern slang. (75).

Miller shows that the basic concept of the musical as it exists today was present in its original conception. It is the idea that the Christian Church’s message must update its methods of teaching in order for it to continue to be relevant to modern culture. Because of this basic tenet, every new production of *Godspell* must update its references to popular culture in order to convey meaning to the concurrent society. Following this idea, I chose to create a production that would speak to my contemporaries. Because many of us remember high school as both a traumatic and invigorating experience, I discovered that having this be the main structure behind my concept would aid in my attempts to modernize my production.

The creation of *Godspell*'s libretto began as an experiment with different theatre techniques. Giere shows, "The approach that led to *Godspell* involved an ensemble of actors as the creative team. Without prewritten scripts or precise instructions from a director, a show's storyline and content evolved through group participation" (45). Giere shows that Tebelak did not create a script by deciding upon a central plot and developing characters that could advance it, but rather he used a preexisting script – the Book of Matthew – and relied upon the creative outcome of his direction of the actors through simple theatre games and character development.

Stephen Schwartz entered the picture after producers Joe Beruh and Edgar Lansbury decided to commercially market *Godspell* and move it Off-Broadway to the Cherry Lane Theatre (Giere 48). Until this point, *Godspell* had been solely Tebelak's creation. Once decided that *Godspell* had a shot of eventually making it to Broadway, Beruh and Lansbury felt that it would need a more comprehensive score. At this point, Schwartz was brought in to create a score that would make the show cohesive and give the plot a through line. *Godspell* was no longer a play with songs interpolated into its script; it was now a full-fledged musical. Giere explains, "The new musical embodied the dynamic relationship between tradition and innovation, and streamed toward full production amidst these two riverbanks [Schwartz and Tebelak] of creativity" (56). Without Schwartz's expertise as a composer coupled with Tebelak's ingenuity for experimental theatre, *Godspell* would never have become the commercial success it is today.

Pre-Production Research

Because *Godspell* incorporates so many dramatic and musical styles, I had to spend an extensive amount of time doing pre-production research. I started by enrolling in the Directing class offered by the Theatre Department. This exposed me to many different directing techniques and allowed me to decide which technique I would choose to employ. After directing three scenes in this class, I determined that I wanted to first create the concept, then map out blocking before each rehearsal, and finally adjust the blocking during rehearsals to fit the actors. Because I determined to use these techniques to direct the show, I chose to cast actors who could pick up direction quickly and apply it.

In order to prepare for the music direction aspect of the show, I took a music theory course. This made me more familiar with both music terms and music structure. Thus, I was able to adjust harmonies where needed to fit around the abilities of the cast. Having studied music from the age of five, I was able to apply my basic knowledge and instruct the members of the cast on different techniques to use while learning a song or voice part. I did not research different pedagogical methods of teaching music, but rather used my experience in leading sectionals in choir. I also used a lot of trial and error as I discovered what teaching method seemed to work best for each singer. When rehearsing music with the entire cast, I used my experience of working sectionals in a choir. This allowed me to separate out each voice part and then gradually put the harmony together. Without my preexisting musical knowledge and my experience in choirs, I would have had to research more pedagogical techniques in order to be able to direct the music rehearsals.

The most background research I had to do in pre-production was that of choreography. Because each song in the show is written in a different musical style, each dance must also be choreographed in a different style. Having taken dance from a young age, I was well acquainted with the various forms and styles of dance, but I was not well versed enough to choreograph dances in each of these styles. To do research for the choreography, I first looked at video tapes from past performances. I was able to find several different styles of dance used in past recital recordings. Starting with this information, I next watched movies of musicals and dance shows that contained the styles I needed to research. Finally, I used the internet to search for videos of live performances from each era.

I was required to research three major different styles of choreography in order to create the dances for *Godspell*. The first was in the style of Motown from the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies. This would be the style required for the choreography of “O Bless the Lord, My Soul” in Act I. When I first listened to the song, I immediately thought of The Jackson 5 and The Supremes. Having been in dances choreographed to songs by both of these groups in the past, I first looked at old production videos for inspiration. I was able to find a dance choreographed to a medley of Jackson 5 songs and found a lot of movement that I could manipulate to fit my purpose. I also watched the movie version of the musical *The Wiz* because it used both similar style songs and choreography that fit “Bless the Lord”. Finally I used the internet to find old clips of The Jackson 5 and The Supremes and was able to incorporate some of their movement into the choreography for my show. This allowed me to create a

cohesive dance that both enhanced the musical style of the song and kept the audience engaged in the show.

The second style I researched was vaudeville. The libretto calls for vaudeville choreography for “All for the Best”. There is no possibility for the style of the choreography to be created in a style other than vaudeville because of the inclusion of a vaudeville joke in the middle of the song and the musical style of the song itself. Having recently choreographed a vaudeville-type number in a previous production of “Showstoppers”, I was more aware of this choreographic style than the others. Vaudeville incorporates a lot of what is now known as basic jazz movements; such as, a box square step, the grapevine, and pivots. Because I was more familiar with the terminology of this style of dance, it was much easier for me to create choreography. I did not have to research this style anew, but rather used the research I had done for the previous production and my knowledge from performing vaudeville-style dances in the past. The previous dance I choreographed was for a number from the musical *Grand Hotel*. I was able to use this choreography as a template and then change it to fit the situation. I used many of the same basic steps from my previous choreography, but rearranged the order so that I could create a new dance that coordinated with the music.

The final style requiring research was burlesque. This style is used in “Turn Back, O Man”. Because the script describes this number as one for “comic effect”, I had to be versed enough with the style that I could manipulate the movement and create a parody of the style. Having no previous knowledge of the choreographic differences between burlesque and vaudeville styles, I first watched clips of burlesque shows from the beginning of the twentieth century. I was able to watch archival footage from the

documentary “Broadway: The American Musical”. This gave me many ideas for the soloist singing the song, but I still needed choreography for the group. When I examined the score, I found that it described the section of the song when the ensemble enters as a “cakewalk”. Having studied this in class, I knew that this type of movement originated in minstrel shows. I went back to the documentary film and watched the clips of minstrelsy to find examples of cakewalks. I also went on the internet and looked up clips from old movies that incorporated a minstrel show in the plot. I took what I saw in these clips – people in one long kick line or a snaking line around the stage – and adjusted it to fit my needs. I found that, due to limited space, if I put the actors in a triangle, I could still use the cakewalk idea. Rather than having the actors parade around the stage and pulling focus from the soloist, I could have the actors move the triangle horizontally across the stage. Having researched all three of these styles prior to choreographing the numbers, it was easier for me to create movement that both fit the style of the song and stayed within the context of the show.

The Incorporation of the Audience into the Show

Because a series of experiments and improvisational games created *Godspell*, any production of the show requires much research into the sub textual elements behind it. Without a clear understanding of the central meaning of the show as well as a grasp on each individual character’s development over the course of the action, *Godspell* seems to just be a group of random games in which the actors have no reason to participate. Similarly, each song must arise from the character’s subtext, or what they are thinking, not necessarily what they say aloud. The director must find a way for each song to move

freely out of the previous dialogue and into the subsequent action. The super-objective that the director must try to portray is the loss of innocence that each character experiences once they feel the loss of the community they have created. In the libretto, this is signified by the removal of the clown-makeup or whatever the director has chosen to substitute to represent this same action. From the original conception and production of *Godspell*, innocence was the central point driving the plot. “Peggy Gordon recalls, ‘John-Michael wanted the humor to serve the innocence and never to sacrifice the innocence, because that’s what was going to enable audiences to open up and have an extraordinary experience’” (Giere 57). Since the basis of *Godspell*’s success as a production lies in its ability to convey a religious experience to the audience, it is essential that the director use the character’s innocence to gain the audience’s support.

Despite what concept the director chooses to use, he must always be aware of whether or not the audience can feel the loss of innocence that the individual characters experience as they progress through the action of the play. If an audience is not able to find a way to relate to this sense of loss, the production cannot succeed. This can be a difficult task for a director to achieve in today’s cynical society. Scott Miller illustrates, “The fantasy world of the original *Godspell* may seem too naïve, too innocent for those of us brought up on *Hill Street Blues* and CNN. The purpose of *Godspell* is to use what is familiar to the audience to help them connect with the material” (77). Miller shows that it is the director’s responsibility to find a way to make *Godspell*’s message poignant enough for a modern day audience to understand. He continues to argue that *Godspell* has long since become an out-dated show. But, because of its adaptability, it is very able to become a show that still speaks to current audiences. The director must make sure that

he decides upon a concept that is both cohesive and relatable for the audience as well as the actors involved in the production.

In order for a director to achieve a successful production of *Godspell*, his focus cannot lose sight of the fact that the show is indeed a cohesive musical. Without blocking and direction that creates a comprehensive plot for both actors and audience, the production will inevitably fail. Miller explains, "The most important point for anyone mounting a production of *Godspell* is that it's not a revue or variety show. It is literally a religious experience...For the show to succeed; the audience must be converted along with the cast" (75-76). For the audience to undergo the same religious experience as the cast, the director must create a believable story. The actors must be committed to the actions they perform, whether it is in the form of a game, improvisational storytelling, or song and the audience must believe that the actors are experiencing a revelation within themselves.

Stephen Schwartz created the songs and placed them where they are seen in the show so that they may aid the director in bringing cast and viewer on a journey of religious revelation. He "evaluated the event of each song, so that the actors wouldn't just be stopping the story to sing. In most instances, songs suggested characters' moments of revelation or conversion" (Giere 57). Because the songs serve so specific a purpose, they make it easier for the director and actors to facilitate each characters religious experience. If the director fails to weave the songs out of dialogue smoothly, then he destroys what Schwartz intended to achieve with each song. If the songs jar the audience out of the moment, then there is no possibility for them to have a religious

experience or any kind of experience at all. They will just perceive themselves to be “having a good time” as they watch a flashy production in front of their eyes.

Consequently, the production cannot exist just on the surface. Unlike many plays and musicals, the audience must perceive and understand the subtext of each and every character in *Godspell*. To exemplify this difference, “According to Stephen Schwartz, the actual story of *Godspell* is in the subtext, not in the playful revue of parables on the surface” (Giere 457). While any well-written play relies on the subtext of the actor to convey the actual text, *Godspell* is absolutely dependent upon it. In most instances, it is both unnecessary and ineffectual for the audience to know an actor’s subtext. But with *Godspell*, if the audience does not know the actor’s subtext, they cannot have the religious experience with the actors. The actor must be very vulnerable and willing to share their joy and unease with the audience. If the director is incapable of finding ways for the actor to do this, the production is likely to be unsuccessful. The audience must be able to understand the way each character thinks prior to their religious conversion or revelation. They must also be able to think as the character does prior to and after the loss of innocence that each particular character experiences. If an audience cannot comprehend why or how the character experiences these shifts in thought and philosophy, then there is no possibility for them to feel the same way as the individual characters.

Chapter Three: Creating a Musical on a Limited Budget

In the spirit of the original production, I chose to create a show that relied on an absolutely minimal budget. Musicals usually cost tens of thousands of dollars to mount, but I set out to create a production on less than twenty-five hundred dollars. Because “[t]he emphasis was on simplicity, on ‘Theatre of Poverty,’ on theatrical magic created by the actors with minimal production values” (Giere 61) in the original production, I was able to achieve this goal. From my decision to produce a small musical as my thesis project, I was aware of the fact that despite the show I chose, I would be required to find something that could be done with as little set and costuming as possible. When I chose *Godspell*, part of the determining factor was the ability to do the show with almost no set and the ability to have the actors wear their own clothing. I was also able to attain a grant from the Honors College that allowed me to pay for the royalties and scripts for the production, making it possible for me to even envision the show in the first place.

With the development of my concept, I took into account the restraints that this budget would place upon me. When I first thought of setting the show in a high school so that I could update it for a contemporary audience, I immediately thought of the

minimal amount of set I could use. I realized that with this concept, keeping my budget small was an attainable goal. I could use studio blocks free of charge as set pieces rather than the scripted saw horses and wood planks. Stage properties described in the script could be found around the house or adapted from my preexisting possessions. I would have to determine how I would mount the Crucifixion scene at the end of the production, but I needed to solidify a performance space before I was capable of doing this.

While looking for a performance space, I determined to discover a venue that already had levels built in so that I would not have to find ways to build them. Meek Auditorium was my first choice because it had aisles through which the actors could enter and it already incorporates a thrust stage. I knew that I wanted to use a thrust configuration so that it would be easier to involve the audience in the production and this space seemed ideal. Once determining that Meek was unavailable for use during the time I wished to mount my production, I chose to use the Johnson Commons Ballroom as my performance space. Unlike Meek, this performance space would not be free. In order to account for this, I chose to use money from a college account fund. I felt this expense was worth the money because the space already included a grand piano and levels, as well as having seating provided. This meant that I would not have to find a way to move a piano into the space to use in the production and that I could configure the seats in any way I chose. I created a stage design that included the upper level of the stage in the Ballroom, approximately fifteen feet in front of the stage on the floor, and three aisles in the audience that would allow the actors to interact with the audience with ease. For a set piece upon which we could crucify Jesus, I chose to use a ladder and place posters next to it so that it looked as though the ladder were there to hang the posters. This fit in nicely

with my concept because, in high school, it seemed as if there was always a ladder mounted somewhere in order for different student groups to hang up butcher paper posters of upcoming events.

Where costuming was concerned, I wanted to allot as little funds as possible. Each actor was able to create a costume or borrow clothing that allowed them to embody the stereotypical high school clique which they portrayed. Rather than using poster board signs to indicate which philosopher each actor portrays in the “Prologue”, I chose to have the actors wear a pair of their own jeans and a white undershirt with the philosopher’s name ironed on to it. This helped enhance the starkness of the set before Jesus enters and the characters’ journeys begin.

I received a donation from a private donor that allowed me to use live musicians rather than a preexisting recording. With this luxury, I knew that I would be able to involve the band in the production, prompting the audience to realize that it was acceptable for them to participate. I was also able to use light trees from the Theatre Department and print programs at no cost. This greatly cut down on production costs because it allowed me to move money I expected to spend on lighting to other things in my budget. Though producing a musical can be costly, I was able to find ways to mount a show for three nights that cost less than two thousand dollars. I achieved my endeavor to produce a musical on a very limited budget.

Chapter Four: Rehearsal Journal

Saturday, August 23

Cattle Call

I sat through all of cattle call to determine a call back list for the show. There were several people who caught my eye. It was a long process to have to sit through and I gained quite an appreciation for the directors who have to do this all the time. I will also watch the dance auditions tomorrow to see if the people I want to call back can move enough to do the simple choreography in the show. Right now I have just under fifty people I am looking at and I want to narrow that to twenty four before callbacks on Monday to ultimately cast ten to twelve members and two understudies. Tonight, I'm going to eliminate some of the people based on how many of each voice type I have and the characters they can play.

Sunday, August 24

Dance Auditions

After narrowing down my callback list to about thirty-five last night and watching dance auditions today, I was able to narrow down my callback list. I also realized that I cannot use music majors in the show because of time commitments to opera. This will make casting easier because I do not have to decide between as many people.

Monday, August 25

Callbacks

We started callbacks at 4:00 pm. Seven people did not attend. It was a long process but I tried to make it go as quickly and smoothly as possible by alternating songs and scenes. I had a very difficult time casting the girls because there were several of them who were good for a few parts. I decided I wanted to use as many people who were not cast in a main stage production as possible. Thus minimizing conflicts with main stage shows and giving more people a chance to use their talents. This was easier to accomplish with the girls than with the boys, as there are a much greater number of girls available to cast. I intended to end callbacks at 5:30 pm, but extended them until 6:00 pm. I have a very good idea of who I will cast, but I still want to take a little more time to look things over and decide who I want to put where. I hope to have the cast list posted by tomorrow.

Tuesday, September 2

I held a cast meeting to discuss schedules and rehearsal conflicts. We also did a very brief read-thru. I decided that first I will hold individual rehearsals with everyone to work solos and individual melody lines in songs. Then we will begin to put the music together and finally move on to blocking. Because some of the harmony in this show is

very difficult, I want to make sure everyone has their part down so that once we add blocking and choreography, the music does not go out the window. I will start rehearsing with Josh first since he has the most music and solo parts to learn.

Wednesday, September 3

Today I worked with Josh on his songs. It went really well. I am very glad that I chose to cast him as Jesus. He is perfect for the role and I am looking forward to working with him through the process of the show. We worked on “Save the People”, “All for the Best”, and “Alas for You” the most today. I made sure he was confident with the melody. He is going to bring me a blank compact disc so that I can make a copy of the accompaniment disc for him.

Friday, September 5

I worked with Greg on his solo today. We decided to work at my house since both of the studios were occupied and I have a keyboard that allowed us to practice with the accompaniment disc. We worked mainly on Greg’s solo, “All Good Gifts” and a little bit on his part in “Tower of Babble”. I realized that “Babble” is going to be the most difficult song to put together because it involves eight melody lines juxtaposed against each other to create a cacophony of sound. This gave me insight into the fact that I will have to spend a whole day of rehearsal putting this song together with everyone. I think the way to go about it is to work on everyone speaking their part, then work on slowly singing it together, and ultimately getting it up to speed, but I will worry about that later.

Monday, September 8

Tonight I worked with Neill on his solos in "Prepare Ye" and "All for the Best". He is very acquainted with the show so the rehearsal went smoothly. I worked mostly with trying to get Neill to not swallow his sound. Because we are not using any kind of amplification in the show, I want to make sure everyone can be heard. This can be a problem with Neill because he does not always project his sound outward, but after I mentioned to him to try sending his sound out to someone rather than just singing, his sound improved greatly.

Tuesday, September 9

I worked with Pam today on her solo, "Learn Your Lessons Well". She has sung this song before so she has some knowledge of it, but she still struggles to hit pitches. Pam has relative pitch, she can pick a key and sing the song, but she does not have the ability to listen to the piano introduction and then sing in that key. She brought a compact disc for me and I went ahead and burned her copy so that she can start working on that now. We also worked on her part in "Babble". This is mostly spoken so I chose to work the most on the rhythmic part of it. I think if she continues to practice with the accompaniment tracks from she will be much more confident in her own sound and will be able to perform the role well onstage.

Wednesday, September 10

I had my first music rehearsal with everyone today. I decided to go through the show chronologically when working on songs with everyone. However, I chose not to work on "Tower of Babble" because I want the chance to work with everyone on their

individual lines of the song before I attempt to put it together. My hope is that, if everyone is confident with their melody, the fusion of the eight lines will be much less painful and will come together quicker. Therefore, I began working with “Prepare Ye”. I had already decided who should sing which parts before I came into rehearsal and this made it much easier to get things going. This song is in four part harmony and it was relatively easy for everyone to pick up because I made sure to put a strong, confident singer in each part. This makes it easier for those who are not strong singers to listen to the correct sound and pick it up. We also worked on chorus parts of the other songs in Act I: “Save the People”, “Day By Day”, “Bless the Lord”, and “All for the Best”. I did not get through all of the songs in Act I, but I did not think I was going to. I tried to give everyone a general idea of how the songs sounded and then tried to break out the parts. This seemed to work, so I will probably continue with this strategy in future rehearsals.

Thursday, September 11

Today we continued to work the chorus parts of songs from Act I and Act II. I started with “All Good Gifts” and then moved on to “Light of the World”, “Turn Back, O Man”, “We Beseech Thee” and the “Finale”. I decided not to work on “By My Side” because it has more parts than the other songs. I want to go through and see if I can cut out some notes since I do not have enough strong singers to cover a five part harmony song. I used the same strategy as mentioned in the previous rehearsal’s notes and let the actors listen to the audio version with the words first, then went through playing each part on the piano and teaching them their line. Next, I played the accompaniment on the piano while they sang the parts together. Then, I had them sing along with the words on

the accompaniment disc. Finally we tried to sing the songs with the accompaniment only track. For the first rehearsal looking at the harmony on these songs, it went really well.

Friday, September 12

Today I worked with Jay on “Light of the World” and his part in “Tower of Babble”. We worked with the accompaniment disc a lot on the latter song because his melody is a counterpoint with Nick Hauser’s; thus, he needed to hear what Nick would be singing in order to find the timing of his melody. My hope is that by the end of the show, Jay will be a much more confident singer. He has a good voice, but he is too self-conscious. I spent a lot of the rehearsal reassuring him that he sounded fine and that he would do well with “Light of the World” in the show as long as he believed in himself.

Monday, September 15

I worked with Nick Hauser today on “We Beseech Thee” and his part in “Tower of Babble”. Like my work with Jay, we used the accompaniment disc a lot to work the rhythmic relationship between what he is singing and what Jay is singing. Nick was sick today, and I think that added to his sense of vulnerability. I think once I add blocking and choreography to “We Beseech Thee” he will have an easier time singing since he will be more involved with his character rather than worrying about the sound.

Tuesday, September 16

I worked with Kelleé on “By My Side” and her part in “Tower of Babble”. The part I decided she should sing in “Babble” is a little high in her range, but she decided she should try it high first and transpose it down if it still did not work. I let her do this

because I want her to feel comfortable with what she is singing, but I might need to have her sing it down the octave for the fuller sound that that produces. Our work on “By My Side” went really well. She has a beautiful lyrical voice that works perfectly for the song. The only problem I might have with this is that it does not carry far without amplification, but I think because Kelleé is so loud with her speaking this voice, having her sing louder will not be a problem. I think the biggest task facing me with this show is making people confident enough to believe in their singing capabilities.

Wednesday, September 17

Today I worked with Anna on “Turn Back, O Man” and “Tower of Babble”. She did well with both songs. Her part in “Babble” is almost a spoken line and she has a good vocal quality for doing this. I think Anna is more confident with her singing voice than some of the other cast members I have worked with recently because she has sung a solo in front of an audience before. She has a great vocal quality for the sound I need in “Turn Back”. There is a very nice sensual quality to it that helps enhance the song. This will help distinguish her from the other characters onstage and show the strong connection that she has with Jesus.

Thursday, September 18

Today I worked with Rachel on “Bless the Lord” and her part in “Babble”. I am not worried about her learning her music correctly because she is a strong singer and because she has already started working the music in her voice lessons with Ms. Balach. I decided to give her the first solo line in “Babble” because she is the strongest singer in the cast onstage at that point of the show. I know that she can sing this melody line

without wavering in pitch. I did have issues teaching her the rhythms of the song, as she did not seem to be able to find the rhythm quickly, but I think with work she will be fine.

Friday, September 19

Natalie and I worked on “Day By Day” and “Babble” today. She is familiar with the song and had practiced before she came to the rehearsal so we finished early. I think that she is the second strongest singer that I have in the chorus part of the cast and I am hoping that she will be able to help lead the alto line in a lot of the chorus songs.

Monday, September 29

Today I held a music rehearsal with the entire cast. Because we did not have rehearsal for two weeks, I expected the cast to be a little shaky on their parts. Ultimately, I decided to go through each song as we did the first time we learned it and to work on the songs with harder harmony first. Today I focused on “Light of the World”, “We Beseech Thee”, and “By My Side”. I decided that I will have my understudies – Nick Bredosky and Brittany Helmes – onstage and participating in the chorus during the show so that I will get a fuller sound. I gave them a duet in “Light of the World” because they have both been very attentive in rehearsals and have really worked hard on the chorus music even though they had no solos. I chose not to work on the cacophony part of “We Beseech Thee” which involves each cast member imitating a different instrument to create a “human band” effect. I want to make sure that the actual sung notes of the song are strong before I add another element. The cast struggled most with the harmony on the “Loves” in the song and I am considering having those spoken rather than sung in four part harmony. I think this will strengthen the context of the song rather than a shaky

harmony with some of the actors making faces at their mistakes in pitch. We worked on “By My Side” the most today. I cut out the doubled root in the five part harmony so that I would have more people covering the harmonic notes in the middle of the chords. We really struggled with this song because of it’s harmonic challenges. I am starting to discover that some of the actors in my cast shut down when they get frustrated rather than pushing through. As we continue to work songs and they feel more confident this problem will lessen; but, for now, I just tried to encourage them to bring in blank compact discs so that I may burn them an accompaniment track that they can practice with on their own.

Tuesday, September 30

I held another music rehearsal with the entire cast. We worked on “Bless the Lord”, “Day By Day” and “Tower of Babel”. The first two songs went really well. The harmony in these two songs is easier than some of the other songs in the show. It resembles the harmony in church hymns, making it a lot easier for the cast to pick up. The work on “Babel” was tough, but we got through it. We used the strategy I devised earlier when I first started working with everyone on their individual parts in the song – first we spoke through it slowly, then increase the speed, next added singing it slowly and finally tried it just under tempo. At the end of rehearsal we tried singing through the song with the voices on the accompaniment disc just to see if they could get through the fast section of the song without completely shutting down. It went surprisingly well for their first day attempting to put the song together and I am much more confident that the song will work itself out rather than just crash and burn.

Friday, September 3

Today we began blocking. I broke the show down into parts that usually involve one parable and one song. This makes it easier for me to keep track of where the story is going and to have a set amount of blocking that I want to accomplish. I began with blocking the first five pages of the script which involves "Tower of Babel" and Jesus' monologue directly in front of it. Beginning with this worked well because Josh is out of town for the weekend and his only blocking in this scene is speaking from a block upstage. It went really well for our first rehearsal of blocking. I have decided to set the play in a high school and therefore the trash that is in the junkyard in the original concept will come from backpacks that the actors will have instead. I went ahead and used the huddle mentioned in the script during Jesus' monologue because I feel that the circle created by this gives a nice contrast to Jesus standing all by himself upstage. It sets him apart from the group and shows that something about him is different.

Saturday, October 18

Because there was no Saturday matinee of *Cyrano*, I decided to hold rehearsal this afternoon. It was scheduled from 11:30 am to 3:30 pm, but I was able to let my cast go early because we worked through everything I intended to finish efficiently and quickly. Today I blocked "Prepare Ye", "Save the People", "Day By Day" and the scenes surrounding these songs. None of the choreography/movement in these songs is very demanding so they were relatively easy to get through. I spent the last two nights figuring out a plot for blocking so that I could come in today know what I wanted to accomplish. I now know for certain that the show will be in the Johnson Commons

Ballroom. This made it much easier for me to set blocking without having to worry about adjusting due to a change in performance space. Everyone was on time despite the early hour of the rehearsal, but Anna had to leave early. This proved a problem when I started blocking “Day By Day” because I could not see the picture I was trying to create with her missing.

Friday, October 24

Today we started rehearsal at 4:00 pm instead of 5:30 pm as usual to give us more time to block before *1940s Radio Hour* rehearsal tonight. Jay was late because he works until 5:00 pm but otherwise, everyone was there on time. We blocked “Learn Your Lessons Well”, “Bless the Lord”, and the parable directly following this song, skipping over the choreography in “Bless the Lord”. I would not have had enough time to finish the choreography if we had started it. The rehearsal went smoothly. I have decided to let the cast play around with a lot of the character development they’re doing in order to find their relationship with Jesus as well as with the rest of the cast. As they continue to explore how they want to portray their character, I have been adding in specific traits I want them to inhabit. I think this is really helping to create a cohesive cast as well as give the effect of people we would have known in high school.

Monday, October 27

We blocked “All for the Best” and “All Good Gifts” and their surrounding scenes today. I worked mainly on the choreography for “All for the Best”. I looked at a lot of vaudeville numbers in preparation for the choreography of this number and I was able to create simple choreography that gave the effect of watching a vaudeville duo perform.

Hopefully this translates to the audience. I am not sure if it will come across since much of today's younger generations are unaware of vaudeville. Though I have an extensive dance background, I am not fully versed on this style and had to research it. I tried to create a dance that both showed vaudeville style and was still modern enough to translate to today's audience. I will see if it worked in January. I also decided not to do the "circle dance" mentioned in the blocking for "All Good Gifts". I felt like this did not translate to my concept for the show and it takes away from the somber and serious quality of the song. I realize this song is important for showing the uniting of the cast into a community, but I think this is just as easily achieved by having them all focus and cheer on Lamar in his attempt to show Jesus what he has learned through his teaching.

Tuesday, October 28

Today I decided to revisit all of the music again. I have discovered in the last few days of blocking that the notes in the songs are getting a little shaky and I felt that everyone could benefit from a review of the music. We worked only on music from Act I since that is what we are blocking right now. I tried to work through all the songs we have blocked so far, but I was only able to get through "Bless the Lord" in the short amount of time I have available for rehearsal. Tomorrow I will continue with the music review and we will finish looking over the chorus music from Act I.

Wednesday, October 29

We continued to review Act I music today. I was able to work from "All for the Best" through the end of Act I – "Light of the World" – in the time we had. It went very well. I can tell who is practicing their music outside of rehearsal and who is not. So far,

Pam is the only person who has her own copy of the music to practice with. I mentioned this to the cast and strongly encouraged them to bring me a compact disc if they cannot plunk out their own melody line on the piano.

Thursday, October 30

I decided to spend one more day on music just to run through all nine songs in Act I and make sure everyone was confident with their harmony. The rehearsal went very well. I am ready to finish blocking Act I now and try to run it with the accompaniment only disc to see if we can get through the act without any major train wrecks.

Friday, October 31

I blocked the end of Act I today, which involved "Light of the World". It went very well. I was missing Nick Bredosky so I had to work around not having a body in some of the pictures I was trying to see. I am a little worried about people forgetting blocking and choreography due to scheduled weekend activities but, hopefully, we will be able to get through Act I without too many problems on Monday.

Monday, November 3

Today I finished blocking Act I. This was probably my easiest day of blocking so far because I was just so glad to actually be done with the first act. I still have to go back and finish choreographing "Bless the Lord" and clean up some of the transitions, but I was glad to get the main structure of the blocking finished. Tomorrow I will run through

Act I and stop and fix as we go. I am thinking of skipping some dialogue or musical numbers just so we can get through the main choreographic and musical points of the act, but I will see how it goes tomorrow.

Tuesday, November 4

The stop-and-go run through of the first act went well. I did choose to skip over some of the songs that I felt were strong enough harmonically and that did not involve any blocking. We were able to get through the main structure of what has been blocked so far. I feel confident enough to move on to Act II tomorrow. My goal is to get all of the show blocked before we leave for Thanksgiving Break. That way, I can focus on cleaning up the choreography, smoothing out transitions, and running through the show enough that it is solid before we leave for Christmas Break.

Wednesday, November 5

Today I started blocking Act II. I was able to get farther than I had originally intended because I was able to keep everyone focused and on track. I blocked to just after "Alas for You". I still have to get sheet music for "Beautiful City" to the cast, but I did let them listen to it on the accompaniment disc today when we blocked that part. I chose to use it as the opener for Act II because I think it reemphasizes the sense of community that the cast has created by the end of Act I. My idea is that this will juxtapose Anna's entrance in "Turn Back, O Man" and reveal to the characters that something is wrong within their group.

Thursday, November 6

Today I blocked “By My Side” and the parables directly before and after it. This song is the most difficult musically, so I will make sure to really dissect it when we review music next Monday. Brittany did not show up to rehearsal today, and when Ruthie and I tried to call her, we could not get a hold of her. Other than that, rehearsal went very well today. I decided to extend tomorrow’s rehearsal for an extra half hour because we are behind the schedule I originally planned and it is starting to worry me a little. I want to block through “On the Willows” as well as review some of the music from Act II so I needed more time to complete all this.

Friday, November 7

Today I managed to block through “On the Willows”. It went really well and I was able to work in some work on the Act II music. Brittany did not show up to rehearsal again today. She also did not answer Ruthie’s and my phone calls again. I am concerned about her not showing up because I need to know whether or not I need to change my blocking to accommodate for her absence.

I was pleased with the work we did on the music. I skipped “Beautiful City” and “Turn Back” because there is no harmony in those two songs, and went ahead and worked “We Beseech Thee”. This song has the most difficult harmonies in the entire show. I am concerned with time so I decided to have the cast just shout “Love” each time it is supposed to be sung in a five-part harmony chord. This is much easier for all of them, especially those who do not read music and who have not been singing for a long time. We also worked on the music for the “Finale”. The only difficulty was the matter

of the counterpoint melodies of “Prepare Ye” and the “long live God” melody line at the end of the song. To help them count this section, I had them look at their music while we listened to the accompaniment disc with the voices. Next I had them sing along with the voices and finally we tried it on the accompaniment only disc. This seemed to work, and hopefully everyone retains what we went over today. I felt I got a lot accomplished for the short hour and a half rehearsal that I had and I hope to continue to progress at a steady speed so that everyone is comfortable with the show by the time we leave for Christmas Break.

Monday, November 10

I blocked the end of the show today. It was my last rehearsal before Thanksgiving Break due to technical rehearsals and performances of *The 1940s Radio Hour*. I am very pleased with how everything has gone so far. Everyone showed up to rehearsal today and as a result we were able to finish early. I was even able to go through the music we did not review yesterday and finish fifteen minutes early. All I have left to do is finish some choreography and clean up the transitions. I think the show is going to turn out great once we put everything together and start running it. I think we will spend the first day back from Thanksgiving Break reviewing music just to get it back into everyone’s brains and then start running acts on that Tuesday.

Monday, December 1

Today we reviewed music and worked choreography in some of the places I skipped over earlier. It went much better than I had anticipated after almost a month without rehearsals. I worked chronologically through the show reviewing music,

skipping solos and songs with no harmony and asking everyone to review that on their own time at home. A few more people have brought me compact discs to burn the accompaniment tracks for them so that they can practice on their own. However, the people that I feel would benefit the most from this have not made an attempt to do this despite my numerous lectures to them. I have realized there is nothing else I can do to force them to take responsibility for their own part so I will just continue to emphasize this suggestion. After some of my dilemmas with the number I choreographed for *Showstoppers* last year, I have learned that there is only so much I can do to make actors have the desire to perform their part to the best of their abilities. It was hard for me to let go of this at first, but I realized that ultimately, the audience judges a performance by its actors first and then looks to its direction. This does not mean I will not try to do my very best to encourage everyone to discover their characters, but right now I just need to focus on making sure my transitions are smooth and the character arcs are solid so that I am not worried about the show falling apart over the long break for winter holidays.

Tuesday, December 2

We ran Act I off book for the first time tonight. It went very well for the first time without scripts in hand and for the first run since our break. Everyone showed up to rehearsal and we were able to get through all of Act I without any major catastrophes. I did not take notes today because I wanted to make sure we could get through the whole show before I start getting nitpicky with everyone. However, I did tell the actors to start thinking more about their connection with Jesus. I also tried to flesh out the setting more for them so that they understand from whence their characters come. I am still working on what exactly each actor's stereotypical high school student character needs to be, but I

have a few in mind: I want Anna to be a cheerleader because it sets her apart from the others and shows that she has a different relationship with Jesus. Since he is the most popular guy in school, she would have more access to him than the others. I think I want Natalie to be a jock because female jocks are not included in the popular crowd the same way male jocks are, but they are still accepted in some ways. This shows why she is the first to follow Jesus in "Day By Day". I am having more trouble defining the boys' characters. I think this is because I have no experience with how guys relate to each other so I need to do more research on this part of the character development.

Wednesday, December 3

We ran Act II off book tonight. It was not as strong as Act I but I think that is because we did not do as much work on the blocking of this act compared the extensive work we did with Act I. This was purely a product of Act I being much longer than Act II and thus requiring more work. We will not have rehearsal for the next three days because I have a choir concert I have to perform in, but we will have a long rehearsal on Sunday in order to run the whole show. This was going to be my last rehearsal, but I think I will find the time to schedule one more during exam week because I am beginning to become a little anxious about the length of Christmas Break. Hopefully I can find a time that works with everyone. This will make me feel more confident about letting them go over break and knowing they will return with a strong basis with which to start rehearsing the show again.

Sunday, December 7

We ran the whole show for the first time today. It was really rough because Josh was not there. I got a call from his roommate saying he had fallen while trying to load something into a car and hit his head on the pavement resulting in a concussion. This would not have been a total disaster, but I was also missing Nick Bredosky who is my male understudy because he went home for the weekend. Because of this, I had Brittany Helmes read Jesus and we ran the show the best we could. We will have another rehearsal next Wednesday so that we can run the show with the entire cast at least once before the break.

Wednesday, December 10

Everyone was at rehearsal today! It made running the show so much easier and I feel much more relaxed about our impending long hiatus. We got through the show with no major catastrophes and the flow is starting to get a lot better as we keep working things and I keep reiterating the importance of the actors' ability to really get into their characters. We sat down and decided what everyone's character should be for sure today so that they can think about it over break and assemble their costume. Neill will be the smarter kid who wants to be cool and fit in. Nick Hauser is going to be a white kid who wishes he was black so that he can stand out in a crowd and also so that he has the hardest time connecting to everyone else and accepting Jesus' teachings. Greg Flaherty is going to be the kid who is just a little slow to pick up on things. He is one of those kids who is so focused on what he likes that he does not care if he conforms to those around

him or not. Jay Jurden is a comic book nerd. Nick Bredosky is the geek. I thought this was appropriate because he has no solo and it helps to show that the rest of the group does not accept him as readily. Rachel Daniel is going to be a girl running for class president. This is due to her willingness and desire to be a part of everything. I think this is reflected in people who strive to become politicians even in high school. Pamela Bullock is the theatre/beatnik girl. Kelleé Fuller is going to be the shy girl who tries to dress herself so that she sticks out the least in a crowd. Anna Donnell is going to be a cheerleader. Natalie Moore is going to be a soccer player/jock. And finally, Brittany Helmes is going to be a "Mean Girl". I thought this was appropriate for her character because, like Nick Bredosky, she has no solo. To me this means that the group does not accept her as much therefore I felt that I should make her the opposite of Nick's character. Ultimately, I chose to make her a type of girl who everyone in school would envy for her popularity, but no one would actually want to be associated with her for fear that their reputation would suffer.

Tuesday, January 7

I began taking notes today and I was surprised to see how nit-picky I was able to get after so long a hiatus. Nick Bredosky is filling in for Nick Hauser because he was unable to come back from Texas due to a doctor's appointment he could not reschedule.

Thursday, January 8

I am still missing Nick Hauser, but he will be back tomorrow. I felt that tonight went much better than last night, and I think once Nick gets back the show will continue to improve.

Friday, January 9

Nick Hauser was back today and as a result our run went much smoother. He was able to pick up on the changes we made in his absence because he made the effort to come and talk to me before the rehearsal. I took a lot of notes on trivial things tonight, so I feel that means the rehearsals are improving. I felt comfortable enough to give the actors the weekend off and we will rehearse again on Monday. From now on, I hope to focus mostly on characters and making sure each actor's intentions are clear.

Sunday, January 11

I chose to not have rehearsal on Saturday because rehearsal went very well on Friday and because I felt it would be beneficial for everyone to have a day away from the show. Tonight's rehearsal went very well and I feel like the show is continually getting better with each rehearsal. We have also been consistently shaving off time and I hope to have the show down to two hours maximum, including the intermission, by opening night. My notes each night are also getting more detailed and focus more on trivial things as well as character notes.

Monday, January 12

We rehearsed in the dance studio tonight. This was good for the actors because it allowed them to get a better idea of the space available for them to use. It also was better for me because I could see things that were previously hidden by the columns and fix them. Overall, the rehearsal went very well. The pace was much better than it has been on previous nights and I think the actors are ready for an audience. Tomorrow night I have a professor coming to observe the rehearsal so that I can gain an outside prospective. I continued to make very detailed notes. This encourages me because it shows that the actors are truly ready to perform the show.

Tuesday, January 13

I set the bows at the end of the rehearsal last night because I felt that everyone had deserved them. All of the actors are working very hard to make this show as good as it can possibly be and I wanted to be able to reward with them by setting the bows. I wanted them to be as quick as possible because I do not like long drawn out bows. To do this I decided that the actors should come on in twos from the back of the theatre, form one line and then bow. I chose to give Neill and Josh their own bows since they are playing Judas and Jesus, respectively, and carry the show. René Pulliam came to watch tonight's rehearsal to give me notes on what I could improve. This was very helpful because she was able to tell the actors things that I have been trying to get across. She was able to word the information differently than I had been and I think this helped clarify what I was looking for to both myself and the actors. She also gave me a lot to

think about as we continue to perfect the show before our opening on Friday night. I also took notes tonight and I am pleased to find that some of the notes that I have given more than once in the past are finally being applied to the performance.

Wednesday, January 14

Tonight was our first night in the performance space – the Johnson Commons Ballroom. There is a lot more space to play with in here and we finally had levels with which to experiment. For the first night in a new space, everyone did very well. They are starting to apply the character notes that we have been talking about to the show and I think this is really helping to raise the energy and keep the show going. There are still some transitional things that I need to work on, but I think as we continue to work, they will start to smooth out. It was also our first night with the band. To account for this, we ran through each song first and then ran the show. This helped minimize the difficulties of transitioning from recorded accompaniment to a live band. My bassist did not show up tonight and when we tried to call him, we were unable to get a hold of him. My accompanist, Paul Brown and my guitarist, Donovan McCain worked with me to discover how we could substitute piano or guitar in some of the songs where the bass was prevalent in the case that my bassist does not show up tomorrow night either. This actually worked well and I almost think I like the music without the bass because it will help with the fact that I am using no amplification for the singers.

Wednesday, January 15

Today was our second dress rehearsal as well as the last rehearsal before opening night. The rehearsal went very well and I am excited about the show opening tomorrow.

I was able to keep my notes minimal and very detailed tonight which really encourages me for the success of tomorrow night. This has been a long and arduous process, but I think with the opening of the show I will realize it was worth all the effort and hard work. For only having two days to rehearse with the musicians, the actors are doing very well. We have had only a few tempo issues and I think the actors are learning to realize that they must pay attention to the music behind them. They cannot do everything just as they like when they have a band behind them driving a tempo. This had been difficult for a few of the less experienced singers and I have also had some issues with some attitude. I have had to remind the actors that while they have been working with an accompaniment disc for months, this is only the second day that these three musicians have had to work together and they are still trying to figure things out. I had to let the actors know that we have to be patient with the musicians as they work out their own problems before we can add vocals to the mix. My bassist did not show up again tonight so we set when the piano or the guitar takes over a dominant bass line or when we just decide to drop it all together. But other than these minor problems, the show is going strong and the actors are very ready for an audience. I think once there are people to interact with in the audience, the actors energy will stay high and consistent.

Chapter Five: The Final Result – What Failed and What Succeeded

Producing, directing, and choreographing *Godspell* was a huge challenge. It took more work and determination than I could have ever imagined when I first embarked on this thesis project. Though ultimately, the struggle was worth it. Of course there are several things I would change or do differently next time, but there are also several things that I would leave the same. In this section, I will discuss the final result of my project and any changes I would or would not make in a future production of the show.

Personally, I felt that my concept realized itself to a degree. I feel like if I had more time, and I was able to articulate some of my desires better, there would have been several improvements in the area of character development. I thought that the area that lacked the most was definability of character and each person's relationship to everyone else onstage. I felt that no one's connection with Jesus was quite strong enough and that if I had spent more time directing this aspect, there was much potential for this to improve. I think the main reason I failed to strengthen these relationships before performances began lies in the fact that it was not something that I focused on from day one. I began with the attitude of "let's get a framework laid down and then start paying

attention to detail". I think this really served to confuse some of the actors as to my intentions, especially the less experienced ones.

Were I to produce this play again, I would begin rehearsals with a thorough explanation of my concept so that each actor understood the part he or she was to play. This way, I think it would be easier for the actors to find their relationship to Jesus from the time we started blocking rather than waiting until later. By not defining their characters for them, I forced the actors to delay some of their character development without being consciously aware of this fact. I think if this had been something I paid attention to from the beginning, my concept would have come across even stronger, and it would have served to give the show higher emotional stakes. This did not really occur to me until we entered the last week of rehearsals. At this point, I realized that I had been so focused on the end result that I had forgotten to pay particular attention to detail. We did do a lot of character work in the last week or so of rehearsals, but I feel that, if given more time to experiment with it, all of the actors would have been able to create much more passionate characters with which the audience would readily relate.

Consequently, I felt that the choreography and movement I created through blocking helped the actors enhance character development better than my specific notes about such. Once I explained that they could dance "in character", I felt that each actor began to develop their back story. Until this point, I do not think that the actors were aware of who they truly were. If I had explained this earlier, I think it would have really improved character development. In any future shows I choose to direct, I will make sure to create the characters I envision clearly in my mind before beginning work with the

actors, thus giving them a starting point, rather than letting the actors create characters that do not necessarily connect to everything occurring on stage.

The other weak points in my work once performances commenced were the transitions from parable to parable. Because nothing is described in the script to this effect, it was very difficult for me to create movement and intentions that progressed smoothly and coherently from one story to the next. I went into many rehearsals rather unsure of how things might turn out because I was not confident enough in my own vision. I wanted to create a concept that would facilitate these shifts in dramatic content, rather than hinder them. While my original ideas may have accomplished this, my own inability to articulate the concept completely muddied my achievement of strong transitions.

This was the one thing I struggled with consistently through rehearsals all the way up to the point of performance and I feel like it was evident somewhat in the final result. The actors did help to smooth out these transitions a lot once they became aware that they each had a distinctly different relationship with Jesus and, as a result, with their contemporaries. Once we added costumes, lights, music, and set to the picture, a lot of the problems with transitions disappeared. I also chose to incorporate stage properties that related to the characters in order to facilitate transitions from one parable to the next. Once the actors had some “business” with which they could experiment, the pace began to pick up and the evidence of large gaps between parables began to lessen.

If I chose to do this show again, I think I would be able to accomplish much cleaner transitions throughout the show. I think that my largest challenge with this was

the fact that I personally did not understand the transitions well enough to create something that flowed nicely. Now that I have gone through the process of producing *Godspell*, I have a much stronger understanding of how each parable needs to progress to the next and how the emotional levels shift though out the play building to the climax of the “Finale/Crucifixion” number at the end.

In contrast, I feel that my strongest point of directing in this show was the work with the parables themselves. I really wanted to suggest John-Michael Tebelak’s original intent that *Godspell* was meant to be a religious experience that the audience experiences with the actors. Though I felt some of my character development was lacking, I believe it was still strong enough to at least grab and hold the audience’s attention. Having received much feedback after each of the three performances, I learned that most of the audience enjoyed what they had just witnessed. Several people also told me that they were moved by the performance. This says to me that I achieved my goal of having the audience experience something meaningful, whether it be in a religious context or just enjoying a good night at the theatre. I believe that my specific direction on the way to tell each parable was what created this resulting experience for the audience.

Because the body of the text of the show is adapted from the Book of Matthew in *The Bible*, I knew it would be very important for me to tell the parables differently than how we usually hear them. We often tend to block out stories we have “heard a thousand times”, rather than truly listen to their meaning. If I wanted the audience to be swept into the story being told and to undergo the same shift in character as the actors, I would have to find a new and different way to tell the familiar parables. Since my target audience was college students, I think that my decision to set the show in a high school enhanced

my audience's connection to the sub-textual elements of the show. High school is often a time we do not want to reflect back on, but it is an experience that we have all gone through and that we remember vividly. This allowed me to tell the parables from a place that my audience would both remember and understand. I felt that, having already experienced the emotional traumas of high school, the majority of the audience could simultaneously go through the emotions with each character as they grew and developed. The confirmation of my ability to accomplish this lies in the generally positive feedback I received from my peers who attended the performances. If I explore directing this show in the future, I may consider using this same concept so that I can improve upon my work with it, but it would depend upon my target audience.

Overall, I think I accomplished my goal of producing a show that expressed both my creativity as a director/choreographer and a means to convey an evocative show for an audience. My hope was to create a theatrical piece that would leave my audience thinking about what they had just witnessed. Though I can never truly know whether I accomplished this or not, the positive feedback I received from several viewers encourages me to believe that they did indeed leave the theatre asking themselves questions. Producing, directing, and choreographing *Godspell* was a tremendous challenge, but overall, I feel that it was worth the struggle. However, it made me realize that directing is not something I want to pursue until I am much older. Working with my peers was difficult because I had to take an authoritative position and I did not feel entirely comfortable in doing so. It was difficult for me (and I believe for the actors) to take command of people with whom I interact on a personal level daily. In rehearsals I could not be their friend, but rather had to convince them to follow my lead and take into

consideration what I was saying. This is very difficult to achieve because when you work with your peers, everyone wants to be in charge. I had to learn that I must be confident in myself and that I must convince or force the actors to perform actions as I envisioned them in order for my concept to remain clear.

However, I did not experience this power struggle as much with the choreographic elements of the show. I feel this is a direct result of the fact that I had more dance training than anyone else involved in the show. Consequently, this made the days when I taught choreography much more enjoyable and easy. Because there is a preconceived notion that choreography is a much more interpretive art than acting or singing, I think the actors were more accepting to the ideas I had in this area. They were also more apt to follow my musical direction, especially those not versed in this subject at all. I struggled most with rhythmical challenges, but we also had a few consistent pitch problems. In future productions of this show or any other musical, I think I would choose to find more time to spend on music so that I could be absolutely certain that even the inexperienced singers had an understanding of what was occurring.

Creating *Godspell* was a strenuous process, but it taught me much about how I communicate with others. The points where the show lacked were a direct result of my inability to articulate concepts and directions to a degree that each individual actor as well as the ensemble as a whole could understand my vision. In the future, if I chose to direct again, I will bring more lucid thought to the table at the beginning rather than trying to feel my way as I go along. I believe I tackled a challenge and was successful in realizing a new concept for a show that constantly transforms itself. In the future, I hope

to be able to remount this musical with a much better understanding of the super-objective of the plot and the transitional moments of the story.

Appendix

Godspell Callbacks

Josh Baker

Tori Bennett

Nick Bredosky

Pamela Bullock

Mackenzy Cade

Kaitlyn Curtis

Alex Dalrymple

Sam Damaré

Rachel Daniel

Anna Donnell

Greg Flaherty

Kellee Fuller

Tiffany Gammell

Alex Hardberger

Nick Hauser

Brittany Helmes

Jay Jurden

Neill Kelly

Alex Mauney

Ashley Mitchell

Natalie Moore

Nicole Sherrill

Christina Tompkins

Louisa Waycott

Kevin Webb

Callbacks are at 4pm on Mon. Aug 25 (Today) in the 2nd floor studio. Please grab the packet below with your name on it and look over this beforehand. You will need to wear clothes in which you can move as we will be doing some improv exercises.

Thanks!

Dana Clark

***Godspell* Callback Info Sheet**

Name: _____

Year: _____

Major: _____

Voice Part: _____

Read Music? _____

Instruments Played: _____

Skill Level: _____

Special Skills: _____

(Continue on back)

Conflicts from 5:30-6:30 weekdays?

Conflicts from 4:00-5:30 M, W? (We will be working with René to possibly use some Showstoppers rehearsal times.)

Please List your schedule below including shows you are cast in this semester. The tentative dates for *Godspell* right now are Jan 16-18, with two days of tech immediately preceding (Jan 14, 15) before school starts again for the spring semester. This will mean that we will rehearse some over Winter Break, but I want to have the show up on its feet before we leave so we don't have to spend too much of the break working on it.

The Sheet I handed the actors who attended Callbacks.

Godspell Cast List

Jesus – Josh Baker

Judas – Neill Kelly

Jeffrey – Nick Hauser

Lamar – Greg Flaherty

Herb – Jay Jurden

Robin – Natalie Moore

Joanne – Rachel Daniel

Peggy – Kelleé Fuller

Sonia – Anna Donnell

Gilmer – Pamela Bullock

Understudies – Brittany Helmes and Nick Bredosky

I will be sending out an email soon with more information on rehearsals.

Thanks to all who auditioned! It was an extremely hard decision to make, you guys all did a really amazing job!

SM – Ruthie Fenger

Scene Breakdown

Act I

I – pp. 6-10 “Tower of Babble”

II – pp. 11-16 “Prepare Ye” and “Save the People”

III – pp. 16-29 scenes

IV – pp. 29-40 “Day By Day” and scenes

V – pp. 40-47 “Learn Your Lessons Well”

VI – pp. 47-52 “O Bless the Lord”

VII – pp. 52-56 “Lilies of the Field” scene

VIII – pp. 56-61 “All for the Best”

IX – pp. 61-68 “All Good Gifts”

X – pp. 69-76 “Light of the World”

Act II

XI – pp. 77-85 “Turn Back, O Man”, and “Alas for You”

XII – pp. 86-92 “By My Side”

XIII – pp. 92-99 “We Beseech Thee”

XIV – pp. 99-104 “Beautiful City” and “On the Willows”

XV – pp. 105-109 Finale

DJC Productions Presents

GODSPELL

DIRECTED BY DANA CLARK

JOSH BAKER

NEILL KELLY

WITH:

NICK BREDOSKY, PAMELA BULLOCK, RACHEL DANIEL, ANNA
DONNELL, GREGORY FLAHERTY, KELLEÉ FULLER, NICK
HAUSER, BRITTANY HELMES, JAY JURDEN, NATALIE MOORE

January 16-18 8pm

Johnson Commons Ballroom

Free Admission

Conceived and Originally Directed by John –Michael
Tebelak

Music and New Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz

Originally Produced on the New York Stage by Edgar
Lansbury/Stuart Duncan/Joseph Beruh

This performance is presented through special arrangement with:

THEATRE MAXIMUS

1650 Broadway

New York, New York 10019

The flyer for the production

Godspell
January 16-18, 2009
Actual Expenses

Expenses:

Royalties and Scripts	\$750
Accompanist (2 Rehearsals and 3 Performances)	\$200
Scenic Elements (Including Properties)	\$100
Costumes	\$25
Lights	\$0
Space Rental	\$500
Publicity/Programs	\$0
Band (guitar, percussion)	\$250
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1825

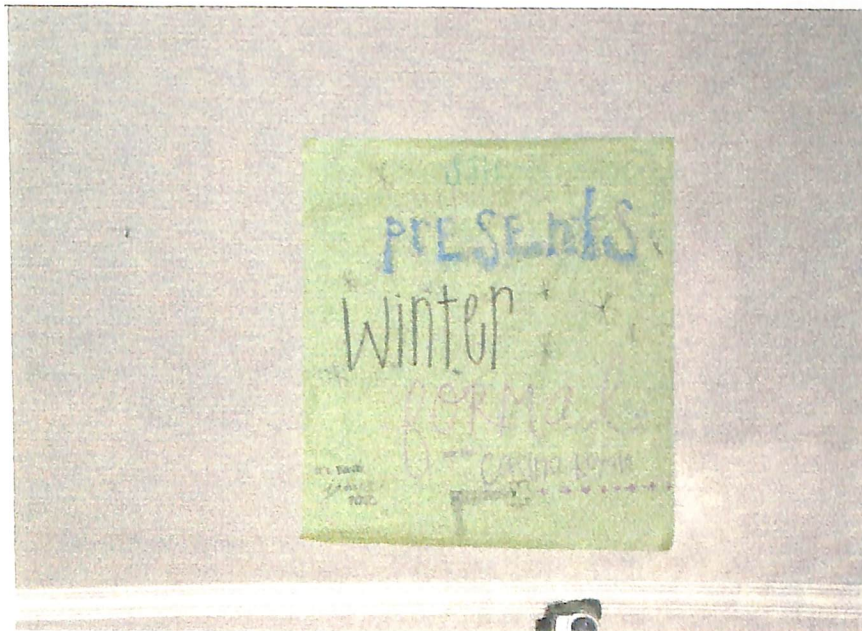
Income:

Honors College	\$750
Private Donations	\$675
Personal Fund	\$400
TOTAL INCOME	\$1825

Set Design



1. The Stage – Johnson Commons Ballroom



2. Poster Example

Blocking



3. "Prologue/Tower of Babble" – The Players and Jesus



4A. "Day By Day" – Natalie Moore, "The Jock"

© Jaime Johnson



4B. "Day By Day" – Final Line, Full Company



5. The Pharisees – Nick Hauser and Natalie Moore

© Jaime Johnson



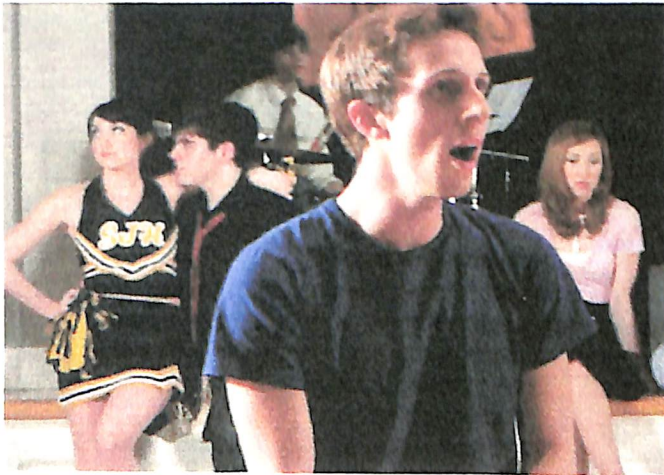
6. "Ten Hut" – Entire Cast

© Jaime Johnson



7. Jesus talks to his flock – Natalie Moore and Josh Baker

© Jaime Johnson



8. "Turn Back" Jesus' verse – Josh Baker, Anna Donnell, Neill Kelly, Brittany Helmes

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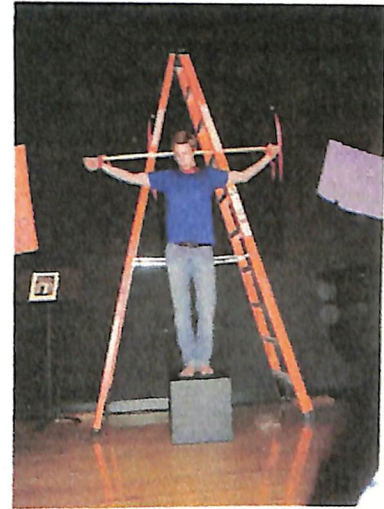
9. Returning the special objects – Full Company



10. The Last Supper – Full Company



11A. Tying Jesus to the Cross -
Josh Baker and Neill Kelly



11B. The Crucifixion – Josh Baker



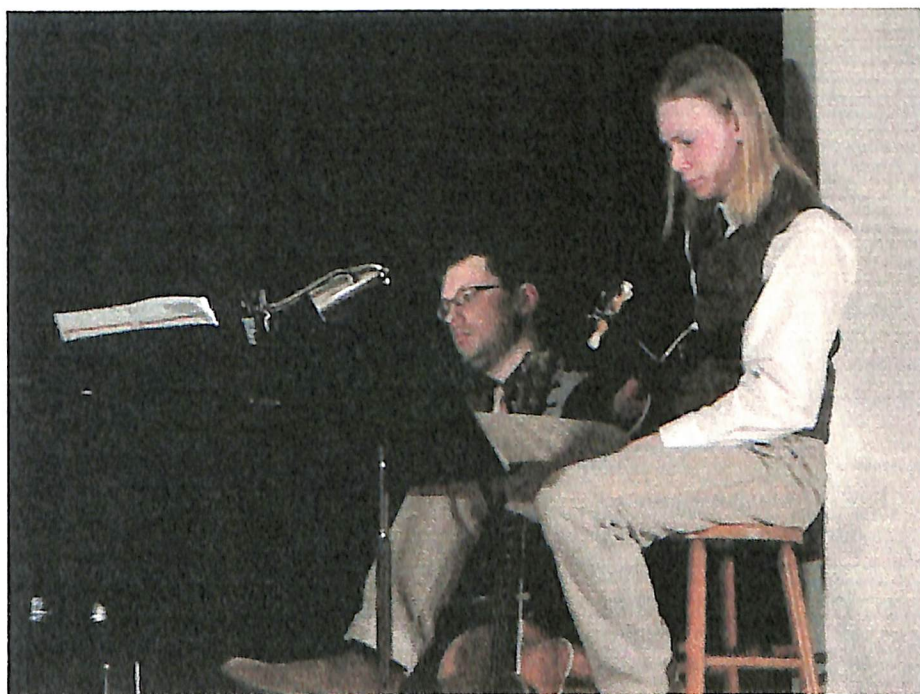
12. Exit – Full Company

Musicians



13. David Frink – Percussion

© Jaime Johnson



14. Paul Brown – Accompaniment

Donovan McCain – Guitar

© Jaime Johnson

Characters



15. The Shy One and Jesus – Kelleé Fuller and Josh Baker

© Jaime Johnson



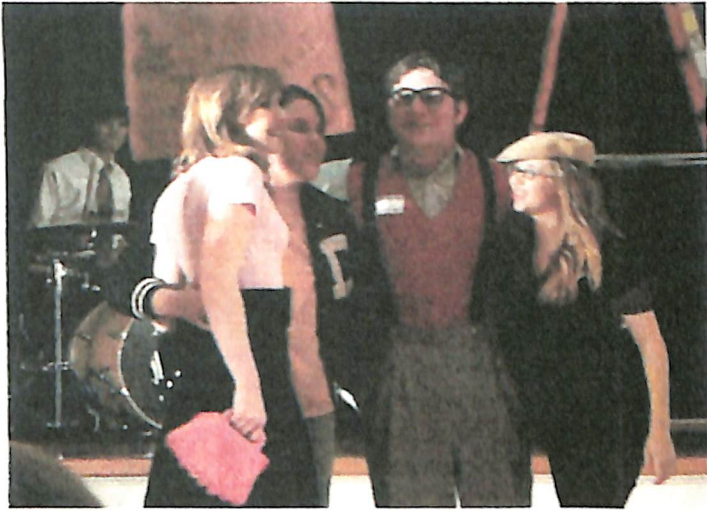
16. The Slow Kid – Gregory Flaherty

© Jaime Johnson



17. The Jock, the Nerd, and the Cheerleader – Natalie Moore, Nick Bredosky, Anna Donnell

© Jaime Johnson



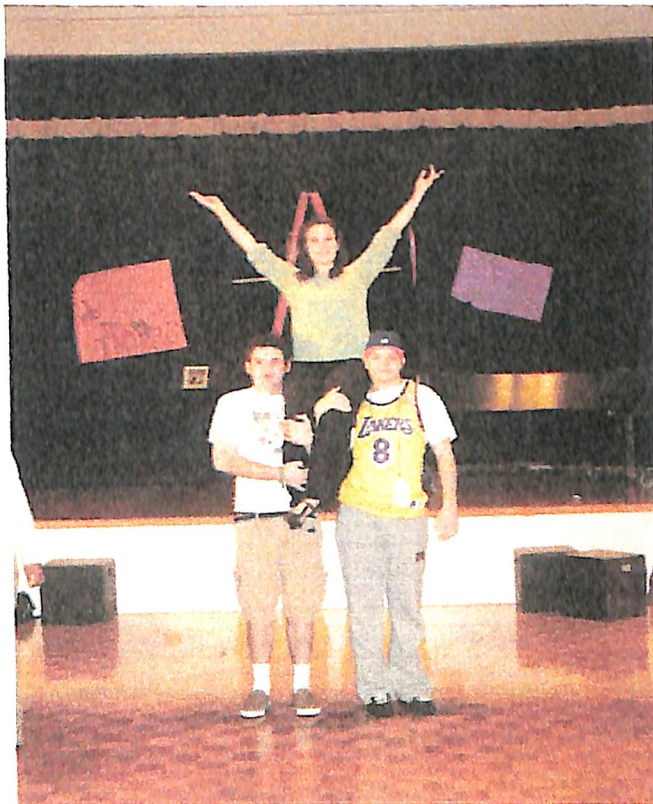
18. The Mean Girl, the Jock, the Nerd, and the Beatnik – Brittany Helmes, Natalie Moore, Nick Bredosky, Pamela Bullock

© Jaime Johnson

Choreography



19A. "O Bless the Lord" – Full Company



19B. "O Bless the Lord" final pose – Gregory Flaherty, Rachel Daniel, Nick Hauser



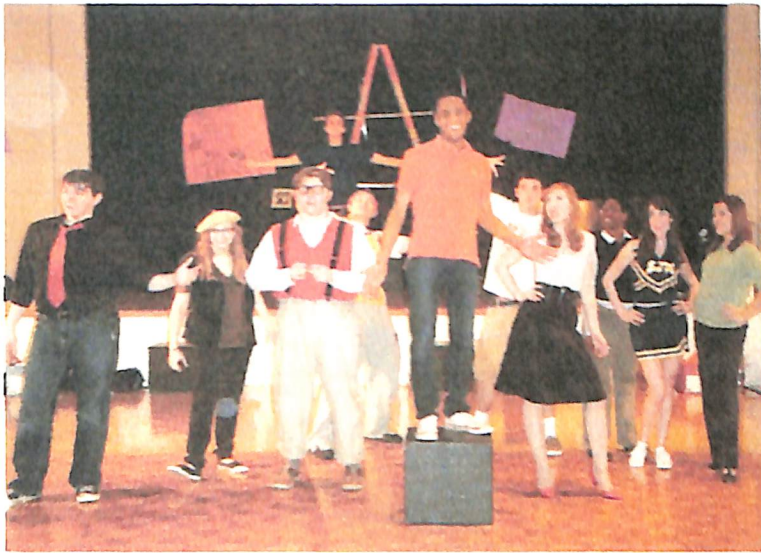
20A. "All for the Best" Jesus and Stage Right

© Jaime Johnson

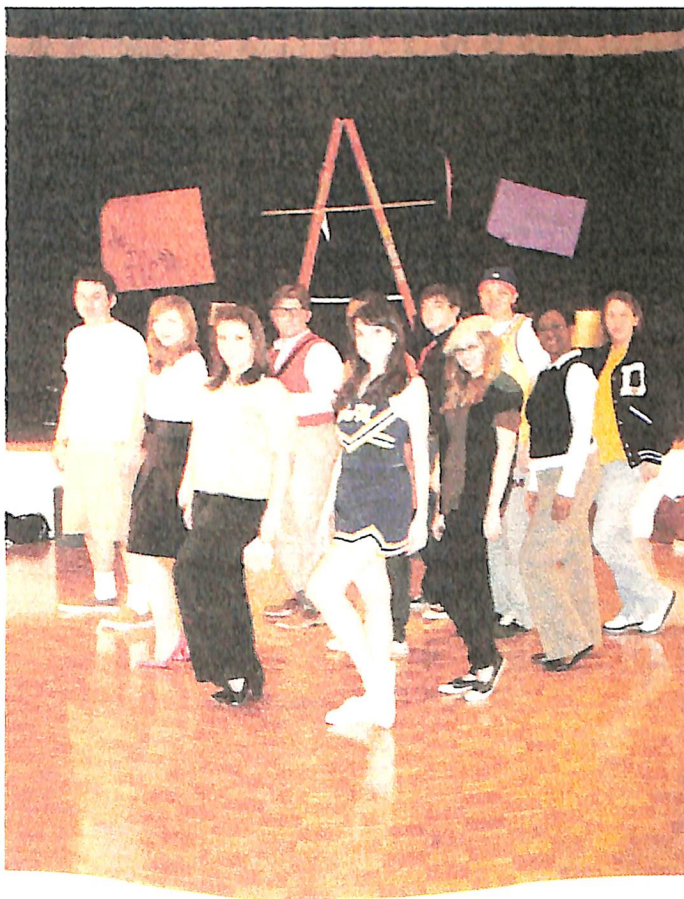


20B. "All for the Best" Stage Left

© Jaime Johnson



21. "Light of the World" – Full Company



22. "Turn Back, O Man" – Full Company

Bibliography

Giere, Carol de. *Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz*. Applause Theatre & Cinema Books: New York, NY. 2008.

Miller, Scott. *From Assassins to West Side Story: The Director's Guide to Musical Theatre*. Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH. 1996.

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The End