

Godspell Pre-Production Packet

Artistic Statement

I am fascinated by this question posed in an LDS children's song: "if the Savior stood beside me, would I do the things I do?" Would He approve of the way that I live my life? Would He recognize me as one of His disciples? Would I even recognize Him?

These are some of the questions I want to explore in *Godspell*. I use the word "explore" intentionally. One of my biggest goals for my production is to work collaboratively with the rest of my team to play, experiment, and discover the show. To me, it's a story about re-evaluating one's personal relationship with Christ/Christianity and perhaps letting go of some preconceived notions about what that has to be. That being said, most of the actors in the show won't be playing characters. They will be playing themselves. In a way, so will the production team and the audience. I want all of us to be able to discover something new about ourselves and our relationships with divinity.

Project Description

Godspell is a musical composed by Stephen Schwartz with the book by John-Michael Tebelak. The show opened off-Broadway on May 17, 1971. My production will be a new cutting of this full-length musical.

"When is *Godspell* set?" is kind of a tricky question to answer. I think of it as set in 35 AD, 1971, and 2022 all at the same time. The story is based on real events that took place over 2000 years ago but brought into a contemporary setting to give new perspective. I love the idea of the New Testament set in the early seventies, but it is more important to me that the story happen *now*, whenever now might be at the time of production. The way I plan on handling that is to set the story today, but with visual allusions to the seventies. Luckily for me, a lot of seventies fashion trends are very popular right now, so I don't think that should be too hard. This nebulous setting sounds a little confusing on paper, but I think it will make sense onstage. After all, *Godspell* is, at its core, a story taking place across time. That's the point.

Character Analysis – John/Judas

1. John enters to prepare the rest of the disciples for the arrival of Jesus.
2. Judas remains onstage to learn from Jesus and help Him teach
3. Judas wants validation and insight from Jesus (at some point this changes – I'm not sure when or how yet, but it's something I'll dedicate some time to figuring out with the actor who plays this role)

4. The moment of transformation for Judas happens somewhere between the beatitudes and By My Side. It can happen gradually, but it has to be completed by the dialogue break in By My Side.
5. Judas changes drastically. He goes from complete devotion to cynicism to betrayal. Making this happen in 35 minutes is going to be one of the biggest acting challenges in the show.

Character Analysis – Jesus

1. Jesus enters to get baptized
2. Jesus stays onstage to teach and get to know the disciples
3. Jesus wants to create a community of believers who can continue His work when He's gone
4. I'm not sure Jesus really changes, just progresses towards His goal. You could think of the crucifixion as a transformation, I suppose – He transforms from alive to dead.
5. Jesus is actually a fairly static character. He's constant from start to end.

Character Analysis – Disciples

1. The disciples probably enter for different reasons, but generally I think they all have questions that they want answers to.
2. The disciples stay to hear Jesus and spend time with Him
3. The disciples want to grow closer to Jesus and learn from Him. I think they probably have some individual motivations that will vary from person to person.
4. Each one of them will find a different moment of transformation during the show. Since they're playing themselves, this will be very personal.
5. Each disciple transforms to be more like Jesus throughout the show and, by extension, a more fully realized version of themselves. Again, these journeys will be very personal to the actors and can't be analyzed much further until the show is cast.

Script Analysis – Structure

1. Exposition: John enters and baptizes the disciples, singing “prepare ye the way of the Lord.” Jesus & His mission are introduced. Jesus is baptized.
2. Inciting incident: Jesus says, “this is the beginning.” He decided that these are the people with whom He will form a community and starts that work in earnest.
3. Rising actions and crises: Songs, games, and parables – the Disciples ask questions and Jesus helps them find answers together. They grow closer and even experiment with teaching. The questions get harder and harder to answer, until Judas comes up against a moment of cognitive dissonance he can't reconcile with.

4. Climax: the betrayal & crucifixion

5. Resolution or falling action: the Disciples resolve to continue teaching what they learned from Jesus, singing “long live God.”

Script Analysis Continued

1. As you think about your story, what ideas are the most influential?

The words I keep coming back to are “radical love.” I have heard Godspell described as a deconstruction of Christianity. If this is the case – if we strip the Christian faith to its very core – love is in the center. Or at least it should be. That’s the story I want to tell. I want to remind people that underneath the thousands of years of tradition and ritual, the story of Jesus is a story about a bunch of radical young people creating a community based on love. That’s just about the most impactful idea of all in my eyes.

2. In your opinion, how might your play be relevant, appropriate and/or meaningful for Your audience?

I have a really unique opportunity here because I’m putting this show on at a Christian University. Everyone I work with on this show will probably have some idea of who Jesus Christ is and some relationship with/to Him. Provo is a community where Christian faith is woven through everyone’s lives, whether they like it or not. In recent years, a lot of young people have pushed back against that, and it’s not difficult to see why. For a religion that preaches love over everything, Christians (particularly LDS Christians) in practice can be pretty exclusive. My goal here is to remind people who share my faith what our Master actually taught us, in a stripped-down, unexpected way. If even one person walks away from Godspell with a little motivation to “see [Him] more clearly, love [Him] more dearly, follow [Him] more nearly,” the production will have been a success.

3. What are the laws or rules of the world of the story as you see it?

Jesus is the literal Son of God and has all the abilities and responsibilities that come with that. Essentially, the rules are the same as the rules of the New Testament, except that time is a little more nebulous. The performers will have access to contemporary objects, clothing, jokes, etc.

4. How do you intend to use the resources of the stage or online platform to manifest the life of the play?

Since Godspell is a musical, we’re going to use all the tools a musical affords us to tell this story. We’re going to sing and dance and play in ways that you don’t get to with any other artistic medium. We’ll find some cobbled-together set pieces and interesting props

to play with, but those elements will be pretty simple. Sound and lighting will be similarly simple, existing only to support the storytelling happening onstage.

5. What form is your production going to take as you strive to engage your audience?

Music and dancing are automatically engaging, so we have that going for us. I also want to incorporate some audience interaction into the show. There are a few games in the script that call for an audience member to get up and play with the cast and I really want to lean into those. The actors playing the Disciples will also start the show in the house, interacting with the audience members. I think this will emphasize the feeling that Christ is inviting not just the actors, but the whole theatre, to come follow Him.

6. Write a one-page inventory of your sensory reactions to the play. This is an experiment of your imagination. For example, what images and/or colors do you see? What textures do feel or experience? How does your text taste? What smells does the play create for you? etc. This could include mood statements and descriptions of concrete images. This kind of imaginative experiment places the text or story into an environment.

Everyone is dressed in free-flowing clothes, and we have flowers in our hair. Several people are barefoot. We are outside. It reminds me a little bit of going to Girl's Camp in the mountain pines of northern Arizona. The sun is warm on my face, there are bugs buzzing and birds chirping, somewhere in the distance there is running water, and the air smells like pine needles. Nobody here is afraid to get a little dirty – we're covered in dust and dry grass, but we don't care. There is a sense of safety and community here as we learn and play and sing together. We know there's a world out there, but for just a moment we don't have to deal with it. It's not a pristine alpine paradise – there's a chain link fence and some beat up camping chairs, but it sort of adds to the charm of it all. Maybe there's an old wooden ramada with peeling white paint, tables with wobbly legs, some cracked concrete. Here there is beauty but also roughness, life and decay, holiness, and raw, authentic earthiness. It is green, gold, and shades of brown, all bathed in pale gold afternoon light. It tastes the way that cold water tastes when you're really thirsty.

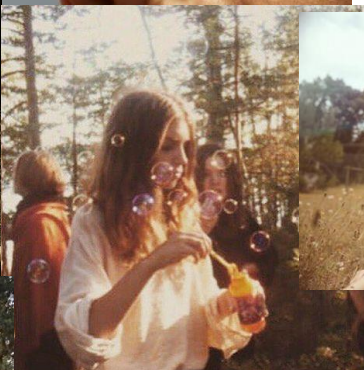
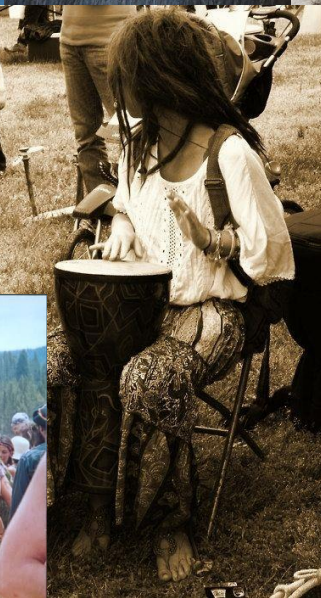
7. Identify a metaphor or metaphors for your production. Metaphors are statements that capture various elements of your production in a different language.

When someone asks for my aesthetic concept in a nutshell, I've been saying "if the Sermon on the Mount was Woodstock." It's more complicated than that, but it gives you a general idea.

I did a lot of written metaphors for the last question, so here's some pictures that I think capture the vibe. Some of these pictures are actually from Woodstock, and the majority of



them were taken between 1969 and 1971. Still, these people wouldn't look too out of place today. That's my goal.



Beat Sheet

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O7xUmSLh0Kh36fnt-1PouR1QyOmWwpkkATC83YsmlTY/edit?usp=sharing>

Research

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_lwNjiDLnhLvg6gv9ftkYu6m9q6LaJpbGEGN1_3sYU8/edit?usp=sharing

Production Schedule

[Godspell Production Schedule - Google Sheets](#)

Rehearsal Schedule

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hoXkebVloWEGAU0SFu9bpMI5z9FeUBqilYcvzEzySdA/edit?usp=sharing>