

PRODUCTION NOTES

Never Thirst Again

by

Deborah Craig-Claar

Premise and Staging Approach

In *Never Thirst Again*, we've elected to tell the life-changing story of Jesus' death and resurrection from the unique perspective of the Samaritan woman at the well as she is transformed by the sacrificial love of Christ. Two actresses portray the woman called Anna – an older woman who looks back at the Passion events from a post-resurrection perspective, and her younger counterpart who encounters Jesus at the well and joins His followers in Jerusalem during Passion Week. This past-present dual-story perspective forms the structure of the musical and all the staging techniques suggested in these production notes are offered in the hopes of clarifying and enhancing this unique approach to the greatest story ever told.

ANNA I functions as a dramatic narrator for the story. She consistently addresses the audience as she recounts her past experiences. In addition to sharing the events she experienced, she also shares her emotions, her questions, her fears, and her victories. Her memories start with her encounter with Jesus at a well in Sychar (John 4:1-42) then progress to the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, Jesus' agony in Gethsemane, the road to Golgatha, His death on the Cross, and the discovery of the empty tomb. Although Scripture does not specify what happened to the woman at the well after her conversation with Christ, it is certainly possible that the woman who ran through her town, telling everyone of her life-changing encounter (John 4:28-30) would have journeyed to Jerusalem to follow her new Master and been witness to the extraordinary events there.

ANNA II is the younger version of ANNA I. As ANNA I recounts specific past events, they virtually "come to life" as memory scenes. Therefore, ANNA II is functioning in realistic dramatic scenes as if they are happening for the first time. This includes not only the famous meeting at the well, but prayers and verbalized petitions to God during the various scenes during Passion Week. It is only in the closing moments of the musical that ANNA II joins ANNA I in addressing the audience directly and offering summative comments concerning the culmination of their spiritual journey.

There are a number of methods you can use to help your actresses – and your audience – keep these two perspectives distinct.

Characterization of the Two Annas

Ideally, you should cast two women in the roles of Anna I and Anna II who bear a resemblance to each other. However, this is certainly not a necessity; many films have cast different actors as older and younger versions of the same character that bear little true physical resemblance

and the audience still believes they are the same person. The key is to suggest their singular identity through posture, movement, voice, and costume.

Regarding **age**, your two Annas can be anywhere from 10 years apart to as much as 30 or 40 years. The script (intentionally) does not designate how many years have passed since the Passion Week events have occurred. Therefore, you can cast two relatively young actresses in the role or use some of the talented older women in your church to portray these two parts. Anna II would surely have been at least in her 20's (and probably older), since she had already had five husbands. The more age difference you can put between your two Annas, the more pronounced the dramatic effect. (For what it's worth, I wrote the parts envisioning Anna II in her early 30's and Anna I in her mid-50's, placing the world of Anna I about 20 years after the Resurrection. But again, this choice is entirely up to you.)

Work with your two Annas to achieve a similar **posture, gait, and movement**. Try and create several "signature gestures" that they both will perform during the course of the musical. (For instance, how they put on their head scarf, how they sit and stand up, how they bow their heads in prayer, how they raise their hands in worship, etc.) A few (just a few) or these well-placed parallel movements will go a long way in establishing the single-character effect.

Also work with your Annas concerning their **voice**. Again, a few similar vocal mannerisms will help establish that they are the same person. If the audience has picked up their similar speaking styles, they will be even more swayed by the similarity of their singing duet during "Power of the Cross." A good exercise to help each actress speak more like the other actress is to have them exchange parts occasionally. When they go back to their own parts, they should have naturally begun to emulate each other.

An important way to link your two Annas is through your **costuming**. Both characters should wear traditional first century Judean garments. The robes that Anna I and Anna II wear should be of similar color and fabric; however, they can (and should) have a slightly different drape and cut. Anna I, as the older character, might have an extra mantle or coat. Although they both would have wrapped their head, Anna II, as the younger character, might occasionally show longer hair. Try and highlight at least one element of the two costumes that will be identical – I suggest the belt, which might be made of twisted or braided cloth.

Characterization of Jesus

Although *Never Thirst Again* is centered on the past-present persona of the woman at the well, the character of Jesus is a critical element since the famous encounter at the well is enacted. You have two options in how you present the character of Jesus. First, you can portray Him with an onstage actor. If you choose this approach, Jesus should resemble the image of Jesus we have all come to embrace regarding age, hair, beard, and clothing. (Special note: Make certain that Jesus and the two Annas are not dressed in the same color.) If Jesus is portrayed by an onstage actor, the well scene will be staged in a realistic fashion and Anna II will interact with Jesus naturally. However, you can also elect to portray Jesus with voice only. An actor will read Jesus' lines offstage. (Do not attempt to prerecord the lines; they must be performed live for

the interpretation and pacing of the scene.) In this approach, Anna II will always face directly forward, as if Jesus is standing directly in front of her. This voice-only approach has several benefits – and is the method I recommend you use. First, you can cast the actor who is best suited to interpret Jesus’ powerful dialogue, regardless of the actor’s age or physical appearance. You will also be able to position Anna II in a visually open position for the duration of the scene. (Two-actor scenes are notoriously difficult to stage since much of the dialogue ends up being delivered in profile.) Finally, using a voice-only approach allows the audience to visually imagine Jesus in their own way. We all have an intensely private image of Jesus in our hearts – this approach honors that personal image and lets each member of your audience imagine Jesus as they “see” Him.

Set and Lights

Never Thirst Again was designed to be presented in a starkly minimalist manner; i.e. no sets or theatrical lighting. Even if you have the space, budget and personnel to accomplish large scale technical productions, you are strongly encouraged to present *Never Thirst Again* on a bare stage with standard room lighting. The center of the musical is the spiritual journey of the woman at the well as she encounters the living Christ. There does not need to be any additional production enhancements to present the power of this story.

Having said that, I will add several addendums. First, it would prove helpful to have a place for Anna I to sit when she isn’t speaking. This can certainly be a tall stool or even a natural area in your sanctuary. Second, although there is no need for any additional lighting, if you elect to put your Annas in individual pools of light, attempt to differentiate them to highlight the time difference. (For instance, Anna I can be in warm amber light and Anna II’s scenes can be in a pale blue light.) You can elect to have Anna II hold an earthen jar in her scene with Christ, but again, this is not necessary. And you are strongly urged not to build a well. The well would only appear in one scene and would, possibly, need to be removed for the second half of the musical; such a scene shift would be very difficult to execute well. It is difficult to make stone structures appear real without adequate (and expensive) materials and the use of full theatrical lighting. So once again – just let the characters carry the day.

Scene/Song-by-Song Staging Suggestions

There Is A Fountain with Song In the Night

This evocative arrangement of two early American hymn tunes serves as a call to worship for your musical. It will set the musical and spiritual themes for the piece. It is suggested that the pastor or host asks the congregation to meditate or pray during this opening choral sequence. Anna I can slowly make her way to the front platform area during this prelude.

Transition

Anna I talks directly to the audience. Depending upon your space restrictions and sightlines (and your actress’s preference), Anna I can either remain seated, she can move about the stage area, or she can stand on one side of the stage. One approach to the staging of the musical is to designate one side of the stage for Anna I and the opposite side of the stage for Anna II. They

will only come together to share the same space for the climatic songs “Power of the Cross” and “Never Thirst Again”.

Prepare Ye the Way (You Reign on High)

This powerful song will evoke the excitement of the Triumphal Entry. If you’d like to recreate the scene, consider having children fill the aisles with palm branches. During the musical numbers, Anna I should remain on stage and watch the choir sing. Do not attempt to have her make repeated entrances and exits.

Transition

As designated in the script, when Anna I says “...except for the fact that He knew me,” Anna II should make her entrance. She can either enter down a central aisle in your auditorium, she can enter from offstage, or, if you’ve elected to use theatrical lighting, Anna II can be “discovered” working as a light comes up upon her. Time this entrance so that she is in place by the time Jesus first addresses her. As discussed earlier, Jesus can either be portrayed by an onstage actor or an offstage voice. The famous encounter scene is scripted as interplay between Anna I and her memory (Anna II/Jesus), so the lines often overlap and interrupt each other. The overlapped lines are indicated by parenthesis in the script. Carefully rehearse this scene so it has fluidity and heightened pace. The scene should naturally build to the climax at the unison declaration “The Messiah.” If you’ve elected to have Jesus appear onstage, He will have to exit after His line “I am He...the one speaking to you.” Simply have him slowly turn and walk away as Anna II turns front and the Annas continue to speak excitedly. As Anna II cries “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Christ?” she should run up the center aisle of the church, continuing to spread (in hushed, excited ad libs) the news of her encounter with those in the audience. Anna I continues to talk directly to the audience as the scene moves to Gethsemane.

Gethsemane Hymn (To See the King of Heaven Fall)

This emotional song encompasses Christ’s agony in Gethsemane and the road to Calvary. Anna II should slowly reenter during the first choral stanza and kneel, as if at the foot of the Cross. When she speaks between stanzas two and three, she is speaking her thoughts out loud as she looks at the dying form of Jesus. Anna I continues to speak directly to the audience.

Transition

This same perspective (Anna I speaking to the audience, Anna II speaking her thoughts out loud) continues over the introduction to “You Were On the Cross.”

You Were On the Cross

Anna II continues her thoughts-out-loud perspective in musical form as she sings the solo on “You Were On the Cross.” During the song Anna I will appear in deep reflection.

Transition

Anna II looks up and speaks directly to the audience, recounting the discovery of the empty tomb. Anna II responds emotionally, as if experiencing the event for the first time.

Hallelujah! Christ Is Risen

During this jubilant song of celebration, Anna I and Anna II should naturally rejoice and worship their risen Lord.

Transition

At this point, Anna II joins Anna I in addressing the audience directly. They share their heartfelt testimony of redemption and forgiveness.

Power of the Cross

The direct testimonies of Anna I and Anna II naturally segue into a stirring duet. The two women might move into the same space for the first time in the musical. They can sing side by side or, if you have a variety of levels or stairs on your platform, one can sing behind (at a higher level) the other. If you use this upstage-downstage position, it is suggested you place Anna I downstage, to allow her a more direct connection to the audience for the following song.

Transition

The two Annas' direct testimonies to the audience continue and segue into "Never Thirst Again."

Never Thirst Again

Anna I moves toward the audience and sings this final song of testimony as heartfelt worship. The congregation is naturally invited to join her on the chorus. Anna II will join the congregation. Anna I sings the final chorus a capella.

If the pastor wishes to deliver an Easter message or an invitation, he can do so at this time. If not, the musical continues to "Peace Be With You."

Peace Be With You

This beautiful choral benediction can be used as the end of the service, as a time of prayer and meditation, or as a bridge to the triumphant finale. (If Anna I and Anna II are still on stage, they can sing "Peace Be With You" with the choir. They should sing directly to the audience, almost in an attitude of invitation and blessing.)

The musical can conclude at this point. For churches that wish to end their musical in a more energetic and triumphal manner, the choir (and two Annas) can sing the finale.

Finale includes Hallelujah! Christ Has Risen (Reprise) with Crown Him with Many Crowns