

READERS THEATRE SCRIPT

of

Never Thirst Again

with

Production Notes

by

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WHAT IS READERS THEATRE?

Readers Theatre is a performance style that employs minimalist traditional theatrical production techniques while calling on the audience to “see” the world of the theatrical story with their imaginations. Traditionally there is no set, lights, costumes or props. Actors do not memorize their lines but read them from scripts. Readers Theatre does not attempt to create the illusion that the events of the story are actually occurring on stage, but rather, creates (as one Readers Theatre enthusiast puts it) “a theatre of the mind.”

Readers Theatre has been known by many names over the years. It has been called Interpreters Theatre, Concert Theatre, Chamber Theatre, Platform Theatre, Staged Reading, StoryTheatre, and Theatre of the Word. The Institute for Readers Theatre defines it as “a combination of oral interpretation and conventional theatre utilizing two or more readers...to communicate the full intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic content of the literature to the audience.”

Professional Readers Theatre traces its origin to 1945 when a professional group in New York who called themselves Readers Theatre, Inc. produced *Oedipus Rex*. In the early 1950's, a Readers Theatre ensemble composed of acting heavyweights Charles Laughton, Agnes Morehead, Charles Boyer and Sir Cedric Hardwicke toured the country to great acclaim by performing *Don Juan in Hell* from George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*. Broadway has hosted other Readers Theatre productions over the years, including Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*, Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood*, and A.R.Gurney's popular *Love Letters*. Radio plays are, of course, a form of Readers Theatre, since the actors read their scripts and there is no formal staging. This form of theatre reached its peak in the 1940's. Beginning in the 1960's, Readers Theatre became very popular within college theatre departments. (As an undergraduate theatre major in the early 70's, I directed Readers Theatre productions of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body*. They were two of my most memorable theatrical directing experiences.) Today, Readers Theatre continues as a mainstay in professional, university and community theatres and is frequently used in elementary and secondary classrooms as curriculum. Christian Readers Theatre ensembles, in particular, have experienced notable growth and have found that scriptural and liturgical materials make excellent Readers Theatre material. It is our hope that many might elect to present *Never Thirst Again* using this exciting “theatre of the mind” approach.

The following production notes are offered as a guide to the traditional performance techniques used in Readers Theatre. Following these instructions is a script of *Never Thirst Again* that has been specially organized and marked for a Readers Theatre performance.

PERFORMANCE SPECIFICS

Performance Space

The performance space used for a Readers Theatre production usually consists of tall stools (preferred) or chairs, arranged in a straight line across the front of the stage. In front of each stool/chair is a music stand. It is important that the stools/chairs and music stands match; the preferred color is black. The look of the performance space should be formal and symmetrical.

Although theatrical lighting is not necessary for a Readers Theatre performance, it can be used to highlight the readers and to establish mood. However, it is strongly suggested that once lighting has been established, that there be no internal lighting cues during the performance.

Dress

In the early days of Readers Theatre, the actors were always dressed quite formally, often in dinner jackets and floor-length gowns. The dress has evolved to a more informal dress, usually all in black. This uniformity allows the audience to concentrate on the text and let their imaginations supply the appropriate historical costuming.

Using the Scripts

Although the actors are, in essence, reading their scripts, they must deliver their lines with the same energy, pacing, and interpretation that they would bring to a fully-staged performance. This will necessitate a good amount of rehearsal and directing. Scripts must always be used, even if the lines are largely memorized. The cast must appear to read from the scripts, although their ability to consistently look up is considered very appropriate. Page-turning and other usages of the scripts should be subtle and not distract from the performance. It is best to place the scripts in black, hard-backed folders.

Acting: Physical Movement

The physical movement of the actors in Readers Theatre is extremely limited. A character's entrance to a scene is indicated by looking up from the script with an inner surge of energy. Exits are indicated by looking down at the script with a decrease of energy. The tempo of these motions is dictated by the mood/pace of the scene. Head and hand gestures during the actual scenes that are natural and appropriate in scale to the performance space are encouraged.

Acting: Offstage Focus

The chief component of performing Readers Theatre involves a technique known as offstage focus. Offstage focus is a technique in which the actors visualize the characters of the story directly in front of them rather than looking at their fellow actors. To achieve this effect, actors should imagine a mirror on the back wall of the theater or sanctuary; "seeing" themselves in this "mirror" is the correct focus spot. The director can also stand in the middle of the audience area and help direct the actors' focus in the appropriate direction. As the actors direct their focus "out front," it should be slightly over the heads of the audience. If the script calls for a character to "break the fourth wall" and talk directly to the audience, then they should do so, making sure that they scan to every area of the audience and not just directly in front of their stool/chair.

Entrance of the Ensemble

The group of actors should enter together in a formal, rehearsed manner. (Their entrance can be before the performance begins or during the opening musical number.) They should enter with good posture and a sense of purpose – heads and eyes up and focused. The group should all carry their scripts in the same manner, preferably in their upstage hands. After they arrive at their respective stools/chairs, they should turn toward the audience and sit at the same time; the last arriving cast member should give the cue. When sitting, bend from the knees, keeping the upper torso straight. The scripts should be placed on the music stands and opened to the first page; rehearse these actions so they happen in unison.

A FINAL WORD

What is Readers Theater? In the words of Vanita R. Smith, the founder of Matinee Readers Theatre in Honolulu, Hawaii: “I believe Readers Theater makes music of the spoken word. It may bring reality to imagination and questions to the listener’s ear. It is a powerful form of imagery for both the actor and audience as both must create this shared encounter. The greater your imagination, the greater your enjoyment of Readers Theater.”

RESOURCES

The follow resources will help you prepare and present Readers Theatre in your church or school.

Print Sources

Readers Theater – Its Methods and Techniques, by Marion Fairman. Contemporary Drama Service, Box 7710, Colorado Springs, CO 80933.

RT: A Readers Theater Ministry, by Todd V. Lewis. Kansas City, MO: Lillenas Publishing Company, 1988.

Readers Theater Fundamentals, by Fran Averett Tanner. Topeka, KS: Clark Publishing, 1987, 1993.

Internet Sources

Readers Theater Digest: <http://readerstheatedigest.com>

Institute for Readers Theatre: <http://www.readerstheatreinstitute.com>

NEVER THIRST AGAIN

The Promise of Easter

Created by Deborah Craig-Claar, Allan Douglas and Phillip Keveren

Arranged and Orchestrated by Phillip Keveren

Readers Theatre Script

(Before the performance begins, the three actors (Anna 1, Anna 2, and Jesus) should make their entrance at the same time as the choir. (You may also elect to only have two actors – Anna 1 and Anna 2 – and have Jesus portrayed by an offstage voice. See the general Production Notes posted on wordmusic.com for additional information using this approach.) When the actors arrive at their stools/chairs, they should turn front, place their scripts on the music stands, open them to the first page, then slowly sit at the same time. The actors may also elect to stand during the performance. [See Production Notes for additional information on entrances.] During the singing of the first (and subsequent) choir number(s), the actors' focus should either be on their scripts, or completely down, almost as if in an attitude of prayer. [Their focus should not on the audience or the conductor.]

I. THERE IS A FOUNTAIN with Song In the Night

(“Song In the Night” concludes, Underscore A begins. ANNA 1 looks up and talks directly to the audience.)

ANNA 1

My song in the night. My Lord of each day. That's the unexpected, the *inconceivable* grace of Jesus Christ. He willingly endured three days of darkness in a cold grave...thereby rescuing me from my night. Then He rose on the third morning into the brilliance of life everlasting...and delivered me to a new day. That's the power of the Cross. That's the miracle of the empty tomb. That's the love of Jesus Christ.

(Underscore A concludes about here)

The road to the Cross was long – the road from the tomb would be longer. I shared the journey for such a short time, yet it changed my eternity. I remember the day Jesus entered the city gates for the last time; it was so many years ago, but it may as well have been yesterday morning.

(“Prepare Ye the Way [You Reign on High]” intro begins)

(over intro) Cloaks, palm branches, hosannas...all strewn in the dusty Jerusalem road. The crowds made way for a powerful king – but we weren't expecting the gentle servant that arrived.

(Anna 1 again bows her head; all three actors hold this position during “Prepare Ye the Way”)

II. PREPARE YE THE WAY (You Reign on High)

(At the conclusion of “Prepare Ye the Way [You Reign on High]”, Underscore B begins. Anna 1 looks up and speaks over it; she talks directly to the audience.)

ANNA 1

The hosannas were short-lived. Voices have a way of fading quickly, especially when promises seem broken. I confess – I was one of the many who expected a warrior brandishing a sword, ready to crush Rome’s tyranny. This was the Messiah we’d been waiting for...but this was not the Messiah who arrived on the back of a colt that noisy afternoon. I probably wouldn’t have known Him, expect for the fact...that He knew me. I had met Him several years earlier...in a small Samaritan town called Sychar...about noon...by a well...

(Underscore B fades out about here.)

I was busy at work that day. My eyes were downcast; I thought I was alone. Then, suddenly, I heard a voice...

(Jesus raises his head and speaks, using offstage focus, speaking just over the heads of the audience, looking directly in front of himself. [See Production Notes for more information on offstage focus.] Jesus can also be portrayed with an offstage voice.)

JESUS

Woman. Will you give me a drink?

(Anna 2 now looks up as she hears Jesus’ voice. She also looks just over the heads of the audience, directly in front of herself, using offstage focus. Anna 1 will continue to speak directly to the audience during this sequence.)

ANNA 1

A man was sitting at the well. I was stunned. He was Jewish and they did not associate with Samaritans. I said “(How can)...”

ANNA 2

(overlapping) (How can) you ask me for a drink?

JESUS

If you knew who it is that asks you...he would have given you living water.

ANNA 1

“Living water?” I said...

ANNA I2

Living water? Where can you get this (living water)?

ANNA 1

(overlapping) (Living water?) What could this man possibly mean?

JESUS

Everyone who drinks the water I give him will never thirst again.

ANNA 1

Never thirst again! I cried, "Sir, (give me this water)..."

ANNA 2

(overlapping) (Give me this water) so I may cease coming to this well.

ANNA 1

I was not prepared for what would follow.

JESUS

Go, call your husband and come back.

ANNA 1

I couldn't speak. So many secrets; so much shame. I had lied for years about my past. But this time...I could only utter the truth...

ANNA 2

Sir. I...I have no husband.

ANNA 1

(hushed) I have no husband. I was not married to the man I was presently with. But this stranger knew all about that, as He did my previous five husbands. Yet...there was no condemnation in His voice; only grace. Surely, He was a prophet. "Sir," I said..."(I can see)..."

ANNA 2

(I can see) you are a prophet. I know that Messiah is coming, and He will explain everything to us.

ANNA 1

Then time seemed to stop. He looked directly at me, and said...

JESUS

I am He...the very one speaking to you.

(Jesus now slowly lowers his head, back into a prayer attitude. The following lines between the two Annas continue to overlap, building to a climax.)

ANNA 2

Could He be...?

ANNA 1

...He must be...

ANNA 2
...the One we've been waiting for...

ANNA 1
...the One *I've* been waiting for...

ANNA 2
...the Christ...

ANNA 1
...our Anointed One...

ANNA 1 & ANNA 2
(*unison*) The Messiah.

ANNA 2
I must tell everyone...

ANNA 1
So I ran back to the village...up every street, to every doorway...

ANNA 2
Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Christ?

(Anna 2 lowers her head to a prayer attitude; Anna 1 continues to speak directly to the audience.)

ANNA 1
Many believed. Others did not. My reputation as one not to be trusted preceded me. And so the whispers and gossip returned. I eventually traveled to Jerusalem – to escape the lies, and to find the One who knew the truth about me.

(“To See the King of Heaven Fall [Gethsemane]” intro begins)
(over intro) But Jerusalem proved to be no different than my tiny village. Religious authorities spewed hatred and condemnation. “Hosannas” became denials...then silence. Even those closest to Jesus turned away at the end. As He knelt in a dark garden, He was alone...with His Father.

(Anna 1 lowers her head. She will look up to speak directly to the audience between Stanzas 1 and 2, and again between stanzas 2 and 3.)

III. TO SEE THE KING OF HEAVEN FALL (Gethsemane)

(Anna 1 raises her head and speaks directly to the audience after the first stanza.)

ANNA 1

Jesus left the garden to accept what lay before Him: the most brutal of beatings, cruel thorns, a blood-stained robe...and a cross.

(Anna 1 lowers her head as the choir sings stanza two. She raises her head at the conclusion of the stanza and again speaks directly to the audience.)

ANNA 1

I also traveled the long road to Golgatha, a barren hill that became the scene of Jesus' death. I joined the growing crowd there. Soldiers mocked Him, women wept. But I was filled with rage. An innocent man was being executed! Then, I remembered the words of the Hebrew Scriptures...

(Anna 2 raises her head, using offstage focus; her lines are spoken as if she is praying out loud to God.)

ANNA 2

He was despised and rejected by men...a man familiar with suffering...He carried our sorrows...

ANNA 1

I, too, had been rejected by men. I, too, knew suffering. But why did this man chose to carry my sorrows...all the way to death on a cross...?

(Anna 1 and Anna 2 both lower their heads as the choir sings stanza three. "To See the King of Heaven Fall [Gethsemane]" concludes. Anna 1 raises her head and speaks directly to the audience.)

ANNA 1

In the ninth hour, Jesus breathed His last. I heard Him beg His Father to forgive us...but I was still not sure my sins could be forgiven. But yet...I could not forget the ancient words...

(“You Were On the Cross” intro begins. Anna 2 raises her head, and using offstage focus, speaks as if she were on Golgatha, looking up at the figure of Jesus on the Cross.)

ANNA 2

(over intro) “He was despised and rejected by men...Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...” Oh Lord Jesus, can you truly take my pain, can you carry my sorrow...?

(Anna 1 lowers her head; Anna 2 will continue to use offstage focus, as if she were looking at the scene of the Crucifixion, as she sings the solo in “You Were On the Cross.”)

IV. YOU WERE ON THE CROSS

ANNA 2

LOST, EVERYTHING IS LOST

EVERYTHING I'VE LOVED BEFORE IS GONE
ALONE, LIKE THE COMING OF THE FROST
AND A COLD WINTER'S CHILL IN MY STONY HEART.

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN ALL THAT I'VE HOPED FOR
WHERE WERE YOU WHEN ALL THAT I'VE DREAMED
CAME CRASHING DOWN IN SHAMBLES AROUND ME?
YOU WERE ON THE CROSS.

ANNA 2& CHOIR
PAIN, COULD YOU TAKE AWAY THE PAIN
IF I FIND SOMEONE TO BLAME, WOULD IT MAKE MY LIFE SEEM EASIER?
ALONE, ALL MY FRIENDS ARE ASLEEP
AND I CAN'T FIND ANYONE TO STAY AWAKE WITH ME.

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN SIN STOLE MY INNOCENCE?
WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I WAS ASHAMED?
HIDING IN A LIFE I WISH I NEVER MADE.

YOU WERE ON THE CROSS,
MY GOD, MY GOD, ALONE, ALONE,
YOU WERE ON THE CROSS,
YOU DIED FOR US, ALONE, ALONE
YOU WERE ON THE CROSS, VICTORIOUS, ALONE.

ANNA 2
YOU WERE THERE IN ALL OF MY SUFFERING
YOU WERE THERE IN DOUBT AND IN FEAR
I'M WAITING FOR THE DAWN TO REAPPEAR...

("You Were On the Cross" concludes; Anna 2 slowly lowers her head. Anna 1 raises her head and speaks directly to the audience.)

ANNA 1
It seems as though I've spent my life waiting for the dawn to reappear. So many sunless days, so many empty nights. And there had never been a darker hour than when His lifeless body was laid in a borrowed tomb outside Jerusalem. Jesus Christ was dead...and all my hopes had died with Him. Saturday was grey and silent. Jesus' followers had disappeared; they were they were either paralyzed by grief, or hiding in fear. Once again, I felt abandoned.

(Underscore C begins)

I slowly packed my meager belongings and prepared for the long journey home. I would leave at daybreak – although I knew I would be traveling without direction or light.

(Underscore C concludes; direct segue; "Hallelujah! Christ Is Risen" intro begins)

(over intro) But on that third morning, the dawn did finally appear! In the early shadows, I met several women on the road...they had come from the tomb. "The stone is rolled away!" they cried. "Jesus has risen!"

(Anna 1 lowers her head as the choir sings “Hallelujah! Christ Has Risen.”)

V. HALLELUJAH! CHRIST IS RISEN

(“Hallelujah! Christ is Risen” concludes; Underscore D begins. Anna 1 raises her head and speaks directly to the audience as Anna 2 raises her head and speaks using offstage focus, as if speaking to herself.)

ANNA 1

On that indescribable morning, my life changed forever. I was no longer lost...

ANNA 2

...I had found a home.

ANNA 1

I was no longer hiding in shame...

ANNA 2

...I was forgiven.

ANNA 1

I was no longer abandoned...

(Underscore D concludes about here)

ANNA 2

...I was a child of God.

(“Power of the Cross” intro begins; both Anna 1 and Anna 2 will maintain their direct-audience-focus and off-stage-focus, respectively, during their solos and duet in “Power of the Cross.”)

VI. POWER OF THE CROSS

ANNA 1

ONCE IN DARKNESS, NOW IN LIGHT
ONCE BLIND, NOW I SEE
ONCE A SINNER, NOW A SAINT
ONCE BOUND, NOW FREE.

THAT’S THE POWER OF THE CROSS
SEE THE CHAINS FALL
THAT’S THE POWER OF THE CROSS
SEE THE CHAINS FALL.

ANNA 2

ONCE A STRANGER, NOW A CHILD
EMPTY, NOW FILLED
ONCE CONDEMNED, NOW RECONCILED
BROKEN, NOW HEALED.

ANNA 1 & ANNA 2(*in duet*)

THAT'S THE POWER OF THE CROSS
SEE THE CHAINS FALL
THAT'S THE POWER OF THE CROSS
SEE THE CHAINS FALL.

ANNA 1, ANNA 2& CHOIR

ONCE A PRODIGAL, NOW HOME
ONCE LOST, NOW FOUND
ONCE AN ENEMY, NOW A FRIEND
ONCE POOR, NOW CROWNED.

THAT'S THE POWER OF THE CROSS
SEE THE CHAINS FALL
THAT'S THE POWER OF THE CROSS
SEE THE CHAINS FALL.

ANNA 1&ANNA 2

SEE THE CHAINS FALL
SEE THE CHAINS FALL.

(“Power of the Cross” concludes; Underscore E begins; Anna 1 continues her direct-audience-focus and Anna 2 continues her off-stage-focus for the following lines.)

ANNA 1

That's the power of the Cross: the darkest sin is washed white as snow...and I am forgiven.

ANNA 2

That's the miracle of the empty tomb: the grave has been defeated...and I am redeemed.

(Anna 2 now closes her eyes in genuine prayer as Anna 1 sings “Never Thirst Again.”)

ANNA 1

That's the love of Jesus Christ: He died for me, He rose for me, He's returning for me...and we will live with Him, forever.

VII. NEVER THIRST AGAIN

ANNA 1

YOU HAVE CALLED ME, JESUS, TO THE SHORE
WHERE ALL MY SINS ARE CLEANSED,

I WILL TAKE YOUR LIVING WATER, LORD
AND NEVER THIRST AGAIN.

ANNA 1 & CHOIR/CONGREGATION

I WILL NEVER THIRST AGAIN
I'LL NEVER THIRST AGAIN,
I WILL TAKE YOUR LIVING WATER, LORD
AND NEVER THIRST AGAIN.

ANNA 1

I WILL NEVER THIRST AGAIN
I'LL NEVER THIRST AGAIN,
I WILL TAKE YOUR LIVING WATER, LORD
AND NEVER THIRST AGAIN.

(Anna 1 now joins Anna 2 and Jesus with bowed head, as the choir sings “Peace Be With You.”)

VIII. PEACE BE WITH YOU

(The musical can end with “Peace Be with You” as a benediction, or conclude with the “Finale.”)

IX. FINALE includes Hallelujah! Christ is Risen Reprise and Crown Him with Many Crowns

(When the musical has concluded, all three actors should “drop character” and either exit with the choir [[in the same manner they made their entrance] or participate naturally in the rest of the service.)