

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### *He's Alive Forever*

By  
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#### **The Concept**

During the spring of 2006, John Jennings of Word Music approached Robert Sterling and me with an intriguing new idea: Rather than write a more traditional tell-the-story-of-Easter musical, how about creating some shorter musical worship services that could be used at various times throughout the Easter week? Creatively and spiritually, we were very excited about the possibilities. The days that preceded the death and resurrection of our Lord are among the most dramatic and powerful recorded in Scripture. The idea of focusing on several events in depth as an opportunity for worship was especially intriguing, as well as challenging. I also felt it was an idea whose time had come. I had heard from enough worship leaders around the country (including my own) that this would be a welcome resource. Many churches elect to hold multiple services during Easter week and need to pull material from a variety of sources; we hope *He's Alive Forever* can become a staple in your Easter worship library.

*He's Alive Forever* can work on a number of levels. It can function as a collection of 12 individual songs, to be performed by either praise teams or choirs during services that lead up to Easter. And although it was not specifically fashioned to be performed cover-to-cover, with some careful insertion of original narration and Scripture readings, you can certainly create a custom-made full-length Easter worship musical for your church. But the intended purpose of *He's Alive Forever* was to provide you with three separate musical sequences around which you can build worship services for your Easter week celebration: *Hosanna!* for Palm Sunday, *Beneath the Cross* for Good Friday, and *Risen to Reign* for Easter Morning. The packages can either end or begin your service, as written. They can also be used to provide special music at various points within your service. We worked hard to make the sequences modular in nature, so they might easily expand to accommodate sermons, readings, additional singing, dramas, dance, film clips, or any other worship activity you choose to incorporate.

Of particular note is the **performance DVD** that was created to accompany performances of any section of *He's Alive Forever*. The use of the DVD will accomplish many ends. It will provide projected lyrics for your congregation, either to read or to use in singing. It will also project corporate reading responses. It will offer a visual reflection of the mood and message of the songs. Using the DVD is not essential; any part of *He's Alive Forever* can certainly work without the use of the DVD, but it will unquestionably be a wonderful addition to your worship program. I want to thank Michael Dupree of Word Music for creating this wonderful worship resource.

These production notes will consider each of the three service-musicals separately, offering a wide array of ideas concerning performance options, visual enhancements, and possible additions. It is my hope that they will also help ignite your own creative spark as you customize each service for your church and congregation.

### **Use of the DVD**

The use of the DVD during your performance of any section of *He's Alive Forever* should be easy to manage. The DVD contains the full stereo, split-trax and click track (for use with live orchestra) and is designed to be played from the beginning until the end of each of the three services. Your need to pause the DVD at various points will be determined by the order and content of your service. If your worship leader wants to insert lengthier segments between the songs, you will simply need to coordinate the timing with your sound technician. Several other points in the services may need some manual manipulation by the sound operator, but these will be discussed within the context of each service discussion.

### **Navigating the DVD**

When you insert the DVD it will automatically take you to the main title graphic of the musical, and then move to the Main Menu page.

Selecting Audio Options from the Main Menu will take you to a Track Menu, where you will select the audio for your presentation. Once you select the audio preference you can start the musical at the beginning, or select different tracks within the musical.

To begin the musical for your presentation, select the title you need. Once you select the appropriate track from the menu, you will be taken to a black screen that lasts approximately four seconds. Pause the DVD at this point and you will be ready to begin your presentation. You may pause between each track as needed, or you can let the DVD continue and it will automatically advance to the next track.

When connecting audio, you only need to connect the right and left channels to your sound system, and the video output to your video system. There is no audio recorded in the “center” or “surround” channels.

We strongly suggest that your DVD operator have the capability of monitoring the video on a separate screen. There are times that you will want to mute the projector, such as when making song selections from the Track Menu or navigating between chapter points.

### **HOSANNA!**

*Hosanna!* will almost certainly be performed on Palm Sunday morning as part of your regular Sunday worship. Therefore, there are not any unique production needs (stage setting, lighting, etc.) outside of what you have planned for Palm Sunday worship. However, the visual and emotional connection to the seminal object of Palm Sunday—the palm branch—is very strong, and you might consider displaying these in as many points around your sanctuary as possible. You might also invest in enough small palm branches for every member of your congregation; they will pick these up as they enter the auditorium. They will then use them as part of the worship sequence. *Hosanna!* has been created to be led by a single Worship Leader and a worship choir or team.

### **Hosanna with Forever**

The coupling of these two dynamic praise songs should make a perfect opening for your Palm Sunday service. The Worship Leader opens with an energetic call to worship, involving congregational response. (measures 10-20) The congregational responses will appear on the

screen if you are using the DVD; if you are not using media, you can lay out the responses in a printed bulletin. “Hosanna with Forever” also provides an ideal platform for interpretive dance or movement. The sequence can also be used as a time of greeting.

### **Transition**

Immediately after the conclusion of “Hosanna with Forever,” the Worship Leader greets the congregation. Although lines have been scripted, this is certainly a time where each Worship Leader will speak spontaneously and from the heart. The introduction to the next song, “Save Us,” begins with “It is a day wrapped in paradox...” and this is when the music (“Hosanna [Underscore]”) actually begins. This warrants a few additional words of explanation, if you are performing the service using the DVD.

Because there are 15 or so seconds of “black” video and instrumental audio after “Hosanna with Forever,” the chapter point for “Save Us” actually starts on the piano underscore (“Hosanna [Underscore]”). As such, if you play the video straight through it will go from the end of “Hosanna with Forever” straight to the underscore. (In other words, the opening scripted narration isn’t factored into the video track.) This was an intentional choice due to the modular nature of the video, allowing you “space” to do your own welcoming. Your operator will need to pause the video after “Hosanna with Forever” and then manually forward the video to the next chapter at the appropriate time during the narration.

And two variations: If you want to perform the song by itself (with the narration as written), the video operator will again need to select that chapter from the menu, press “pause” and then start the video at the appropriate time during the narration. Lastly, in the event you might want to perform the song “Save Us” without any introductory narration, you’ll need to manually cue the video to the appropriate point in the video (right after the underscore text “save us” fades to black) and press “pause.” The operator can press play to begin right in on the actual song (this factors in the click countdown as well). Since there are several measures of instrumentals before the vocals begin, the operator will have plenty of time to start the track and then fade their projector up from black before the video really gets going.

(Never fear—there aren’t special notes like this for any other song in the musical. The visual element [the syllabication of the word “hosanna”] in the underscore made this short sequence unique.)

The transition into “Save Us” might warrant a few words. Although we traditionally think of Palm Sunday as a uniform time of joyous praise, it really had, as the narration states, a “duality of emotion.” I feel that is perfectly embodied in the Hebrew meaning of “hosanna” – “save us.” The song that follows allows the congregation to contemplate that meaning on a personal level, and to consider what individual sacrifice they may be called to make in the wake of the Jesus’ sacrifice for the world.

### **Save Us**

“Save Us” is an easily taught worship song of personal petition and meditation. The lyrics are all drawn from Psalm 118, the same psalm quoted by the crowds that greeted Jesus during the Triumphal Entry. (“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Psalm 118:26) “Save

Us” can be led vocally by the Worship Leader or by a member of the worship team or choir. The Worship Leader can invite the congregation to sing, to pray, or both. The media images chosen for this sequence are a montage of individual faces, highlighting the reflective nature of the song. (If you create your own media, you might follow this same pattern and use images of people from your congregation and community.)

### **Transition**

After the conclusion of “Save Us,” you can pause the DVD and insert additional readings or a brief sermon or testimony. You can also invite the congregation to join in extended prayer time. If you choose to continue the service, let the DVD/trax continue. As the Worship Leader makes mention of the “place Jesus held in His heart for children,” the group of children that will sing on “Lift Up Your Voice with Hosanna” can run down the aisles and from the sides to join the Worship Leader on the platform. These children can be your existing children’s choir or simply volunteer children from your church. They can be dressed in their Sunday best or in simple Biblical robes and sandals. They might also carry palm branches. The Worship Leader should gather them around himself as he gets ready to sing.

### **Lift Up Your Voice with Hosanna**

This celebrative song is based on the text found in Isaiah 40:9, and joyously heralds the arrival of Jesus through the gates of Jerusalem. It was fashioned to facilitate a physical reenactment of Jesus arriving on a donkey amid palm branches. Even if you decide not to enact the event, the climax of the song and the jubilant reprise of “Hosanna” will provide an exciting conclusion to the musical service. If members of your congregation picked up palm branches when they entered the service, now is their opportunity to use them.

If you are going to enact the Triumphal Entry, you will need to time Jesus’ entry to make the most of the climax of the song—the key change at measure 51. If your aisles are relatively short, Jesus should first appear at this time. However, if the journey will be longer, you should send Him in earlier (at the beginning of the second verse or second chorus). That way, Jesus will arrive at the front of the auditorium at the climatic measure 51. You might also bring in a number of non-choir individuals (youth work especially well) to function as crowd members to accompany Jesus. If Jesus rides a donkey, the animal should be led out of the room after Jesus dismounts. Because children have been an integral component of the song, you might end “Lift Up Your Voice” (measures 70-72) with a single child running to Jesus, who lifts the child high in the air. This will help usher in the final reprise of “Hosanna”. If you used dancers in the original “Hosanna”, they should return at this time. The musical sequence should end with a praise-filled tableau.

### **BENEATH THE CROSS**

*Beneath the Cross* differs from the other two musical services in this collection in two important ways: first, the musical was fashioned to be presented in an evening service on Good Friday rather than a Sunday morning service, and second, *Beneath the Cross* does not call for significant congregational musical participation. Although it is most definitely a worship service, the worship is often private and internal, calling on the congregation to participate with responsive readings, prayer and meditation. The approximate time of the program elements, as presented

here, equal about 30 minutes. It is expected that you will add additional material to these components in the way of pre-service worship, private prayer, possible testimony and/or a sermon to expand the musical to a full-length service. The most appropriate places to insert additional material are at the various points when chimes are heard.

*Beneath the Cross* was written in the format of a *tenebrae* service. *Tenebrae*, which is Latin for “darkness,” is a service emanating from earlier centuries which is most often held on Good Friday to represent the death of Christ. The choice of music and readings trace the progressive hours on Friday, leading to Jesus’ last breath. Lighting is gradually reduced throughout the service, often accomplished through the extinguishing of candles. With the final candle extinguished, the congregation leaves the service in silence and darkness, privately meditating on Christ’s atoning sacrifice. In other versions of the service, sanctuary objects are gradually removed or covered in dark cloths, so that the worship environment becomes virtually barren and desolate. Another variation progressively subtracts the musical components (choir, instruments, etc.) of the worship service, so that a single, unaccompanied voice concludes the service before the last candle is extinguished.

You are encouraged to include as many of these elements in your presentation of *Beneath the Cross* as you consider appropriate and feasible. The following production notes for each musical segment will trace how the various parts of the *Tenebrae* can be incorporated.

Because *Beneath the Cross* recounts Christ’s journey to Calvary and His hours upon the Cross, a large full size wooden cross would make a powerful central visual symbol. To facilitate the extinguishing of light, the sanctuary should be filled with candles. Five large candles should be placed in a central position on the platform. (Each of these candles can be extinguished, one by one, to correspond with the five chime segments in the service.) The choir and other service participants should be as visually unobtrusive as possible. (Wearing dark clothing will help accomplish this.) *Beneath the Cross* is scripted for a Worship Leader and two readers, but you may add as many additional participants as you’d like. (If you plan to enact the progressive candle extinguishing, you will need a group of carefully rehearsed individuals to carry out this task at the designated times.)

**A Note Concerning Candles and Darkness:** The use of any open flame in a public building requires meticulous attention to safety standards and meeting local codes. If you have never lit candles in your sanctuary or auditorium before, be sure to consult with your local fire marshal as to the appropriate procedures and what equipment to use. Although this service should be conducted in a dimly lit sanctuary, it will never be pitch black—even at the end of the service. In addition to the required exit signs, be sure there is enough light to easily facilitate an exit by any individual in the auditorium at any time. Using a blue gel on lights can help maintain a dimly lit, somber atmosphere, while still providing enough light for safety concerns. If your congregation has never attended a *tenebrae* service, you will need to provide information—both verbal during an earlier service, and printed in a bulletin and/or on easels in the church foyer—concerning the unique format and environment.

## **The Chimes**

A distinguishing feature of *Beneath the Cross* is the use of recurring chimes between various sections. Chimes begin the service in the introduction of “Were You There?” and then are used strategically throughout the service to mirror the reduction of light and the approach of Jesus’ death. Starting with five chimes at the conclusion of “Were You There?” (CD point 33), the chimes reduce by one chime each time they are heard, until the final solitary chime ends the service. The chimes are included on the accompaniment tracks and on the DVD. They can also be performed live, using real chimes or the chime stop on an organ. They provide a moment of reflection—a “Selah” in the service—and allow candles to be extinguished. You may want to pause the accompaniment tracks or DVD after each chime segment to allow each group of candles to be extinguished before continuing. This will give the order of service a slow, reverent pace, and allow for silent prayer and reflection. These pauses also allow you to insert any additional material you choose to customize the service for your situation.

## **Before the Service**

As the congregation enters, the sanctuary should be lit with candles. Those arriving can enter a silent sanctuary or you can arrange for several live acoustic guitars and singers to gently lead those assembling in quiet singing. Individuals are encouraged to come forward and kneel before the cross, pray, and prepare their hearts. The songs chosen should be well known to your congregation and address the theme of the Cross and Christ’s sacrifice. (“The Wonderful Cross”, “Worthy Is the Lamb”, “Beneath the Cross of Jesus”, etc.) When the service begins, the opening chimes of “Were You There?” should segue naturally out of the quiet time of worship.

## **Were You There?**

The soloist for this piece (and subsequent soloists in *Beneath the Cross*) should not receive focus or be specially lit. He/she might sing the solo from the back of the sanctuary, from the balcony, or from the side of the platform. As this song functions as a call to worship, there is a black screen on the DVD for the first two verses. When the Worship Leader begins to speak (measure 57), soft, shifting close-up images of the wood of the Cross begin to appear. As the song concludes, the image broadens to reveal the three Crosses of Calvary against a red sky. This will set the central theme for the entire service.

## **Transition**

The first set of chimes (5) is heard immediately following “Were You There?” At this time approximately one-fourth of the sanctuary candles should be extinguished, as well as one of the five large candles on the platform. The Worship Leader recounts the events on Friday that led Jesus to the Via Dolorosa. The two readers read from Scripture as the Worship Leader reflects and interprets the events. (The scriptural passages are from the NIV version of *The Bible*.) These sequences should be performed simply and directly, allowing the congregation’s focus to remain on the cross.

## **This Man of Sorrows**

“This Man of Sorrows” is a mournful, emotional song based on the Isaiah 53 text that so elegantly describes the suffering Christ endured for each of us. As this is a song of personal reflection, there are no visual video images. The black screen allows each member of the congregation to focus on the scriptural lyrics and reflect. (“This Man of Sorrows”, “This Man of

Sorrows (Underscore)” and “Jesus Paid the Highest Price”, are individually listed on the DVD menu, as the accompaniment track is included on the DVD, although the screen for these numbers is black.)

### **Transition**

The second set of chimes (4) occurs at the conclusion of “This Man of Sorrows.” This marks the second period of candle extinguishing. Another quarter of the sanctuary candles should be extinguished at this time, in addition to the second large candle in the group of five at the front of the platform.

### **This Man of Sorrows (Underscore)**

The Worship Leader and the two readers lead the congregation through a recounting and response to the seven last words of Christ. The choir and other individuals involved in the service can encourage the congregation to join in the simple response: “Thank you for the cross, Lord.” (As this sequence is during the black-screen segment of the service, the response will not appear on the screen. It is best to let the response happen naturally.)

### **Jesus Paid the Highest Price**

The seven last words sequence segues into “Jesus Paid the Highest Price”, a deeply-felt new hymn that speaks directly to our personal response to Christ’s death on the Cross. Once again, it is a time for personal prayer and reflection.

### **Transition**

The next set of chimes (3) occurs after “Jesus Paid the Highest Price.” Another quarter of the candles in the sanctuary should be extinguished, in addition to a third platform candle.

### **What Wondrous Love Is This**

Introduced by three of the most profound scriptural expressions of Christ’s love, this beloved American folk hymn provides a soaring climax to our individual time of praise and thanksgiving for the Cross. The sequence of video images reflect this moment of worship with a moving study of a historical painting depicting a solitary believer as he kneels at the foot of Christ’s cross. The piece of art is a fifteenth century fresco (1440-1445) entitled “Crucifixion” by Fra Angelico. The figure kneeling at the foot of the Cross is the disciple John. A special note concerning this extraordinary painting by this early Italian Renaissance master: It is averred that Fra Angelico, a devout Christian, never handled a brush without fervent prayer, and that he wept as he painted the crucifixion of our Lord.

### **Transition**

The next set of chimes (2) follows “What Wondrous Love Is This.” The last quarter of the candles in the sanctuary should be extinguished, as well as a fourth platform candle. The sanctuary should now be in darkness, except for a single lit candle at the front of the auditorium, in front of the wooden cross. The Worship Leader leads the congregation in prayer. The formal service is brought to an end.

### **Lamb of Glory**

This gentle chorus serves as a benediction to the service. The video image of candles being extinguished leads to a final, acapella rendering of the chorus. (This final chorus can also be sung by a soloist, helping to mirror the reduction of all elements in the sanctuary.) At the conclusion of “Lamb of Glory”, the final chime is sounded and the last candle is extinguished. The congregation leaves in silence and “darkness.” (Be certain you have informed worshippers that this is how the service will end.)

### **Alternative Service Options**

*Beneath the Cross* lends itself well to a variety of alternative service environments. *Tenebrae* services can be readily conducted as *worship gatherings* in such alternative areas as meeting halls, gyms, or even a hillside. A large wood cross can be placed in the center of the area, and individuals can actually sit and kneel under and around the cross for the service. Actual iron nails and pieces of rough wood can be held by the worshippers as reminders of the suffering of our Lord. During “Jesus Paid the Highest Price” individuals can write personal sins upon pieces of paper and actually nail them to the central cross. Stations can be placed around the cross, where worshippers can pray, sing, or perhaps receive communion. Good Friday beckons us to consider every possible creative means to make the Christ’s sacrifice real and deeply personal.

### **RISEN TO REIGN**

*Risen to Reign* is designed to provide your congregation with a non-stop, high-energy worship service that celebrates the resurrection of our Lord. It is assumed that the musical will be presented during your Easter morning service(s), amid the traditional Easter décor of your sanctuary. The service is led by a single Worship Leader and the lyrics of all four musical segments are graphically reproduced and illustrated on the performance DVD. The service is best served by not pausing the DVD between numbers but allowing it to play straight through.

### **Alleluia! Alleluia! (Call to Worship)**

The Easter version of *Ode to Joy* provides an exciting vehicle to call the congregation to worship. The short congregational responses are prompted by the video, as well as providing key lyrics to guide congregational singing.

### **Transition**

If the Worship Leader or Pastor would like to offer an extended greeting at this point, simply pause the accompaniment track or DVD. If not, the introduction to “Risen to Reign” will begin immediately. The Worship Leader provides a brief set-up for a musical retelling of the garden tomb events.

### **Risen to Reign**

“Risen to Reign” paints a descriptive picture of the events before and during the Resurrection. As the praise team or choir sings and the lyrics are projected, the congregation is invited to imagine the scene and share in the thrill of the announcement: “He is risen!” If you want to act out the event at a scenic garden tomb you’ve constructed with individuals in Biblical attire, it should happen during this song. The events should simply mirror the lyrics, including the

earthquake (measures 28-30), the appearance of the angel(s) (measures 31-33), the rolling away of the stone (measures 34-36), and the emergence of Jesus from the tomb (measures 37-40). If you elect to have women discover the empty tomb and the risen Christ, it should occur during the two choruses (measures 41-end).

### **Transition**

The introduction to “Alive Forever, Amen” begins directly after the end of “Risen to Reign”. The Worship Leader declares that the news of the risen Christ must be taken to the world.

### **Alive Forever, Amen**

The congregation is invited to sing this energetic song that declares the life-changing news of Christ’s resurrection. If you have enacted the discovery of the empty tomb, the women should run back into the congregation, excitedly sharing the news as they run down the aisles of the auditorium. If you have a dance team, this song would provide a perfect vehicle for the interpretation of the song’s message.

### **Transition**

The introduction of “All the Earth Will Sing Your Praises with Alleluia! Alleluia!” segues directly out of “Alive Forever, Amen”. The Worship Leader introduces the song by boldly declaring the promises of our salvation through Christ.

### **All the Earth Will Sing Your Praises with Alleluia! Alleluia!**

This energetic final number allows the congregation to not only celebrate Christ’s resurrection, but the promise of His return. The coupling of this song with “Alleluia! Alleluia!” provides a soaring climax to this service of celebration.

### **An Invitation for Consultation**

I recognize that these production notes are, by necessity, fairly general in nature. As individual-to-your-church questions, thoughts, or concerns arise, please feel free to write me directly. I set time aside every week to discuss production concerns with music and worship directors, and I am happy to exchange ideas, chase down a resource, or simply be a sounding board. (And if I don’t know the answer to a question, I’ll help you find someone who does!) Write me at my home office e-mail: [deborah.claar@sbcglobal.net](mailto:deborah.claar@sbcglobal.net). I will try to always get back to you within three days. May God bless every one of you and your committed ministries as you prepare for the blessed Easter season.

