

Production Notes

Believe

by Steve Moore

Last Easter David T. Clydesdale, Alan Carter, Word Music and myself (and several of you across the country) participated in a new genre of musicals for the Church . . . a musical called *Eyes of Faith*. As I said last year, we explore new mediums not because we want to blaze new creative trails. We do so because the expectations and experiences of the congregations are changing. Twenty-five years ago, music and video merged into an art form unto itself. As the church has always “moved forward forcefully,” we see worship media and presentations also moving and changing with that same force.

Like the predecessor to *Believe*, this production is less an acted-out story, than a “60 Minutes” type of docu-drama. Occasionally, in musicals for the Church, the putting-on of accents, period costumes, and the use of Biblical/King James phrasing, has created distance between the characters and the congregation. We have long wondered what people’s reaction to Christ would be if these barriers were removed. This is the goal of *Believe*. The story is communicated not by the audience watching the activities occur, but by hearing eyewitness accounts. Scene-by-scene staging, therefore, does not change.

It is hoped that this type of presentation removes barriers of language, medium and time. Any staging that enhances this effect is desirable. We hope and believe that this blending of film, music and drama will take the message of the One we follow into more hearts, and deeper into the hearts who already have it.

STYLE

Believe is a type of period piece. Period, in that the situations, thoughts and feelings of the characters all take place during the life of Christ. Modern, because the language, costuming, and the way the message is conveyed is distinctly contemporary. As mentioned previously, it is more docu-drama than melodrama.

CASTING CONSIDERATIONS

If it is desired that the characters be acted live, it is recommended that the accompanying DVD be utilized as a guide. (A Split-Trax version without drama is available for this instance. You will be able to have all the graphics and congregational lyrics from the DVD, but your actors may be live.) In the casting of the DVD, we strove to have characters that were the appropriate age, look, and even ethnicity of the actual characters. Ideally, the actors chosen would mimic this. Importantly, the dialogue is conversational, not formal.

Choir: There is considerable flexibility with regard to choir location and scene participation. The choir is the figurative centerpiece of this musical, and can occupy a

portion of the stage where their music illustrates the thoughts, dreams, and motivations of the characters.

PILATE: Not simply a monolithic Roman governor; Pilate was educated and likely obtained his position from Caesar due to his political assistance, alliance or influence—not unlike how some U.S. Ambassadors are chosen today. Pilate likely prided himself on his education, his “superior” Roman civilization and justice. Though ruthless at times, the Romans believed theirs to be the most civilized and ‘liberal’ society on earth. Pilate, because of both the news he had undoubtedly received about Jesus, as well as the dream of his own wife, appeared curious about Jesus and may have even viewed the trial as his opportunity to meet Him and find out if Jesus was who others claimed he was. Pilate likely viewed the Pharisees as followers of a primitive religion, and maintained peace in Judea by allowing the expression of that religion. It was his job to maintain that uneasy peace.

CAIAPHAS: A capable negotiator and manipulator. He traded control of the populace to the Romans in return for power. Because of his position, he could guarantee the Romans a peaceful Judea, (allowing them to post more soldiers to places where they were more needed) and in return, the Romans allowed the Temple (and therefore, Caiaphas’ power-base) to remain. Jesus’ popularity threatened the peace, and therefore, Caiaphas’ power. Caiaphas made the truth what he wanted it to be, and rationalized the murder of an innocent man. He was willing to hand a Jew over to the Romans for execution for his own selfish ends—all the while cloaking it as an act of religious devotion.

MARY: An incredibly strong woman who endured hardship few other people have experienced. She believed every word her son every spoke, and wondered only why others did not. She was willing to go to the death with him, but was subject to his wishes. A strong, yet devoted woman.

JOHN: Close friend to Jesus who failed him at a critical point—along with the other disciples. Devastated by grief and shame, he was still one of the first to accept Jesus’ resurrection. Strong, honest character, who was unafraid to admit his fears and faults.

THOMAS: Sure of himself and cynical. His frustration with all that was false first led him to Jesus, and then caused him to doubt the resurrection. The last one to believe any story, yet the one—once believing—who most strongly championed it. He had been fooled before and had been burned. This time, he was not going to be the fool.

SET AND LIGHTS

The production is meant to be simple to present. If it is desired that the DVD will provide the dramatic portion of the production, at least one screen will be required, which would be visible to all in the congregation. I have seen this production performed utilizing two screens, and even utilizing five. With two, you have the opportunity to alternate the characters on opposite screens, which would enhance the variety.

Obviously, any screen should not distract from the choir. However, the piece is designed to enhance the choir's presence, not eliminate it or detract from it. With multiple screens, a simple staging would have screens stages right and left, with the screens even with, or slightly downstage of the choir. Similarly, the narrator would also be downstage of the choir, but ideally would not be directly in front of the choir.

Other options are limited only by technical capabilities of your facility. Similar presentations have been produced, where the choir is surrounded (or fronted) by a scrim, which, when lit from the outside, becomes opaque, and can actually be the screen on which the characters are portrayed. When the choir is featured, lighting on the choir renders the scrim largely invisible. Screen placement, however, is limited only by imagination and facility.

If it is desired that the Biblical characters be performed live, staging locations similar to the screens should be considered. A simple staging would include a wash on the choir, with spotlights designating the positions of the actors.

While this piece, as others before it by the same authors, is scaleable, it is best suited to a simple presentation. The costuming, language and set are not complicated. It is hoped that the words and eyewitness accounts of the characters, on their own, will impact the audience.

As I have said before, however, the message of the piece is not dependent upon the scale. It depends upon the way in which it is communicated, and the prayers of the participants.