

JOY JOY JOY

*Celebrating
The Season, The Story, The Savior*

PRODUCTION NOTES

By
Deborah Craig-Claar

CONCEPT

Christmas is the time for joy - not *a* time for joy, but *the* time for joy. It is the yearly event most anticipated and the observance around which every child's world and every adult's memories revolve. It is the season of smiles and laughter, of wonder and praise, of waves and hugs and raised hands. The act of rejoicing is timeless, connecting our contemporary Christmas joy with the joy of those experiencing the first Christmas. How God's people rejoiced at the earliest prophecies announcing the coming Messiah! How Mary's spirit rejoiced at the heavenly message that she was chosen to bear the Messiah! How the shepherds responded in joy to angelic glorias! How the magi joyfully bowed to offer gifts to the King of Kings! And how our hearts cry out in joy today, knowing that because of Emmanuel, God is *with us*, reconciling us to our heavenly Father. Now *that* is joy to the world!

Joy Joy Joy is structured around three progressive themes:

- Our JOY as we experience the season of Christmas
- Our JOY as we relive the story of Christmas
- Our JOY as we embrace the savior of the world

Two hosts, functioning as both worship leaders and narrators, lead us through the musical, inviting us to participate in song, memory, and worship. Beloved carols, new worship songs, and powerful Scriptures are woven together with the sounds and the spirit of the season. Scripture tells us that joy may come in the morning, but at Christmas, joy comes on this most holy night. How *great our joy!*

It is this sense of jubilation, praise, and *joy* that we strove to capture in *Joy Joy Joy*. With these production notes, we hope to spark your own creative ideas in bringing the event of the greatest joy the world will ever know—the birth of Jesus Christ—to life. Although *Joy Joy Joy* is designed to be a cover-to-cover presentation, there is also enough flexibility in the musical so that you can add additional elements to customize the presentation for your ministry and your community.

NARRATORS

The narration in *Joy Joy Joy* is divided between two adults - preferably a male and female. They can be of varying ages, as long as their voices are compatible. (Consider casting a woman with a higher-pitched voiced and a man with a lower-pitched voiced, or vice versa.) Most important, both narrators need to have warm, conversational speaking styles. Over the years I have noticed that the major difficulty narrators have during performance is that they tend to rush their lines. Be sure both narrators have a CD of the underscores so that they can practice their timing. Encourage the narrators to memorize their parts rather than read the narration from a script. This will vastly improve the naturalness of their performance. Both narrators should wear lavalier microphones so they have complete mobility. In addition to letting your narrators move about the sanctuary, you might also consider having them walk directly into the various nativity scenes. This provides a strong visual picture of the ancient Biblical character and the contemporary worshipper meeting at the manger.

You can also divide the narration between a small group of speakers, numbering anywhere from three to eight. A larger pool of narrators underlines the concept of “community” in a very special way and also involves more individuals from your congregation. You might also use individuals from different age groups: seniors, teens and children, as well as young adults. If you decide to split up the narration, I would find unique areas in which to place the narrators when they speak – the balcony, the aisles, even within the congregation itself.

TECHNICAL CONCERNS

Sets and Lights

Because the choir is the visual center of *Joy Joy Joy*, the musical does not call for a specific set or other scenic elements. However, you will want to create a warm, seasonal “frame” for your production that will help give visual focus to your performers. This is often best achieved by putting a brightly-lit backdrop of cyc (a large piece of canvas or material hung from a pipe) behind your choir. The other visual “frame” for your performance may be the projection screen(s) used for media enhancements. If you plan to use visual media predominantly throughout the production, you may want to incorporate the screen(s) directly into your scenic scheme by creating holiday borders with holly, fir garlands, or ribbon.

An attractive (and very appropriate, thematically-speaking) scenic addition to your stage area might be three banners with the word “Joy” hung from your ceiling or mounted on tall poles. These banners can serve as good visual “anchors” to the outermost corners of your stage area or can supply a good backdrop. If your church does not have a banner ministry, you can find out most of what you need to know at www.worshipbanners.com

A large fir tree can also be used to provide a lovely visual centerpiece to your stage area. Instead of decorating the tree with ornaments, consider lighting the tree with clear lights and draping the tree with large cut-outs of the word “Joy”.

Because the Christmas story is told during the musical, you will probably want to locate an area in which the nativity will be staged. Depending upon where your choir is placed, the nativity area can be in a baptismal area over the stage, over to one side of the platform, or center stage. Given the open nature of the musical, you might restrict your nativity scenes to a simple manger without any structural walls. Mixing Biblical and contemporary figures is often a very meaningful way to communicate the message of a Christmas musical.

Your lighting should be bright and warm. Because there will probably be quite a bit of primary red on the stage, your prominent gel color should be pink rather than amber. The nativity area should have its own focused lighting. Using follow spots for the narrators will allow them to move freely about the sanctuary and even into the various Biblical scenes. If you have used a backdrop or cyc, you will be able to project patterns and pictures of light with gobos. A gobo is a small metal cutout template that is placed in the gate of an ellipsoidal reflector spotlight to project an image or pattern of light. There are a wide variety of commercially made gobos that are reasonably priced and easily ordered through theatre supply houses. The most popular Christmas gobos are the star of Bethlehem, fields of stars, angels, and snowflakes. If you do not already have media screens, a cyc or backdrop will also allow you to project video or other media images.

The Lobby

The lobby of your church building would be a wonderful place to highlight the theme of “joy”. In addition to other traditional expressions of the season (trees, lampposts, etc.), you might also ask your Sunday School classes to paint expressions of “Christmas joy” and display them on the walls. You can also ask your entire congregation (all ages) to submit responses to the question: “What is Christmas joy?” These responses (and any accompanying photographs) might be mounted on a wall or corridors for everyone to enjoy.

Dress

Your choir can wear formal concert attire, choir robes, or festive holiday attire. If you choose the latter option, a good principle to follow is the restricted use of primary greens and reds. Ask your choir to create a base costume of black and white. This can include dress slacks, skirts, blouses, sweaters, etc. Primary red and green accessories (vests, scarves, sweaters, mufflers, hats, etc.) are then added to the base costume. You will be amazed how “bright” and clearly defined your choir suddenly becomes, especially if they are standing in front of a lit backdrop. Do not weaken and allow ivory, burgundy, and olive! Black, white, red and green . . . only!

As a rule, soloists may elect to dress slightly more formal than the choir, and the narrators may dress slightly less formal. (If your narrators will be sitting on tall stools, be sure they are dressed appropriately.)

If you will be costuming Biblical figures for a nativity sequence, they should be dressed in first century Judean attire. Choose robes of deeper natural tones (rust, deep green, caramel, etc.) so that angels, stars, and other lighting effects will all appear that much brighter. Remember that the best Biblical costume fabrics are usually large weave, knobby napped, textured material for the holy family and shepherds, and heavy brocades and velour for the magi. The drapery and bedspread sections of thrift stores often yield terrific amounts of material at extremely low prices. Create layers for your characters' costumes by fashioning coats with open sleeves and wide, multi-textured sashes and belts.

SONG-BY-SONG STAGING SUGGESTIONS

Christmas Angels

This exciting opening song is the first of four new Christmas songs in *Joy Joy Joy* from Michael W. Smith's 2007 Christmas album *It's A Wonderful Christmas*. David T. Clydesdale has fashioned a spectacular arrangement for adult and children's choirs and a soloist. The opening prelude (played in a light, enchanting "Nutcracker" style) (m. 1-6) can be used to dim the audience lights to signal the beginning of the performance. On the downbeat of m. 7, as the energetic instrumental introduction begins, the full auditorium lights can come up as the choir and/or other festive individuals come down the aisles to greet the audience. Along with greetings of "Merry Christmas!" and "Joy to the World!" they can hand out special program mementos, including candy canes or homemade ornaments. The children's choir can join them, or can take their places on the platform during this opening segment. At m. 30, both the adult and children's choirs should be in place, as the auditorium lights dim and the full platform lights come up. At this point, the soloist comes forward. (He can be a soloist from the choir or one of the narrators, who will function as a host of the evening.)

During the song, a variety of seasonal activities can continue: decorating a large central tree, "hanging of the boughs" on pews or on walls, sending small "caroler" groups out among the audience.

Underscore 1

After "Christmas Angels" concludes the adult and children's choirs remain on the platform. The narrators/hosts should move along the front of the platform and perhaps even among the audience, as they introduce the message and themes of the musical.

That Joyful Noise!

This entertaining look at the various “noises” of the Christmas season can be performed in several different ways. First of all, the adult and children’s choirs can simply sing the song and let the orchestral accompaniment provide the various sound effects. However, I did hope that individuals would participate in helping to create the “noise.” This is easily accomplished by members of the two singing groups. (You can also recruit non-choir individuals to stand to one side and create the noises, much like the “foley artists” of the old radio shows.) Be sure you rehearse the sound effects carefully, as they are scored as part of the song and must be executed as precisely as the singing. The sound effects include the following:

- **Bells** (m. 5-6, 34-35, 65-66); the bells can be sleigh bells, hand bells, or chimes; the bells can be actually played in sync with the rhythm and pitch of the music, or can be randomly sounded
- **Choirs Singing** (m. 7-8, 36-37, 67-68, 81-82); the choir-singing has been scored for the children’s choir to sing an brief excerpt of “Jingle Bells” and “Silent Night”
- **Laughter** (m. 11-12, 41-42, 71-72); the “laughter” can simply be ad-libbed Christmas greetings and excited chatting and giggling; it will be best to assign a small group of individuals to perform this, as large groups will overpower the accompaniment and make the effect difficult to manage
- **Cell Phones** (m. 26-28); the “kids’ Christmas noise” segment is all about talking on cell phones. There are cell phone sound effects on the accompaniment tracks, but you can also add your own effects by having a half dozen individuals actually call real cell phones held by kids on stage; the ad-libbed lines by a small group of children should include such appropriate lines as “Can you hear me now?” as well as basic chatter. The adults’ scored “Stop!” abruptly ends the cell phone “noise.”
- **Car Horns** (m. 56-58); the “adults’ Christmas noise” segment concern traffic noise during busy Christmas shopping. The car horns on the accompaniment tracks can be augmented with a couple of real hand-operated horns (ooga-horns and other varieties can be found at bicycle shops). The ad-libbed lines by a small group of adults can include “nice yelling” – in other words, expression of exasperation (“She took my parking spot!”) rather than true anger or yelling “at” someone. (Keep control of any ad-libbed sequence; they tend to take on a life of their own; I would assign specific lines and try to recreate the same sequence every time during rehearsals.)

The “crescendo” chorus (m. 78-95) starts with both kids and adults saying “Shh!”, leaning forward with their index finger to their lips. The singing starts very softly, and then gradually builds, finally ushering in the final chorus. (For an extra-fun ending: Although we didn’t record it this way, you might experiment with having several [several

only!] individuals “sound” their sound effects (bells, cell phones, car horns) on the last three measures (m. 111-113), being careful to end cleanly with the final cut off.)

Underscore 2

The mood changes with Underscore 2, as the atmosphere becomes quiet and nostalgic. Two soloists come forward to sing “Christmas Day.”

Christmas Day

This second offering from Michael W. Smith’s *It’s A Wonderful Christmas* features a male-female duet with choir. The two soloists can be in concert attire or you can create a holiday “scene”. Have the soloists wear dress coats and mufflers and sing under a lamppost or by a fir tree. (If you can create snow falling on stage, so much the better.) The video created to accompany this song will help enhance the “memories-of-Christmas” message of the song. (A nice extension of this song for your church family is to dedicate a wall in your lobby for photos of Christmas memories. Encourage everyone to bring photographs of their favorite “Christmas Day” – the older the photo, the better. The photos can be posted with hand-written captions underneath.)

Underscore 3

The end of “Christmas Day” brings the first section of the musical – “Celebrating the Season” – to a close. “Underscore 3” provides a transition to “Celebrating the Story,” the section that will trace the events of our Savior’s birth in Bethlehem.

The Promise

This haunting song by Michael W. Smith and Ryan Smith captures the hopes of God’s people during the hundreds of years of Messianic prophecy. Passages from Isaiah and Micah are interspersed between the opening verses. Although it is scribed to one of the narrators, you can elect to have a Biblically-dressed prophet(s) speak these Scriptures. The opening solo has also been arranged to resemble the vocal prayer of a Hebrew cantor. This solo can also be sung by either a contemporary soloist or a costumed Biblical character. If you plan to stage the various events of the nativity, “The Promise” can feature lit candles, an altar, and other objects of Hebrew worship including a scroll or a menorah.

At m. 51, “The Promise” segues into a soaring worship sequence, echoing praise for the coming Immanuel – our God is with us. The repetitive melody and words – which are displayed on the available accompaniment video – should be easy to teach the audience. The narrators/hosts can invite the audience to sing starting at m. 59. After an emotional climax, the song concludes with a hushed, prayerful coda.

Underscore 4

The scene now moves to Bethlehem. If you plan to stage the nativity scene, Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus should already be in the stable area, positioned around the manger.

Wonderful

“Wonderful” is a beautiful new Christmas worship song, written especially for this musical by Michael Farren from the popular praise band *Pocket Full of Rocks*. The opening female solo suggests a lovely ballad for Mary to sing to her newborn Son. After the choir establishes the chorus and bridge, the audience is invited (by the narrators/hosts) to sing the chorus at m. 56 until m.70, when the soloist/Mary takes over the solo once again. The intimate portrait of the holy family around the manger should provide a perfect initial opportunity for the congregation to offer their corporate praise to the newborn Prince of Peace.

Sing Gloria Tonight! with Glory, Glory!

As the rhythmic introduction begins, lights should flood the auditorium. The heavens explode with the angelic announcement of Jesus’ birth – and who better to set this celebration to music than David T. Clydesdale? Your decision to include live angels will depend upon the size of your sanctuary and your technical capabilities. If you decide to include individuals portraying the shepherds, they should initially react to the intense light from strategic points in the auditorium. As they make their way to the stable area, pace the shepherds’ movement so that they arrive at the manger just before the bridge (m. 58). Plan something special to occur visually during the short reprise of the classic “Glory, Glory!” You might consider having “Glory, Glory!” interpreted by a movement team or a solo dancer as the “step-out” soloists help bring the song to its electric climax.

Immanuel

The tempo quickly shifts from the excitement of the angels’ announcement to the devotion of the first worshippers of our Lord around His manger throne. (Have the shepherds place “common” gifts before the manger – handmade crafts, bundles of food, mantles and cloaks.) The narrators/hosts invite us to join the shepherds – and all of creation – in worshipping Immanuel. Another passionate praise song from Michael Farren facilitates our worship. The congregation is invited to join in worship at m. 96. The projected lyrics should help lead this time of adoration.

Offering with His Glorious Name

Paul Baloche’s beloved worship song “Offering” has received a regal processional arrangement from David T. Clydesdale, creating a perfect sequence for the magi to present their offerings to the King of Kings. If you plan to enact the magi procession, allow your kings to be as regal and opulent as your budget will allow. Keep the scale of their physical appearance large and the pace of their approach slow and measured. You

can add other individuals (especially youth and older children) as entourages and gift-bearers for each of the Magi. The first Magi should process during the first two verses and chorus (m.1-39). Once he arrives, he should present his gift and either stand or kneel to one side. The second Magi should process during the second chorus and repeat (m. 40-58), also laying down his gift and moving to the side. The third Magi should process during the majestic rendition of “His Glorious Name” (m. 59-end). He can kneel with his gift directly before the manger, with his cape being spread out behind him. The final scene should include shepherds and kings, bowing in worship, and the common and regal gifts grouped together before the manger.

Son of God

The musical now moves to the third and final section: “Celebrating the Savior.” During the brief narrative introduction, the nativity figures should slowly and unobtrusively exit the nativity scene. A single, white spot light should focus on the manger as other lights dim. The soloist for “Son of God” can sing from the dark or from the edge of the manger light. This heartfelt song from Michael W. Smith’s 2007 Christmas project presents the final message of *Joy Joy Joy*: “The Son of God is with us.” Once again, the congregation is invited to sing on the final worship sequence, starting at m. 45: “We’re singing Gloria, alleluia!”

Underscore 5

This underscore allows the narrators/hosts to deliver a direct appeal to the congregation, allowing them to respond to the joyous gift sent from God the Father – His only Son, Jesus Christ. The underscore fades out under the narration so that your hosts or your pastor can insert an invitation, a special message, or a prayer. The “Finale” begins when this time is completed.

Finale includes Joy to the World!, How Great Our Joy!, Joyful, Joyful, and Christmas Angels

This exuberant finale includes our most beloved songs concerning the joy of Christmas. The narrators/hosts lead the audience in these well-known songs, including the return of the new song “Christmas Angels.” The media projection of lyrics should help everyone join in this uplifting expression of Christmas joy.

USING THE ACCOMPANIMENT DVD

The DVD for *Joy, Joy, Joy* was created to help visually enhance the themes and moods of the musical, as well as cue congregational participation as noted in the choral score. Projected lyrics will encourage corporate singing, and the other visual elements will help construct an atmosphere of celebration, reflection, and worship. While the musical can certainly be performed without the DVD enhancement, we feel the audience will benefit from the powerful use of visual graphics and projected lyrics of the songs.

NOTE: The DVD has been specifically designed to enhance only the musical numbers. During the narration and brief dramatic scenes, the screen is black, so that the focus remains on the narrator and characters.

The use of the DVD during your performance should be easy to manage. The DVD contains the full stereo-trax, split-trax and click track audio (for use with live instruments) for all songs and underscores, and has been designed to play continuously throughout the musical. As always, it is strongly recommended that you rehearse extensively with the DVD before using it in a live performance. You may also elect to pause the DVD at certain points to insert various program additions, such as a prayer or a message by your pastor.

Navigating the DVD

When you insert the disc into a standard DVD player, it will automatically take you to the main title graphic of the musical, then move to the Main Menu page. At the Main Menu page you have three options: *Stereo-Trax*, *Split-Trax*, or *Click*. These options will allow you to choose an audio track for your performance.

Once you have selected an audio track you will be taken to a Song List. Here you can choose to either start the musical at the beginning, or select a specific title within the musical. To begin the musical for your performance, select “Play Musical” or choose a song title. Once you select a title 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.

Note: In order to maintain consistency between all three audio tracks, the chapter markers are typically set to match the beginning of the Click countdown. This may be of particular importance if you are using these songs independently from the musical (or out of their original sequence) with the Split-Trax or Stereo-Trax. As a result, it is again recommended that you thoroughly navigate through the DVD before using it in a live performance. It is also recommended that DVD operator have the capability of monitoring the video and audio on a separate screen.

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.

A FINAL INVITATION

I’d like to offer my services—both as production consultant and prayer partner—to you concerning any aspect of your production. Nothing is more exciting for me than to hear from gifted and committed individuals, like you, who are bringing these works to life. Please write anytime (no question is too small!) to me at: deborah.claar@sbcglobal.net If I don’t know the answer, I promise to help you find the person that does! I wish you God’s richest blessings in every aspect of your ministry.