

# I'VE SEEN JESUS

## *Production Notes*

By

Deborah Craig-Claar

### PREMISE

*I've Seen Jesus* is a unique expression of the Easter season. The musical starts with the discovery of the empty tomb and ends with the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. It then traces the forty days during which the resurrected Christ delivered His final message to humankind and outlined His vision for our earthly future until He comes again. Each of the Lord's appearances and encounters after His resurrection offers a blueprint for us today concerning how we are to harness the power of His triumph over the grave and live emboldened, impassioned daily lives—what we might call “Resurrection Living.”

- Like Mary Magdalene at the tomb, we may be blinded by earthly grief and pain and not recognize Him when He reaches out to us—until He calls us by name.
- Like the two men on the road to Emmaus, we can become so consumed with daily minutiae that we don't realize He is always walking beside us, desiring our fellowship.
- Like the confused and fearful disciples in the upper room, we often compromise our witness, hesitant of wearing His name publicly in a secular, hostile world.
- Like Thomas, we can easily become hardened skeptics, demanding only physical evidence of Christ's claims, forgetting Jesus offers us spiritual assurance beyond any temporal proof: when we believe without seeing, we are, indeed, blessed.
- Like Peter by the Sea of Galilee, we let our weaknesses and past failings rob us of the conviction that we can fulfill the promise we made Jesus when we first believed.
- Like the 500 that bore witness to the resurrected Christ, we offer praise for His life that conquered death, and worship Him for the gift of His death which gives us life.
- And like all of creation, as He ascended to sit at the right hand of His heavenly Father, we eagerly wait for His return, newly convicted with an urgency to spread the news of His resurrection and the daily power it holds for each of us.

*“I want to know Christ and the power of His Resurrection!”*  
*Philippians 3:10*

### PRODUCTION APPROACHES

*I've Seen Jesus* can best be described as “musicalized story-telling.” The Scriptural encounters the resurrected Christ had with individuals during the 40 days before He ascended comprise some of the most extraordinary and thrilling events recorded in the gospels. I genuinely believe these encounters contain all the drama one could hope for, and so do not need to be embellished or extended in any way when performed. The

encounters are scripted strictly from Scripture, and so are fairly brief and concise. Trying to stage them in a more formal theatrical fashion (changing sets, extensive props, and crowds of people) is simply not feasible, nor will it help convey the powerful theme of this musical. You are encouraged (dare I say *urged*) to keep the musical simple, direct, audience-connected and Christ-focused. There should not be any set, per se, other than your regular sanctuary Easter decorations. Your choir and/or praise team should be placed in the area(s) of the platform they normally occupy during worship. This musical is especially appropriate for live accompaniment, utilizing your praise band with additional instruments. The band should be made an integral part of the performance and placed in a central area on the platform. You do not need any special lighting or sound. If you regularly use media during your worship service, we have provided you with an excellent performance DVD to visually enhance the music with projected lyrics. However, the DVD is optional and the musical can be just as effectively presented without media. The heart of *I've Seen Jesus* is the message. You need only speak and sing it! There are two basic narrative approaches you can use.

### **Two Different Narrative Approaches**

#### **Approach 1: Narrative / Dramatic**

This approach uses a single narrator and different actors to speak the various character roles. (This is how the musical was recorded on the demonstration recording.) Because the majority of the characters are male, I chose a female narrator for balance and contrast, but you may, obviously, cast whomever you'd like as the narrator. You can also split the role up and use several individuals to narrate the story. (I have always felt your pastor would be the ideal narrator of this musical; this would render the musical as a teaching and inspirational vehicle more than a performance.)

The individuals you cast as the characters Mary, Thomas and Peter can either sing their respective solos on the songs associated with their story, or you can have separate soloists perform the numbers. Because this is a *presentational* (rather than theatrical) performance, it will work equally well both ways. The individuals who portray the characters dramatically will, naturally, step out to the front of your platform area as the brief encounters are portrayed.

You can use one of two presentational approaches for these segments. However, whichever one you choose, be sure you are consistent; the same approach should be used with every brief scene.

- Readers' Theatre: This well-known approach allows the actors to use scripts (either held in black folders or placed on stands) and interpret the lines in a dramatically-read fashion. The actors should not be in Biblical costume, but in contemporary dress. (One variation is to ask the actors to wear all black or to coordinate their clothing by color or style – e.g., all wear slacks and turtleneck sweaters, etc.) The actors can simply emerge from the choir, they can enter and exit onto the stage, or they can sit in a line of chairs separated from the choir and step forward for their scene.

- Dramatic Story-Telling: In this approach, the actors will memorize their lines and perform their parts much as they would in a full-staged play. The difference is that their scenes are extremely short and so begin and end fairly abruptly. When you stage each short scene, take extra care that the scenes begin and end smoothly. Here are two reliable methods:

USE LIGHTING: If you have the capability to use focused pools of light, then the characters can be “discovered” in light to begin their scene and the light can go out on them at the scene’s (or song’s) conclusion.

HAVE ACTORS TURN TOWARD THE AUDIENCE: This time-honored method of beginning dramatic scenes in acting classes will work perfectly well in performance. Simply have your actor enter (out of character) unobtrusively during the set-up narration and stand with their back toward the audience and their head bowed. As the scene starts, they turn (now fully in character) toward the audience and perform. When the scene is over, they turn away from the audience and again bow their head. After the audience’s focus has been directed elsewhere (especially to the choir or a media screen), then the actor (out of character) unobtrusively exists.

In the Dramatic Story-Telling approach, the actors can either be in Biblical costumes or dressed in contemporary attire. There is one very special provision that I would encourage (OK, again, *urge*) you to consider if you use this approach, and it is this:

Do not portray the risen Christ physically onstage; the risen Christ should be performed as an offstage voice *only*.

It is far better to allow your audience to imagine the unfathomable appearance of the resurrected form of Jesus Christ than attempt to portray Him physically. Limiting the portrayal of the risen Christ to an offstage voice will also allow you to play all of your short dramatic scenes directly to the audience. All of the characters will face the audience full front and speak to Christ as if He were standing in front of them. This is far more dramatic and engaging for the audience. The actor who will be speaking Jesus’ lines can be placed to the side of the platform, back at the sound console, in the balcony, or anywhere out of the audience’s direct view.

### **Approach 2: Narrated Only**

*I’ve Seen Jesus* can also be very effectively presented using a single (or multiple) narrators. Simply take each brief dramatic scene and render all the character lines as third-person quotations. (In other words, turn it back into Scripture!) The narrator(s) will tell the stories expressively, either memorizing the lines or reading from a script. An effective approach would be to have your narrator(s) memorize the connective narrative

lines, but read the dramatic scenes/quoted dialogue directly out of a large Bible. You can also illustrate these scenes with creative media of your own design.

You will notice that much of the narration is not underscored. This is to keep the “performance” quality of the musical at a minimum, and to enhance the direct communication with the audience. If your pastor agrees to serve as the narrator for the musical, please encourage him or her to make this musical their own and set-up each encounter as they’d like.

## **USE OF THE DVD**

The DVD of *I’ve Seen Jesus* was created to help visually illustrate the themes of the musical through the artistic depiction of the lyrics of the songs. The musical can certainly be performed without the DVD enhancement, but we feel the audience will benefit from the powerful use of visual graphics and projected lyrics of the songs. At times these projected lyrics will encourage corporate singing, and at other times the lyrics can aid in private worship and reflection. The DVD has been carefully crafted by Word Music’s Michael Dupree 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), and has been designed to play continuously throughout the musical. In order to accommodate the narrated sequences that occur without musical underscores, there are several “blank” tracks that have been built into the DVD. (These are listed on the Song Menu as “ENCOUNTER...” tracks.) Because your narrator’s delivery or programming needs may vary, it may be necessary to pause or advance the DVD after each “Encounter” to allow these scenes to happen at their natural tempo. Of course, 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 live testimony or a message by your pastor.

### **Navigating the DVD**

When you insert the DVD 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 specific 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 in this musical are 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.

## **SONG-BY-SONG SUGGESTIONS**

### **Christ Arose**

This exciting contemporary setting of Robert Lowry’s classic lyrics provides the perfect musical expression of the Resurrection. In addition to letting the projected lyrics and artistic backgrounds convey the scene, you can also enact the human events as they are described by the narrator. (Although I strongly suggest you do not attempt to erect any scenery, you can certainly use individuals to mirror narrative events.) Several women (in Biblical dress) can approach the platform at ms. 34. They can pause, as if regarding the angel, and then run to the platform (starting at ms. 43). A pile of muslin cloths can be placed on the platform, and the women can pick them up, rejoicing at the news that “He arose!”

### **I’ve Seen Jesus**

“I’ve Seen Jesus” is a direct segue from “Christ Arose”. From ms. 1-11, the women should suddenly face front, toward the audience, as if they have encountered the risen Christ and are listening to His words. As the vocal starts in ms. 12, the women can run down the aisle, spreading the news that Jesus is alive. You may elect to have a praise team or smaller ensemble come forward to sing the verses on “I’ve Seen Jesus” with the full choir helping to lead the audience in the joyous chorus.

### **Narration**

This extended narration is without underscore so that the theme of the musical may be introduced in a simple, unadorned, conversational manner. You may elect to have the narrator(s) move along the front of the platform, or even among the audience. As previously mentioned, feel free to adapt this segment (shortening or lengthening) to meet the specific needs of your programming and your church.

### **You Call Me Yours (Underscore)**

With the beginning of the underscore, the figure of Mary Magdalene may be discovered in light, or she may turn towards the audience. She might hold the urn of spices she had brought to the tomb to prepare the body. She is quietly weeping. As previously discussed,

Jesus' voice should be delivered from offstage, and when she hears it, she looks up, startled, as if seeing Him before her. Their exchange of dialogue is warm and gentle.

### **You Call Me Yours**

This beautiful song by Regi Stone and Christy Sutherland expresses the heart of a woman embracing the full healing redemption of the risen Christ. If the woman portraying Mary will also sing the solo, she simply begins to sing. If you elect to have a non-dramatic soloist sing the solo, you can either have the character Mary remain on stage, responding to the song, or have her "exit" (dimming lights or having her turn around – then actually physically leave the platform) as the song begins. (This choice of approaches applies to the character solos as well.)

### **Narration**

This brief narration introduces the next encounter – Jesus' meeting with the two travelers on the road to Emmaus. You will surely notice that this is the one encounter that does not have character dialogue. I made the decision not to render this encounter dramatically based on several observations. First of all, the Emmaus road scene is lengthy and eventually covers several geographical settings, making it awkward and relatively impractical to "act out". In addition, the two travelers are somewhat ambiguous individuals, historically speaking, certainly lacking the definition of characters such as Mary Magdalene, Thomas and Peter. This is not to diminish the power of their story! But I felt it best shared through story-telling narration and song. (The exception, of course, is Jesus, who speaks for Himself. Once again, have His lines delivered from offstage.)

### **Open My Eyes**

You may recognize a familiar theme and structure to "Open My Eyes." One of my favorite hymns from childhood – "Open My Eyes, That I May See" by Clara H. Scott – has always reminded me of the Emmaus Road encounter. Each stanza of this classic hymn progressively implores God to open first our eyes, then our ears, and finally, our mouths...certainly the dramatic progression of what occurred on the Emmaus Road. I asked Robert Sterling to create a contemporary worship song based on Scott's beautiful hymn, and "Open My Eyes" is the terrific result. Let the song's thoughtful lyrics (enhanced by media) and the power of the narrated Scriptural encounter tell the story and deliver the message.

### **Narration**

The scene now shifts to a locked room in Jerusalem. As the scene is first described ("...they brought the news of their encounter to the disciples"), the lights can come up on several men grouped together. (Feel no need to have eleven men on stage. If the exact number [eleven] mentioned in Scripture feels incongruous to you, eliminate the specific number and just say "They found them in a secluded room...") When the narration mentions the sudden appearance of Jesus, the disciples should quickly turn front, as if seeing Jesus before them. They respond with excitement and joy.

### **Taking a Stand**

As the introduction for “Taking a Stand” begins, the disciples respond to Jesus’ challenge (voiced from offstage). If you elect to have the disciples remain onstage during the song, they can sing the first verse by themselves, and then join in on the rest of the song. You can also elect to have them exit at the beginning of the song.

### **Narration**

As the narration begins, the character of Thomas should be isolated. He can either step out from the group of disciples who have remained on stage for “Taking a Stand,” or he can be discovered in light or turn around to face the audience. He responds naturally to the encounter with Christ. He then either sings the following solo, or exits unobtrusively.

### **My Savior, My God**

This well-known contemporary song by Aaron Shust makes a perfect testimony for Thomas, who shouted “My Lord and my God!” upon having his doubts shattered by the living proof of Christ’s resurrection. The character of Thomas can sing the song or a soloist will perform after Thomas exists.

### **Narration**

Like Thomas, the character of Peter will either be discovered in light, or will turn toward the audience to begin his scene. (This should happen on the narrative line “One disciple, however, seemed without direction or conviction.”) The interchange between Peter, the offstage voice of Jesus, and the narration is fairly fast-paced and should be rehearsed enough to establish a smooth and effortless flow.

### **Coming Back to Life**

This dynamic new song by Scotty Wilbanks and Chris Peevy was first recorded by the popular group Echoing Angels. In that serendipity that often happens with contemporary songs about modern day spiritual struggles, “Coming Back to Life” seems to also be a perfect reflection of Peter’s post-Resurrection journey, bringing him to a place where he can fully embrace Christ’s healing forgiveness. This song brings the encounter sequence to an emotional climax. Whether sung by the character Peter or a soloist, “Coming Back to Life” should be sung directly to the imagined figure of Jesus (slightly elevated over the audience area). This will keep the “You” reference in the song clear and focused.

### **Narration**

The brief narration that occurs before “You Are Holy” starts can be used to bring all of your dramatic characters (Mary, Thomas, and the disciples) back on stage to join Peter. They group together – some sitting/kneeling, some standing – facing front, listening to Jesus.

### **You Are Holy**

The group assembled on stage should join the choir in this heartfelt time of worship. At ms. 47, as the narrator describes the Ascension, the group can slowly raise their heads and eyes, as if following Jesus as He rises to meet His Father. During the bridge of the song (ms. 50-59), the small group can stand and spread out along the platform area. At

the key change into the final choruses (ms. 59), the audience should be encouraged to sing and join in worshipping the ascended Lord.

### **You Are Holy (Underscore)**

This gentle piano underscore allows your narrator to deliver some of the contemporary lessons embodied in the post-Resurrection encounters of Jesus. You might elect to play this underscore live (keyboard or solo acoustic guitar) to grant your narrator more freedom in the delivery and length of this sequence. Feel free to insert a sermon at this point, testimonies from church members who have experienced similar struggles and victories, an invitation, or an extended time of worship and/or prayer. When you are ready to conclude the musical, begin “I’ve Seen Jesus (Reprise)”.

### **I’ve Seen Jesus (Reprise)**

This rousing reprise challenges the audience to take the central message of the musical and share it with the world. The cast, choir and narrator(s) must join in the song, encouraging the audience to sing.

## **ADDITIONAL APPROACHES TO THE MUSICAL**

In addition to presenting this musical in its entirety on Easter Sunday morning, the modular nature of *I’ve Seen Jesus* makes it a perfect vehicle for a pastor’s sermon series. The Resurrection sequence (“Christ Arose” and “I’ve Seen Jesus”) can be presented on Easter Sunday, and then each of the following six segments (the five encounters and the Ascension) can be presented on the following six Sundays, augmenting a sermon addressing each of the encounters. The strong personal testimony nature of the musical also lends itself to being used as a supplement to adult Bible study. Each Christian can easily remember when they first encountered the risen Christ – this musical gives your church the opportunity to let everyone tell their own story!

### **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](mailto: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.