

VOICES OF CHRISTMAS

Production Notes

by

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CONCEPT

The overall message of this musical is introduced in its title. Its subtitle: *Musical of Prophecy, Promise, and Praise* speaks to the method of the message delivery. Hearing first from contemporary and historic voices that express some frustration, fatigue and loneliness, the musical invites the audience to listen to the voices that surrounded the first Christmas. These were prophets who predicted the coming of Messiah, parents of the child who would be Messiah's forerunner, a shepherd who saw and heard a spectacular announcement of His arrival, and two who held Him in their arms at His official dedication. The audience can hear the hope in these voices and perhaps let their encouragement override the oft-disparaging ones of today.

STYLE

Voices of Christmas is a through-composed, music-driven, choir-centered musical. Its dramatic elements include narration (which can be performed in readers' theatre style), monologues, and "shout outs" from the choir members at various times.

Although there are no scenes with dialogue, the spoken dramatic parts are still a large part of the action that delivers the message. All spoken parts are underscored with dramatic musical motifs.

CHARACTERS

•Narrators:

These characters are like storytellers who speak to the audience and introduce the subthemes and move the nativity narrative along. They should be dressed in contemporary clothes.

•**Narrator 1** (male) – continues to be Narrator #1 throughout the musical.

•**Narrator 2** (female) – continues to be Narrator #2 throughout the musical.

•**Child Narrator** – delivers child narrator parts throughout the musical. (This should be an offstage voice if the accompaniment DVD is used)

OPTION: if the DVD is not used, the Prophecy Narrator or someone else can deliver this narration

•**Prophecy Narrator** (could be offstage if video is used)

Speakers From The Choir:

These are people who step out from the choir and deliver a few lines:

- Male choir members (2)
- Female choir member (1)

Contemporary Monologues/Shout Outs:

These are characters that briefly tell their stories and share their feelings about Christmas to the audience. Dress them in contemporary clothes appropriate to their age.

- Woman 1** – younger to middle aged adult
- Man 1** - younger to middle aged adult
- Woman 2** – older woman, at least 70 years old

Period Characters

These characters address the audience with quotes that depict an historical character. You may choose to dress them in period costumes indicated below. Since they only have a few lines, you may think it not necessary to have them in costume. However, consider using them in a choreographed “parade” of characters during the song *The Voices of Christmas*. Another option for these characters is for them to create a scene or tableau that stays in place until the end of the song. Maybe use lighting to put them in silhouette. This would a nice way to re-emphasize their “voices” and significance to the season. (They also may deliver the “shout outs” found on page 26.) Have them return during the Carol Medley at the end.

- Man 3** (dressed as **Scrooge** from Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*)
- Child 1** (a young boy dressed as **Tiny Tim** complete with wooden crutch from Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*)
- Woman 3** (dressed as **Laura Ingalls Wilder** in 19th century prairie attire)
- Woman 4** (dressed as **Helen Keller** in 19th century city attire; wears dark wire rimmed glasses and carries a white cane)
- Child 2** (Since it isn’t clear when “**Bobby**” lived, we can imagine him as a child of any era, like the 1930’s. As a child of the ‘30’s, for instance, dress him in appropriate attire i.e. knickers, suspenders, ivy wool cap, etc.)

Biblical Characters

- Moses** (could be offstage if video is used)
- Micah** (could be offstage if video is used)
- Isaiah** (could be offstage if video is used)
- Zechariah** (should be offstage if video is used)
- Elizabeth** (an onstage character who sings a solo/duet)
- Shepherd** (should be off stage if video is used)
- Simeon** (should be offstage if video is used)
- Anna** (should be offstage if video is used)

Singing-Only Biblical Characters

- Mary** (dressed in traditional biblical costume)

Optional Characters

- Carolers** in *Voices of Christmas*
- Joseph**
- Angel(s)**

•Wise Men

GENERAL TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Set

If you do not use the accompaniment DVD you might want to create “atmosphere” areas in which live action can take place.

For this option, divide your stage into four sections and create small areas for various pantomimes and monologues:

- 1) Onstage narrators (downstage right perhaps) on stools.
- 2) Prophecy Narrator (an old chair and table with a parchment/quill and a small lamp or candle on it; raised platform at upstage left)
- 3) Period Characters (a Victorian living room, downstage left)
- 4) The choir would occupy the fourth space (upstage, center) and those who deliver contemporary monologues (except for the older woman) and shout outs may cross to the downstage neutral space in front of the choir. Dancers may also use the neutral space. The young voices may sing from the choir loft next to the adult choir or stand just in front of the adult choir on risers.

Lighting

If you use the DVD throughout the musical no special lighting effects are needed. The DVD weaves video and still shots in and out of each song and these will provide visual interest on their own. Be sure, however, that the people who deliver the short one-liners (shout outs, I call them) are well lit and can be heard.

If you do not use the video, light the various areas independently and then create a wash for big choral numbers.

Costumes and Dress

Onstage contemporary narrators may be dressed in black or in contemporary clothes of your choice.

Onstage biblical characters should obviously be dressed in typical biblical costumes. If you use the DVD, images of some of the characters, i.e. Zechariah, Shepherd, Simeon, and Anna, appear in the video so it is not necessary to use costumed characters on stage for these monologues.

Period characters, i.e. Scrooge, Tiny Tim, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Helen Keller, 1930’s child, (if you choose to have them as onstage characters) have costume suggestions in the “Characters” section of these notes.

Props

Little or no extra props are absolutely necessary for this production. However, if you fully stage the musical according to the scene-by-scene directions below, here is a list of props that may be needed:

- An old-fashioned telephone
- A few small gifts
- A simple tea set and baked goods
- An old Bible
- A framed picture or old scrapbook
- An ancient-looking Judean lamp or candle with stand
- An ancient-looking quill and parchment
- Two babies (dolls that play the parts of baby John the Baptist and Baby

Jesus)

SCENE-BY-SCENE

The “scenes” in this musical are actually the songs themselves. If you choose to use the DVD accompaniment track, the settings for the biblical narrative songs are enough to hint at the time and place of many of the events brought out in the songs.

However, if you choose not to use the DVD, here are some staging suggestions:

GOD BLESS US EVERYONE This is the welcome song much like a musical overture for a Broadway musical. It invites the audience to the evening’s event. If young voices are used, the children, the adult choir and soloists may enter at the same time during the introduction.

A small group of proficient dancers may perform classical ballet-type movements also.

THE VOICES OF CHRISTMAS Create a scene using the fictional and non-fictional characters you have introduced in the monologues preceding this song (during Underscore 1). Here are some suggestions for this scene: A small Victorian set may be at downstage left of the main stage to which these characters may cross. Remember that Helen Keller was blind (and deaf) and so someone should lead her to a chair or settee. When a telephone ringing is mentioned at measure 13 in the song, all the characters may look at each other in bewilderment until the 1930’s child goes to answer an old-fashioned telephone sitting on an end table. (All of the characters are 19th century characters except “Bobby.”) The child may then try to give the phone receiver to Scrooge who seems amazed at this invention.

At measure 36, a group of carolers may enter the scene and sing “Deck the Hall” and “Ding Dong, Merrily on High” to the period characters. The carolers exit the scene with pantomimed glad tidings from the characters.

In pantomime, Scrooge may prompt Bobby to pass out small gifts he has brought for the others. Laura Ingalls Wilder could serve the others baked goods and tea. At measure 68, she may take out a Bible and act as though she is reading to the others. A merry atmosphere should continue throughout the song. Lights fade down on these characters at the end of the song as they exit.

WHERE ARE YOU, CHRISTMAS? As suggested in the score the actors who deliver monologues may step out of the choir and move to microphones downstage. However, when the older woman (Woman 2) speaks, you may have her sitting alone in a chair on the Victorian set, possibly looking at a framed picture or an old scrapbook. She may stay in position until the end of the song as the lights fade slowly on her.

THE PROPHECY The Prophecy Narrator moves to the biblical set (see SET) and he delivers his narrations there. The other biblical characters should cross to neutral space to deliver their monologues.

ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH The two characters may deliver their monologues from the neutral space at downstage center. Elizabeth enters carrying a baby. She stays upstage while Zechariah tells the first part of his story. She crosses to Zechariah and gives him the baby as he says, “But once my boy was born...” Zechariah raises the baby up when he says; “I lifted my son toward heaven...” Elizabeth takes the baby back from Zechariah as she begins her monologue.

SLEEP WELL Elizabeth sings the verse of the song to the baby. Zechariah steps back upstage and looks in awe at the sight of his wife and the child. As Elizabeth sings into the chorus, she gives the baby to Zechariah and he exits carrying the baby.

During the narration on page 84, Mary enters carrying her Baby. She sings her first verse to the Baby. If you choose, Zechariah (or another character; Joseph perhaps) can come back in and take Mary’s Baby somewhere around measure 62 so that the women can end the big duet embracing each other.

SHEPHERDS AND ANGELS The shepherd crosses to the downstage center neutral space. He starts the monologue kneeling down but stands up as he says, “Then suddenly the sky blazed...” Space permitting you may want to add an angel in silhouette or in a tight spotlight nearby as the shepherd quotes the angel.

CAN YOU HEAR THE ANGELS SING? This song has a lot of energy on its own and I might suggest leaving it without much movement. However, if you have space this would be a good place to bring in a multitude of the heavenly hosts!

HERE WITH US This is the invitation song. The soloists should sing from

SIMEON AND ANNA These two characters should also deliver their monologues from downstage center. If you choose, you may have Mary (and Joseph, too) re-enter with the Baby in the middle of Simeon's first monologue when he says, "Shrouded in light, I knew..." Mary (and Joseph) may appear in the upstage left biblical set (where the Prophecy Narrator appeared) if the table and chair have been removed. Use subtle lighting for this.

CAROL MEDLEY During "Where Are You Christmas? Reprise" all characters may come back to the stage one group at a time. The period characters should return to the Victorian living room. The Old Testament characters could move to the narrators' stage right space. Then, the New Testament characters could cross to the upstage left space.

JESUS, BORN ON THIS DAY All characters can exit except for the nativity characters where they create the traditional scene as a tableau. These characters could be Mary, Joseph, Shepherd, Baby Jesus in a manger, and you can even add a Magi or two or three. However, this song has a grand message and a spectacular ending and so you may choose to let the choir be featured here.

Below are suggestions for staging using the DVD.

GOD BLESS US EVERYONE This song does not have running images on the DVD, so the above suggestions would work here. However, the children and the soloists may create enough visual interest that no other staging is necessary.

THE VOICES OF CHRISTMAS There are no DVD images for this song either so the appearance of period characters here would be a nice visual. Children are still on stage and their presence usually is enough to brighten things up. Children should exit the stage during Underscore 2.

WHERE ARE YOU, CHRISTMAS? This song does not have running images on the DVD; however, the song's tempo and character is a little more laid-back and thought provoking. Don't feel as though you need movement here. Just a stand-up choir song with a soloist singing beautifully at center stage is enough.

THE PROPHECY begins the video images. These, along with the musical style, put the audience back in time.

ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH has biblical images to start. When the child narrator begins, however, there is footage of a contemporary girl reading from scripture. It's because of this that the child narrator doesn't have to appear onstage but might deliver her lines from offstage. During Zechariah and Elizabeth's monologues images of a baby appear on screen and take the place of live staging.

SLEEP WELL has no running video after the introduction. Elizabeth's solo is tender and moving. Elizabeth should be dressed in biblical costume. Mary, also, sings and she should be dressed in biblical costume as well. The two women can and should interact during this song.

SHEPHERDS AND ANGELS has images of angels as the narrators tell about the angels' appearance. As the child narrator speaks, the same contemporary girl reading scripture appears on the screen. There are also images of a shepherd and sheep therefore leaving the need for a costumed biblical character not necessary. The shepherd, then, is an offstage voice.

CAN YOU HEAR THE ANGELS SING? The video for this song starts with a sky full of stars and then fades out. This could be a place to bring in the heavenly hosts!

HERE WITH US There is no running video for this song. Let the soloists and the choir take the stage.

SIMEON AND ANNA During the child's narration, the video has the same contemporary girl reading the Bible. Images of Simeon and the ancient temple appear on the screen. Therefore the child narration, Simeon's monologue may be delivered offstage. Anna's image appears on the screen during her monologue. Her voice, too, may come from offstage.

CAROL MEDLEY The video with this medley contains holiday images and lyrics on the screen. The congregation should be invited to sing along with the choir where indicated in the score.

JESUS, BORN ON THIS DAY There is no running video on the DVD for this song. Let the choir and soloists finish it out!