Scenic design for the musical *Godspell*

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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Graduate Program in Theatre

The Ohio State University

2009

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Abstract

In April of 2009 the Ohio State University Theatre Department produced *Godspell*, a musical originally conceived by John-Michael Tebelak with music by Stephen Schwartz. This production was built and technically rehearsed in the Thurber Theatre, and then moved to the Southern Theatre in downtown Columbus, OH. As the scenic designer of this production I developed an environment in which the actors and director created their presentation of the text.

Briefly, the director’s concept (Appendix A) for this production was to find a way to make the production relevant to the local population. *Godspell* centers around the creation and support of a community, so by choosing to reference the City Center Mall, an empty shopping center in downtown Columbus, the need for making a change as a community was emphasized. This environment consisted of three large walls that resembled an obscured version of the Columbus skyline, inspired by advertisements within the shopping center. Each wall had enlarged newspapers that could be seen under a paint treatment of vibrant colors. The headlines on these papers referenced articles that the local paper has written about the situation at the shopping center, therefore making the connection more clear. Within the space created by the skyline
walls, there were small indicators of a retail environment: a checkout counter with a cash register, a sign from a former anchor store in the center, and empty clothing racks.

Along with the commercial elements of the design, there were several elements that indicated renovation and repair within the space. An industrial rolling ladder, janitor’s cart and sawhorses created the feeling of a space undergoing change. This paper will examine the development and execution of the design.

Topics addressed in this document include information on the playwright and relevant productions of this text, including a synopsis and brief analysis of the content; a discussion of the specific elements encompassing this production of Godspell; the challenges involved in performing the show in two different theatres; the Director’s concept and how this was translated into a scenic design; and a reflection on the design process and evaluation of the final product. At the end of these chapters there are appendices which include relevant drawings, renderings, plates and photographs to further demonstrate the final result of these ideas. The paper concludes with a list of works referenced.
Acknowledgements

Many thanks to those who supported and encouraged me through my time at Ohio State.

Thank you to Dan Gray, Mandy Fox and Kristine Kearney for their time and efforts throughout the thesis process.
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Chapter 1: The producing situation

On April 16, 2009 the Ohio State University Department of Theatre opened its production of *Godspell* in association with the Columbus Association of the Performing Arts (CAPA) at the historic Southern Theatre in downtown Columbus. The production was built and staged in OSU’s Thurber Theatre, and then moved into the downtown space for seven performances. The Southern Theatre is located in the heart of Columbus, Ohio and the use of this venue provided the staff and students of the Theatre Department with a valuable learning experience.

The Southern Theatre is located in downtown Columbus and was originally opened in 1896. It served as a venue for touring shows, vaudeville, and a multitude of other kinds of performances. The producers experienced a variety of financial difficulties and by 1931 it was only used as a movie house. By 1979 the theatre was in severe disrepair and was closed. It was then given to CAPA in 1986. Several years later CAPA spent 14 months remodeling the space and it officially reopened in 1998. The historic architecture and style had been preserved and it is now used for touring shows and serves as the home performance space for many of the capital area’s music groups.
A traditional proscenium style theatre, the Southern seats 933 patrons. The audience seating is divided between three floors offering a host of vantage points. The proscenium itself is 30’-9” wide and extends up into a rounded arch that is 33’ high at its tallest point. There is both a main drape and a decorative curtain, known as a lambrequin, which can be used as a first border or flown out completely.

The stage measures 40’-5” from plaster line to back wall. Downstage of the plaster line the stage extends into a curved apron which adds nearly 12’ to the stage depth at its deepest point. Approximately 8’-6” of this floor space is a lift which can be lowered up to 13’-6” below stage level in order to become an orchestra pit. For the purposes of this production it was dropped 56”. The Southern has 51 linesets, many of which are occupied by permanent pieces that make up the space’s orchestra shell. None of these linesets are designated electrics, and therefore allow flexibility in the hang schedule. The floor has a finished hard wood surface which cannot be painted or have bolts put in it.

Figure 1. The Southern Theatre
The Southern Theatre is deeper yet more narrow than the Thurber Theatre where the production would be previewed. In order to diminish the need for rehearsal time at the Southern Theatre, a full technical rehearsal process for Godspell was scheduled at the Thurber Theatre in the Drake Performance and Event Center. The proscenium at the Thurber Theatre is 35’ wide and the stage floor is nearly 38’ from plaster line to back wall. This theatre has 35 linesets as well as 4 designated electrics. Like the Southern, the Thurber Theatre has a pit that can be lowered. The front edge of this pit is curved very much like the Southern pit, and is nearly the same size. The Thurber pit is approximately 6” shallower than the Southern pit, and is about 4’ wider.

While these two spaces are remarkably similar there are several differences that make the transition between the two challenging. Because the Thurber is shallower than the Southern, hanging soft goods must be compressed into a smaller space. The masking and flying scenery must be adjusted to fit around the designated electrics in Thurber, whereas the Southern allows for greater flexibility. Also, the fly rail in the Thurber is located stage right, but it is stage left at the Southern. Another major difference between the two spaces is the audience seating. The house of the Southern is much larger and seats people on three different levels, but the Thurber only has an orchestra level. The sightlines in the Southern are quite different because of this.

The first production meeting for Godspell was held on November 4, 2008. The final scenic design was presented on December 2. Because of the impending winter break the Technical Director, Chris Zinkon, and I decided that my final drawings would
be due by December 18, despite the fact that the original production calendar listed their due date on January 13 of winter quarter. The set was moved into Thurber Theatre on March 9 and technical rehearsals began on March 31. After a full technical and dress rehearsal process at the Thurber we moved the scenery and lighting equipment downtown on April 13 where an abbreviated technical process allowed us to open three days later, on April 16. *Godspell* closed on April 19 and the scenery was struck that evening following the performance.

Those involved in this production of *Godspell* included Chair of the theatre department and Producer Mark Shanda, faculty Director Mandy Fox, undergraduate Assistant Director Janice Wessner, guest artist Musical Director Theo Jackson, undergraduate Assistant Musical Director Kevin O'Rourke, faculty Choreographer Jeanine Thompson, undergraduate Stage Manager Brandon Curtis, undergraduate Assistant Stage Managers Andrea Schimmoeller and Margret Glasser, staff Production Coordinator and Sound Supervisor Jim Knapp, graduate Lighting Designer Anthony Pellecchia, undergraduate Assistant Lighting Designer Mike Hesmond, undergraduate Sound Designers Dan Mayer and alum Adrian Varwig, graduate Costume Designer Elisa O’Neal, staff Technical Director Chris Zinkon, and undergraduate Assistant Technical Director Heath Monat. Theatre department undergraduate students acted as run crew during the Thurber Theatre technical process. These students were supplemented by International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) stagehands of local chapter 12 when we reached the Southern Theatre, which is a union house.
Godspell was produced in agreement with Music Theatre international, using the 1971 book as revisited by Stephen Schwartz in 1999.
Chapter 2: The story and history of *Godspell*

*Godspell* is based on the biblical book of Matthew. The text is made up of small vignettes which relate the stories of many of the parables written in Matthew. Through these stories and action, the characters accept Jesus into their hearts and become a community which can survive his passing and carry their faith beyond the life of Jesus.

The play opens with a brief monologue from the actor playing Jesus. He states his beliefs and then this moment segues into a prologue in which eight of the ten actors represent various philosophers throughout the ages. Each one relates a different philosopher’s theological beliefs and as the music builds they begin to sing and speak over one another. This creates a cacophony that grows until the sound is exhausted and the philosophers collapse. This sequence is meant to represent the falling of the Tower of Babble. As each individual asserts his or her personal belief the dissonance causes chaos and the structure cannot sustain itself.

Once the metaphorical tower has fallen there is stillness and John the Baptist enters. He sings “Prepare Ye,” and proceeds to baptize the eight in preparation for the coming of Jesus. At this point in the play each of these characters is a distinct individual
and their only ties to one another are their anticipation of Jesus’ arrival. Although their ties are still tentative, they have begun to form a community and have evolved from the conflict in the “Tower of Babble.”

Jesus arrives on the scene at this point and asks John to baptize him as well. As this proceeds he sings “Save the People,” and the eight approach him individually in order to introduce themselves and begin their relationships, and the actor playing John the Baptist becomes Judas. As the formation of this community is solidified, Jesus passes out face paint and the nine characters use this as a physical representation of their bond to one another and to Jesus (who has entered already wearing face paint). Once this ritual has been performed the characters proceed to tell the first parable. The story of a persistent widow serves to communicate the value of persistence in one’s relationship with God. Following this story is the tale of the Pharisee and the tax gatherer, which teaches the community that, “he who exalts himself shall be humbled, but every man who humbles himself shall be rewarded in heaven.” This series of parables concludes with stories of forgiveness and its importance in the Christian faith. As these stories resolve the actress playing Robin steps forward and sings “Day By Day.”

At the end of “Day by Day” the parables and lessons resume, and Jesus continues to instruct his community. First there is a brief lesson about responsibility when he states that, “it’s better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to be thrown into hell.” Following this there are stories about kindness, the value of being humble, and treating others well. The parade of lessons leads Gilmer to sing “Learn Your
Lessons Well,” a song which encourages the others to pay attention because, “first you gotta read ‘em, then you gotta heed them, you never know when you’re gonna need them.” Following this lesson about lessons there is the story of a man who values money more than his salvation, and this leads to the song “O, bless the Lord My Soul.”

As the first act progresses there are stories that encourage the community to look to God for answers, and to have faith in his word. These lead into the song “All for the Best,” in which Jesus and Judas sing about trusting the Lord. As “All for the Best” concludes the well known parable of the seed begins. Peggy leads the cast through the story of the seeds which fell on the footpath, rock, among weeds and onto good earth. Jesus’ explanation of the parable emphasizes the importance of a solid foundation of faith and concludes with Lamar’s song, “All Good Gifts,” in which he thanks God for all of his blessings. This song finishes as Herb leads the cast into the parable of the Prodigal Son. This story combines the basic tenants that have been laid forth in the previous lessons: humility, forgiveness and kindness. The cast comes together to tell this story as a group, which signifies their development into a community rather than a group of individuals. This parable is the last of the first act, and the act is concluded with “Light of the World,” a vibrant song which encourages people to be and do their best in all things.

In order to further capture the audience in the spell of the play, the intermission in Godspell breaks with traditional theatrical practice in several ways. First, it is directly acknowledged by Jesus and the rest of the characters. Their informal connection with the audience creates a less formal atmosphere and during the intermission the cast
mingles with the crowd. Intermission ends with Lamar and Gilmer singing a reprise of “Learn Your Lessons Well,” and as the audience returns to their seats there is a casual transition back into the conventional performance mode where the performance resumes with Sonia’s “Turn Back, O Man.”

“Turn Back, O Man” is a sensual melody which encourages men to, “forswear thy foolish ways.” This draws the audience back into the performance and once again establishes the cast as a community as they sing and dance together. At the end of this song, however, their merriment is halted by Jesus’ cry of “Stop! This is the beginning.” At this point the series of stories and lessons flow into the story of the last week of Jesus’ life, from the trial by the Pharisees to his death. This section of the text is begun as Jesus condemns the hypocrites and sings, “Alas For You,” a song which expresses Jesus’ anger and frustration as the end of his life draws near and he is constantly challenged by those around him. “Alas for You” is followed by several more lessons which culminate in the story of a young woman about to be stoned for adultery. As Jesus saves her from the crowd by declaring that only someone, “who is faultless shall throw the first stone,” the woman, played by the character of Peggy, turns toward Jesus and declares her faith in the song “By My Side.” During the music of “By My Side,” a short narrative introduces the betrayal of Judas Iscariot and sets the stage for the final days of Jesus’ life.

The next tale is that of how God will gather the nations of men before him and distinguish between those who served him by serving others and those who did not.
This parable leads to Jeffrey’s rendition of “We Beseech Thee.” This song progresses seamlessly into a reprise of “Day by Day,” during which the characters remove one another’s face paint as an indication that they no longer need physical evidence of the community that they have become. Finally, the ten actors are seated in a portrayal of the last supper in which they are offered communion and must say their farewells to Jesus. During the supper Judas leaves in order to meet the priests who will later arrest Jesus. As the other eight characters say goodbye to Jesus the band plays and sings “On the Willows.” As the supper concludes the scene is transformed into the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus says his final prayers and his followers fall asleep while keeping watch. Judas arrives, causes Jesus’ arrest and the scene immediately progresses to the crucifixion. The original text of the play ends here, after the crucifixion with the community remaining to sing the Finale. The lack of a resurrection caused controversy and confusion among the early audiences and inspired Schwartz to add the song “Beautiful City” to the production. In many productions this song is placed in various places throughout the text, but in our production “Beautiful City” was added to the curtain call as a symbolic resurrection.

The story behind Godspell acts as a catalyst for the evolution of the community surrounding Christ. While the passion story and lessons are the focus of the text there is an underlying emphasis on the effect Christ had on those around him. The intention behind the text is to weave a spell of God’s word over the ensemble and the audience, hence the name of the production, Godspell. The ensemble begins the play as
individuals and ends it as a community. Their faith is slowly built through their interactions with Christ. The second act, where the parables and stories reflect the events of the last week of Jesus’ life, is the only part of the text that has a traditional plot line, yet when the production is examined this is not truly the story of the play. Schwartz states, “what really happens in Godspell is that ten separate individuals come together and then turn to the audience and attempt to get them to also become a unit – with them” (De Giere, Defying. 457).

The original production of Godspell used the original cast member’s names as the character names, in essence allowing each cast member to play themselves in the formation of the community. The official script still uses the original cast members’ names and identifies each character according to the original personalities, but there is an aspect of the show that must be discovered by each individual cast in every production process. Throughout the script Schwartz has added notes and comments on how the original production was staged, and often encourages directors and cast members to find their own version of the jokes and popular references. Because of the freedom given to the cast and director each production of Godspell is unique, and in this way the cast and director must become a community of their own in order to effectively convey the meaning behind the text. The wonderful thing about this free-form approach to the script is that each production of Godspell will be different, and each production provides an opportunity for the message to be delivered in a new way.
One aspect of the text that remains the same in most productions of *Godspell* is the physical representation of the community when Jesus arrives. Traditionally this is done with some sort of face paint, as it was in the OSU production. The marking of the characters identifies them as an individual who is a part of a whole. When the face paint is then removed it does not signify the end of the whole, merely the end of the need for an outward representation of the community: the bonds have grown to extend beyond the need for physical reminders.

As a musical, *Godspell* is able to make use of conventions like the face paint to create a world that is not necessarily realistic, but still believable. One of the distinct characteristics of musical theatre as a genre is the ability to put unrealistic events on stage without diminishing the meaning of the story, and this text takes full advantages of these conventions. Each song has its own style, reflecting different kinds of music. “We Beseech Thee” was inspired by the Supremes, while “Light of the World” introduces rap to the production. Schwartz took inspiration from popular artists of the sixties and seventies, as well as looking at types of music that would convey a certain mood or atmosphere. “All for the Best” is meant to show the bond between Jesus and Judas, and its vaudeville style (inspired by Irving Berlin and his ability to overlay melodies within a song) creates an entertaining moment for the two actors to show their relationship. Each song in this script serves the text in a specific, intentional way.

The original music director, Stephen Reinhardt, emphasizes that there is, “a combination of songs that were meant to fulfill a particular moment in the story about
why Jesus came... some of the songs are situational, and some of the songs are about the heart and the faith journey” (De Giere, Defying 257).

The original concept behind Godspell stemmed from a master’s thesis project by John Michael Tebelak at Carnegie Mellon University. Tebelak felt that traditional telling of the passion story, and the formal church services that he had attended were not successfully reaching his own generation. Along with his feelings frustration with the religious climate he was experiencing, Tebelak read Harvey Cox’s theological essay “Feast of Fools” and was taken with the idea of Christ as a harlequin, and therefore a bringer of joy. He was inspired by this concept and, “wanted to make [Godspell ] the simple, joyful message,” and to “re-create the sense of community,” that he had not felt in his recent religious experiences (De Giere, Defying 45). The title of his text refers to his desire to capture the audience in God’s spell.

Godspell began with a group of actors and no script. Tebelak and the actors improvised and brought their own ideas to the different parables throughout rehearsal. It took time for the actors to fully understand Tebelak’s ideas and intentions, but once the message became clear the creative process sprang to life. The characters in the production were the actors themselves as clowns, acting out the parables and creating a community that was in many ways a reflection of their own journey to create the production. Years later, as Godspell has become a popular choice of productions among musical theatre enthusiasts, this idea of discovery has remained central to its
production. As with the original cast, future ensembles are encouraged to discover their own ways of portraying the parables to the audience.

The original music for *Godspell* was written by Tebelak’s friend Duane Bolick and the lyrics were based primarily in hymns or psalms. Its original performances at Carnegie Mellon were quite successful and the audience approval inspired Tebelak to take the production further, leading him to Café La MaMa in New York City. While *Godspell* played at La MaMa it was seen by producers who saw potential in the work, and expressed a desire to take it to the Cherry Lane Theatre several months later. Before moving the production to the Cherry Lane Theatre the producers asked that the musical score be re-written, a job that would have to be done in less than two months. This was when composer Stephen Schwartz was approached about the production. Schwartz knew many of the performers because of his own time spent at Carnegie Mellon, and immediately saw the potential in Tebelak’s creation. Because of Schwartz’s previous associations, he was welcomed into the *Godspell* project with enthusiasm. Before opening at Cherry Lane, Schwartz re-wrote almost all of the music for the production, changing many of the songs from group numbers to pieces that featured individual vocalists. He varied the placement of ballads with faster paced songs, and used a broad range of musical genres for inspiration. He kept many of the lyrics from the hymns and psalms. The only song that Schwartz did not change was “By My Side,” which had been written by some of the original cast members and fit well with the re-worked musical score.
While Schwartz updated the music, the cast and Tebelak updated the script. Despite their initial trepidation at the introduction of new musical numbers the cast quickly learned the revisions and Godspell continued to evolve. At this point during the process Tebelak began to take a smaller part in the production process, and Schwartz began running rehearsals with the cast. Godspell, in its new form, opened at the Cherry Lane Theatre on May 17, 1971. It soon outgrew this space and moved to the Promenade Theatre, an “Off-Broadway” venue. Godspell’s success continued with the release of an original cast recording, which sold extremely well. Theatre companies across the country produced the play, and there were several tours that took the show on the road. Godspell was even produced in London, first in an off-West End theatre, and then moved to a larger venue in the West End. Tebelak and Schwartz also adapted the show so that it could be made into a movie, which was filmed in 1972.

John Michael Tebelak was only 22 years old when Godspell opened. He remained a part of the project through its transition from La MaMa, Cherry Lane and the Promenade. He co-authored the screenplay for the film as well. Tebelak later became “the dramaturge for the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City, and wrote and staged liturgical drama there” (De Giere, John). Tebelak passed away in 1985.

In 2001 Schwartz revisited the text and music of Godspell for a Broadway revival. He updated some of the orchestration and the mood of the entire production was modernized. Technology and pop culture brought the text out of the 1970’s, and created a production more relevant to today’s generations. Schwartz looked at artists
like Dave Matthews and Tori Amos as inspiration for updating the orchestrations for this revival. A new cast recording was released with the updated musical numbers in 2000, and there was a national tour in 2001.

After the creation of Godspell, Stephen Schwartz has experienced a broad range of success in the world of musical composition. He was only 23 years old when Godspell opened, and by the time he was 26 he had written music for three Broadway musicals (Godspell, Pippin, and The Magic Show). At this young age Schwartz was the first composer to have three productions running on Broadway simultaneously (Retta). The success of these three plays was followed by several less successful projects. Schwartz’s plays Rags, The Baker’s Wife, Working, and Children of Eden, were not well received in the world of commercial theatre. Despite their failure on Broadway, however, both Working and Children of Eden have seen success in regional and community theatres across the country. After experiencing difficulties in the world of live theatre Schwartz turned his energies to film. He wrote for Disney’s Pocahontas, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, and Enchanted. He also wrote the score for DreamWorks’ The Prince of Egypt.

Stephen Schwartz was born in 1948 in New York City. He spent his childhood traveling with his family and learning about music. He appreciated opera at a young age and was taken with all kinds of popular styles throughout his life. Schwartz went to college at Carnegie Mellon University at the age of 16 where he received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in drama. While at the university he took an active role in a student theatre group, and began working on what would later become the musical Pippin. His
professional career in musical theatre began shortly after his time at Carnegie ended, and he has seen a broad range of success since then.

Schwartz has received four Grammy awards, four Drama Desk awards, and three Academy awards and has been nominated for six Tony awards throughout his career. After his success in the film industry Schwartz once again returned to live theatre with Wicked, a musical that has become astoundingly popular. The success of Wicked has made Schwartz the only song writer to have three productions run for more than 1900 performances on Broadway.

Godspell serves as a prime example of Schwartz’s style and creative energy, which has revealed itself in much of his subsequent work. He was inspired by a huge range of musical genres for Godspell, and this is a trend he has continued through many of his other plays. Children of Eden, like Godspell, has tones of soft-shoe, gospel, and popular music. Schwartz’s use of counterpoint melody in “All for the Best” is seen again in Wicked’s “One Short Day.”

Schwartz acknowledges that while his work is not autobiographical it is often indicative of his point of view at a particular time of life. Godspell features child-like characters in young, exuberant sketches. Pippin, produced shortly after Godspell, is the story of a young man’s exploration into the world and coming of age. Years later Schwartz returns to the theme of self discovery from the perspective of a father, in Children of Eden. Many of his works reflect the position of an outsider in society finding their own way. In Godspell Jesus is presented as a man who becomes a leader of a
community. In *Children of Eden* the text of the first act follows Adam and Eve as they leave the garden of Eden and create their own community. *Wicked* centers around an outcast who struggles to find her way in the world despite the expectations of society. Another similarity in Schwartz’s work is the frequency of religious themes. Schwartz however, states that his attraction to these stories is how they, “deal with solid issues of personal responsibility and ethics and philosophy” (Sebesta).

While *Godspell* was originally created by two individuals, it has become known as Schwartz’s first major work and his first major success. He has since contributed to numerous influential plays and films, and has solidified his reputation as a talented composer and lyricist. Participating in a production of his first notable work has allowed me to appreciate his talents as they first appeared, and contributes to my enjoyment of his later works.
Chapter 3: The director’s concept and design process

Traditionally productions at The Ohio State University take place on a quarter-by-quarter based schedule. *Godspell* immediately identified itself as a unique production by breaking with this traditional scheduling format. Because of the dates available at the Southern Theatre, the performance was scheduled to occur earlier in the spring quarter than usual, and the entire production process was started earlier than the production team was accustomed to for a spring performance. Because of the unusual schedule many of the scenic design due dates fell between holidays and breaks in the school calendar, a fact which motivated me to begin meeting with director Mandy Fox earlier than the first scheduled production meeting.

During our first meeting, on October 14, Fox described her initial concept for our production of *Godspell* and suggested several things she wanted to consider including in the scenery. Fox developed her concept by asking “where can we (as a production) ‘meet’ the audience,” and began looking at the City Center Mall in downtown Columbus. This shopping mall had originally flourished, but had since begun to empty as businesses failed and removed themselves from the premises. At the time of our first conversation
there were very few stores remaining in the three-story complex, and it had become something of a sore spot for the local Columbus community. Because Godspell was originally set in an abandoned urban playground, the City Center Mall seemed to be an ideal location to set this production. It was an abandoned playground of sorts, and was a location with which the local audience would be well familiar. It housed many images that were iconic in the Columbus area.

In this first meeting Fox and I discussed creating a dilapidated version of City Center in order to suit the world of the production. We discussed several of the features of the shopping center, including the levels, floor treatments, store fronts, security grates, the glass elevators in the atrium, and the chrome columns throughout the mall. We discussed the possibility that the original design of the City Center Mall may have had a flaw in its design that contributed to its downfall, and began discussing the images that Fox would like to include in the production. Fox stated that she did not feel a need to use advanced technology for any of the stage effects and was interested in a set that created an environment rather than a place. She mentioned that she would like a way for the actors to access the audience during the performance and that she would like to consider placing the band in the up stage right corner of the stage. We briefly talked about possibilities for where and how the crucifixion at the end of the show would take place and agreed that we should take a trip downtown to see the City Center site together in order to develop a mutual understanding of its condition and visual elements.
Our visit to the downtown shopping mall occurred on October 17. Fox and I were joined by lighting designer Anthony Pellecchia. During our visit we discussed a website that we had discovered called “deadmalls.com” which provided a national look at other malls like City Center. The founders of the website had gone so far as to create a glossary of terms used to describe features of a failing shopping center and it was interesting to learn that there was broad interest in the phenomena of abandoned shopping malls. As we walked through the City Center location we noted key features, such as the glass elevators in the atrium, the chrome columns and handrails throughout, the presence of cleaning and repair signs, the lighting fixtures and the fact that many professionals passed through the mall as a route from the attached parking garage to their respective workplaces. As we noted these elements Pellecchia and I took numerous photos in order to later keep track of our conversations. At one point we were approached by security personnel who asked us to refrain from taking pictures of the merchandise; an ironic occurrence given the state of the center and the fact that there was no merchandise to be photographed. We all took note of this incident and how it

Figure 2. The City Center Mall
reflected adherence to rules that no longer applied, yet were still being upheld. This served as an indicator of just how lost this center had become.

Fox and I met again on October 28, at which time I presented her with sketches and research that I had accumulated. These sketches took a very literal interpretation of the City Center architecture and used the iconic elements of the space to create a smaller version of the mall for the stage, and Fox’s reaction was positive. We discussed the possibilities of including store fronts with security fences, and features of the mall that would be recognizable and portrayed as broken. Our conversation led to more sketching and at the first official production meeting on November 4, I was able to present the production team with very preliminary sketches in order to get an early reaction to the concepts and ideas.

Reactions to the sketches I presented were varied. The most common view was that they portrayed a set much larger than was feasible. While no one expressed specific concerns, I was strongly encouraged to downscale the concept and take greater consideration to the fact that the scenery was going to have to change locations over a limited period of time. These reactions were helpful and generally confirmed worries that I had already realized.

During this first production meeting Fox, presented the team with her written director’s concept (See appendix A) and Producer Mark Shanda informed us that the budget for scenery was $4200, and the properties budget was $1500. We discussed the fact that we were working with a band that had previously worked with us in similar
producing situations and established that there would likely be four or five members of the band for this particular show.

Fox and I met again on November 14 at which point she told me about a meeting she had had with our Producer, Mark Shanda. He had given her several images from books that he had and encouraged her to generalize the feeling of the design. One of the images showed a skyline with newspaper articles juxtaposed with the buildings. There was a very painterly feeling to the picture and both Fox and I felt that it did a good job of abstracting the specifics of this particular location, yet keeping them clear enough to read. We decided to use this image as inspiration for a revised scenic design. After this meeting I revisited my photos from the City Center trip and focused on several that I had from advertisements in the mall. These advertisements promoted the City Center as a popular, chic place to shop and were still being displayed in the mall despite its emptiness. I was inspired by the presence of the Columbus skyline in these ads and began to use elements of the ads in combination with elements from the research Shanda had passed along to develop a different approach to the design.
In my next meeting with Fox, on November 21, I showed her several sketches that I had drawn, in which the set was dramatically scaled down and incorporated the new ideas. I used the Columbus skyline to create three walls that would serve as a backdrop for the playing space. On these walls I drew in representations of the local newspaper, which had been covering the progress of the mall from its inception. The concept behind these skyline walls was to indicate the iconic Columbus skyline at the top, and then at the base of the buildings to mimic the appearance of the advertisements inside the City Center mall. I planned to “dirty-up” and distress the scenic elements to add age to their appearance.

These revisions were received with positive feedback and we began to discuss the development of these ideas as well as the finer details of the design. The script calls for sawhorses and planks to be used as both a ramp and a table, so we began to converse about ways these elements could fit into the City Center concept. Fox wanted to create the impression of construction within the space so we looked at industrial ladders and scaffolding as ways to introduce levels because the revised design became a
much simpler structure with no constructed levels. We also discussed which elements of the City Center we would like to maintain so that the design did not lose all specificity and decided that some of the chrome columns would be an interesting accent to the dilapidated appearance of the other scenic elements.

My preliminary scenic design was presented to the production team at our November 25 production meeting. The removal of all permanent levels was mentioned and we discussed the idea that the levels now consisted of elements the actors would have to move themselves (such as the rolling scaffolding and the sawhorse table). Because the final design was due one week later and the week between the meetings was the Thanksgiving holiday I was not able to meet Fox before the next production meeting. Therefore, on December 2, I presented a color rendering of the elements that we had already decided upon and sketches for three different ways to include more levels within the space. All of these options looked at placing a level in front of the stage right wall.

Around this same time the costume designs were pretend to the production team. O’Neil and I had both had meetings with Fox and I did my best to keep lines of communication open between us. We did not want the characters to become lost against the colorful walls, and this fact was kept in mind when choosing colors for both the scenery and the costumes.

At this point in the process I had not yet met with Pellecchia due to his involvement in another production. When we were able to meet we discussed aspects
of the lighting and scenic designs that would heavily influence one another. Fox had expressed to Pellecchia her desire to use both the mylar rain curtain that belonged to OSU and the LED star drop that belonged to CAPA. She had specific scenes in mind for both of these flying elements and their inclusion dictated a need to rearrange some of the lineset schedule. During this meeting Pellecchia proposed an idea for the prologue sequence that would require the addition of a second black scrim in a downstage position (we were already planning on using one in front of the upstage white cyclorama). Because we were going to use the scrim that belonged to the Southern Theatre in the upstage position we discussed the use of the OSU scrim in the downstage position. Because of its condition the OSU scrim was not an ideal piece to place so close to the audience. Years of use had resulted in numerous tears and the entire scrim was stretched so that it hung crooked. Keeping these factors in mind we discussed the rest of Pellecchia's ideas.

Pellecchia wanted to use several of the linesets to fly lighting instruments in and out during key musical numbers. He wanted to use this effect in the opening sequence and I agreed to this idea as long as it was not a one-time event. In order to use such a convention we both agreed that it needed to appear throughout the show so that it would not create a moment that was too far removed from the rest of the design. Later in the process this idea of bookending the production with flying lighting effects developed into a “curtain” of lighting instruments that would fly in upstage of the skyline during the finale. This effect (dubbed as the “par curtain” in reference to the
lighting instruments used) would indicate a symbolic resurrection by filling the space with light after a period of intense darkness.

The final idea that Pellecchia proposed in our first meeting was that of creating two spotlight positions in the downstage wings of the stage. He wanted to supplement the front of house spotlight positions with these side positions in order to create more interesting angles during the show. These positions were to be placed at the top of scaffolding in the wings which would be visible to most of the audience. I agreed to his use of the wing space as long as actors could still enter and exit underneath the scaffolding. At this point in the process there was a unit of rolling scaffolding on stage to be used by actors, and one of the potential level options included the use of more scaffolding. Pellecchia and I both felt that the addition of some scaffolding in the wings would supplement these images nicely.

All of Pellecchia’s ideas had taken into consideration the concept and physical elements of the production. While it appeared that we were going to have to adjust our lineset

Figure 5. Prologue storyboard showing offstage spot positions and special lighting batten. (Sugarbaker)
schedule in order to add these new ideas, I was happy to do what I could to allow Pellecchia to effectively light the production.

Fox and I met once again on December 10 to discuss the pending issue of the levels within the playing space. She had had looked at the sketches I had provided and asked if we could instead add something like a checkout counter found in mall department stores. This piece would allow props to be stored within it and provide a place for actors to stand and dance. By placing a cash register on the countertop it would emphasize the idea of a shopping center. I agreed to develop this idea and began to look at spacing within the ground plan.

On December 12 we visited the Southern Theatre with the production team in order to orient ourselves to the space. We discussed the placement of the countertop in relation to the walls, and Pellecchia and I established a rough spacing plan for the flying battens and the second scrim he had designed. We discussed the concerns about our current black scrim with Technical Director Chris Zinkon who then approached our Producer in order to see about purchasing a new one. This idea was approved, much to the relief of those involved. Several days after this trip Fox and I shared a mutual concern that the chrome columns were no longer working with the rest of the design and decided to remove them from the plan. On December 15 I met with Zinkon to discuss the drawings and technical questions about the design. Soon after this meeting the school took its break between the fall and winter quarters. The plan was to begin building the set as soon as we returned from the three week hiatus.
The final design for Godspell was approved at the beginning of the winter quarter. Most of the elements had remained the same since the preliminary presentation, but the details had been in flux before the quarter break. Once the countertop was confirmed we decided to replace the rolling scaffolding with a rolling ladder, and the traditional planks that were to be set on top of the sawhorses became a store sign.

In the final design the Columbus skyline was divided into three walls, allowing the actors to enter between and behind the buildings. The lines of the buildings were skewed towards a central point, causing them to look as if they were being viewed through a lens of some kind. I chose to do this at the urging of Fox. There was attraction to the idea of an altered version of reality; that this was Columbus, yet also a more generic city that could be anywhere, anytime. The paint treatment on these walls consisted of splashes of colors that started at the top of the walls in the cool range and descended to warmer tones at the bottom where they changed into a solid, more graphic advertisement-like treatment. My goal was to create the feeling of a far away cityscape at the top of the walls, and then to bring the location to a more intimate, interior space towards the bottom of the walls. The colors were somewhat muted yet vibrant enough to indicate an atmosphere of festivity. The muted colors also allowed the bright costumes to stand out against the skyline walls.

The surface treatment of these walls was very smooth and flat. I created newspaper articles that resembled the format and style of the local paper, the Columbus
Dispatch. Again, in an effort to retain some specificity while creating an environment that could be anywhere I chose to create my own newspaper headlines that pertained to the text and to the City Center location. The paint treatment was done on top of these printed pieces and the text could be seen in some parts and not in others. This was directly inspired by the research provided by Shanda, and served as an indication of the local issues. The walls were intended to become billboard-like, and to mimic the advertisements in the empty City Center.

While the surfaces of these walls were flat there was texture within the paint treatment. The bottom advertisement-like sections were treated to look dirty and abused. The top parts of the buildings had a worn, weathered effect to the treatment. The colors blended together in order to make a smooth transition from top to bottom. The text beneath the color treatment added another element of shape and line to the buildings. I chose to outline some of the buildings in a dark color, providing some separation between the major features of the skyline and also creating a greater juxtaposition between the lines

Figure 6. Paint Elevation, Center stage wall
of the newspaper articles and the lines of the buildings. I chose to use text from the book of Matthew as the text of the “articles” in the newspaper. I was quite sure that the audience would not be able to read what was in the smaller print of the articles, but wanted to be sure that the text was relevant in case someone could indeed read it. By using the text of Matthew I felt that there was a relevant foundation for the text, linking the newspapers to the production. In certain places I reemphasized the text of the articles with dark paint and markers in order to bring out the words and shapes. This was not intended to help the audience read the text, but to greater enhance its presence and make the texture come through more clearly.

While the skyline walls were the central visual elements of the scenic design there were several smaller elements that played a great part in the staging and use of the space. The aforementioned checkout counter found its home stage right and was used throughout the production, primarily by Jesus. It received a paint treatment similar to that on the skyline walls and the upstage side of the counter was open and would be used for prop storage throughout the production. In addition to the counter there was a rolling ladder to be built by our scenic studio. Fox had expressed a desire to have the ability to put eight actors on the ladder, and still be able to move it around the stage. This made it necessary for us to build it, rather than buy it, and allowed me to design the size and shape. The steps were covered with expanded steel, which allowed the light to pass through the ladder. Its top step was approximately seven feet in the air and was the highest point that an actor could stand on the set. Along with the ladder there were
two sawhorses and an old store sign, also created by our scenic studio in order to guarantee their strength. These were distressed and painted to look old and beaten. The sign carried the logo of the department store Marshall Fields, which had once been an anchor store in the City Center, but had been closed for several years. The actors would manipulate these elements in order to create tables or ramps. In the table formation the sign would be made strong enough for six actors to stand or sit on top of it.

Throughout the rehearsal process I received regular rehearsal reports from Stage Manager Brandon Curtis. I attended several run-throughs of the play in order to see how Fox was using the space and to touch base with the rest of the design team. These run-throughs were exceptionally helpful because they provided an opportunity to answer any questions Fox or the other designers had for me. During these rehearsals I They also provided the opportunity for me to ask questions of our Choreographer and Director. A large part of the communication during the production period was accomplished at these rehearsals.

One of the most successful aspects of our production process was the manner in which Fox chose properties. We had a conversation about the props early on, and because of the nature of the production Fox expressed a desire to have things in rehearsal for the cast to explore. We spent some time in properties storage and put together a collection of items that had potential comic or inspirational value for the cast. Throughout the process, Curtis kept me updated on which items had been used or set aside, and requested items that they would like to add. Because the cast started
rehearsals with so many items in hand the process of collecting or making properties for this production was greatly simplified.

Figure 7. Photo of the Model

Three elements of the scenic design crossed the boundary between a prop and a set piece. Among these were two sawhorses and a department store sign that were actor manipulated and transformed between parables. In addition, there were two rolling clothing racks that served as indicators to the retail environment, which were used in “All for the Best” as carts for cast members to ride in and race around the stage. The last combined scenic and prop element was a custodial cart that remained on stage throughout the performance and held most of the props to be used in the skits. These three elements were handled and manipulated by cast members but also served to set
the environment and communicate information about the location and condition of the environment.

The scenery was intended to create a feeling of specificity and generality at the same time. The goal was to make an environment that could be recognized by the local community, yet would remain applicable to people not familiar with local issues. Fox expressed the importance of moving pieces and elements that were included in the original script and these became the foundation for much of the blocking in the production.
Chapter 4: The production process

The scenic studio began building Godspell soon after the winter quarter started. The largest elements of the design were the three skyline walls, and these were the first pieces to be built. Because of the complicated outlines of the building I worked with Technical Director, Chris Zinkon, to draw the building silhouettes onto the lauan before the framing pieces were made for the walls. When the building outlines were finished and cut, the frames were made to fit the odd shapes. When the facing was attached to the frames the sections were fixed together to create the three separate walls. As each wall was erected I was able to complete the surface preparations as the next wall was being built. Once built the walls were installed in the scenic studio, based and back painted. I was then able to begin the process of applying the enlarged newspaper articles.

Using the department’s large format copier and printer I created the newspaper articles in three foot wide sections. Once these pieces were printed they were applied to
the walls using a wallpaper adhesive. After being applied, these pieces needed to be
sealed in order to keep the toner from being removed during the paint process and to
create a uniform surface treatment to receive the paint. The paint treatment over the
newspaper articles was accomplished through layers of translucent glazes in order to
allow the text to show beneath the color.

After the walls were constructed, the platforms designed be placed in the pit
were built. The Technical Director at the Southern, Greg Bryan, loaned me a sample of
their floor so that I could match the paint treatment on the pit platforms to the high-
gloss finish of the hard-wood floor in the Southern. In order to create the appearance of
a hard wood floor, I painted full sheets of lauan with several translucent, gloss glazes,
after which they were cut into “planks” and stapled to the appropriate platforms.

At the end of winter quarter the skyline walls and pit platforms were installed in
the Thurber Theatre and the cast began rehearsing in the space on Tuesday, March 10.
Once the set was installed in the theatre, and I was able to see it from the audience, I
began to emphasize certain pieces of the newspaper text to make sure they could be
seen from the audience. I also adjusted the paint treatment on the checkout counter in
order to make it stand out from the wall behind it. During this time the lights were hung
and focused in the space. During the weeks of March 16 and 23 the theaters were
largely empty because of the end of the quarter and the spring break. During much of
this time I was out of town and could not return to the space until the spring quarter
officially began.
On March 30, the first day of spring classes, a run-through was held in order to allow the production crew to watch the performance. Because our sound, lighting, scenic and wardrobe crews are made up of students who must see the performances for their classes, this kind of run-through is the standard beginning of the technical process. This is their only opportunity to sit in the house and see the production as an audience member, which serves to familiarize them with the show. The following evening we held a dry technical rehearsal, during which we moved through the show scene by scene in order to establish what the significant looks would be. A traditional “dry tech” would not include the actors, but the production team decided that it would be more useful to be able to see the major bits of blocking and dance that would help dictate major cues during the production. Therefore the actors were called for this rehearsal, even though it was not a full run-through. During this process we attempted to run “All for the Best,” which was a number that required precise timing and coordination in order for the clothing racks to be successfully used as racing vehicles. The tempo of the recording used in dry tech was much faster than that used in rehearsal, and this sequence did not run successfully. We did not get all of the way through the performance during this rehearsal.

On April 1 we finished our “look-to-look” run of the production and then began a full run-through at the top of the show. Once again the clothing rack races were unsuccessful and the opening sequence was somewhat rough in its timing. We discussed the need to rehearse the clothing rack races first during our next rehearsal, in
order to determine if the problems were actor or technically oriented. As a production team we also agreed that the timing of the flying elements during the opening sequence was still in need of work.

Our technical rehearsal on April 2 began with a re-working of the crucifixion sequence. Once this was finished we addressed the problem of the clothing rack races and determined that part of the confusion was due to a traffic pattern problem backstage. This was solved, the tempo of the music was adjusted, and we were able to move past these hiccups. We then ran the show from the beginning, skipping less technical sections in order to make up for the time we had spent in the beginning of rehearsal, which delayed our start-time. On this evening we discovered that the timing and choreography of “Turn Back O Man” needed some adjustments, therefore time was spent cleaning up these components.

One element of the technical process that caused slight difficulties was the prologue sequence at the opening of the show. The cast members speak as different philosophers and Fox had stated her desire to recognize which philosophers were being referenced. Throughout the process I attempted to come up with different solutions for this challenge, but was having a difficult time finding a way to appropriately achieve this effect. In the original productions of Godspell the cast members had worn shirts that had the philosophers’ names printed on them, but Fox had expressed a desire to achieve our goal in a different way. We talked about having the characters or the band hold out signs of some kind, but this interfered with their blocking and performances
during those moments. Fox suggested that we could use an electronic sign to spell out the philosophers’ names, but when Pellecchia looked into the cost of such a sign, we discovered that we could not afford one that would achieve our goals. Fox and I discussed the option of creating newspaper headlines that would mimic the newsprint in the buildings, but did not know how to effectively communicate these pieces to the audience. By the time we reached the technical rehearsals Fox had expressed a desire to have Judas stand downstage of the proscenium with an easel and a kind of flip-chart that would have the names printed on it. We tried this and the visual greatly distracted from what the other actors were doing, therefore interrupting the flow of the scene. Fox then asked that we try having the actor playing Jesus say the philosophers’ names into his microphone from off stage. Once we tried this we discovered that the timing of the music was much too tight to add more lines to the sequence. Finally, during our dress rehearsal process, the question of the importance of this element was posed, and the production team came to the conclusion that it was perhaps not as vital to the prologue as we had thought. During the next run we did not have any indication of the philosophers’ names and agreed that this was the best solution we had tried up to that point.

The first dress rehearsal for Godspell was on April 4. This was the first rehearsal with costumes and the full band. The introduction of costumes and live music to the show helped to bring the production together as a cohesive piece and at this point it began to feel as if the show was starting to come together well. By this point in the
process I was feeling positive about the scenic elements and had very few notes to take care of between rehearsals. *Godspell* had an informal preview performance in the Thurber Theatre on April 8.

On April 9 the scenery was struck and readied for the move to the Southern Theatre the following day. The large skyline walls had been built with this move in mind and therefore came apart in 4’ wide sections. As we disassembled the walls I carefully scored the newsprint wallpaper so that it would not tear as we separated the units. The wall sections were stored on our loading dock for the evening and the other scenic elements were condensed and readied for transit. On April 10 we loaded the pieces onto a 24’ box truck rented for the occasion. I was slightly nervous about the condition of the truck, because it was raining and appeared to have a leak. The scenery was to be driven downtown and kept in the truck over the weekend and I was afraid that the weather and storage conditions would affect the paint treatments. We covered what we could with plastic, and attempted to pack the more water-sensitive pieces on the drier side of the truck. We were able to fit almost all of the scenic elements in one truck, but it was necessary to pack the rolling ladder unit onto a second truck that had been rented for the lighting equipment.

On Monday, April 12, we spent the day at the Southern, unloading and setting up the scenic elements and hanging lights. The rain had not affected the scenery as I had feared, and with the help from stagehands from the No. 12 IATSE chapter we were able to install all of the scenic elements and soft-goods in the space. There was very
little damage done to the scenery during the move, a fact for which I was thankful. I was able to make small repairs to paint treatments and then focus on the overall appearance of the design in its new space. I felt that the majority of the scenery looked as I expected in the more grand theatre, but the platforms in the orchestra pit did not match the floor of the stage. The sample I had borrowed from Bryan had only one coat of stain on it, while the actual floor had two. Even though I knew this, I was unable to match the floor color and depth. In order to adjust for this miscalculation I painted the platforms with a layer of clear gloss, tinted to be slightly more red than what had been painted originally. The addition of the gloss helped make the colors much richer and although they were not a perfect match the new sheen did wonders in making the platforms appear as if they belonged in the space.

The technical process at the Southern Theatre was much shorter than that at the Thurber Theatre. We had a tech/dress rehearsal on Tuesday, April 14, and then an invited preview performance the following night. Godspell officially opened on April 16. There were six performances during the four day run, and on April 19 the production closed with a matinee performance. The production was well received and ticket sales were successful.

As soon as the final performance ended the scenic studio supervisor, Technical Director, GTAs, and several stagehands began to take the scenery apart. This process went quickly and the pieces were loaded into another truck. They were then driven back to the Drake Performing and Events Center and unloaded once again. We could not
dispose of them until a dumpster was delivered, so they were stored in the loading dock area. The strike for the scenic elements of this production went fairly smoothly and because of the simple nature of the pieces it was done quickly.

*Godspell* was a deviation from the Department of Theatre’s traditional spring schedule. It took the combined efforts of everyone involved to make sure that the production came together and the complexities of the process were dealt with on every level of participation.
Chapter 5: Evaluation and reflection

The design process for Godspell was a unique challenge because of the transition between venues. I had to take this aspect of the production into consideration with every decision. The opportunity to present a production in a space that is as aesthetically imposing as the Southern Theatre was a new one for me. I wanted to find a creative balance in the visual aspects presented to the audience so that neither the theatre nor the design would detract from the other. My hope was that the two would complement each other in a way that would enhance the entire visual experience for the audience. I believe I was successful because of the scale of the skyline silhouette and the use of the bold color palate in a combination of cool and warm tones.

Overall I feel that the most successful aspect of the design was the way that it filled and framed the space. The angles of the buildings allowed the familiar local environment to become an abstracted representation of the real thing. The audience could both recognize the location and separate themselves from it at the same time, which helped make the environment universally appealing. Early in the design process I had shown Fox a sketch with the buildings standing straight and had preferred this idea.
When Fox saw the second sketch, however, she encouraged me to explore the slanted buildings and I’m thankful for her nudge in that direction. The resulting image was both more dynamic and allowed for better visual effects. The curve framed the cyclorama and created a playing field for Pellecchia’s creativity, proving especially effective during the scenes during which items flew in and out upstage of the buildings (such as the mylar curtain and the par curtain in the finale). The curve that was created also echoed the architecture of the curved proscenium in a way that tied the theatre’s architecture to the scenic design.

While the lines created by the skyline were interesting and successful, I feel that there were elements of the cityscape that were less successful. Although the original intent had been to create a flat world that resembled an advertisement or billboard I think that these ideas were obscured by the abstraction of the surface treatment and the walls ended up being flat backdrop pieces. I hoped that the newspaper print would have a different impact on the overall appearance of the skyline, but in order to achieve the strong colors in the paint treatment much of the newspaper text was heavily covered. Despite my efforts to re-accent the text by painting and drawing over it, it seemed that only the headlines could become more clear. While this was partially what I wanted I had a difficult time making the general appearance of the entire article come through, and felt that the final look put too much emphasis on the large text while the smaller text seemed to fade away completely.
The walls also felt as if they were too flat because they were indeed flat. The pieces were large and imposing, but they provided little interest outside of their silhouette. One of the most effective visual moments of the show was the beginning sequence when the city was revealed behind a black scrim. Pellecchia did a fantastic job crafting this reveal with light, and it was a moment that fulfilled my expectations greatly. However, once this reveal took place there was little that could be done to make the walls interesting. In retrospect I would have given them some kind of physical texture, or even built out pieces of the buildings in order to provide a more interesting canvas for Pellecchia’s talent. Because these pieces were so imposing and lacking in depth I feel that the other designers were limited by the two-dimensional quality of the scenery.

While the large pieces of the scenic environment lacked dimension, I was pleased with the ways in which Fox used the smaller, mobile pieces of the scenery. We had discussed the importance of having both the ladder and the sawhorses be actor manipulated, and I was pleased to see her make use of them. The rolling ladder ended up being one of the most dynamic pieces of the scenery. It moved with ease and the actors were able to use it in a huge variety of ways and places on the stage. It was especially effective during “We Beseech Thee,” when most of the cast stood on the steps and were pushed around the stage by the remaining actors. It served to unify their actions yet allow each character to make independent movement choices. I was also pleased with the way the ladder transitioned into the cross for the crucifixion. One of
my goals in this scene was to use some piece of scenery that had always been present in a way that it had never before been used. I wanted the audience to immediately recognize the pieces of the environment, but to perceive them in a completely new way. I thought that the ladder served its purpose fully, and comfortably retained the familiarity I had hoped for, while allowing Fox’s blocking and Pellecchia’s lighting to create a new mood and atmosphere for the final scenes.

In the end I feel that this design was successful because of the collaboration involved in the process. While I feel that I could have designed a more interesting environment, and pushed its effectiveness as a single entity much further, I felt that the final product was made successful by Fox’s use of the space and Pellecchia’s lighting, and Elisa O’Neil’s costume designs which brought out the colors and helped tie the characters to their space.
References


City Center Mall Advertisement. Personal photograph by Sarah Sugarbaker. 17 October 2008.
City Center Mall levels. Personal photograph by Sarah Sugarbaker. 17 October 2008.

City Center Mall storefronts. Personal photograph by Sarah Sugarbaker. 17 October 2008.


Appendix A: Director’s Concept
Raise your hand if you did this play in high school...If you raised your hand, you’re probably already in love with this play. The score is simultaneously groovy, euphoric, and gut-wrenchingly tragic, but, in the end, we leave the theatre bursting with hope and a restored faith in the guy who’s been hogging our armrest for the past two hours.

So, yes, it restores our sense of hope and faith in the community of mankind, but it also happens to center around a widely accepted religious tale, in this area of the world, anyway; I don’t think we’ll be seeing any GODSPELL productions in Baghdad anytime soon. We must acknowledge that many of us are easily inspired by the play, but not all of us...So, for a moment, let’s extract the religious tradition and just look at the story. Is it even feasible? What if this happened today?

Let’s say you had a friend who met some guy who claimed to be sent by God to teach the people of the world how to live their life and that your friend should drop everything and follow him.

I’m thinkin’...

Charles Manson...or Hale Bop...or any number of cults.

But wait...

What about Cindy Sheehan? People dropped their lives to join her anti-war activism. What about those that quit their jobs to work for political campaigns? What about those that dropped their lives to join Cesar Chavez in the plight of the California Farmers? What about some of the “jam band” followings of The Greatful Dead or Phish? While some may call these examples cults and their followers simply misguided or lost, others consider the charismatic leaders of these groups to be modern-day prophets. Maybe it’s not so outlandish after all. People seeking “a way” (with no motive for earthly gain) coming in contact with a person(s) who illuminate “the path” toward “the way”.

This play is about proceeding. How do we proceed? More specifically: (1) Which way and (2) How do we get there?

When Jesus is introduced, we see “the way”. Then we try to find “our individual way”. Then we go (together) “the rest of the way”.

I never thought of it quite like that in high school, but I loved it anyway.
Dramatic Action
In his “Author’s Note to the Director” Stephen Schwartz writes:
Above all, the first act of GODSPELL must be about the formation of a community… In the second act, … Jesus announces: “This is the beginning.” By this he means that now that the community has been formed, they are ready to move through the challenging sequence of events leading to the crucifixion …
When Jesus is taken from them at the end, the rest of the company remains fused as a community, ready and able to carry forth the lessons they have learned … If this basic dramatic arc is not achieved, GODSPELL does not exist; no matter how amusing and tuneful individual moments may be, the production has failed (p.i).

In his notes, Schwartz identifies the many challenges of directing GODSPELL, particularly that “the dramatic action, and virtually the entire action of the first act, is subtextual” and “while Act Two essentially follows the Passion story … it is still interspersed with stories and teachings” (p.i). With these directives and challenges in mind, we must approach the play with a razor-sharp focus on the dramatic action.

The root conflict of the play is: “The message of Jesus” vs. “The human condition”. Throughout the play, the actor playing John the Baptist/Judas is used to realize this intangible conflict. After the prologue which, sets up a group in need of “a way”, John the Baptist enters and announces that the company is to “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” (p.8). This begins the root action (Inciting Incident) by initiating contact between the two ideological forces (message vs. condition). The remainder of the first act is spent building the community with each company member accepting the message of Jesus at particular moments. It is not until the second act, when Jesus states, “Stop! This is the beginning” (p.69) that we see the point of crisis; this moment also marks the beginning of the Passion play through-line. GODSPELL reaches its catastrophe when Jesus says to Judas, “Friend, do quickly what you have to do” (p.92). The play reaches its climax when the company, the band, and the lifeless, physical body of Christ unite in “Long Live God” (p.95). After this section, there is no conflict, which means that the climax of the play is, essentially, the very last moment. The curtain call ritual will serve as a sort of denouement or, perhaps, more appropriately, a benediction for the evening.

Environment: where can we meet?
John Ahart, author of The Director’s Eye, writes, “Where can we meet? We ask it when we have something extremely sensitive to say to someone. Some things can’t be told just anywhere” (p.142). Ahart continues:
When this sought-for meeting of play and audience happens, all the viewer’s own feelings and memories can be tapped to unify with the play’s action. ‘The production brings the action’, one might say, ‘and the audience brings the memories.’ Together they become the experience of the play” (p.141).
In his notes, Stephen Schwartz describes the setting of the original production of \textit{GODSPELL} as suggesting “an abandoned inner-city playground” (p.iv). He goes on to say, “And while the setting need not be a graffiti-covered inner-city lot, a feeling of urban blight and poverty is integral to the mood of the show” (p.v). When considering Schwartz’s directives in identifying a locale to unify our audience with the dramatic action, one place stuck out – The City Center Mall which, according to deadmalls.com, is now categorized as a Fourth Class Mall (“shuttered or slated for demolition”). If we ask ourselves where can we meet this audience – here – now, it makes sense to present them with a place that hangs in limbo, a place that we, as a community, have loved and stopped loving, a place about which no one can agree on how to proceed, but all agree that something “should” be done. The space begs the question of us, as a community: “How do we proceed? What’s to be done?” At the beginning of \textit{GODSPELL}, the characters in \textit{GODSPELL} recognize that something needs to be done, but can’t agree on how to proceed; their attempts lead them to self-service and self-glorification and, therefore, God damns their efforts and renders them incapable of what they have previously considered progress. The characters are left with no options and, as the tale goes, no way forging the simplest communication that may lead to a solution (Tower of Babble). The City Center facility, of which many of us have fond memories, sits nearly empty, waiting for a “way to proceed”. No one can agree on how or what, only that something “should” be done. What is our community waiting for? A messiah? Mayor Coleman swept in and took possession from the “deadbeat owners of the lease”. Now what? We are primed and ready for someone with a really good idea. Enter John the Baptist.

A few weeks ago, I visited the site with the scenic and lighting designers (S. Sugarbaker and A. Pellecchia) to determine the feasibility and impact of this locale choice. During our visit, we examined architecture (the mall in general, as well as each store’s particular design), lighting (natural and practical), detritus (empty display cases and things left behind), decay (things padlocked or boarded-up, wires where fixtures once hung), personnel (weary business people seeking a quiet lunch, the down-trodden or perhaps-homeless, truant kids, maintenance workers, police officers, passers-through coming from the “cheapest parking garage in town”), maintenance debris (pylons, “wet floor” teepees, tool boxes, power cords, floor buffers, custodial carts), and forgotten marketing materials (murals of the mall in its heyday, labelscars [a widely used term coined by Peter Blackbird in 1998, deadmalls.com], and advertisements for merchants long gone). Evoking this place will whet the audience for our story and support the action by affording us every opportunity for variation in scenic, lighting, props, sound, and character design.

An interesting side note, during our visit, we were approached by a police officer who told us that we were not to take pictures of “the merchandise”. We couldn’t help ask, “What merchandise!?” In defense of the officer, we did, later, find a long list of posted rules and one of the rules was, indeed, “No photography”, but did she not see the empty shell that surrounded us? Was she so obedient a follower (of, assumedly, the Chief of Police) that she did not see the rules as no longer pertinent – a modern day Pharisee! She did offer us the option of “taking pictures of each other smiling, ya’ know”; therefore,
several of the research photos taken by the designers feature me, smiling in front of security gates, giving “thumbs-up” next to a pylon, or lounging glamorously on a ripped plastic couch.

Perhaps most conceptually significant, was the experience of being flooded with powerful memories of “special prom dress trips” downtown, elaborate holiday decorations and carolers, and sounds of shoppers hustling to and fro. It was sweet and sad. But mostly it felt like we were somewhere we were not supposed to be, like we shouldn’t be messing around, trying to do “something” where, obviously, “nothing” happens anymore and because no one can decide on how to proceed. The people here, are here, solely because “nothing” happens here – they are looking for a quiet place to eat their brown bag lunch or they have nowhere to be and have come to do their “nothing” here, where “nothing” is done, to unify with the limbo of this place, the place where “nothing” happens because no one can decide on how to proceed. This is the post-tower of babble world. What now? Which way? I guess I’ll just sit on this ripped plastic couch and wait for a sign.

**The World of the Play & Nuts and Bolts**

Though Schwartz speaks about, “an emphasis on simplicity, on ‘The Theatre of Poverty’, on theatrical magic created by the actors without ‘production values’” (p.iv), he also references the use of spotlights, strobe effects, and a “red stage”. Because of this seeming contradiction, I ask that we translate his suggestions as “in the spirit of” the Theatre of Poverty, rather than their most stringent translation, which could prematurely smother our wild ideas. He speaks about the lighting (of the original production) being “deliberately rudimentary” to avoid a production that is “too polished” and lists, “… the sense of fun and beauty created from urban garbage …” as among the greatest design accomplishments of the original production. This may mean actor-operated mechanicals are somehow included in the lighting design or that actors hop up into a pre-existing “display light” for certain sections. I’m not sure. Obviously, I see no reason for lighting to be tied to realism for the entire show. I sure would love a City Center logo gobo (as suggested by the lighting designer during our site-visit). Perhaps this gobo could appear during pre-show and intermission? The set should “evoke” a mall and the gobo will assure that we know which mall.

In his notes, Stephen Schwartz writes:

The style of playing is also important to mention. We used to tell cast members in the original production to imagine that the audience was composed of half adults and half children, some of whom were blind and some of whom were deaf. The parables had to made clear and entertaining to each of these groups. Thus the use of both sophisticated verbal humor and broad physical comedy, to appeal to all the age groups, and the reliance on acting out the stories visually (for the “deaf” members of the audiences) and through the use of different voices and sounds (for the “blind” members of the audience).
The actors have been cast according to the “salient personality traits” suggested by Schwartz and all possess skill with improvisation and physical comedy. Judas (Judith) has been cast as a woman and the actress (Meredith Lark) will play the role as a female character. Gilmer has been cast as a man and the actor (Daniel Ferguson) will play the role as a male character. The Prologue is the only part of the play where we will observe the “fourth wall”; when John (or in this case, Joan) the Baptist enters, the fourth wall disappears and never rises again. We will all be in the room together and everyone sees everyone (including the band). The actors will move throughout the house (upon occasion) and a few will remain in the audience for intermission, conducting some sort of communion with the audience (grape lollipops? “This is the lolly of Christ… anyone?”).

The characters are those that would be in the City Center. As mentioned before: weary business people seeking a quiet lunch, the down-trodden or perhaps-homeless, truant kids, maintenance workers, police officers, passers-through coming from the “cheapest parking garage in town”. Perhaps, Joan the Baptist is a type of Cindy Sheehan, someone “called” to action by her revelation. These characterizations are most pertinent during the prologue after which, the company forms a new community. I certainly see some sort of costume change when the actors enter for “When Wilt Thou Save the People”, although I’m not sure it is an entirely “new” outfit, but perhaps, a version of their previous dressing. I’m completely open and I look forward to meeting with the costume designer as she completes her current assignments.

Theo Jackson will, once again, be serving as our Music Director and we have been meeting over the summer and fall to experiment with style and orchestration. I’m exploring (with S. Sugarbaker) options for the placement of the band (onstage vs. pit). Also, I’m thrilled to announce Jeanine Thompson will be choreographing. The voices in the cast are the best I’ve heard at OSU – a testament to the successes of past OSU musicals, which have generated a fresh excitement among our talent pool.

Looking forward to working with you with all of you☺
Appendix B: Preliminary sketches and research
Plate 1. Research: City Center Mall
(Personal Photograph)

Plate 2. Research: City Center Mall
(Personal Photograph)
Plate 3. Research: Advertisement within City Center Mall
(Personal Photograph)

Plate 4. Research: The Columbus, OH skyline
(Doughney, Mike “Columbus Skyline desktop”)
Plate 5. Research: paint texture for skyline walls
(Alain Nortje, Cityscape)

Plate 6. Research: Skyline and newspaper inspiration
(scenic backdrop from “Flora,” Eckart)
Plate 7. Research: Marshall Field’s advertisement
(Imaginary Forces)

Plate 8. Research: Marshall Field’s logo
(Imaginary Forces)
Plate 9. Research: Custodial Cart (McMaster-Carr online catalogue)

Plate 10. Research: Industrial rolling ladder (McMaster-Carr online catalogue)
Appendix C: Renderings, Model, Paint Elevations
Plate 11. Early concept sketch

Plate 12. Mid-process sketch
Plate 13. Revised concept sketch

Plate 14. Revised concept color sketch
Plate 15. Storyboard sketch: Prologue

Plate 16. Storyboard sketch: “All for the Best”
Plate 17. Painted Rendering

Plate 18. ¼” scale color model
Plate 19. Stage right skyline wall paint elevation
Plate 20. Center stage skyline wall paint elevation
Plate 21. Stage left skyline wall paint elevation
Plate 22. Newspaper layout on skyline walls
Plate 23. Newspaper one

Plate 24. Newspaper two
Plate 25. Sawhorse reference
(Personal Photograph)

Plate 26. Marshall Field’s sign paint elevation
Appendix D: Final Drawings
Plate 27: Ground Plan
See Additional files
Plate 28: Centerline Section
See Additional files
Plate 29 : Front Elevations
See Additional files
Appendix E: Production Photos
Plate 30. Production Photo
“Prologue”

Plate 31. Production Photo
The Pharisee and tax gatherer
Plate 32. Production Photo
A man cannot serve two masters

Plate 33. Production Photo
“All For The Best”
Plate 34. Production Photo
“Alas For You”

Plate 35. Production Photo
“We Beseech Thee”
Plate 36. Production Photo
The Crucifixion

Plate 37. Production Photo
“Finale”