

GODSPELL

Education Guide



Villanova Theatre, 2017-18 Season

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Photos courtesy of Kimberly Reilly and Ann Marley, Villanova Theatre Marketing

Welcome to the Villanova Theatre Education Guide. This resource is intended to help individuals, educators, and students gain additional insight into the production.

Godspell marks the inaugural guide. It includes discussion questions to consider before seeing the show, as well as after, suggested activities to help you engage with the show on a more intimate level, a behind-the-scenes interview with one of the actors, excerpts from the Book of Matthew and *Godspell* to consider in comparison, and much more.

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Synopsis, The Original Creative Team, Introduction to The Gospel of Matthew sections provided by Casey Berner, *Godspell* Production Dramaturg



A Synopsis

Amid chaos and disunity, one voice cries out: "prepare ye the way of the Lord," and ten respond. Through stories, songs, and jokes, Jesus brings his group closer and closer together as they explore the good news of God and the fulfillment of scripture. As the stories turn from lighthearted fun to a call to action, faith is tested, assumptions are shaken, and lives and hearts change.

(Courtesy of Production Dramaturg, Casey Berner)

The Characters

In John Michael Tebelak's conception of *Godspell*, there is a fluidity in how the characters are portrayed on the stage. Since the musical is a devised piece, meaning that the performers create the show through collaboration and improvisation, much about the character development depends on the work done during the rehearsals. Additionally, the names of the characters change based on who is cast. For example, in the original 1972 production, there was a character named Herb; however, in the 2012 revival, Herb became George. In the Villanova Theatre production, the character's name is Stephen. The cast of the Villanova production was asked to describe their characters. Below is a list of the characters in our production and in parentheses the character's original name, followed by the actor's description of their character.

Cast of Characters:

Jesus – Jesus is a teacher with endless patience and a friend with endless kindness.

John the Baptist/Judas – John and Judas are both devout followers of Jesus, eager to help create and be a part of the community. John is essential to bringing together the community, while Judas is essential in serving the community, both as one of its passionate members and as the necessary betrayer.

Sisi (Peggy) – Sisi is shy to lead but eager to participate. She likes the ridiculousness of what's happening on the stage, but she's not going to be the first to step up. Once she's in though, she's in fully.

Galen (Sonia) – Sonia feels love with her whole self. She is someone who loves everything with her whole body. Her body embodies her love and she shares this full embodied love with Jesus.

Kara (Joanne) – Kara is the first to start play. She is the first to say, "Oh pick me. I'll do it." She is the first to jump into things. She's pretty outspoken, and she wants to have a good time.

Heather (Gilmer) – Heather is a class clown. She's a little crazy, but eager. She's never the first person to step up, but she's willing to have your back.

Marissa (Robin) – She's a very sincere person, who is looking for what it means to be a family, a community. She's looking for connection.

Stephen (Herb) – Stephen commits to everything: jokes, songs, dances, skits, and even really bad ideas. He looks, and leaps anyway. He doesn't like getting serious, but if that's what you want, don't worry: he's in, all the way.

Leo (Jeffrey) – Leo is eager and willing to jump in and be a part of the community. It's what he desires and craves. When the opportunity presents itself, it is very fulfilling for him. Along with being silly, he is deeply loyal and committed. He's in it until the end, whatever it is.

Discussion Questions (Characters)

Pre-Show :

1. Look at the descriptions of each character. Which one do you think best reflects you as a person? Is there more than one? Take a few moments to write about why the character(s) description speaks to you on some personal level.
2. Read each description carefully. What do you notice about the characters? Do they share anything in common? If so, what? Where do they diverge and how so? Do any of the characters, besides Jesus and John the Baptist/Judas, particularly stand out to you? Why?

During-Show Activity:

3. Actors are called to make choices on stage. Some of the choices an actor makes are driven by the director. Others are driven by the actor. Before attending the show, choose a character that speaks to you. Familiarize yourself with the actor's description of the character. As you are watching the musical, pay attention to the choices the actor is making in order to convey their character. Consider how you might have performed the role. What would you have done similarly? Where might you have diverged from the actor performing it in the production? Be prepared to discuss your observation after the show.

Post-Show:

4. Revisit the actor's statements about their characters. How did the cast embody the characters as described? What did you notice about a character or characters that the actor performing the character didn't mention?



The Original Creative Team

About the Playwright:

John Michael Tebelak, born in Cleveland in 1949, found his first and biggest theatrical success in *Godspell*. The first iteration of *Godspell* was produced for Tebelak's master's thesis at Carnegie-Mellon University, where he and his classmates devised and staged the show. Because the vast majority of the script comes from the gospels (and the Gospel of Matthew in particular), Tebelak is credited as "directing and originally conceiving" *Godspell*. Tebelak was inspired to stage *Godspell* by the joy he found in reading the gospels, and a particular Easter service he attended which he felt sucked that very joy out of them. Several of his collaborators at CMU went on to perform in the first off-Broadway production of *Godspell* at La MaMa Theatre in 1971, followed by a 5-year run off-Broadway at Cherry Lane Theatre and a Broadway opening in 1976; Tebelak directed all productions. He also wrote the screenplay for the 1973 film adaptation. Tebelak's other works include *Elizabeth I* and *The Glorious Age* (director). In addition, he worked as dramaturg for the Cathedral Church of St. John Divine, where he wrote liturgical dramas. He also briefly attended divinity school, with the intent of becoming an Episcopalian minister. Tebelak died in 1985 of a heart attack, at the age of 36.
(Courtesy of Production Dramaturg, Casey Berner)

About the Lyricist and Composer:

Stephen Schwartz was born in New York City in 1948. A fellow alumnus of Carnegie-Mellon University, he graduated with his B.F.A. in drama in 1968 and moved back to NY to work in music production and Broadway theatre. He began work on *Godspell*, his first major full-length work, in 1971. Schwartz has composed and written several successful Broadway musicals since his earliest success in *Godspell*, including the musicals *Pippin*, *Children of Eden*, and *Wicked*, which is currently running on Broadway. He has also collaborated on several Disney movies with Alan Menken, including *Pocahontas*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *Enchanted*. He has won several awards, including 3 Oscars, 4 Grammys, and 4 Drama Desk Awards. Several of Schwartz's works have explicitly religious themes. Like *Godspell*, his musical *Children of Eden* and animated film *The Prince of Egypt* dramatize biblical stories (the creation story and the Israeli Exodus from Egypt, respectively). In addition, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* takes place in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris and involves conflict with religious authorities.
(Courtesy of Production Dramaturg, Casey Berner)



The Gospel of Matthew

About the Gospel of Matthew:

Matthew's Gospel, which is today considered the second of the four gospels to be written, makes up the majority of *Godspell's* script. Scholars today place its writing between 50-70 AD. According to Christian tradition, the evangelist Matthew was one of the twelve apostles, Jesus's closest and most devout followers. As such, he would have been an eyewitness to the events he wrote.

Scholars today largely agree that Matthew wrote with a primarily Jewish audience in mind, aiming to convince the Jewish people that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah (one anointed by God to bring salvation). This gospel focuses more heavily on Jewish law and piety than the other three, and it quotes Hebrew scripture more than any other book in the Christian New Testament.

(Courtesy of Production Dramaturg, Casey Berner)

Below is a passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew. Alongside the passage are two excerpts from the *Godspell* script. These excerpts are some of John Michael Tebelak's adaptations of the Sermon on the Mount. One of the excerpts is described as a game started by one of the actors; the other is a song.

Gospel of Matthew 5:1-16

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,

The Beatitudes

2 and he began to teach them. He said:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Godspell

The Beatitudes (adapted text)

(JOANNE...decides to start another game.)

JOANNE

Master, Master! Blessed are the poor in spirit...

JESUS

For theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

(The OTHERS like this "complete-the-sentence" game and begin to get into it, each one challenging JESUS in a rhythm that slowly escalates.)

ROBIN

Blessed are they that mourn...

JESUS

For they shall be comforted.

GILMER

Blessed are the meek...

JESUS

For they shall inherit the earth.

JEFFREY

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice...

JESUS

For they shall be filled.

SONIA

Blessed are the merciful...

JESUS

For they shall have mercy.

LAMAR

Blessed are the pure in heart...

JESUS

For they shall see God.

PEGGY

Blessed are the peacemakers...

Gospel of Matthew 5:1-16

Salt and Light

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Godspell

JESUS

For they shall be called the children of God.

HERB

Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...

JESUS

(Opening his arm wide in an embracing gesture)

For theirs is the kingdom of Heaven!

...

JUDAS

(Pointing to JESUS with great intensity)

Blessed are you!

...

...When men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you...falsely.

Light of the World (song)

[HERB]

You are the light of the world!

[CHORUS]

You are the light of the world!

[HERB]

But if that light is under a bushel,

Brrr, it's lost something kind of crucial

[CHORUS]

You got to stay bright

To be the light of the world.

[PEGGY]

You are the salt of the earth.

[CHORUS]

You are the salt of the earth.

[PEGGY]

But if that salt has lost its flavor,

It ain't got much in its favor.

[CHORUS]

You can't have that fault

And be the salt of the earth.

So let your light so shine before men.

Let your light so shine,

So that they might know some kindness again.

We all need help to feel fine.

[JUDAS]

Let's have some wine!

[JEFFREY]

You are the city of God.

[CHORUS]

You are the city of God.

[JEFFREY]

But if that city's on a hill,

It's kinda hard to hide it well.

[CHORUS]

You've got to stay pretty in the city of God.

So let your light so shine before men.

Let your light so shine,

So that they might know some kindness again.

We all need help to feel fine.

Discussion Questions (The Gospel of Matthew)

Pre-Show Discussion Questions:

1. Matthew ends the story of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount with the following two lines: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, / because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28-29).

What does it mean to teach as one who has authority? What other ways are there to teach? How do you imagine the "teachers of the law" taught?

2. The song, "Light of the World," serves several functions. It operates as a vehicle to deliver Jesus' message about being a light, but it also serves as the song to end the first Act.

What is the message that Jesus is delivering about salt and light?

How might the song operate as an ideal vehicle to convey this message?

Why might Tebelak and Schwartz have chosen to place this message about salt and light at the end of the first Act?

Pre-Show Activity:

3. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' delivery of the Beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount is, from all appearances, straightforward. Tebelak's adaptation is not so straightforward. It begins with Joanne starting "another game." A game?!

Take about 15 minutes to imagine what this game might look like. What's involved in the game? Is the game simple or complex? What is the cast doing? What happens at the end when Judas delivers his lines.

(Note, the stage directions during Judas' moment have been omitted.)

If you are working with a group of people, put your imagined game into action.

During-Show Activity:

4. Pay attention to the "Beatitudes Game." What does the game look like in this production? What happens during and after Judas' lines?

Post-Show Discussion Question:

5. In the Pre-Show Discussion Questions, you were asked to consider the function of the "Light of the World" song. Having seen the production, consider, again, how the song worked as a vehicle to convey the message about being the light of the world. What led up to the song? What took place during the song? What happened afterwards, both during the intermission and the start of Act II? Did the start of Act II have the same tone as the end of Act I? What was the same or different?



Parables

A parable is a type of allegory. It is a very short and simple narrative that illustrates a religious lesson or moral. In the musical, *Godspell*, numerous parables are told. This is largely due to the Gospel of Matthew, which contains a number of parables, but Tebelak drew from the Gospel of Luke as well, which contains some of the most well known parables, including “The Good Samaritan” and “The Prodigal Son.” Below is the Parable of the Sower as it exists in the Gospel of Matthew.

Gospel of Matthew 13:1-23

The Parable of the Sower

- 1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.
- 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.
- 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.
- 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.
- 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.
- 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.
- 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.
- 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.
- 9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.”
- 10 The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”
- 11 He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.
- 12 Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.
- 13 This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.
- 14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.
- 15 For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’
- 16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.
- 17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.
- 18 “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:
- 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.
- 20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.
- 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.
- 22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.
- 23 But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”



Discussion Questions (Parables)

1. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' disciples question why Jesus speaks to the masses who have gathered around him in parables.

What do you make of Jesus' response to his disciples? Why is he speaking to the masses in parable?

The fact that the disciples ask Jesus about his choice of parables suggests that there were other ways Jesus could have conveyed his message. What other options could he have chosen when speaking to the masses? What might the drawbacks have been to these other options?

2. Pantomime is the act of representing a story or song through gestures and miming. In the Villanova Theatre production, the "Parable of the Sower" is pantomimed by the cast. In your group or class, perform a pantomimed version of lines 3-8 of the parable. If you are working with a large group of say 16 or more, split the group into 2 or more. Groups should ideally be no more than 10, since that's about the size of the *Godspell* cast. As you are preparing your pantomime, consider the following:

What events in the parable have an action behind it that can be performed through gesture or miming? What might those gestures look like?

What characters are needed in order to convey the parable? Make sure everybody has something to do.

Practice performing your pantomime a few times until you feel you have a good handle on it. Once you are done, if you were split from a larger group, perform for each other.

3. When you go to see the production, pay attention to the choices the cast makes in their performance of the "Parable of the Sower." How do you think they did? If you practiced performing the parable as a group, were there any similarities between the choices you made and the choices the cast made?



Iconography

Iconography is the visual representation of a person, object or concept that is accepted or recognized by a particular community, society, or cultural group. For example, among Christian religions, an image of a dove represents the holy spirit, and because the holy spirit embodies the concept of God's love for humanity, the dove has also come to represent love and peace among many people.

In the Villanova Theatre production of *Godspell*, the iconography of Jesus is altered considerably. A person who has historically been conveyed as a male figure is being portrayed by an woman. Additionally in the Anglo-American iconography, Jesus is portrayed as a white male, usually with long, brown hair. But Villanova's female Jesus is Asian.

1. Research the various ways Jesus has been portrayed. How do different cultures portray him? How many different ways can you find? What do these various visions of Jesus reveal about us?
2. Michael Hollinger in his essay, "[Re-imagining Godspell with a gender-blind cast](#)," writes: "Watching an Asian woman take on the role of Jesus (rather than a white man, as is still most commonly done) invites us to consider "otherness"; it helps us question what it means and feels like to be considered an outsider within a dominant culture, long before the "right idea" becomes widely embraced."

As you are watching the musical, consider this statement. Where, in the production, did the sense of "otherness" resonate with you most?

3. Take a few moments to write a reflection about your experience of seeing an Asian female portraying Jesus. How has it challenged your understanding of Jesus? Why might having our understanding challenged be a good thing?



A Closer Look at the Music

The music in *Godspell* is quite catchy, and some of the songs have had a lasting impact since the musical's first appearance on Broadway. A person may be familiar with the song, "Day by Day," without even knowing that it is from *Godspell* since it has become such a part of popular culture. There's another reason, however, that "Day by Day" may resonate and sound familiar. It is an adaptation of a 1941 Episcopal hymn titled, "Day by Day, Dear Lord." The lyrics are similar between the two versions, but Stephen Schwartz, who composed the score, makes the song more jazzy, more catchy, so that by the time the third stanza of "Day by Day" is sung, one can't help but want to sway or sing. Schwartz adapted a number of Episcopal hymns in a similar way, either changing the lyrics or composition or both. Below are two versions of "Turn Back, O Man" with links to allow you to listen to both.

Hymn: Turn Back, O Man

1 Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways.
Old now is earth, and none may count her days,
Yet thou, her child, whose head is crowned with flame,
Still wilt not hear thine inner God proclaim,
'Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways.'
2 Earth might be fair, and all men glad and wise.
Age after age their tragic empires rise,
Built while they dream, and in that dreaming weep:
Would man but wake from out his haunted sleep,
Earth might be fair, and all men glad and wise.
3 Earth shall be fair, and all her people one;
Nor till that hour shall God's whole will be done.
Now, even now, once more from earth to sky,
Peels forth in joy man's old, undaunted cry,
'Earth shall be fair, and all her folk be one!'

Godspell: Turn Back, O Man

[SONIA]
Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways.
Old now is earth, and none may count her days.
Da da da da da
Yet thou, her child,
Whose head is crowned with flames,
Still will not hear thine inner God proclaim:
Turn back, O man (Is your seat comfortable sir?)
Turn back, O man (Mmm, I like that)
Turn back, O man (Can you take it?)
Forswear thy foolish ways.
(See ya later I'm going to the front of the thee-AY-ter)
Earth might be fair, and all men glad and wise.
Age after age their tragic empires rise.
Da da da da da.
Built while they dream,
And in that dreaming weep:
Would man but wake from out his haunted sleep.
Turn back, O man (Mm, I'll say it again)
Turn back, O man (Can you see from where you're sittin'?)
Turn back, O man (Hi ya big boy)
Forswear thy foolish ways.
[JESUS]
Earth shall be fair, and all her people one;
Not till that hour shall God's whole will be done.
Now, even now, once more from earth to sky
Peels forth in joy, man's old undaunted cry:
Earth shall be fair, and all her people one!
[SONIA]
C'mere, Jesus, I got something to show ya!
[CHORUS]
Turn back, O man.
Forswear thy foolish ways.
Old now is earth, and none may count her days.
[SONIA]
Da da da da da.
[CHORUS]
Yet thou, her child,
Whose head is crowned with flames,
Still will not hear thine inner God proclaim.
Turn back, O man
Turn back, O man

For other song comparisons, check out the [Production Dramaturg website](#) created by Casey Berner.

Discussion Questions (Music)

Pre-Show Discussions Question:

1. Part 1: Listen to the hymn, "Turn Back, O Man." What is the tone of the song? What is its message? What are men's foolish ways? Note, the second stanza provides some important insight into the hymn's message. How do the tone and message align?

Part 2: Now, listen to the *Godspell* version of the song. What's its tone? Consider that the message as you understood it from the hymn is the same. How does the tone of the *Godspell* version align with the message?

During-Show Activity:

2. In the original production of *Godspell*, Galen's character was the "sexy" one. That particular performance of the character seems a bit dated in our time. Pay attention to how Galen performs this particular song. Pay attention to her relationship with Jesus and Jesus' relationship to her. Consider Jesus' role in the song. It's interesting that Jesus is given a portion of the song to sing. Consider why that might be as you watch the performance. And finally, pay attention to the scene that follows the song.

Post-Show Discussion Question:

3. Why do you think Tebelak and Schwartz decided to have Jesus perform a portion of the song? What is accomplished in having Jesus do so? How does the inclusion of the song, "Turn Back, O Man," inform the subsequent scenes?



An Interview with an Actor: Megan Slater

Megan Lee Schumacher You are performing the John the Baptist/Judas role in *Godspell*. Do you see this role as two separate characters or one and why?

Megan Slater Such a good question because they are two historical figures, they actually existed, these men, but the transition as an actor from one to the other without a big costume change, without a big vocal or physical change, doesn't feel right. So, in my mind, the way I am settling on it is they are two sides of the same coin, where they both are devout followers that are almost a toe towards fanatical. They just are so eager to be a part of the community and do what is right. So I think they have more in common than not. It's still early, though. I think that's the other thing I'll say about these questions. We still haven't finished blocking the whole play. I think for me a big part of my process is going to be going back to the beginning and putting it all together to sort of try and figure out this complicated arc. And I think one of the questions that will become clear is this John and Judas duality or combination or same person. I think it will become clearer to me, but where I am right now, a week and however many days in, it is more useful for me to just think about being one person as an actor. It does beg the question, storytelling-wise, what the audience needs, and I think that's a factor I need to see and ask Matt Pfeiffer, the director, about once it's all together.

MLS Have you given any thought as to why John Michael Tebelak might have conceived having this one actor play these two characters?

MS It's interesting what Casey Berner, the production dramaturg, said at some point. It's almost a matter of practicality. It felt wrong to have Judas baptizing the cast at the beginning, since they wanted to begin with a baptism, to create the community and bring everyone together; that's John's role not Judas'. To have Judas doing it felt wrong.

MLS Could you acquaint us with your character? Who are you in this musical? What is your character struggling with?

MS Again, this is all coming from where I am right now in the process. I think I just need to keep throwing that caveat out there. I think for me, Judas is immensely devout and immensely passionate about these teachings and about this person, but Judas has a fate to fulfill. It's almost Greek in a way. You know these great Greek plays where you can't escape this fate. In order for Jesus to be who Jesus is, he needs Judas to betray him. And, again, Casey sent me different sections from different Gospels about Judas and there is also a Book of Judas, and reading through that, there is this interesting perspective. For some of the authors, it's like the devil takes over Judas and that's what happens and for others there is a conscious choice. In conversation with Matt, he really holds on to the *Jesus Christ Superstar* understanding of the character, in terms that Jesus got too big for "her" britches, but in *Godspell*, it's not about that. That doesn't feel right to me within our story. I don't think the text fulfills my feeling that Jesus is going too far, so it does feel more like fate. As an actor, I am really wrestling with trying to understand this thing with fate and choice. I think it is important as an actor that this is not just somebody playing out somebody's wishes, but that I make the choice to go to the priest and take the silver and betray Jesus. I think that is important to me for this story, because I think this story is about the very humanness of Jesus and Judas and the parables, and for that I need to have some autonomy. It's tough.

Something we are working with is that the script is sort of a transmission of a devising process as opposed to being written by a playwright. So a lot of the stage directions and a lot of the dialogue is written with this, "this is what we did, but if doesn't work for you feel free to change it." I am so used to grounding a lot of my choices on what the playwright gives, but there is really very little that is said about why and how Judas gets to the end. A conversation we had in rehearsal is that the man who originated the role of Judas clearly had a clear arc and must have understood the emotional touch-points to get plot-wise where he had to go, but it's not written in the text. You know, in the performance, we, the characters, are all telling these parables and then, what feels like out of nowhere in the middle of "By My Side," I choose to betray Jesus. So that's a big challenge that this script has presented for me, trying to make that real and developed. Again, to go back to what I was saying previously, at this point I've sort of laid a couple of choices in, but it won't be until next week when we start to put the whole thing back together that I'm even going to really understand what I need in order to get from point A to point B to point C.

MLS How have you prepared for the role? What does the devising process in finding the character look like?

MS In terms of my preparation, I feel like everything happened really quickly. We had auditions and two days later were cast and thrust into rehearsal the next day. I am not a musical theatre performer. You could have never told me six weeks ago that this is where I would be right now. There is definitely an element of looking at a script different because the lyrics of the songs are part of the text analysis, and that's different for me. I have been relying a lot on Casey Berner and her great work to help give me some historical context which is grounding me in something. Because unlike most of the ensemble, for Mina and I, Jesus and Judas are the two named characters, everyone else is using their own name, which makes it a little different.

In terms of the devising process, having done different devising projects over the years, this is different in that it's not completely devised because we do have a script that's there, but it's sort of like we were handed an outline and we get to fill in the blanks. We get to sort of color it with what is right for us. It was written almost fifty years ago so there are parts that are just dated, and so it's lovely to just be handed an outline because there is the freedom to update the things that no longer feel useful. A big thing that jumps out to me of something we updated is Galen's character. Her character was very vampy, va-va-voom. There was a lot of talk about her body. It was a lot of misogyny that did not need to be in this musical at all. Now, she gets to be her, and sing this very freeing song, but it's not about sexuality. It's not us poking fun at her body or interacting with her body or shaming her body. I am very grateful we made those changes. What's great about Villanova is that they always have a dramaturg in the room during rehearsals. There is always someone with an eye on what is this story that this musical is trying to tell. Casey can always ground us in what the parable is telling us and whether our changes will work while keeping the message the same. It's not just changing for changing's sake. Matt has come in with a lot of ideas and there is a real sense of conversation in the room, so people are able to share their thoughts, and then we just get to play. Matt will propose something, but everyone puts their own stamp on it. Again, he sort of hands us an outline within the outline and then the people who have to do it can embody it.

MLS What have your favorite moments of the rehearsal process been?

MS Being a non-singer, one of the first moments in the show is when John the Baptist, when I walk in singing "Prepare Ye," and the way the blocking is set allows me to sing to the ensemble and we all get to be with each other and check in with every single person. That is a really special moment to me. This show is so important. It is about community. It's about this group of people. Again, Jesus needed his disciples as much as his disciples needed him, so this sense of community is really important. And, it's been a really great group of people. Everyone has come into the process with their hearts open, ready to play, which is lovely.



Discussion Questions (Actor Interview)

Pre-Show Discussion Questions:

1. Towards the beginning of Megan's interview, she describes both John the Baptist and Judas as being "devout with a toe towards fanatical." What do you think that means? Is that how you see John the Baptist and Judas? What is your understanding of them? How were you taught to see them?
2. Megan discusses the role of fate in the death of Jesus. She hearkens back to the Greek tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus. How is Jesus life like a Greek tragedy?

During-Show Activity:

3. When Megan was interviewed, it was in the early stages of rehearsal. She was still trying to get a handle on her character. Pay attention to the choices she made in conveying Judas' passion for Jesus' teachings and Judas' "choice" to fulfill his fate.

Post-Show Discussion Question:

4. What are some of the choices you saw Megan make in order to convey her passion for Jesus' teachings? Where did you notice her struggle to fulfill her fate?
5. Megan states, towards the end of her interview, "Jesus needed his disciples as much as his disciples needed him." How does the production uphold this idea?



Community

The Gospel of Matthew is all about making the kingdom of God a reality, and in order to do that Jesus needed to bring his disciples together so that they would have the tools to go out and spread his message when he was no longer there to do it. *Godspell* is interested in the formation of such a community. Tebelak believed play, improvisation and clowning could be tools used to bring people together, and hence closer to God. He played with this idea in his conception of *Godspell*, which illustrates through performance, a community coming together through games and storytelling. By the end of the musical, the community is solidified and prepared to go out into the larger world to spread the “good news.”

1. How does a community evolve? What is necessary in its evolution? What’s required of its members? How do you know when a community has become fully realized?
2. Much of the devised process of *Godspell* involves playing. There are even stage directions in which a character is described as having started a “game.” How does play help create community?
3. What did you notice about the formation of community while watching the musical? How do you imagine the director went about building a sense of community?
4. In Megan Slater’s interview, she discusses Judas’ role in the formation of the community of God. She must betray Jesus in order to solidify the community. Based on the casts’ performance, do you agree? Why or why not? Could a community of God, as understood in the Christian tradition, have been fully realized without Judas’ betrayal?



