

Righteous Insanity Theatre Company Presents...

# DRAMA MINISTRY

for the Dramatically Challenged

a guidebook for using drama in  
youth ministry

by  
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# Introduction:

## Why Drama?

Tyler and Shane had no idea what they were getting into. I was teaching a drama elective at a Christ In Youth Conference in Adrian, Michigan. I had just asked how many people in the room had seen that classic film from Britain, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. As I expected, about half the room raised their hands.

I asked Tyler and Shane if they would stand up in front of the rest of the class and re-enact a scene from the movie. Without a second's hesitation, the boys dived into their rendition of King Arthur's meeting with the Knights who say, "Ni!" After a few moments of madness, the rest of the audience applauded politely, and Shane and Tyler headed back to their seats.

"Wait a minute," I said. "I'd like you guys to stay up here a moment." The guys returned to the front of the room, a little puzzled. "I have a question for you. I'd like you to tell everyone, to the best of your knowledge, what your pastor spoke on last week in church."

Silence.

Long silence.

Tyler managed an, "Uhhh..." but couldn't follow up. Having made my demonstration, I let the boys sit down and continued. "Does anyone have any ideas as to why they couldn't answer the question?" I asked. The group responded with a number of possible answers, but they seemed to agree on one primary reason: "It's boring!"

You really can't blame them for saying so. The teenage world is not at all what it used to be. Gone are the days when they would spend twenty hours in the library researching the Declaration of Independence. Today all they have to do is hit a button and that research is downloaded in less than a minute, freeing up nineteen hours and fifty-nine minutes to play Quake and shop eBay.

MTV and the Internet have created a high-energy, fast-paced, visual playground for the eyes and ears. All forms of information and entertainment are available at the touch of a button rendering patience nearly obsolete as a character trait. Cars are sold in thirty seconds, politicians by charisma, and policy in soundbites. Is it any wonder our country has been so willing to tolerate abortion and homosexuality and yet forbid prayer in schools? It's so much easier to sit back and nod while the TV tells us how we should believe than it is to stand up for the truth!

The problem of reaching teenagers is further complicated by the education system which is now proudly indoctrinating the third generation the lie of evolution. This, like every other humanist philosophy, is accepted with the nod of a head by students who then go out and act like the godless descendants of animals, destroying themselves with drugs and sex. Some dare to search for hope in religion and philosophy, but the voices of a million false prophets dim the odds that they will ever find the one Truth.

Young people today are rather distrustful and cynical when it comes to matters of faith and God, and with good reason. They were trained to accept "truth" based on say-so, only to discover that most of what they were taught was based on opinion rather than fact. They were taught to trust in scientific fact rather than faith, only to discover that a great deal of scientific fact is based on -- what else? -- faith!

Thus we arrive at the challenge of the modern day youth minister. He or she must reach a generation of kids with:

- a) Short attention spans.
- b) A thirst for entertainment.
- c) A hunger for the truth -- the REAL truth.
- d) A need to have these truths proven to them.
- e) A complete and total distrust of all things grown-up.

Okay, pop quiz: Let's say you are the youth minister at a church with an average youth attendance of around 70. You have one weekly meeting with your group on Wednesday nights in which to give them the truth of God. The meeting lasts one hour: twenty minutes for social time and games, twenty for praise and worship, and twenty for a lesson. (Let's say it's on sex.)

That's twenty minutes for you to make a statement to your youth group about God's plan for sex: a statement which will be in direct opposition and competition with what TV, radio, movies, billboards, T-shirts, advertisements, magazines, celebrities, and most of their own friends will be saying to them during the remaining 167 hours in the week!!!

Question: What do you do?

Answer: You make a BIG statement!!!

Here is where drama can be an effective part of youth ministry. Four weeks from that Wednesday, not even your most loyal youth sponsors will be able to remember your beautifully researched, five-point outline on God's plan for sex. But give that crowd a five-minute skit based on that theme and they have an aural and visual reminder of what you talked on that night which may stay with them for a much longer!

Certainly drama is not the only device you can use. Games, music, dance, and other forms of art can be just as effective (if not more, depending on the crowd and the topic). However, the emotional and mental responses drama creates in an audience make it one of the more powerful tools for reaching youth.

Drama is a flexible art because it can communicate in so many different ways. In its format, drama can be funny or serious; elaborate or simple; realistic or fantastic; sublime or ridiculous. Drama can cause a variety of reactions. It can make people laugh, cry, think, scream, or groan. It may make people identify with the characters and relate the theme to their own life. It can also frighten, surprise, shock, or take an audience's breath away. Or maybe just make them put their finger to the side of their head and say, "Hmmm...."

Drama is also a proven tool for convicting and persuading. Shakespeare captured the essence of drama's power in *Hamlet*. Prince Hamlet hires a theatre troupe to perform "The Murder of Gonzago", a play depicting the assassination of a king by his brother. When this play within a play is performed, the king, Hamlet's uncle, runs out of the court in a guilty rage, confirming his guilt to the prince.

If you prefer a true life illustration, maybe you'd be interested in why President Bill Clinton sent troupes into Bosnia. He was dead-set against getting involved in the Bosnian conflict until he saw *Schindler's List*, Steven Spielberg's depiction of the Jewish Holocaust. After witnessing the horrors of genocide depicted on the big screen, Clinton signed the order to send American forces to Bosnia the very next day!

Of course, not every issue can be resolved in five minutes. Sure it happens all the time in sitcoms, but how many teenagers really make a lasting decision about abstinence in three

minutes? Drama is not a substitute for Bible study and discussion, but one more tool you can use to help your kids internalize the word of God.

For seven years, I had the privilege of working with a talented group of young actors known as the Dramamaniacs, the youth drama troupe of Northside Christian Church in New Albany, Indiana. During the school year, the Dramamaniacs perform one or two skits every week. In their spare time, they perform at inner city missions, children's homes, youth camps, retirement homes, and other churches in Kentucky and Indiana. We performed for as few as twenty and as many as five hundred: children, youth, and adults. And believe it or not, I took over control of this growing drama ministry a few weeks after dropping out of acting class.

This book is a compilation of all I have learned in my years in youth drama ministry. It is intended primarily for the inexperienced drama director, as a tool to guide you through starting and running your drama ministry. We will begin at the beginning, with the rounding up of actors, scripts, props, costumes, and other necessities. The next section will give you an overview of acting, directing, and managing the group as a ministry team. We will then look at some basic scenes and monologues and the ways drama can help you teach. The fourth section will introduce you to several non-traditional forms of drama, including lip sync, reader's theater, and audience participation.

# 1

## **Putting Your Act Together**

The process of forming a drama group should not be an overwhelming experience. There is no need to waste hundreds of dollars on props, costumes, technical items just to make things look good. None of these are even required for a drama performance. Only three ingredients are actually needed: a storyteller (the actor) a story, and an audience. In this chapter, we will look at that first ingredient: that special breed of human known as the actor!

### **Recruiting the Actors.**

Before you attempt setting up a drama program to perform weekly, you must assemble a committed team of performers and establish a weekly rehearsal schedule. Even if all you have to start are two junior highers, they will be enough. Drama is not limited by numbers. I know of several churches where the entire adult drama ministry consists of two actors. Some nights you may only need one. The important thing is to find kids who will commit to the group and the ministry.

When you begin your recruiting process, it is very likely you will find a much larger number of girls participating than boys. The Dramamaniacs typically had a girl-guy ratio of 4 to 1. This is not a significant problem, but it is a challenge to work with. Make the best use of the talents God brings to you. Write or select scripts that match the group you have. One obvious way to work around a lack of males actors is to select scripts that require mostly female casts. No topic you will ever cover with youth demands you to use all male casts. Even in a dating skit, you really only need one male.

You may also find most of the kids join the group for the thrill of acting and not the love of ministry. Again, do not let this discourage you. They're kids! They're still growing and learning. As their director, it will be your job, and I hope your joy, to instill the love for ministry in them.

Nothing will help you build and grow like a regular rehearsal time. Rehearsals should be weekly. They need to take place at the same place in the same location and should last 60 to 90 minutes. Switching times and locations will lead to confusion. It will make your job harder when kids don't get the right information and miss rehearsals.

Rehearsals need to combine a good balance of spiritual training, acting training, and drama rehearsal. You might begin each practice with devotions and prayer, followed by acting exercises and rehearsal. You may want to start with acting exercises, follow with devotions, and end with rehearsal. Or you could start with devotions and then split the group: part of the group rehearses the week's skit, the rest participate in acting exercises.

### **Auditions**

As time goes on, the group will begin to recruit for itself. Other kids in your church or friends from outside church will see the drama group in action and want to join in. The key for you is to keep the group from growing too big.

For two directors, 15-20 is a good size limit. Twenty-five is the maximum. Any more could result in a chaotic scene. You may only need four kids for a skit, leaving the remaining twenty-one with nothing to do. As I mentioned earlier, the remainder may do acting exercises in

a separate room. You also might put them to work on future projects or on writing. You need to find something to keep them from becoming bored. You don't want to be the one caught in a room with twenty kids infected by the theater bug.

One way to keep your group size down is through an audition process. By requiring auditions will cut down on the number of kids who join the group for three weeks then fall off the face of the earth. Those who are really interested will gladly audition.

Here's one plan for how to run auditions. First, have a preliminary informational meeting. Use this as an opportunity to explain the purpose of the group, what you do in rehearsals and performances, and what you require from members. Each prospective member then receives a monologue for their audition. Select six to eight monologues -- some serious, some humorous -- and allow the auditioners to select their own audition piece.

A week later, the applicants perform one at a time for the directors only. Look for good memorization skills, stage presence, vocal projection, energy, body movement, and how well they create a character. Look not only for naturally ability, but for potential. Every kid will have weaknesses, and every kid will have areas where they can learn and grow. Since this will be a ministry, it is also a good idea to look at their attitude and their Christian walk. The youth minister is usually a good consultant in this area.

Aside from maintaining a manageable group size, auditions will help you put the best people on stage. You may not feel right cutting someone, but look at the situation from the audience's point of view. The Christians and non-Christians in your audience may not be into acting, but as TV, movie, and theater watchers, they know good acting when they see it. And no matter how good the script may be, if the quality of the acting is not equal to that of the script, you are not giving God your best.

At the same time you want to find the best performers, don't cut the kid with potential. And don't cut the kid who truly wants to minister through drama. Give them a chance to grow and develop in practice. And even if they aren't an actor, they could still be an asset to the group as a sound, light, or stage technician.

### **Non-Christian Members?**

One decision you will have to make is whether or not you will allow non-Christians to participate. This is not a black and white area; you will need to discuss it with your youth minister and especially with your Heavenly Father. It is a risk to put someone who has not yet accepted the gospel on stage to preach it. However, in my seven years with the Dramamaniacs, I have seen nearly a dozen kids come to know Christ through their involvement with the Dramamaniacs.

I have never regretted any time I have used a non-believer in a ministry performance. In fact, the kids we have had to remove from Dramamaniacs were people brought up in the church, not outsiders who never accepted Christ. That's not to say this will be the case in every group and every church, but as Luke 1:37 says, nothing is impossible with God.

### **Developing Young Talent**

One final note on new members: do not forget to develop their skills! The newcomers will most likely come from the younger grades, and the temptation will be to stick with the veterans. You have to bear in mind those veterans who have carried you for years will not carry you forever. They get driver's licenses, they get jobs, they get boyfriends and girlfriends, they

graduate, and they leave for college. Use the veterans while they last, but at the same time, make sure you are developing the next generation of drama ministers to fill their shoes. And encourage those veterans to teach the younger ones and leave them with the same love of ministry they have.

## 2

### A Story to Tell

The second element of drama, the story, ties the first and third together. The story you tell is depends on two things: who is telling the story, and who they are telling it to. Once you can answer those questions, you can begin search for that perfect script.

#### **Who Am I Talking To?**

The first thing you need to examine when selecting a story is the intended audience. What age group do you perform for? Are they Christians or not? How much knowledge do they have of the Bible?

Let's face it, teenagers are hard to please. They want you to be honest and talk with them on thier level. Your script selection must take these things into account.

Suppose you are planning a youth meeting around the theme of sex. If your audience is primarily church attending believers, you would be more likely to address God's plan for sex in marriage. One skit we use, called "Princess", is written as a fairy tale. When a Christian girl is pressured by her boyfriend to have sex, her fairy god-mother intervenes and reminds her of her place in God's kingdom. "I am the daughter of the king of kings, and no one should treat me as anything less than a princess!"

A non-Christian audience is less likely to be interested in a Biblical perspective or a True Love Waits theme. You'll probably bring the Bible themes into your lesson, but in the skit leading up to the lesson, you need to grab their attention. For the non-Christian, that means addressing the consequences of sex outside God's plan: AIDS, pregnancy, and emotional pain. A skit like "Honeymoon Horror" would be more appropriate. This is a much more up front, in-your-face approach to the theme than "Princess." It begins with a couple in their honeymoon suite professing their virginity to each other. The romantic moment is interrupted by a game show host, who brings out a wide range of guests. Cheerleaders, basketball players, twins, bosses, and total strangers parade on stage to make a powerful point: everytime you sleep with someone out of wedlock, you're also sleeping with everyone *else* they slept with!

The point is to be careful in selecting the approach to your theme. Not only that, some subjects are best reserved for one audience or the other. "The Trinity" is not a likely topic to captivate the unchurched crowd, and "How to Become a Christian" will be the same lesson retold for the one-million-and-sixth time for the Christians.

You also need to pay attention to the age of the crowd. You can generally go deeper in depth with an older audience than a junior high audience. And some topics are really too sensitive to discuss with junior highers. Skits on rape and other sexual issues may bring snickers and giggles from a less mature crowd.

#### **Who's Doing the Talking?**

Once you settle on your approach, the second restricting factor is your own drama troupe. You need to find a script that will fit the mix of guys and girls in your group. "Honeymoon Horror" may make the point you want, but unless you have ten guys in the drama group, you better keep searching. However, don't allow yourself to be restricted to the scriptwriter's will. If

that “perfect” script was written for too many guys, you might be able to change some of the characters to girls.

You also want to look at the difficulty of the roles and determine whether or not you have the talent to cover all the roles. Not every kid can cry. Not every kid can play the clown. Not every kid can play accents. Sometimes it’s fun to give a kid a chance to stretch, and I encourage you to push them to grow as performers. Just don’t give them something too over their heads. Or in other words, don’t try to make an Adam Sandler play Othello. Simply put: it ain’t gonna happen!

### **The Quest for the Perfect Skit**

Drama materials can be found everywhere: magazines, books, youth curriculums, catalogs. How can you find the best material for your group?

The greatest test to see if a sketch will work on your youth is to let them read it. Teenagers are very honest about what’s good and what’s not. If they think something stinks, they will tell you in no uncertain terms. If you go drama shopping, take them along with you.

Also, anytime you can preview a script, or at least a specific writer’s material, do it. A drama that looks great on paper may be completely dull on stage. And a script that looks stupid on paper may be great when brought to life. Remember, drama is meant to be seen and heard, not read.

Look for skits that take place in one location only. It’s too complicated to try and switch locations in the middle of a five minute skit. Keep things as simple as possible.

If you use published dramas, don’t be afraid to revise, rewrite, or adapt them. Most of the skits published in books are two to three years old before they hit the shelf. Therefore, since the youth culture “reinvents” itself every six months, the words, phrases, etc. in a script could have gone “in” and “out” three times already. Remember the “Macarena”? We used it opening night of our youth outreach program in the fall of 1996 and got a terrific response. Not two weeks later, people were being lynched for even saying the “M” word!

The central truths will never change, but you’ll be surprised how quickly fads can go in and out. Once again, let the kids be your guide in the rewriting.

Another strategy for keeping up with the youth culture is to write your own material. However, this requires a gifted writer with a love of God and a desire to serve him with their talent. Maybe you are that writer. Maybe it’s another person in your church. And don’t overlook the kids in the group! Who knows better how the world looks through the eyes of a teenager? At the very least, they are valuable co-authors.

Don’t forget the third ingredient to theater is a story, not a script. You may use outlines or take a general topic to create your own scenes. One technique we have used to develop new material is to break the kids into smaller groups, give them topics, give them twenty minutes, and let them create their own skits. Not every dramatic work that comes out of these improvised scenes will be a masterpiece, but on occasion you’ll find a diamond in the rough. Take the basic idea, mold it, shape it, and rehearse it until it is stageworthy. The end result will be a scene that is not only genuine, but a scene that will become very special to the kids who created it.

There is certainly nothing wrong with using published material. Part of my reason for writing this book is to allow you to use my own work. If you like what you see, I have a catalog filled with more of the same. If what you see is not to your taste, check out the Lillenas catalog. Or Willow Creek Community Church. Or the *National Drama Service*. The Internet is full of

script resources: Dramaquest ([www.dramaquest.com](http://www.dramaquest.com)), DramaShare ([www.dramashare.org](http://www.dramashare.org)), Christians in Theatre Arts ([www.cita.org](http://www.cita.org)), Drama For Church ([www.drama4church.com](http://www.drama4church.com)), and of course, Righteous Insanity ([www.righteousinsanity.com](http://www.righteousinsanity.com)). Drama ministry is an ever-growing field, and more and more options appear every day. There's bound to be something to fit your taste, style, and need.

# 3

## Icing on the Cake

As I said at the outset of chapter one the three ingredients necessary for drama are a story, an actor, and an audience. Elaborate props and costumes are NOT included in that list. For that matter, neither are cheap, cheesy-looking props and costumes. Therefore, DO NOT PANIC when your youth pastor allocates \$20 for your yearly drama budget.

Of course, that doesn't mean you should do without props and costumes. You can do a great deal by pulling from your own closets, attics, kitchens, and ingenuity. Here are a few suggestions for creative prop and costume usage.

**Buy items you find yourself using frequently.** Some things we have found ourselves using over and over include candles, lighters,

**When unusual prop and costume needs arise, try to borrow or bring items from home.** No need to spend forty dollars on a prop you'll only use once if some one already owns it.

**If possible, make or sew items you don't have or can not afford.** The Dramamaniacs once did a skit on smoking which called for a puppet of Joe Camel. We used a combination of felt, fur, cheeseball cans, dowel rods, stuffing, and styrofoam to bring him to life. The total cost of materials? Around \$14: three bucks cheaper than the tie we put on him!

**If you must buy, check thrift stores and discount stores first.** Don't pay the more expensive costume and novelty shop prices unless you have to.

**Get as much use out of costly items as possible!** Make those heavy investments pay off. And be creative! Two months after his debut, Joe Camel made an appearance in our Christmas program.

Just in case you do have a generous budget or a generous benefactor, here are a few "must have" items you might want to stock up on.

### Top 5 Most Useful Costumes

- 1. Angel Robes.** Also useful for Jesus, Princess Leia.
- 2. Dress Clothes.** Shirts, ties, slacks, dresses. Why? Two words: kids forget!
- 3. Fantasy Costumes.** Whatever gets donated, whatever you've got already. You'd be amazed how much mileage you can get with only a monk's robe, a military jacket, and a Snow White gown.
- 4. A Graduation Robe.** This can be used for Death, judges, etc.
- 5. Pillows and/or Stuffing.** Useful for creating muscle men, pregnant women, big guts, and large rear-ends.

### Top 5 Most Useful Props

- 1. Glasses.** Nerd glasses, horn-rimmed glasses, shades. You'll use 'em.
- 2. Beer bottles.** A&E Root Beer bottles work well- no markings or labels.
- 3. Phones.** You need at least two. And make sure they are table phones, not wall phones!
- 4. Dinnerware.** Plates, napkins, cups, forks, spoons, knives. Plastic and paper will work.
- 5. Poster board.** Billions of applications.

### Top 5 Non-Prop Items You Can't Live Without

**1. DUCT TAPE!!!!** A theater professor at Indiana University once told me there were three things that revolutionized the way theatre is done; three things that she cannot imagine how theatre happened before they were brought into being. I've since forgotten the third, but the second was colored light gels and the first was a little miracle known as Duct Tape. Ninety-nine percent of the theaters in this world are held together by this magical wonder! Props, set pieces, costumes, technical equipment, you name it. The silver adhesive is everywhere, making it's all important contribution to the art of the theatre!

**2. Scissors.** Keep 'em around so you don't go looking for them. They come in handy.

**3. Sound Effects CD.** Make sure it has a doorbell, ringing phone, gun shot, and driving nails.

**4. Highlighters.** To mark scripts. Helpful in memorizing lines and marking tech cues.

**5. Markers.**

### **Top 5 Items You Don't "Need", But They're a Lot of Fun!**

- 1. A Rubber Chicken.** Try giving him CPR.
- 2. A Gorilla Costume.** The fun is endless with one of these beauties.
- 3. The Sledge-O-Matic.** Just like Gallagher. Everybody loves to watch people break stuff!
- 4. A Mascot.** We found a Dow Bathroom Scrubbing Bubble for \$1.01 at a thrift store. His name is Delbert, and he travels everywhere with us for moral support.
- 5. Stage Make-up.** DO NOT buy the cheap Halloween stuff! Professional theatrical make-up is worth the extra few bucks. The basics you'll need are:
  - A basic white.
  - A color wheel with blue, red, yellow, orange, green, and black.
  - Make-up brushes.
  - Sponges.
  - Baby Wipes. Use these to clean make-up off easily.

**A Note about Make-up:** Black eyes are not black. Bloody wounds are not all red. Wrinkles are not straight, black lines. And bruises, depending how old they are, may be yellow, green, brown, blue, or any combination. If you're interested in realism, consult a book about stage make-up with a sections on wounds and aging. If you're lucky, you may have some one in your group with theater make-up experience who can show you how to do it.

### **One More Useful Item**

As a director, you might want to pick up a copy of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Try to find a copy that has the book's slogan "DON'T PANIC" written on it. Keep it handy, and every time things get hairy, pull it out and heed that advice. Pray, give the problem to God, and watch everything fall in place!

# 4

## The Basics of Directing

Actors and directors have their own unique language. So just in case you're completely new to the theater, this chapter will give you a quick guide on stages, blocking, and directing. But first, one of the great philosophical questions in modern drama:

### **Is it spelled “Theater” or “Theatre”?**

Well, here's how a high school English teacher with forty years of drama experience told me: the building you enter to see a play or movie is a *theater*. The art of drama is referred to as *theatre*. However, both are considered grammatically correct. So it's up to you.

Now, on to directing.

### **The Stage**

There are three basic types of stages: the proscenium stage, the thrust stage, and the arena stage. They are generally distinguished by the number of vantage points from which the audience can see the stage.

On a **proscenium stage**, the actors only have an audience in front of them. A proscenium stage is described as having an imaginary “fourth wall.” This is the wall through which the audience looks in and witnesses the action of the drama. A proscenium theater is essentially made up of two rooms: the house (where the audience sits) and the stage. These two areas are separated by a wall with a picture-frame opening in it. The front of the stage is usually runs straight across the front of the theater, and the stage may also have a curtain which can hide the entire stage from the audience. Proscenium theaters are ideal for shows that require large props and scenery. If your church has a gymnasium with a stage built into one of the end walls, you probably have a proscenium stage.

Unlike the proscenium theater, the actors in on a **thrust stage** have an audience on three sides of them. The thrust stage projects into the audience, allowing viewers to sit in front or to the left or right of the action. The stage designer must be cautious in using large scenery on a thrust stage, making sure not to block any of the audience's view. Many professional and university theaters have thrust stages. Many modern church auditoriums, especially Christian and Baptist churches, also have thrust stages.

An **arena stage**, also referred to as a “theater-in-the-round,” is completely surrounded by the audience. This is the most difficult stage for using scenery.

### **The Elements of the Stage**

Believe it or not, every area on and off the stage has it's own special name. To help you sort things out (and catch you up with the theater veterans in your drama group), here's a quick guide to just about everything you might find on a stage. Some of these terms will not apply to your church auditorium or stage, but they're here just in case you're ever lucky enough to have a use for them.

**Backdrops-** Large curtains or sheets of canvas with images and scenes painted on them. These are used to help establish a setting in dramatic works. An example would be a mountain landscape painted on a backdrop for *The Sound of Music*.

**Backstage-** The area behind the stage, sometimes concealed by a backdrop.

**Batons-** Metal rods on cables used to hold up backdrops.

**Curtains-** Ehh, everybody knows this one...I hope. They hide the stage before the show, during intermission, between scenes, and after the show.

**Duct Tape-** Look around on any stage, any where. I guarantee it's holding up something.

**Fly Loft-** A large open space above the stage. This is used to store the backdrops not being used on stage. The backdrops are lifted into the fly loft so they are not seen.

**Gels-** Transparent colored film used to gift color to stage lights. (The same theater prof who explained the all-importance of duct tape to me said this was probably the second most useful invention in the history of theater.)

**Props-** (or if you want to sound professional, "Properties") Large or small items used on stage in a dramatic work. These may be large, fixed items such as tables and chairs or small, hand-held items like books or candles.

**Scenery-** Large stationary props, such as trees and shrubs.

**Set-** The lay out of props and scenery on stage.

**Wings-** The area immediately to the right and left of the stage.

**Which way is which?**

Stage directions are a little tricky, so here's an easy way to remember them: it is assumed the actors are "dumber" than the director. Therefore, when someone says **stage left** or **stage right**, it is ALWAYS the actor's view.

**Up stage** is away from the audience. **Down stage** is the toward the audience. So if you were to play "Near and Far" with the audience, "near" would be down stage, and "far" would be up stage.

Center stage is self-explanatory.

Just in case you need a visual picture:

## Back Stage

Up Stage Right	Up Stage Center	Up Stage Left
Center Stage Right	Center Stage	Center Stage Left
Down Stage Right	Down Stage Center	Down Stage Left

Audience (The House)

## **Blocking**

Blocking is the primary function of the director. It is the process of instructing the actors on where, when, and how to move on stage. This includes entrances, exits, standing, sitting, hugging, fighting, etc., and is every bit as important for the actors as knowing their lines. Especially in comedy, the timing of action can be crucial to a scene's success.

Blocking is not something that can easily be taught in a book. It is best learned by watching other plays (movies and television included), watching other directors rehearse, and first hand experience.

Your drama group may be of some help to you in blocking. However, make sure you make all the final decisions about blocking a scene. You are the director; they are the actors. The main purpose to this is maintaining order during rehearsals. The last thing you need is to have a scene with five actors and six directors. Multiple directors, as a rule, never work; everyone will want to block and direct in their own way. Therefore, drama is much more successful when the rehearsal process operates as a dictatorship rather than a democracy.

As I said before, blocking is best learned by experience. However, there are a few cardinal rules of the theater I can share with you to get you started.

First, **never, ever, ever turn your back to the audience.** There are exceptions to this rule of course, but for the most part, keep your front turned out to the audience. This is not natural for us as humans. No one holds a deep, emotional conversation with their beloved while keeping their bodies angled to the side; they do it face to face. However, when two young lovers talk on stage, they must keep their bodies angled toward the audience.

Turning your back is a much more difficult problem on a thrust stage or an arena stage. In fact it's an impossible situation on the arena stage. In these instances, make sure the important actions are visible to everyone and that at least one character is visible to every person in the audience at all times.

One way to alleviate some of the difficulty in a thrust or arena theater is to watch the drama from all sides in rehearsal. As the director, you need to see the scene from every angle and determine if every person will feel the same impact from the scene.

Second, **make things active.** Keep people moving. Don't let them just sit and talk. Drama is about conflict. It's people trying to achieve a goal. It's people confronting and overcoming obstacles to their goal. The conflict in the dialogue needs to be reflected in the actions and interactions the audience sees.

The extreme example of the importance of action is pantomime, where conflict and emotions must be communicated through movement and facial expressions. The "opposite" form of drama is reader's theater, where conflict and emotions must be communicated through the voice.

As you experiment and work with your drama group, you'll discover other do's and don'ts for drama in general. You'll also discover do's and don'ts for your own group and your own stage. This chapter should give you a foundation for experimenting and discovering your own rules for directing and blocking.

# 5

## Acting for Dummies

If you're looking for an in-depth, insightful discussion of Stanislavsky's Method, forget it. This is not the book for you. There are a number of books by numerous drama teachers and directors that will tell you everything you've ever wanted to know about the art of acting.

Personally, the only person I would recommend such a book to would be an insomniac. I bought a nice, 200-page volume on acting two years ago. I read twenty pages and fell asleep three times. My accounting textbooks in college were a more exciting read than that book!

It has been my experience that acting is taught best by experience, not by reading. However, since this is a book on doing drama as a ministry, a quick lesson on the basics of acting would be appropriate.

At a recent workshop I asked a room full of high school students what's the most important thing to know when you step on stage. The most common answer I heard was "know your lines." That answer is wrong.

**The most important thing for an actor to know is not what to say, but why their character says it.** Or, to use the great theatrical buzz word of the 20th century, the actor must know his character's *motivation*.

Remember when I said drama was about conflict? That conflict must be expressed in the performances of the actors. Since drama is a visual, moving art, repeating lines is not enough. The motivations of the characters and the conflict in the story must be expressed in the way the actors speak, move, and interact. It is the emotions and the motivations that makes the drama come to life, not the memorized lines.

In order to do so, the actor must study more than his lines. He must study the entire script. He must know who his character is; what he wants; what he will do to get what he wants; what he feels at each given moment; and how to portray that feeling.

## Discovering the Character

To help the actor discover all he or she must know about a character, it may be helpful to do a “psychological profile” of that character. Using the script and his or her imagination, the actor answers a series of questions about the character. Some typical questions used by college and professional actors include:

1. What is my name?
2. How old am I?
3. Where was I born?
4. What is my ethnic background?
5. Where do I live?
6. What is my occupation?
7. What is my educational background?
8. What is my religious background?
9. What is my marital status?
10. Do I drink or smoke?
11. What are my favorite foods?
12. What is my favorite hobby?
13. What are my political views?
14. What is my favorite TV show?
15. For the guys: Am I a Mary Anne or Ginger kind of guy?
16. For the ladies: Am I a Han or Luke kind of girl?

And so on. You and your actors may add or subtract from this list as you feel the need. There is no set formula for creating a character.

Once you discover who your character is, you may go on to discover that character’s goals and motivations within the drama. Again, it may be helpful to ask a series of questions.

1. What is it that my character wants?
2. Why do I want that thing?
3. What characters can I depend on for help? What characters will oppose me?
4. What will I do to get that thing?
5. What do I expect the outcome of my actions to be?

## How to Be Happy

Knowing your character and his or her motivations is the first step in acting. Applying that motivation to your performance can be tricky. At this point, you know how your character is feeling in a certain scene. (Let’s say she’s angry.) The problem is, you can’t simply “be angry.”

Anger is an emotion. It is an automatic response by a human being to a troubling situation. You don’t have to think, “Okay, this is not good, so I need to be angry.” You just *become* angry. Acting is about *acting* and *doing*, not being. Therefore, the actor must know how to be angry.

Here’s how. Every emotion has an external expression. Once the actor discovers her character is angry, she must then ask the question, “How do I express anger?” Anger can be expressed in a number of ways: clenched fists, trembling, yelling, pointing fingers. Depending on

the situation and the degree to which the character is angry, the actor can determine for herself which of these external actions she will use to portray her anger.

One helpful exercise you might use is “The Emotion Skit.” This skit is included in Chapter 8, *Breaking the Ice*. This nonsense scene can be played with any number of emotions. This will allow your actors to explore these emotions and discover what actions they and others use to portray each emotions.

Another tool is the “as if” rule. This is where the actor creates metaphors to help him act according to his motivation at a given moment. If she is shocked, she will act “as if she was just hit by a Mack truck.” If he’s giving comfort, he will want to touch the other performer “as if she were a china doll that will break if held too tight.” Make sure to use simple, physical metaphors you can easily relate to with your senses.

# 6

## **Training Drama Ministers**

Training your actors to become better actors is important, but there's an even more important form of training they will require. You might have the greatest actor in the world in your group. A natural performer. One who gets things right the first time, every time. However, if that individual is not living off stage what they stand for on stage, you do not need them.

Living the Christian life requires preparation just like acting. That preparation can include daily quiet times, studying God's word, memorizing verses, attending church, and belonging to a small group that will hold you accountable. And just as the actor must find out how their character acts, the Christian must daily ask, "What would Jesus do?"

The same kids your group performs for are probably going to be the same kids they go to school with. Once they have set foot on that stage, their friends' eyes will be on them off stage as well. They will want to know if they really believe what they say on stage. They will want to know what their real motivations are.

You can't control every kid and keep them out of trouble, but as their leader, you can do a number of things to help them live the walk off stage.

### **Establish a Standard**

Make sure the kids you send on stage to model the example of Christ believe in and strive for that same standard in their daily lives. Lay out a set of guidelines for the young actors and hold them to it. Give them a copy of those guidelines. Have them sign a form that says they understand the rules. Most important, use discipline when you have to. Some of the kids may try to test you on this point, so be prepared to carry out your threats, whether it be removing them from the group for a month, a year, or indefinitely.

In my fourth year as the director of the Dramamaniacs, I had to throw four people out of the group for various reasons. All four were tremendous talents and dedicated members of the group. Two of them were good friends. But none of them were living the example of Christ, and I couldn't send them on stage any more. I also didn't want them in rehearsals with the younger members. I had recruited a solid class of new talent that year, and they needed a better example to follow than the one represented by the older members.

It wasn't an easy decision. We prayed long and hard it wouldn't come to expelling them from the group, but you can't change the minds and hearts of others, and we had to let them go.

### **Make them Accountable**

Give them a little something that will exercise their minds spiritually and hold them accountable for it. Some ideas you might try include:

**Memory Verses.** Make them responsible for learning a verse a week. Vary the length and try to make the verses in line with whatever skit is being prepared that day. This is an ideal form of accountability in that it develops their knowledge of the scriptures and develops their memorization skills! However, if the kids don't bother to learn the scriptures until five minutes before practice while their out in the hall, it doesn't do a whole lot of good.

**Devotions.** Begin each rehearsal with a short devotion prepared by one of the kids. Set up a schedule so that everyone gets a turn. You can give them verses or topics to get them started, but don't help too much. This allows them a great opportunity to learn on their own as they write.

**Small Groups.** If your drama group is small enough to make it practical, you may turn them into a small group. Spend time before each practice reading the Bible, sharing your struggles, asking accountability questions, and praying for the ministry and each other.

### **Mentoring**

When you first begin your drama troupe, you'll most likely start with a younger group with mostly junior high students. Eventually these early members will become juniors and seniors in high school and leaders in the group. And a new group of junior highers will follow them. These younger members will look up to their older, more experienced counterparts as role models, both on stage and off.

When your group reaches this stage, encourage the older members to look out for the younger ones. Share with them the blessings you have received in watching them grow in Christ. Then allow them to experience that same thrill by mentoring the younger members. Most importantly, make sure they realize they are being watched at all times. It is not enough to be a good acting role model; they must be Christian role models in real life. Allow the veterans to teach the newer performers and share their own wisdom on life and drama. And pay attention when they do. You'd be amazed at what your kids will teach you!

### **Student Assistants and Directors**

As the group begins to grow, you may be able to hand over some responsibilities to your older members. Put them in charge of managing costumes, make-up, props, and other technical jobs. Give them the freedom to write their own skits and experiment with directing.

Especially with a larger group, a student director is a good idea. It will give you a chance to work more one on one with that person and allow them the opportunity to have a greater share of responsibility in the ministry. However, be very careful whom you choose! The best student director may not be the best actor or the most outgoing member. A good guide as to what to look for in a student director includes:

- a. A Deep Love for Jesus and a growing relationship with Him.
- b. A responsible, mature attitude. No Butt-Heads or Beavis.\* (\*plural for Beavis)
- c. A loving heart and the ability to get along with others. You don't want someone who hates everyone else...or vice versa. Pick someone the others will listen and respect.
- d. A strong dedication to the group and its ministry. If they're out every other week in school plays, sports, etc., they aren't going to help you out a whole lot, are they?

### **Training Drama Missionaries**

It could happen to any drama group. For the first few years, your group is made up of younger kids, seventh and eighth grade. They aren't the best performers in the world, but their hearts are in the right place, and they love what they are doing. You begin to work with them, to mold them into actors and actresses. They gradually get better, and better, and just when you think they've peaked, they still get better!

They learn fast. They work well as a team. They keep their focus on God and trust him to work out the question marks and details. Audiences adore them. They entertain, they teach, and they touch. By the power of God, you've created a well-oiled ministry machine, and there's nothing that will stop you from conquering the whole world for Christ!

WRONG!

Reality hits on the second day of high school: the day the audition notice for the fall theatre production gets posted. This year the show is *West Side Story*, featuring a big cast, a chorus, and a projected budget of around \$20,000. Sure your drama kids enjoy the five-minute skits they've perfected over the last two years. Sure they enjoy the ministry aspects and recognize the importance of what they do. But do you think they're gonna be able to resist a big budget show with real sets and real costumes played out in real theater on a real stage?

Get real! You may be fortunate enough to retain one or two (more if the local high school theatre program is less than desirable!), but don't bet on it. Even your most loyal members are gonna feel the lure of the stage and want to try the water.

So, you ask, just what am I supposed to do? Is there anything I can do? What do I do to encourage them to stay in the ministry?

You don't. The smart thing to do is let them go. No guilt trips, no begging, no cheap ploys or bribery. And don't even think about trying to compete. Losing your strongest talents is not frustrating. It's EXTREMELY frustrating! After a few years and several productions that drain your support, you'll begin to question whether you are running a ministry or a training grounds for the high school theatre director!

Actually, you're pretty much in the same boat as that high school teacher. When you attend the final show of the season and he or she recognizes all the seniors in the cast, take a look at how many talented people are leaving that group!

High school drama is made up of high school students who will one day grow up, graduate, and become college students! Whether or not you keep them around full time, they are still going to have to leave the group eventually. So why get too attached to one particular group? At the same time you are maximizing your top performers, you need to be preparing your future leading actors and actresses. When their time comes, they need to be ready to step into the spotlight and carry on delivering the message of Jesus through drama.

Also, consider the opportunities high school theatre will give them. It's an entirely different world of learning experiences that you can never give them. Later on, you may benefit from their experiences as they come back to the group when they can and impart their new wisdom to you and the remainder of the group.

There's an even greater reason for wanting your kids to branch out and join their high school theatre program. Think back to that last high school play you saw. Remember the girl who played Maria in *The Sound of Music*? Or the boy playing Hugo Peabody in *Bye Bye Birdie*? What was your impression of them as you watched from your seat? "Nice kid, I'll bet. Gets good grades, well liked by peers, motivated, never gets into trouble." You may be right, or you may be looking at a fifteen year old pot smoking, goddess worshipping, alcoholic bisexual.

I'm sure you're aware of the existence of such things in high school these days, but unless you've been involved in the performing arts previously, you may not be aware that most every form of immorality that exists seems to exist more often in the artistic community. It's quite likely that the majority of those happy, smiling teenagers will be smashing their brains out with alcohol within two hours of curtain call. You'll probably also encounter cigarettes and drugs of

all kinds, New Age Practices, Wicca, Druidism, Homosexuality, Bisexuality, and of course the more natural guy-girl brand of sex. It sounds absurd and exaggerated, I know, but I encountered every one of these at my own high school in small town Indiana. I can't imagine what it's like in New York.

The truth is you should be training them for just that purpose: to go into high school theatre...as drama missionaries! If you haven't guessed already, the point is that your local high school drama department is a very needy and very untapped mission field. They need your kids. They need the Gospel brought to them. Jesus never said, "If you preach it, they will come." He said, "Go and preach." Our mission is to take the gospel into the schools, into the dressing rooms, into the back stage areas and to the people on stage.

You may never meet the lost girl who played Maria, but your kids know her. Through Bible study, witness training, and prayer, you can give them the tools to reach her for Christ!

# 7

## **Preparing the Director**

As fun as it is to watch kids grow as actors and actresses, there is nothing more exciting than seeing them grow and bloom in their spiritual walk. However, before you can become an effective spiritual leader to your drama troupe, YOU have to be at work on your own spiritual walk! Through prayer and your daily life, you must set an example of how to live as an actor and a minister that they can follow.

### **Pray**

It all starts on your knees. Everything good that comes from God begins with prayer. Bathe the ministry in prayer. Pray before rehearsals. Pray after rehearsals. Pray before performances. Pray after performances. Have people outside the group pray for you. Pray before planning meetings and writing sessions.

In your private prayer times, pray for every member of your troupe: for their Christian walk, their witness at school, and their witness in drama. Write down special concerns and follow up on them.

### **Lead by Example**

Have a daily time of scripture reading, devotions, worship, and prayer. Share openly with the group members your spiritual struggles, triumphs, and learning experiences. Have an open heart to hear their own stories and experiences, and pray with them when they need it.

You should also establish one or more accountability relationships, where you meet weekly with one other person to discuss personal struggles and pray about them. You might even do accountability with one of the older kids in the drama troupe. However, if you do start accountability with one of the kids, make sure it is someone mature enough to keep everything you say confidential. And select someone of the same sex, since males and females deal with entirely different issues and struggles.

### **Be There**

You will find there is a special bond that develops in the theatre because of the tremendous amount of trust required by the art form. The performers depend on each other to know their parts and hit every cue exactly the same way every time. If one person drops a line, the others ad lib or cover for them so the scene does not die.

The need for trust is even stronger during improvisation. When the performers trust each other, they are not afraid to take risks because they know their partner(s) will justify their moves. And the better the actors know each other, the easier it is to create a scene on their feet.

This kind of trust very often carries over off stage. Your drama kids may confide in you or their counterparts things they've never told anyone else. (And if my experience is typical, then be prepared for anything and everything!) They're going to depend on you to listen, to be their friend, to pray for them, and not to judge them. Pray that God will give you a willing heart and wisdom to fill whatever needs they might have.

# 8

## **Breaking the Ice**

When you run an outreach program, or any program where Christians will bring their non-Christian friends, you want to create an atmosphere that's non-threatening. You want to make the non-Christians feel welcome and comfortable so they will listen and come back. A short, humorous skit is one way you can accomplish this.

A good ice breaker skit has two basic requirements: it must move fast, and make people laugh. You generally don't want a long drawn out skit to open things up. If it gets too long or boring, the audience will be checking their watches the rest of the night.

Where can you find good ice breakers? Many of our best ice breakers have been developed out of improvisation exercises. Other sources to consider are skit books, comedy albums, movies, and TV shows such as *Saturday Night Live*. Routines taken from these secular sources may need editing, but it's something the audience will recognize, it's all but guaranteed to please the audience.

The following three skits are popular ice breakers from the Dramamaniacs repertoire. I mentioned "The Emotion Skit" in Chapter 5 as a good acting exercise. I think you'll find it makes a very entertaining ice breaker as well. Ask the audience to suggest three emotions for your actors to use. Then perform the skit four times: once with no emotion, the next three times using the emotions chosen by the audience. The Dramamaniacs have done everything from Happy, Sad, and Angry to Backwards, Slosly, and Foreign.

You may also write your own variations on the skit. I stole this particular script from one of my actors. He stole it from another drama person who probably stole it from somewhere else.

One other tip on doing "The Emotion Skit." When you perform for an audience, have the Son change the number of jars of mayonnaise every time you do it. The first time through, it's twelve jars. The second may be a hundred, the third, a thousand, and the last fourteen million, nine hundred sixty thousand, two hundred and seventy seven. Or something like that.

"The Answer is Six" is another unusual skit we developed. It was inspired by the old joke about...well, read the script and find out.

# THE EMOTION SKIT

## CHARACTERS

Dad  
Mom  
Son  
Daughter

*(Dad enters. His hand is behind his back.)*

DAD- Honey, I'm home.

MOM- Oh, sugar baby, you're home.

DAD- Where are the kids?

MOM- I don't know.

DAD- *(calls off)* Kids, come down here.

*(Son and Daughter enter.)*

SON- You called?

DAUGHTER- What did you want?

DAD- I brought something for the whole family.

*(Dad pulls his hand out as if holding a jar.)*

MOM- What is it?

DAD- It's mayonnaise.

SON- But don't we already have twelve jars in the kitchen?

DAUGHTER- Yeah. You bring home mayonnaise every day. We're kind of tired of it.

DAD- You don't like mayonnaise?

DAUGHTER- No.

DAD- Go to your room.

*(Daughter exits.)*

DAD- What do you have to say?

SON- Nothing.

DAD- Go to your room.

SON- Okee dokee.

*(Son exits.)*

MOM- Honey, don't you think we already have enough mayonnaise?

DAD- There's always room for more mayonnaise. I love it. Now go to your room.

MOM- But I'm your wife.

DAD- I said go to your room.

*(Mom exits.)*

DAD- I love you, Mr. Mayonnaise.

*(Dad kisses jar, then exits.)*

# The Answer is Six

by john cosper, jr.

## CHARACTERS

Six blondes

A brunette

*(One blonde enters, stands at center stage, and looks up at a fixed spot. The other five blondes enter and form a semi-circle around the first blonde, staring up at the same spot.*

*The blondes huddle up. One blonde sticks her head up, looks around, then dives back into the huddle.*

*The huddle breaks. The first blonde runs off stage. The second and third blondes pick up a fourth blonde on their shoulders. The fourth blonde grabs onto the fixed spot, which is an imaginary light bulb. Blondes 2 and 3 spin the fourth around in a circle as the fourth holds onto the light bulb.*

*The light bulb comes out, and the Blondes 2 and 3 set the Blonde 4 down. Blonde 4 spins around, dizzy. She hands the burned out bulb to the fifth blonde.*

*The first blonde returns to the stage, holding an imaginary light bulb. Blonde 1 hands the new bulb to Blonde 4. Blondes 2 and 3 pick Blonde 4 up and spin her in the opposite direction, screwing the light bulb back in.*

*Blondes 2 and 3 set Blonde 4 down. Blonde 6 reaches up and pulls on an imaginary cord, turning on the light bulb. The six blondes exit. The brunette enters.)*

BRUNETTE- The answer is six. It takes six blondes to screw in a light bulb.

# 9

## **Setting Up A Lesson**

There are two basic strategies for using drama as a teaching tool. One is using drama to teach a lesson. In this type of skit, a problem is presented, the problem is solved, and a lesson is taught through that scenario.

The second strategy, which we will examine now, is to set up a lesson. In these skits, a problem is presented but not necessarily resolved. The primary purpose of such a drama is to stimulate the audience's thinking on the subject at hand. However, drama will also allow your audience to feel. Drama is essentially a re-creation of life. Watching realistic characters confront realistic problems generates an emotional response. By seeing the problem introduced but not seeing its resolution, the audience members mentally place themselves in the characters' positions. They ask themselves how they feel about the issue, and what they would do in such a situation.

Drama can make them laugh or cry. It may make them smile, or it could make them angry. And different people with different points of view may respond to a given skit or topic in completely opposite ways. For example, a skit that shows abortion to be the murder of innocent children may generate tears among pro-life audience members and scowls on the faces of pro-choice audience members. The intention is not to bring everyone to the same point-of-view, but to allow each individual to recall and identify their own personal feelings. By doing so, you have prepared the audience for a discussion time or a lesson. It is through the discussions and lessons that God's attitudes are presented and impressed upon the audience.

Besides leaving problems unresolved, set-up skits do not always involve God. This tactic can be used to show how hopeless a situation is without God. It may allow some one who disagrees with God's view to see the situation in a new light. Also, by holding off and not introducing God right away, you may help the unbeliever to feel less threatened. They will be less likely to feel like God is being shoved down their throats. The skit can then capture their attention, allowing you to lead them step-by-step to the resolution and God.

# Jilted

Like many skits, this particular work came out of my own personal Christian experience. When you're a full time college student, a part-time worker, and a youth sponsor, it's easy to get distracted by your obligations and neglect your relationship with God. When I do consciously make the effort to set time apart for God, things always run smoother, and I've NEVER found I have less time for getting things done. But when my focus shifts away from God, obligations pile up, I don't make time for God, my spiritual growth suffers, and I have a harder time managing my problems.

A relationship with God is like a marriage: it requires constant communication in order to thrive. Lack of communication and time spent with God will lead you further apart, just as a lack of time spent with your spouse will affect your marriage.

It was in dealing with these problems that "Jilted" was born. The character of Amanda is that busy, eager young adult who longs for success and happiness. She has everything she needs at home in the form of her friend Jesus, but rather than spend time with him, she'd rather shop, watch TV, and be with her other friends. Everyone who knows Jesus can find something of themselves in Amanda. She asked God for a raise and received it, but she neglected to bless God in return by tithing. She spent years pursuing the goal of becoming an actress, never once bothering to ask God for his guidance and his will. Her dreams were crushed, all because she failed to find out what God's dream was for her life. She can't spare five minutes to talk with her Savior, yet she dedicates a full thirty minutes to her favorite sitcom.

The scene takes place in the living room of Amanda's apartment. The set should be furnished with a couch, a table, chairs, etc.

The scene is straight forward and serious. The actors should play their characters in a natural and realistic manner- no stereotypes. The actress playing Amanda should play all of her interactions with Jesus as if he were a boyfriend or husband. Likewise, Jesus should be played more like a jilted husband than the supreme ruler of the universe. Furthermore, as indicated in the directions, Jesus should be dressed in street clothes and NOT Biblical robes.

Playing Jesus and Amanda like a married couple and dressing Jesus in street clothes allows the audience to first see the scene as a husband and wife relationship. Then as the scene develops and Jesus' identity becomes apparent, they can draw the parallel between marriage and a relationship with God.

After reading the script, it should be obvious that it would not work on its own. This skit is only the beginning of your teaching. After the skit you might break the audience into groups and ask them to discuss the skit: How would you feel if you were in Jesus' position? What did the skit show you about your relationship with God?

The discussion time would then lead into a lesson or sermon. Or, the skit may be followed directly by a sermon. The skit itself did not make your point, but the skit will be a primary reason why your audience remembers the lesson: the Christian life is a day-to-day relationship with Jesus Christ, requiring just as much time, effort, and communication as any other human relationship!

# Jilted

by john cosper, jr.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:24-26

THEME: Living for God

## CHARACTERS

Amanda- A young woman

Jesus- (dressed in street clothes, not Biblical attire)

Jodie- Amanda's friend

Derek- Amanda's ex-boyfriend

*(A couch, and table with a phone are on stage. Jesus sits on the couch, waiting. Amanda enters, wearing a coat and carrying a purse and several full shopping bags.)*

AMANDA- Hi! I'm home! Oh my gosh, you wouldn't believe it! You know that raise I've been asking you for? I got it! Isn't that great? So I went to the mall right after work, and I bought a ton of clothes with the extra money! *(holds up a dress with a very short skirt)* Will you look at this? Isn't it cute?

JESUS- Looks a little short.

AMANDA- *(laughs)* I knew you were gonna say that!

*(She walks to the table and sets her bags, her purse, and her coat on it.)*

JESUS- Amanda, what about your promise?

AMANDA- Promise?

JESUS- Yeah. You told me you couldn't afford tithing, and if you got a raise...

AMANDA- Ohhhh, yeah. That promise.

JESUS- Did you save some?

AMANDA- Well, no. But this was my first big paycheck. I...I had to go blow it on myself! I earned it, didn't I?

*(Jesus rolls his eyes and turns away. Amanda walks over to the couch.)*

AMANDA- Oh, I know what you want. *(hugs his neck from behind)* I don't have anything to do today, so I have all night to talk to you!

JESUS- Really?

AMANDA- Yeah, really. Goodness, you act as if I never talk to you.

JESUS- You don't...except when you want something.

AMANDA- That's not true! We've talked...other times. I told you about that guy at work who's not a

Christian.

JESUS- You told me about him because you wanted to go out with him, not witness to him.

AMANDA- Well, look, we've got all night to talk about whatever you want, okay?

(Door bell.)

AMANDA- (*calls off*) Come in!

(*Jodie enters, frantic.*)

JODIE- Amanda! Amanda! Oh my gosh! You're not going to believe this! Craig Coffey asked me out! He's coming to pick me up in an hour!

AMANDA- You are not serious!

JODIE- I am! He's taking me to a play, and I haven't got anything to wear!

AMANDA- What about your black formal?

JODIE- It's at the cleaners!

AMANDA- What about the one with the flowers?

JODIE- Same place.

AMANDA- Well, what about your white one?

JODIE- (*cups mouth so Jesus can't hear*) It's got jungle juice all over it.

AMANDA- Oh, yeah. I remember.

JODIE- You've gotta help me! I don't know what to wear! Can I borrow one of your outfits?

AMANDA- Sure. (*to Jesus*) Sorry...this will only take a minute, okay? I promise.

(*Jodie and Amanda exit. Play Jeopardy theme. Jodie and Amanda walk back on. Jodie is carrying a dress.*)

AMANDA- That dress is gonna knock his eyes out. Have fun.

JODIE- 'Manda, I can't thank you enough. (*to Jesus*) Bye! Wish me luck.

(*Jodie exits.*)

AMANDA- Isn't that sweet? I just love it when a couple just comes together like that.

JESUS- They're not gonna come together.

AMANDA- What do you mean they're not going to come together? You've seen them. They're perfect for each other!

JESUS- According to who?

AMANDA- Look, I don't care what you say. Jodie deserves a guy like Craig, and if you don't do something about it-- (*freezes, looks at her watch*) Darn it! It's 8:05. I'm missing *Friends*!

(*Amanda exits. Play Jeopardy theme. Amanda re-enters, singing "Smelly Cat" and sits on the couch.*)

AMANDA- I love that show. Phoebe was so funny tonight! You should have watched it with me.

JESUS- You want me to watch it with you? The whole show promotes sex outside of marriage and-

-

AMANDA- Oh, please! There you go again. Almost every show on TV is about sex. Would you like

me to just quit watching TV?

*(Jesus looks her in the eye. Amanda rolls her eyes at him. The door bell rings.)*

AMANDA- Come in!

*(Derek enters.)*

DEREK- Hi, Amanda.

AMANDA- Derek? What are you doing here?

DEREK- I made a mistake. I shouldn't have treated you the way I did, and...and I just wanted to see if...you could forgive me.

AMANDA- Are you kidding?

*(Amanda runs over to him, hugs him tight, and kisses him on the cheek.)*

DEREK- I've missed you.

AMANDA- I've missed you too!

DEREK- You got time to go out for a bite to eat?

AMANDA- Well, *(looks at Jesus, then Derek)* Sure!

DEREK- The car's right outside.

AMANDA- I'm right behind you.

*(Derek exits. Amanda grabs her coat and purse off the table and starts to leave.)*

JESUS- Amanda...

AMANDA- Later!

JESUS- Don't waste your time on him. You're not ready for that.

AMANDA- And how do you know what I'm ready for? What are you, my dad or something?

JESUS- I know what's best for you, Amanda.

AMANDA- Excuse me, but I think I can decide what's best for me just fine on my own.

*(Amanda exits. Play Jeopardy music. Amanda and Derek enter holding hands.)*

DEREK- So, we got a date tomorrow night?

AMANDA- Well, let me think about it *(no pause)* okay.

DEREK- *(kisses her cheek)* See you then.

*(Derek exits. Amanda yawns.)*

AMANDA- Ohhhhhh, I'm so tired. I think I'm ready for bed.

JESUS- Aren't you forgetting something?

AMANDA- What? Oh. Look, I'm exhausted. I'll probably just fall asleep on you.

JESUS- We really need to talk.

AMANDA- About what?

JESUS- About you! Derek! Your job! Your life! Amanda, we're growing apart. Our relationship

is dying. We can't go on like this.

AMANDA- Tomorrow! I need to get some rest! I don't have time for your little guilt trips now.

JESUS- You had time for *Friends*. You had time for Jodie and Derek.

AMANDA- Cut me some slack, will ya? I need my space. Why are you so persistent in telling me what's right and wrong for my life?

JESUS- Because I know what's best for you.

*(Phone rings.)*

AMANDA- *(to Jesus)* Whatever. *(answers phone)* Hello?... *(excited)* Yes!...Yes, this is she!...Yes, ma'am!...Thank you!...I...*(excitement turns to disappointment)* Oh...I see...No, I...I understand...Yeah...Sure...Yeah...Bye. *(hangs up)*

JESUS- What's the matter?

AMANDA- *(glares at Jesus)* You know darn well what's the matter! That was Dr. Brown from the conservatory. I was turned down.

JESUS- Oh yeah.

AMANDA- "Oh yeah." My dream just went down in flames, and you shrug it off and say, "Oh yeah."

JESUS- What do you want me to say?

AMANDA- I don't want you to say anything! I want you to do something about getting me into that school! This is my dream! It's been my dream since I was seven years old!

JESUS- Has it ever occurred to you that there might be something bigger and better in store for you?

AMANDA- Bigger than my dream? My seventeen year old dream? No, sir, that hasn't occurred to me! Getting into that school, getting into the theater, that's all I've ever wanted! There's nothing bigger, and there never will be. *(sighs)* I need a beer.

JESUS- Why not a Coke?

AMANDA- Because I want a beer, okay?

*(Amanda walks behind the curtain and re-emerges with a beer in hand.)*

AMANDA- What's the big deal, anyway? I'm only gonna drink one. It's not like I guzzle down twelve a day. I'm not an alcoholic!

JESUS- No, but other people are, and when those people see someone like you drinking, it's not a good example!

AMANDA- *(angry)* If it's such a big deal, then why why don't you try and stop me? Hmm? *(holds out beer bottle)* Go on! Rip it out of my hand! Go ahead! *(waits, then pulls it back)* I didn't think so. *(picks up her purse and coat)*

JESUS- Now where are you going?

AMANDA- Out.

JESUS- Out where?

AMANDA- I don't know where! Away from this house. Away from you. I need to think.

JESUS- We need to talk.

AMANDA- No thank you. Be back later.

JESUS- I'll be waiting.

AMANDA- Is that a threat?

JESUS- It's a promise.

*(Amanda pauses, then exits. Fade to black.)*

# Melanie

Very few skits leave an impression like “Melanie.” Even our chatty junior high group was left completely speechless dramatic monologue. This isn’t the most brilliantly written dramatic piece in the world, but no one forgets about it. No one forgets the message they *heard* because no one forgets the image they *saw*.

Actors enjoy monologues because it gives them a chance to be one-on-one with their audience. They are completely alone, and will fly or die based on their own skill. And if the performer really enjoys the work he is given, great things may result.

Successful monologues have several traits. To begin with, they tell a story. It may be told directly to the audience, or it may be indirect. In either case, the character must have some story to tell in order to be on stage. Melanie’s story is more or less spoken directly to the audience.

A monologue may contain dialogue, which the speaker recalls for the audience’s benefit. When Melanie talks to the other runaway girl, she remembers her words of doubt. She remembers the advice she gave the runaway: advice she’s probably shared with others; advice she believes in; advice she’s too scared to take herself.

Monologues are also active. Drama is a visual art, not merely something to listen to. The visual aspects of the monologue support and propel the story line, and in “Melanie”, the visual image makes the entire piece unforgettable. The opening is hardly interesting: a girl walks on stage with a back pack on. Then as she begins her discussion on being an addict, she shocks us. A mirror, a bag of powder, and a razor blade appear. Something most people only hear about or watch in movies happens right in front of us: a teenage girl is preparing to use drugs. This visual completely captured the audience’s attention, and I doubt anyone missed a word she said or a move she made once the drugs were out in the open.

Good monologues should also contain surprises and twists. If there’s no conflict, no change of direction, no twist in the action, the character might as well be telling you about the time they walked across the street safely. Melanie’s story takes several twists. She robs the runaway, then intentionally wakes her up. Was it a cover so no one suspected her of the robbery? Or did she know what she was doing all along? Then there’s the second twist at the end, when Melanie mails the money back to the girl...but keeps the drugs.

Many times, you’ll find a skit with more than one application. “Melanie” could be used in a discussion of drugs, addictions, running from your problems, running from God, or the struggles faced by teenagers. “Melanie” seems to work best with the subject of addictions. Even though drugs are the central image of the monologue, the story focuses more on her attachment to the addict’s life, and not on her drug use.

Realism is crucial to selling a skit like “Melanie.” It is very likely someone in the audience knows exactly how to prepare cocaine. In order to be as believable as possible, the young lady who originated the role had a youth sponsor with first hand knowledge show her how to track cocaine. The idea is not to fool the audience into believing the person is actually preparing to take drugs, but to make it look as real as possible. In this way, the audience is able to “suspend disbelief” and, just for a moment, forget they are watching a skit in church. For that one moment, they are watching a real person struggle with a real problem. Someone trapped in a deadly addiction. Someone who wants to be free herself, but can’t see a way out. Someone just like them...

# Melanie

by john cosper, jr.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5:18; Jude 22-23

THEME: Addictions

Monologue for a teenage girl

*(Melanie enters, dressed very homeless. She carries a big backpack. She stops at center stage, looks around, and sits down. She slowly opens the backpack and pulls out a book, a razor blade, and a bag of "cocaine". Once she pulls everything out, she begins the monologue. As she speaks, she prepares the cocaine by taking some out, placing it on the text book, and separating it with the razor blade. She takes her time, pausing to look up at the audience frequently.)*

The problem with being an addict is that no one thinks you're capable of good. You're nothing but a waste, a dirty kid living from one high to the next. A junkie. A criminal not to be trusted. Fact is, not a day goes by I don't help someone in need.

I'm waiting for a bus, and I see this girl asleep on the bench. Probably close to my age, I figure. Obviously it's her first night. Her bags look like new, and her outfit's too clean. Probably got into it with her mom or something stupid like that. Decided she'd had enough, so she'd take off on her own.

No doubt she's got some money on her, being new to the road. And her purse is easy access. Two hundred dollars in her wallet! Not bad for a high school girl. Probably has a job. She doesn't look like a rich girl. I check her bag next. She's loaded. Pot, a box of Marlboros. I can always use an extra pack of cigarettes. There's about three or four pill bottles, too. Can't tell what they are, but when you're desperate for a fix, does it really matter?

I stash the money in my right shoe. The drugs fit in the bottom of my bag. I'm set for at least a week. Then I wake her up.

"Wake up! Wake up! Would you mind moving over?"

"Not at all." She scoots over just a little, and I sit down. It doesn't take her long to realize she's been robbed. "Happens to everyone sooner or later," I tell her. I ask for a cigarette, and she finds out that's gone as well. Out of pity, I give her twenty bucks. "This'll get you out of town," I say.

She asks me how long I've been away. Shoot, like I know. My watch got stolen long ago. Doesn't matter out here anyway. All I really need to know is whether it's gonna be hot or cold, and where to find a dealer. She's really nosy, and keeps asking questions. Wants to know why I'm out here. "Rule number one, you don't ask that question of anybody. Your reason is your own personal business." I don't know if that's really true, but I'm not interested in bearing my soul to a complete stranger.

I do it anyway. I couldn't live in my own house. Not on my terms anyway. I had found a way of life I liked. I found something that gave me fulfillment and at the same time, took me away from all my problems.

It was a lifestyle decision, I said. I could've suffered through the hell of growing up, but I chose to escape. I thought things would be better off out here. They are better off out here! I've seen the world. Well, North America, anyway. I've learned how to live off the land. How to

survive. Out here, I live for myself. And there's no one to tell me what to do or where to go or how to be.

"And no place to call home," she answers.

"Home? Who needs it? It only holds you back. Ties you down."

"No one to lean on," she says.

"What do you want someone to lean on for? You come out here to escape all that. Is this really where you want to be? 'Cause you don't sound very sure of yourself."

Of course it's not where she *wants* to be. I knew it the moment I laid eyes on her. She knows it, too. She's not fit for this kind of life. Hiding from the police. Turning your back on the countless saints roaming the streets looking to save the lost souls. (*hesitates, thinking about her own pain*) The misery of selling your body to pay for one more hit. The anguish and the pain that come when a bad trip sends your body into convulsions. The loneliness lying face down in a gutter, falling asleep in your own vomit, praying that you never wake up.

*(She snaps out of her sorrow, continuing with her story.)*

She needs a home. She screwed up her life, and she's afraid to ask forgiveness. Afraid she'll be rejected. She doesn't want to face her problems, and yet she doesn't want them to rule her life, either. Maybe her parents will forgive her; but then again, nobody loves an addict. It's a risk, I tell her, I'll never take. If she doesn't go, she'll never know. But if she does...if she's willing to take the chance...

*(Melanie pulls out a dollar bill and rolls it tightly.)*

Before I can get another word in, she's gone. Just like I knew she would be. She'll go home and admit her mistakes. Her parents will take her back with loving arms. She'll go to counseling. Maybe even rehab. They'll get her cleaned up, she'll go back to leading a normal, healthy life. And to help her on her way, next week she'll get her two hundred dollars returned in the mail. A gift from a friend.

But not the drugs. She doesn't need them any more. Only bad girls use drugs.

*(Melanie leans over to sniff the cocaine. Blackout.)*

# 10

## Teaching A Lesson

When you're on the road or performing at special events, you're not always going to have time for a lesson to follow your skit. In those cases, you want a skit that can introduce a problem and give the solution, all in a matter of five to eight minutes.

You have to be careful in selecting teaching skits. You don't want the skit to seem contrived, unnatural, or preachy. In other words, avoid skits that end with a Mike Brady/ Ward Cleaver life lesson/ lecture. It's too corny, and even the kids who agree with you will be throwing eggs.

There are exceptions to this rule, of course. If cornball and cheese is part of the skit you are using, such a lecture could be appropriate. An example would be a parody of *The Brady Bunch* or *Leave It to Beaver*. You can't help but be cheesy when you parody that sort of material. That's part of the fun!

The message doesn't have to be directly stated. In most cases, if the actions and events lead the characters to learn the lesson, the audience will be led to the same conclusion. When this happens, it is redundant to have a character restate the message. These skits tend to make themselves more memorable. Rather than spoon-feeding them and answer that flies in one ear and out the other, you have engaged their thinking process, which will help them remember the lesson.

# The Follow- Up Show

Before we move on to this next skit, a brief disclaimer: I do not like doing talk show parodies. They are done all the time on *Saturday Night Live*, *Mad TV*, *In Living Color*, and every other sketch comedy show. The gag has been done over and over on television and movies.

There is a good reason for this: talk shows are funny. Sick as that may sound, we as television viewers find something terribly funny in the sordid lives that parade across Sally, Jerry, Ricki, and Oprah's stage. However, we've seen it all before, and I never use the gimmick unless I have a good reason.

I found a good reason when I wrote "The Follow-Up Show." Talk shows do updates on their former guests every now and then to let their viewers know how much their lives had changed (for better or worse) since they last appeared. Our youth minister was talking on commitment, and I thought the follow-up gag would work. Christianity is more than a one-time conversion experience. It's a daily walk with God. What better way to illustrate the idea than to have a tabloid TV host follow up on someone who gave their life to Christ?

But first, we need to set the scene, which is where Sandra, Richard, and Christine come into the picture. Talk shows seem to thrive on people with weight problems, psychological problems, and sexual problems. We chose to parody the first two for obvious reasons. (This is ministry, and we've gotta keep it clean!)

Richard, if you can't guess, is a spoof of the world's foremost fitness guru and an audience favorite...especially when he gets it from Sandra. Make sure you get your actor in a tank top, short shorts, and a curly head wig.

Christine is not as easy to play as you might think. I worked with a brilliant actress at CIY in 1997, and she took all week to develop the role. Each different "voice" needs to have its own sound. Another thing the actress can do to distinguish the speakers is to turn her head and change facial expressions for each voice. Timing of lines is important, but doesn't need to be rapid fire. Pace the lines so it sounds as if the voices are really having a conversation, but don't rush so much you lose your place and character. Finally, make the "fight" at the end of Christine's bit as active and comic as possible. Pick an actress who's not afraid of getting dirty or getting a few bumps. The wilder it is, the better.

The pay off to the scene comes with Denise, the former bad girl who gave her life to Christ and...went back to being a bad girl. Here, the scene's tone turns serious. You've lured the audience in with humor, now you're going to hit them where they are. Denise can be played in a number of ways. She may be completely confident in her double life or very shaky. And the character doesn't necessarily have to be a girl. Depending on your group mix and your audience, you may change the character to a male.

"The Follow-Up Show" had a good response in our youth program and at CIY. It is a classic example of how a drama can teach an important Biblical lesson.

# The Follow- Up Show

by john cosper, jr.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:21-23

THEME: Commitment

## CHARACTERS

Ricki Jenny Raphael- Talk Show Host  
Sandra- Fat person  
Richard Salmon- Fitness guru  
Christine- Girl who has split personalities  
Denise- Former bad girl who became a Christian

*(Music. Lights up. Three chairs are on stage. One sits separate from the others. Ricki is center stage with a microphone.)*

RICKI- Today, on the Ricki Jenny Raphael show, we will be doing follow-ups on our former guests. We like to do this every now and then to see how our guests have handled their lives since our last show. You might remember our first guest from a show last year with Richard Salmon. At that time, she weighed over four hundred pounds. Today, she is a trim one hundred and twenty pounds. We're gonna bring her out now, but first, welcome back our old friend, America's fitness guru Richard Salmon!

*(Richard Salmon enters.)*

RICH- Ricki, you are simply now going to believe the difference in our friend Sandra.

RICKI- Let's bring her out. Sandra?

*(Sandra enters, very fat.)*

RICKI- Sandra, what happened?

SANDRA- Oh, Ricki, I got so nervous in my hotel room last night, I ordered room service. Then I ordered it again. Then I got Chinese take out, and I had a pizza delivered, and had another pizza delivered...

RICH- I can't believe you, Sandra! We had this problem licked!

SANDRA- Shut up! I feel bad enough!

RICH- I spend the last year of my life bringing you down to a trim one-hundred, and for what? So you can blow it all in one night!

SANDRA- I said shut up, you little sissy!

RICH- You have humiliated me on national TV! You've destroyed my reputation!

SANDRA- Shut up or I'll...I'll...

RICH- You'll do what, fatty?

*(Sandra throws Richard on the floor and jumps on him. She throttles him for a few minutes, then leaves. Richard crawls out after her.)*

RICKI- Wow. Not a happy ending. Well, let's move on to Christine. As you'll remember, When we last saw her, she had been diagnosed as having multiple personalities. She was committed to the care of Dr. Heinrich West of the Center for Multiple Personalities studies, and today, we're gonna see how she's doing. Christine, come on out.

*(Christine enters, walking nervously.)*

RICKI- Hello, Christine.

CHRIS- Hmm? Oh, hi.

RICKI- How are you feeling?

CHRIS- Great. Fine. Never better.

RICKI- As I just told our audience, you've been under Dr. West's care for the past year.

CHRIS- *(altered voice)* He's dead!

RICKI- What?

CHRIS- *(normal voice)* Nothing.

RICKI- How have the treatments been going?

CHRIS- Just fine. *(altered voice)* No they haven't! *(third voice)* Shut up, you little weasel or you'll give us away!

RICKI- Are you okay?

CHRIS- *(altered voice)* Fine! *(normal voice)* No I'm not! *(third voice)* Shut up! *(normal voice)* I need help! Help me! *(altered voice)* I'm going to slap you now! *(slaps herself; normal voice)* Oww! Stop hurting me! *(third voice)* I'll hurt you.

*(Christine slaps herself repeatedly on both sides of the face. She stands up in desperation and stares down at the chair.)*

CHRIS- *(normal voice)* No, no! Get away from me! *(sits, looks up at where she was standing)* Come back here! I'm not through with you!

*(Christine runs off screaming.)*

RICKI- Okay. We're not doing so well today. Let's bring in our third guest. She was a troubled teen until the one day she ended up in our audience. We had popular Christian artists dc Talk with us, and we allowed dc Talk to give an invitation at the end of the show. Denise was one of the many girls who came forward wanting to turn her life around. Please welcome Denise Farnsley.

*(Denise enters.)*

RICKI- Denise, it's good to see you.

DENISE- Nice to be back, Ricki. I never miss your show.

RICKI- Well, we'd all like to know how you are doing.

DENISE- As in, my life, school, or what?

RICKI- As in your relationship with God.

DENISE- Oh.

RICKI- You do remember the last time you were on our show.

DENISE- Sort of, yeah.

RICKI- And you remember your desperate cry for help.

DENISE Sort of.

RICKI- (*reading*) "I'm tired of the lies!" you said. "Tired of the drugs! I wanna change! I wanna live my life for God! I wanna be free!"

DENISE- Oh yeah.

RICKI- You talked with a counselor afterwards about a life full of boys, beer, and pot. But on that day, you gave your life to the Lord. And since then your life has been full of...

DENISE- Boys, beer, and pot.

RICKI- (*surprised*) Really?

DENISE- But I go to church every week...when I'm not hung over.

RICKI- I don't believe it! Denise, you made a serious commitment. How could you just blow it off like that?

DENISE- Look, I had just broken up with my boyfriend, I was real emotional, and besides, by going up, I got to meet that cute Toby guy, who it turns out was married.

RICKI- You haven't made any effort to build on your relationship with God?

DENISE- Come on, Ricki, I'm a teenager. I've got my whole life to work on my relationship with God. Right now is my time to have fun!

RICKI- But Denise, you're not promised a tomorrow. You could walk out of here and be killed in a car accident!

DENISE- Hey, I've already got Jesus in my heart. I'm covered. He'll forgive me for having a little fun, won't he?

RICKI- Perhaps, but is it worth taking the chance? Do you really think God want such a half-hearted commitment? (*to audience*) If that's really the attitude we have about God, perhaps we should ask ourselves if we really meant it when we made our commitment to God. Something to think about. We'll be right back.

# Wicked Ruler

Sometimes you know a great skit the moment it comes off the printer. Other times, it's not until they hit the stage when you find you've discovered something special. Inspired by a line out of *The Usual Suspects*, this skit took everyone by surprise. The idea began as a reader's theater, but as the premise grew, it became clear this was a full-blown skit that had to be seen, not only heard.

The story line is based on the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11. The subject that evening was Satan, and we wanted to present the Prince of Darkness in his truest form: a master of disguise, a creature that will say, do, or be whatever he must to win you over. Rather than have one individual portray the evil one, we split him into three distinct voices: power (one), evil (two), and seduction (three). The message, too, was three-sided: Satan is real; Jesus has already defeated him; but he still has power because we grant it to him, either by our selfish desires or a refusal to believe he is real.

The skit communicates these complex and abstract themes successfully because of its avant garde style. It is performed on a stage that is completely bare except for the ladder at stage right. You might also use a small black block or a small platform in place of the ladder. This ladder represents the rocks and the mountain top Satan uses in his temptation of Christ.

Costuming is an important element of this skit. The stereotypical image of the devil dressed in red did not fit with the devil we wanted to portray. As a powerful angel with many sides to his personality, he also has power enough to appear in many forms. We chose to dress the three actresses wore black turtlenecks, pants, and socks, allowing the audience to create a visual image of each voice in their imagination. Jesus dressed in street clothes to allow the audience to identify with him in his temptation.

The three Devils should speak in a tone representative of their part's distinctive voice (powerful, evil, and seductive). They must know not only their part, but the other two parts as well. Many of the lines follow and build on each other, so the dialogue requires a careful of rehearsal.

The layout of the scene should also aid the performers in bringing out their voice. The powerful devil stands on top of the rock (ladder), looking down on Jesus. The evil devil holds an apple with a bite taken out of it, representing the original sin of Adam and Eve. She can bring more emphasis to that visual by making gesturing with the hand holding the apple. The seductive voice is beside Jesus, lying on stage. She is able to express her personality physically. She may touch him on the arm, wrap her arm around his shoulder, or speak closely in his ear, as if she were whispering.

The final touch to the skit is the blackout. We had trouble with this part in our first performance. Our audience is accustomed to blackouts meaning the end of the skit. The first time we did the skit, the crowd immediately began to applaud and missed the final line. The following night, we asked the audience not to applaud so they wouldn't miss the end.

I've given you a good number of details on how to produce this skit. With an unusual scene like this (or any scene, for that matter), these tiny details add up and make a big difference in the final performance. Like I said, I wasn't sure how good this skit was when I first wrote it. We rehearsed, we brainstormed, we worked every line and every movement to get the most out of the script. The end result was so powerful, it became an instant favorite of the Dramamaniacs. In addition, the theme and style of the skit make it an ideal piece for special performances outside

our youth group. A week after its debut, we used “Wicked Ruler” to open up for Forefront recording artist, Bleach!

One final note: in June of 1997, “Wicked Ruler” won the Christians in Theatre Arts National Dramatic Sketch Writing Contest. The sketch was given a reading at the Christians in Theatre Arts national conference in Baltimore. It was also published by the *National Drama Service*, a Baptist Sunday School Board publication, in the fall of 1997.

Christians in Theatre Arts (CITA), if you’re interested, is a national network of churches, Christian theater companies, universities, actors, writers, and directors dedicated to supporting drama as a ministry. They have a bi-monthly newsletter, a national directory, several regional conferences, plus national and international conferences. For more information, write to CITA, P.O. Box 26471, Greenville, SC 29616.

For information on the *National Drama Service*, write to *National Drama Service*, c/o the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 127 Ninth Avenue North, Nashville, TN, 37234.

# Wicked Ruler

Winner of the 1997 CITA Dramatic Sketch Writing Contest  
by John Cospers, Jr.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 4:1-11; Philippians 2:10

THEME: Satan

## CHARACTERS

Power, Evil, and Seduction- Three Sides of the Devil  
Jesus

*(A ladder is at stage right. Power is on the ladder, two steps up. Evil is at stage left, holding an apple with a bite out of it. Seduction lies on the ground, facing the audience, with head pointed towards stage right. All three wear black. Jesus enters, slowly, wearing jeans and a white shirt. He is hungry. He sits on the front edge of the stage.)*

POWER- Welcome. You have been expected.

EVIL- No one comes by without my knowledge, and no one gets by without seeing me.

SEDUCTION- I've been waiting for you for a long time.

POWER- Surprised to see me? Or surprised by what you see? Am I not what you expected?

SEDUCTION- I'm not what anyone expects.

EVIL- To some, I'm a nightmare.

SEDUCTION- To others, a dream.

POWER- And still others, a fantasy.

EVIL- But you know better than anyone who I am.

POWER- The crown prince!

EVIL- A musician by trade.

SEDUCTION- An angel. The archangel.

POWER- This is my kingdom. I am God here.

EVIL- I set the rules. I hold the power!

SEDUCTION- I can make you, or I can destroy you!

EVIL- I'll make you rich, or reduce you to a pauper.

SEDUCTION- I can give you beauty or transform you into something hideous.

POWER- I'll give you power and glory.

EVIL- Or I'll crush you!

SEDUCTION- Break you!

POWER- Bury you!

EVIL- I control your fate. Resist me, and you only destroy yourself.

POWER- All those hopes and dreams will be smashed beneath my feet. You came here with nothing, and you'll leave with nothing!

SEDUCTION- *(sliding next to Jesus)* But it doesn't have to be that way. I'll give you life, love, peace, happiness. All you have to do is...listen to me.

EVIL- Let me feed you. Let me clothe you.

SEDUCTION- *(putting a hand on Jesus' shoulder)* Let me put rings on your fingers,

sandals on your feet. Let me take care of you.

*(Jesus pulls away and stands up. Evil approaches him, angry.)*

EVIL- You think you can resist? *(holds out the apple)* No one can! No one! You may see yourself as different, but you're not! You're flesh just like the rest of them!

POWER- You're in my domain now! All you see is mine! The ground beneath you. The air around you. The sky, the water, it's all mine now! Mine!

SEDUCTION- And the more you resist, the more you become mine!

JESUS- I don't need you.

POWER- You are hungry. Perhaps you would like to eat? *(gesturing to the ladder)* Do you see this stone? If you truly don't need me, if you are who you say, then turn this rock into bread so you may eat.

JESUS- It is written: "Man does not live by bread alone."

*(Power slides off the ladder. Evil grabs Jesus by the arm and forces him up the ladder.)*

EVIL- This is the highest peak in my kingdom! If you do not need me, if you are who you claim, then throw yourself down! It is written, "He will command his angels to watch over you!"

JESUS- It is also written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test!"

SEDUCTION- Look out from there! Look to the north, south, the east and west!

Everything you see I will give you if you will only bow down and worship me!

JESUS- You shall have no other Gods before me! At the holy name of Jesus, every knee shall bow!

*(Power, Evil, and Seduction drop immediately and fall face first before Jesus.)*

JESUS- Away from me!

*(Jesus exits.)*

POWER- *(looking up)* My fate is sealed.

EVIL- *(looking up)* My end will come.

SEDUCTION- One day, I too must bow.

POWER- Then perish in the fire.

SEDUCTION- But I will not go alone.

EVIL- You will die with me.

POWER- *(standing)* Some because I gave you power. *(turns to exit)*

SEDUCTION- *(standing)* Some because I gave you glory. *(turns to exit)*

EVIL- But most because I made you believe...

*(Blackout.)*

EVIL- That I don't exist.

# 11

## Children's Drama

Once the youth drama program is up and running, don't be surprised if one day you get a phone call from the Children's minister.

"Hey, (insert your name here), I saw that skit you guys did at youth the other night. Awesome. You guys are really great. Do you think you could maybe do a skit for the kids some time?"

Why not? Drama is visual, it's different. It helps keep the kids' attention and can break up the monotony of the average children's worship. (Of course, if children's worship at your church is like it is at my church, you can hardly call it average, and monotony is not a problem!)

This is probably stating the obvious, but it's still an important point. If you're ever called upon to perform for children, you have to bear in mind an audience of children is *completely* different from an audience of teenagers. Two characteristics distinguish a children's audience:

**(1) Children need to have the message told to them.** Only in rare instances will a set-up skit work with a younger audience. A skit like "Jilted", for example, would never work. Younger children would miss the parallel between Jesus and a marital relationship, and probably miss out on Jesus' identity as well.

The plot, characters, and theme must be as concrete as possible. Leave no loose ends and no unanswered questions. If you were to hold a discussion after the performance, you would want the kids to be able to identify the characters, the conflict, and the right (or wrong) solution to the conflict.

**(2) The younger the group, the shorter the attention span.** The skit needs to be fast-paced and to the point. You also want a skit that is VISUAL. Clever dialogue and witty one-liners will never impress a six-year old like a well-timed pratfall. Unique costumes and large props can also enhance the experience for the young audience.

The characters need to be vivid, active, and energetic. If the actors hold back or give a low-key performance, they are likely to lose the audience quickly. Keep your performances bright, up-tempo, and lively.

"What I Like About Church" premiered at the 1995 Midwest Kids Crusade and later opened the children's worship at the 1995 North American Christian Convention. Over six hundred kids were in the audience for that performance! It's page and a half length is ideal (though we have used much longer scripts with more action to keep their little eyes busy). However, the simplicity of its message communicates directly to the children, and the occasional "over-their-heads" humor keeps the "grown-ups" entertained as well.

When you reach the "Audio Adrenalin-in-in" portion of the script, feel free to substitute any band which might ring a more familiar bell with the kids. Out of Eden, Rebecca St. James, dc Talk, Newsboys, whatever. I like the AA reference because of Erin's corrupted pronunciation.

The skit requires a bright, active actress to fill the role of Erin. She needs to sound kid-like, but still understandable. The Cindy Brady-lisp are cute only if we understand what she's saying. She should be dressed in a "baby doll" dress and might hold a teddy bear or whatever cute and fuzzy companion happens to be popular. As for the band, try to copy their look as best as you can to help the kids recognize them. Also, make their "singing" sequence as lively as

possible- lots of jumping, choreography, flashing lights, and the like. Make it a big bang to recapture the attention of anyone who's drifting away.

**A Few Words About Recurring Characters.** One of the reasons for the longevity of *Saturday Night Live* has been the use of recurring characters. The Coneheads, Wayne and Garth, Ed Grimley, the Spartan Cheerleaders, Mary Catherine Gallagher, and the Church Lady have all played a major role in the show's success. Each character or set of characters has a unique set of quirks, behaviors, and catch phrases which makes them special and endears them to the audience.

When I was with the *Dramamaniacs* we used a few recurring characters, with limited success. Erin was one of the first and is so far the most successful. Later installments include discussions of worship and the bigness of God. Dr. Hairball and Dr. Lipschtick, the Screwball Scientists, have appeared in six skits. They have explored topics like Creation, Sportsmanship, the Trinity, and Rock Music. Another set of characters I've worked with are Be-Nice and Bible-Head, a spin off of the obnoxious MTV characters.

An important key to recurring characters is to have the same actors and actresses play the role each time. We were never successful in this with Hairball and Lipschtick so they never became recognizable figures. Erin's routines have fared much better with numerous actresses, probably because of the universal appeal of little girl monologues created by Carol Burnett and Gilda Radner.

One of the more successful recurring roles we used in *Dramamaniacs* was in a skit we "borrowed" from Adam Sandler on *Saturday Night Live* called "The Denise Show." The skit featured a young man named Steve (played by a well known actor and youth group member named Steve Robinson) who hosted his own TV show as a tribute to his ex-girlfriend, Denise. We did a couple follow-ups to the original Denise Show, each one building on what happened in previous skits. The audience loved these sketches, largely due to Steve's portrayal of the hopeless romantic. The audience was able to get to know the character, feel for him, and cheer for him.

The best part of recurring characters is that they give the performers a role that is uniquely theirs, something other people recognize and enjoy. The important thing for you as the director is to assess the talents in your group, then create or select the characters you use accordingly. Don't just assign these characters randomly. Make sure the character matches the personality and abilities of the actor. And most of all, make them special!

# What I Like About Church

by john cosper, jr.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 122:1

THEME: Church

## CHARACTERS

Erin- A little girl

Miss Burns- Erin's Sunday School Teacher

“Audrio Adrenalin-in-in” (can be changed to any Christian band)

Jesus

BURNS- Hello, boys and girls. Tonight, we have a very special guest speaker. Erin Mills is going to give a speech on what she likes about church.

*(Miss Burns claps, gets the audience to clap. Erin walks out to the front of the stage, smiling. She takes a breath like she's going to talk, then she sees the audience. Her eyes get big, and her knees start to shake. She turns around to run off stage, but Miss Burns stops her.)*

BURNS- Get out there!

ERIN- No!

BURNS- You have to go out there.

ERIN- I'm scared.

*(Erin turns her head to look at the audience and smiles. She walks back to the front of the stage.)*

ERIN- "What I Like About Church", by Erin Mills. Church is the place where adults take us so we can learn about Jesus. I've been going to church since I was *(counts on her fingers)* a baby! It's pretty, cool, but sometimes it gets really boring, especially for us kids. If I ran the church, here's what I'd change, and what I'd leave the same.

One thing I wouldn't change about my church is my Sunday School teacher. I really like Miss Burns. She knows all kinds of stories, like the one about Jonah and the Whale. I really like that one. One time I asked her how Jonah went to the bathroom while he was in the whale. She said she didn't know, but if she found out, she'd tell me. I thought that was pretty cool because when I asked my big brother the same question, he just punched me in the mouth.

I also like the singing in church, and we have a really nice music man. But sometimes, the music gets kinda boring. I don't always understand the words, either, like the song "Amazing Grace". I've heard that song a million times, and I still can't figure out what's so amazing about her. I'm not even sure who Grace is! So if I ran the church, we would have really cool music, 'cause our music ministers would be Audrio Adrenalin-in-in!

*(Audrio A. enters, lip syncs for 10-15 seconds, then exits.)*

ERIN- Another thing I'd change is the sermon. I always fall asleep during the sermon cause its so boring, especially when the pastor's reading something like Hosea. Miss Burns, my Sunday School teacher told me Hosea was a minor prophet. I'm not really for sure why he's a minor prophet, but I think it's because his book was so boring, they decided he wasn't good enough to play in the Major Leagues. So, if I ran the church, instead of a sermon, we'd just have more of Audrio Adrenalin-in-in!

*(Audrio A. enters again, lip syncs for 10-15 seconds, then leaves.)*

ERIN- There is one other thing I'd keep the same about church. I want my best friend to be there.

*(Jesus enters, stands next to Erin.)*

ERIN- You know why? Because the church is his house, and it just wouldn't be the same if he wasn't there. It doesn't matter if Audio Adrenaline is singing, or if nobody sings at all. Without my best friend, church wouldn't be any fun at all. That's what I like best about church- I get to visit my bestest friend in the whole wide world!

*(Erin hugs Jesus.)*

# 12

## Plays and Musicals

In all the world, in all works of literature I've read, all the plays and movies, I've never heard a better description of play production than the one offered in Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard's *Shakespeare in Love*. The scene shows Phillip Henslowe, theater owner, explaining to one of his investors the nature of the theatre...

Phillip Henslowe: Mr. Fennyman, allow me to explain about the theatre business. The natural condition is one of insurmountable obstacles on the road to imminent disaster.

Hugh Fennyman: So what do we do?

Phillip Henslowe: Nothing. Strangely enough, it all turns out well.

Hugh Fennyman: How?

Phillip Henslowe: I don't know. It's a mystery.

Of all the challenges I faced as the leader of the Dramamaniacs, the biggest one was trying to pull off a play. One act and full length plays are worlds apart from the week to week skits we did. It takes a different type of rehearsal, a different type of work ethic, and a different mindset for the group. I could probably write another entire book on how to produce a play, but hopefully these few pages will give you a good jumping off point to learning the big play by doing. I'll start with the most important thing to producing a play:

### **Convince the Kids to Take Ownership**

Big budget sets, state-of-the-art technical resources, and scripts worthy of a Tony award will be not enough to put on a play. The most important thing to do is sell the kids on the play. It simply won't happen unless they take ownership.

This is especially critical if your group has only done short skits up until this point. The differences between short skits and a play are much bigger than you realize. There are more lines to learn and more actions to block. There is more down time for actors and actresses in between scenes, requiring much more patience on the part of the participants. The actors will necessarily need to put in more time out of rehearsal working on lines and characters. Unless the kids are "sold" on the play, you will never get this level of patience, effort, and commitment out of them.

The kids need to know what is expected of them. They need to see the vision of the play, the final product you hope to produce. They need to be shown that this final product is worth their investment of time and work.

How do you sell the kids? First of all, they have to believe in the script. Get their input when you are selecting the script. They are much more likely to accept the challenge of the big play if they are able to help select the play.

Second, get them involved in every aspect of the play. Let the kids assist in planning rehearsals, designing the sets, designing their costumes, and designing the sound and lighting cues. Ask them what can be done to make the play more successful, and then ask them what they are willing to do to make it happen.

The first play will be the roughest. It will be a learning experience for you and for the kids. But when the second time comes around, it will be much easier. Having lived through the

successes and failures of plays in the past, the kids will have a better idea what to expect, and will be better prepared for the sacrifice and hard work it takes to put together a play. As new kids enter the group, the veterans will be able to impart their experience to the rookies. The more experience the kids gain, the more success your plays will have.

### **Divide and Conquer**

Division of responsibility is the second key to tackling a big play. Whether the kids or other adults take charge of technical aspects of the play is up to you. It should actually depend on the level of skill that the kids bring to the play. If the kids have the knowledge and know how, let them use it. If not, find adults that can teach these skills to the kids so that down the road, the kids can take full ownership of the technical side of theater.

Sit down with your production crew and generate an overall vision for the play. The production crew may include any of the following:

Technical Director (TD)- The person responsible for calling all the technical shots during the play. Once the director has finished blocking and directing the action, the TD takes over and actually runs the show.

Music Director- Responsible for teaching and directing the group in learning musical numbers.

Sound- Runs the sound board: microphones, sound effects, etc.

Set Design- Designs and leads construction of the set.

Lights- Designs and runs the lights for the play.

Costume Designer- Plans the costumes for the play.

Make-up Designer- Plans make-up and make-up effects, if needed.

Student Directors- Students who assist in running rehearsals. When the director is not running rehearsals, Student Directors have full authority to run rehearsals.

With this production crew you will decide what kind of set to build, when and how to build it, what the over all look and feel of the play will be, what sound effects are needed, how the action is to be played... This is where you cast the dream that you will sell to the kids.

Once the vision is cast, the job of putting the play together is divided up. The sound tech gathers are the necessary sound equipment. The costumer makes and purchases all needed elements for the costumes. The director is responsible for the actors' performances. Try to manage it all yourself, and you'll quickly find yourself overwhelmed.

I must point out that a big play does not necessitate a large set, lights, make-up, costumes, etc... But if you're going to go to the effort to produce a longer drama, and the budget and script lend themselves to an elaborate set, go for it.

### **Brace for Disaster...Revel in the Mystery**

Just like the cryptic words of Mr. Henslowe, obstacles will come. Kids will miss rehearsals or drop out. The set won't be ready on time. The microphones won't have batteries. The light board will short out.

I can almost guarantee you'll end up ten minutes from curtain, gnawing on your knuckles, wondering if the whole thing is going to go down in flames. But keep the faith, dear friend. Remember what I said earlier in the book: Don't Panic. Keep your focus on Christ, let his mysterious ways work everything out. I guarantee, everything will be fine. How do I know? I

can't say how. "It's a mystery." And it's one of the things that keeps you coming back for more: the thrill of flying by the seat of your pants, living one heart beat away from self-destruction. It's the rush that you only get in the theater. The bug that bites and never lets go.

# 13

## **How to Keep Things Interesting**

Sometimes, the usual five minute scene just gets to be a little, well, routine. If you only do one scene every month or so, it's not so much a problem. However, when you do two or three skits a week, it gets a little more than routine. It gets boring! Not only is it boring for your audience, but the actors get sick of the same style over and over again.

Remember, the purpose in using drama is to make the lesson memorable. We want to give people something special to remember what they heard. When they get used to seeing skits every week, even that becomes part of the routine, and pretty soon people tune out before the skit!

The solution? Every now and then, give them something different, something wild, or maybe even experimental. Anything to make them sit up and say, "Hey! Now this is different!"

And don't put any boundaries on ideas. Experimental theatre has always played an important part in the development of the arts. Two of the hottest tickets in New York are for the off-Broadway, avant garde productions *STOMP* and *Blue Man Group*, both of which have provided inspiration for my own drama troupe.

This section is dedicated to various non-skit theatre ideas: what they are, how you should go about producing them, and suggestions for using them in ministry. Six very effective alternatives are Improvisation, Drama Prompts, Lip Syncs, Audience Participation, Reader's Theater, and Home Movies.

# 14

## **Drama Without Scripts**

I can hear the strict, program oriented youth ministers gasping for air. “Drama without a script? How can that possibly be a ministry tool?” Sure it’s unpredictable. Yes, it does involve some risk. But it can also be very funny, very entertaining, and very useful. Those of you still shaking your heads can skip ahead to Chapter 14. As for the adventurous among you, here comes a crash course in improvisation and drama prompts.

### **Improvisation**

Improvisation is essentially drama without scripts. And contrary to popular opinion, it is NOT a difficult skill. Improvisation is merely reacting to situations, something everyone does in their day to day lives. The actors are given a set of prompts or cues (location, lines to say, characters, situations, actions, etc.) which are incorporated into the scene. These prompts may be very detailed and specific, as in a story outline, or they may be very limited. Mike Nichols and Elaine May, film makers who began their careers as improvisational comedians, were famous for their first line/ last line routine. They would ask the audience to suggest only the first and last lines to be spoken in the scene, and use them to create hilarious scenes.

The most important thing you can tell your actors is that there are **NO MISTAKES** in improvisation. When there is no script, and no set lines to be spoken, it is **IMPOSSIBLE** to mess up. This is due to the rule of agreement. The performers must agree that every line spoken and every action taken become part of a scene that is being created on the spot. If one actor states that he is proud to be an astronaut, he must trust that his partner will agree with him and become an astronaut, too.

The trust goes both ways. The first astronaut may pick up a rock which he imagines to be a moon rock. If he asks his partner, “Do you know what this is?” and the partner responds with “It’s Pee Wee Herman’s brain,” the first astronaut must agree that the rock is, in fact, Pee Wee Herman’s brain.

The only way the scene could be messed up is if the actor partner ignores the lines and actions of their partner. They must constantly adjust to and react to their partner’s actions and lines. For instance, if one actor picks up a basketball and says, “Look at this watermelon,” his partner cannot respond with “You idiot! That’s a basketball!” The first person has already identified the basketball as a watermelon, so the second person must agree to see the basketball as a watermelon.

The second most important thing to tell your performers is they should NOT try to tell jokes. Improvisation is usually (though not always) humorous. However, the humor does not come out of jokes or witty lines. The humor comes from using the prompts and suggestions and making connections between them. For instance, let’s say one performer is playing Queen Elizabeth, and the last line of the sketch is “Game called on account of rain.” The performers may tie the two ideas together by having the Queen call off a baseball game because of her inauguration...hence, the game was called on account of her “reign.”

So how can you use a completely random form of drama in your ministry? Several ways. First of all, improvisation can be very entertaining. Second City, Improv-Olympics, and Comedy Sport are three groups that use improvisation. There is even an improvisation game show called

*Who's Line Is It Anyway?* And if you've ever seen Bob and Doug MacKenzie on *SCTV*, their routines were completely improvised. If you have some performers with particularly strong improv skills, why not use them for your ice breaker skit? Give them a bizarre situation, or a prop to work with, or lines to use, and let them go!

Improvisation can also be utilized with a lesson, usually as a set-up. For instance, improv can be a living illustration of how we have no control of our own destiny. Three of the best formats for this illustration are:

(1) Have two people draw characters and a scenario out of a hat to improvise a scene.

(2) Playing "Tag." This game calls for four or five performers. Two people begin a scene with audience suggestions. Once the scene begins, the other players enter the scene by yelling "Freeze!" They then replace one of the players and begin a new scene. In this game, it is possible for a person to be playing a dentist one minute, then be transformed into a dinosaur in the next moment.

(3) Playing "Whose Line?" Two actors improvise a scene beginning with a suggestion from the audience. They are each given three sentences on cue cards, which they must pull out at random and use in the course of the skit. These lines can be made up by the audience, the director, or other actors. They can be famous quotes ("I have not yet begun to fight"), clichés ("All's well that ends well"), lyrics ("Bringing in the Sheaves"), Bible verses ("The frogs...were piled into heaps and the land reeked of them."), recognizable sayings ("Spill on aisle three.") or complete nonsense ("If I want a buffalo living in my bathtub, I'll call Ralph Nader and ask for one!"). As you can probably guess, the lines will almost NEVER fit the story, but in this game it is the actors' job to incorporate the lines and make them fit in the story.

Another application for improvisation would be in a discussion about witnessing. Pull two actors out and have them play a Christian and non-Christian. Either have the Christian take the offensive and share his or her faith, or have the non-Christian quiz the Christian and force him or her to defend that faith. The intent of this scene is to force the audience think about how well prepared they are to share their own faith. You may even want to allow the actor playing the non-Christian to prepare for the scene ahead of time so they can give the Christian character a greater challenge.

The final thing you need to know about improvisation is that anything can (and usually does) happen, which means the possibility exists for something un-Christian or inappropriate to come out. No matter how good or how conscientious the actor, no one is perfect, and on a given night, anyone can slip.

I generally cut things off when they get ugly in practice, but on stage in church is another matter entirely. So far the problem has not occurred, but we're always prepared to deal with it, just in case. The best strategy I've seen involves having someone in the front row with an aerosol air freshener. Before beginning the improvisations, inform the audience that this person is present, and in the event something "dirty" comes out, that individual will run on stage and hose the violator down with air freshener to "clean them up." Once that line was crossed, the scene was over.

Obviously, your hope as a director is that the person with the air freshener will NOT have to leave their seat. Make sure your actors agree with this opinion. Make sure they don't see the air freshener as a green light for cussing or dirty jokes. Anyone with this attitude does not belong in a ministry position, much less an improv group.

# 15

## **Drama Without Dialogue**

Stage drama is more than just words. Unless it is brought to life in a physical sense on stage, it's just a piece of literature on paper. Therefore, drama does not necessarily need dialogue or words at all. Drama can involve music and action. It may involve a narrative and action, with no words spoken by the actors. Or it may not require any sound at all. Lip Sync, Human Video, and Mime are three useful forms of drama without dialogue.

### **Lip Sync**

Most everyone has seen lip syncs performed at some point in their life. When well-rehearsed, they can be hilarious, but when thrown together they can be really bad.

The secret difference between a good lip sync and a bad lip sync is planning. Throwing three guys on stage and telling them to air guitar along to MxPx will not cut it. That's not to say air guitar is not cute. It is...for all of about thirty seconds. You need to develop some sort of an outline for the performance.

Before you prepare a lip sync, you must know what your purpose in performing the lip sync is. Does it apply to a theme? Do you want to emphasize the message of the song or simply set up a topic or mood? Is it more important for the audience to pay attention, or do you just want to have fun and make fools of yourselves?

If the song has a story line, use it in your performance. For example, we used twenty people to put Audio Adrenaline's "DC-10" on stage. One person, dressed as the grim reaper, lip synched the lyrics. The other 19 came out at various points in the song, screaming and dying, until by the song's end, we had a HUGE pile of corpses on stage.

Choreography is a must. If you want to hold the audience's attention, you need to give them something worth watching. That doesn't necessarily mean a group of girls doing a "Rhythm Nation" style dance routine, but it does require some rehearsal and collaboration. Choreography can mean creating humor. The first year our youth program sponsored a lip sync, the winning group featured three boys dressed as nuns, singing and dancing to "I Will Follow Him" from *Sister Act*.

Lip syncs can also be enhanced with good costumes, good use of props, lighting effects, and audience involvement.

These guidelines are not intended to take the fun out of the creation and performance of a lip sync, but to give you tools to make your lip syncs more entertaining and more fun. After all, when the audience is enjoying themselves, the performers enjoy themselves even more!

### **Human Video**

Half way between lip sync and mime is a form of drama known as Human Video. This form of drama uses music, but doesn't necessarily follow the lyrics or the message of the song. Human Video tells a story, and is usually highly evangelical in nature.

I've seen Human Videos performed for years, but only recently discovered the term on the internet. Ever seen the skit called "Turnaround"? It depicts a girl embracing a number of other characters representing temptation and depression. She finds herself faced with another character labeled "Suicide" she backs away, but finds that suicide pursues her. The other

characters circle around her as she tries to dodge Suicide. In the end, a figure in white delivers her and carries her to safety. All of this is set to the old Bonnie Tyler song “Total Eclipse of the Heart.”

Carman songs lend themselves well to Human Video. I’m sure some of you have seen “The Champion” played out on stage as many times as I have. One song we developed but never got the chance to use was Fiona Apple’s “Criminal.” Next time you hear it, listen for the religious interpretation in the lyrics. The Bible says God is present everywhere in creation; my experience shows creation includes such arenas as popular music and science fiction. (Check out the God symbolism in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Dune*, *It Came From Outer Space*, and *Tron*.)

Many youth ministers who use Human video have tapes of their particular pieces and trade tapes with other youth ministers to get ideas.

## **Mime**

If someone had told me two years ago when I began this book I’d include a chapter on mime, I’d have said they were crazy. Like most clear thinking, level-headed Americans, I hated mimes as a rule. That was before I had the privilege of seeing Silent Light. Silent Light is a youth mime group based at the Master Arts Company in Grandville, Michigan. The group is made up of mostly home schooled students, and they travel all over the country. They perform at inner city missions, churches, and other events, and their work is powerful! They even wear the white grease paint, and I was *still* blown away!

The lesson learned was that mime isn’t all guys trapped in a box or walking into the wind. Mime has as many variations and uses as straight drama. It can be an emotionally charged art form that expresses feelings and spiritual struggles in a way words can’t. It may be completely silent, it may use music, it may use narration, or it may use narration and music. It may be done with grease paint and black costumes, no greasepaint and black costumes, character costumes, or street clothes. It may use props, it may not use props. Or, if your name is Albert Brooks, it may even involve dialogue. (Okay, so that wasn’t really mime!)

The mime we have experimented with uses narration and some props. “Bus Stop” is an older script, but still very popular with our audiences. We dress the girl like a runaway, wearing all she owns on her back. A worn back pack is her primary prop, and the two tickets are usually cut out of what ever paper we find handy. The man with the scars (hmmm, wonder who that is) is also dressed like a “traveler”, usually with a jacket. The friends wears street clothes. We never use grease paint. I want the audience to give the drama a chance, so I try to keep the traditional “mime” look out of it. Some directors have used additional actors to represent the “party bus” as well. I always liked leaving that image to the audience’s imagination.

That’s one of the things that makes mime work. A good mime deals with imaginary in such a realistic way, the audience is forced to “fill in the blanks” with their imagination. As I mentioned in the chapter on skits that teach, when you engage the audience’s minds, you make a much greater imprint on their minds and cause them to remember the skit.

One of the most successful mimes we used came from Joshua Harris’ book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. The book has a great story in it called “The Room”. We combined the mime and narrative with the soundtrack to *Twin Peaks* (The creepiest music in the world! Get the CD, and I promise you’ll find a use for it.). The result was chilling.

If you're interested in doing mime, there are a lot of popular Christian mime skits floating around. There's also a national organization specifically for Christian mimes called *Mimeistry*. You can contact them at 1605 E. Elizabeth Street, Pasadena, CA 91104.

# Bus Stop

by john cosper, jr.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:13-14

THEME: Direction in Life

## CHARACTERS

Narrator

Girl at Bus Stop

Man with Scars in His Hands

Friend on White Bus

*(Girl sits on bench with her backpack. All action is pantomimed along with narration.)*

She sits alone at the crossroads. She stares unwaveringly down the road she has chosen. It is the fast lane, promising fun, excitement, and a good time. It is a road navigated by a large psychedelic colored bus, packed with other travellers just like her, looking for a good time.

Unseen to her is the end of that road- a cliff, a long fall, and a fiery death. No passenger on that bus sees the end. Are they really ignorant of their fate? Or do they deem the intermittent fun and excitement worth the ultimate price they must pay?

She looks the opposite way to see if the bus is coming. She dives into her bag, making sure she still has her ticket. She shuffles through her many belongings and finds her ticket, being careful not to knock anything else out as she removes it.

But something else does fall out. Another ticket for another bus, that travels on another road.

She looks up and sees the other bus, its door wide open as if it was inviting her to come in. Had it pulled up since she had first sat down? Or had it been there all along? The bus is white, covered with dust from the rugged road it travels.

She examines the old ticket. Yes, she remembers it now. It was given to her by a mysterious man.

*(Enter Man with Scars)*

He told her the story about the price he had paid to get the ticket- a story of pain, suffering, bloodshed, and death. It seemed too fantastic to believe, but then, when he offered her the ticket, she saw the scar.

She gasped in terror. He saw her alarm, and showed her that the wound went all the way through. He showed her identical wounds on his other hand and on his feet. He showed her the gash in his side, and the tiny wounds across his brow. As she gingerly reached out to touch the scar in his hand, he smiled at her, and she remembered his next words as if she had just heard them.

"I did it for you."

She had almost completely forgotten that gift of years gone by. She stares at the ticket, trying to figure out how she had forgotten.

The blaring headlights of the approaching bus jerk her back into the moment. With a squeal of the brakes, the psychedelic bus slides to a halt, its door wide open. She throws her bag over her shoulder and starts for the door of the bus.

A whisper holds her back.

*(Enter Friend.)*

It was a whisper she knew well. The whisper of a close friend coming from the old white bus. She feels herself moving towards the white bus as he softly calls her name, beckoning her to come with him, his smile warming her with love.

The loud sounds of the colorful bus distract her. Dare she pass up the party of a lifetime?

She stares at the two tickets. In her left hand, a ticket to the fast lane. In her right, the ticket for that dusty old white bus.

She hears her friend's whisper.

She hears the party.

She hears the voice of the man with the scars.

She makes her choice.

*(Blackout.)*

What would your choice be?

# 16

## Audience Participation

Have you noticed that I've mentioned involving the audience several times in this book? This is yet another way of doing that. In fact in this form of drama, the audience actually becomes the cast and characters.

This format calls for a narrator or narrators to guide the action. You may use as few or as many narrators as you like. I usually write for two. As the storyline unfolds, the narrators travel into the audience and pull people out as needed to portray the different characters in the story.

This is an ideal way to communicate with a small group or an outdoor group. Gather the audience around you, and you've created a highly enjoyable "Theater-in-the-round." And though it may seem tricky, this is actually an easy and VERY effective form of drama to use with small children. After you've pulled one kid out and given them a part, you'll have a dozen hands waving to be pulled out and fill the rest of the cast. The story should be as simple and direct as possible, so your actors can follow and act out the story with as little prompting as possible.

An older audience may not be so cooperative. Should you meet with resistance from someone who does not want to act, there's only one solution: do not give them a choice! We pulled our straight-laced, no-nonsense church administrator out of the audience once, completely against his will! He did the skit because we wouldn't let him say no. Once you've given in to one person, you'll never get anyone on stage. The trick is learning to grab them before they know what's happened. Once they realize they're on stage and the audience is cheering for them, they're stuck! Completely at your mercy!

If dialogue is necessary, there are two ways to use it. One, is to say the line and have the person repeat it in character. This method is easiest when you have a young audience that may not know how to read. The other way to handle dialogue is to make cue cards. When speaking lines occur in the story, the narrators hand the cards to the characters. The cue cards are especially helpful when punchlines or inside jokes are contained within the story's dialogue.

The most important thing to remember with this kind of skit is to keep it moving. Don't let things drag out. Ad lib to fill gaps, but don't ad lib every time. Only as much as it takes to speed the skit along to its conclusion.

"So What the Heck Is Sin Anyway?" uses the audience participation format to explain the problem of sin and the forgiveness of God. Be sure to pick out a guy strong enough to hold two smaller girls. Then for the final dose of sin, get the biggest guy in the crowd.

When you come to the section with the cross, you may want to have two "plants" in the audience: people who already know the script and know how to form the cross the way you want. The way you want the crossed form is for one guy to stand, and another guy to be held in his arms, straightened out, parallel to the ground. That way, they form a cross that is visible and recognizable to the audience.

# So What the Heck Is Sin Anyway?

by john cosper, jr.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 3:23-24; 6:23; 5:8

THEME: Sin

## CHARACTERS

John and Laura- Narrators

*(Laura enters carrying an teddy bear. John follows.)*

LAURA- I don't get it! I don't get it! I just don't get it!

JOHN- Laura, chill out. What's the matter!

LAURA- Look, I can't deal with these abstract concepts! I need to see things! A Bible. I can understand that. I can see it; I can touch it. A cross. I get it. Two sticks of wood tied together; guy gets nailed up on it. What I don't get is this thing called sin! I can't see it. I can't touch it. I can't measure it. Therefore, I don't understand what it is or how believing in God is the only way to get rid of it!

JOHN- Okay, okay. I think I can help. Here.

*(John pulls two people out of the audience. He leads one to up center stage.)*

JOHN- Let's say this person represents God.

*(John has the other person stand down center.)*

JOHN- The other one represents man. Now, when this man was just a little baby, he began to sin. He was selfish, he fought with other children, he lied.

LAURA- Did he pick his nose, too?

JOHN- Maybe, but he was still young, so he hadn't sinned very much. So, let's say Teddy represents his baby sins.

LAURA- Are you calling Teddy evil?

JOHN- I am not calling Teddy evil. It's just a demonstration.

*(John hands the teddy bear to the Man.)*

JOHN- Hold this.

LAURA- You hurt him, and I'll pound you!

JOHN- As a baby, he hasn't committed that many sins, and so far, he thinks he can handle them just fine on his own. Got it?

LAURA- Yeah. Go on.

JOHN- Now, as he gets older, he commits even more sins. He's probably got little brothers and sisters he beats up on, he cheats in school

LAURA- He picks his nose!

JOHN- And a lot of other things. So, more sins means he's carrying a slightly larger load on his arms.

*(John pulls a small girl out of the audience. Have the girl hold Teddy, and the Man hold the girl.)*

LAURA- Slightly larger? Are you saying she's fat?

JOHN- I am not saying she's fat, but she is bigger than Teddy because as he grows older, he's committing more sins. Fair enough?

LAURA- Fair enough.

JOHN- The sins are starting to pile up, but it's still not so much that he thinks he needs any help...yet. Then he reaches high school.

*(John pulls another small girl from the audience.)*

JOHN- Now depending on how vulnerable this guy is to peer pressure, he could get into a whole range of trouble in high school: cheating, lying, stealing, drinking, and...

LAURA- Picking his nose!

JOHN- Maybe even that! The load's getting to heavy for him to carry in his arms, and these sins hang on his back like a monkey.

*(Have the second girl climb on the Man's back. If he can't support them, grab a person out of the audience to get on all fours like a stool. Have the Man sit on the stool, then the two girls sit in his lap.)*

LAURA- Are you calling her a monkey?

JOHN- I am not calling her a monkey. I'm saying the sin hangs on him like a monkey.

LAURA- Sure you are.

JOHN- Now, he's still managed to stay on his feet, and even though the load is quite heavy, he's not ready to give it all up. Then, he gets to college.

*(John picks the biggest guy out of the audience and brings him on stage.)*

JOHN- Now he's in trouble. At this point, the sin has accumulated so much, he can't possibly carry it all. Even if he could, there's no way he could reach God because at the same time the sin accumulated in his arms, a wall formed to separate him from God.

LAURA- What wall?

*(John pulls four people out of the audience and stands them up as a wall in front of God.)*

LAURA- This is taking forever. I need to sit down.

*(Laura grabs someone out of the audience, has them get down on all fours, and sits on their back.)*

JOHN- See? A wall.

LAURA- Nice. Get on with it.

*(John picks up the Teddy doll.)*

JOHN- With all the sin in his life, there's no way he could reach God on his own. *(holds up Teddy)* And even if this was all the sin he had, he couldn't break through the wall. He's completely helpless. The only way he could reach God was if God reached out to him. And to break through the wall of sin, there was only one way to get across.

*(Pause.)*

LAURA- How? *(doesn't notice the pun on "across", "a cross")*

JOHN- To get a cross.

LAURA- That's what I'm asking. What did he need to do to get across?

JOHN- He got a cross.

LAURA- I know he got there, but how did he get there?

JOHN- He got a cross!

LAURA- I know he got there, but how did he get there?

JOHN- He got a cross!

LAURA- I know he got there, but how did he get there?

JOHN- He got a cross!

*(As Laura continues, John picks up the second person in the "wall". He hands that person to the third person next to them and instructs the second person to lay flat so the two people form the shape of a cross.)*

LAURA- *(really ticked off)* I know that! I know that already! I know he got across! I wanna know how he got across! But everytime I ask you how he got across you say he got across! Now how am I supposed to figure out how he got a cross if everytime I ask you how he got across you say he...*(sees John forming the cross)* got a cross.

JOHN- The only way a perfect God could tear down the wall and save man from his sin was to get a cross.

# 17

## Reader's Theater

We were preparing to talk on the subject of drugs again, and none of the old scripts would do. As I read through them, I realized everything we'd written up to that point was out of the same mold: scenes or monologues depicting the aftermath or end results of drug abuse. Exactly the kind of material the drug users would expect to see; exactly the kind of drama they would shut out and ignore.

We needed something different. Something they couldn't shut out and ignore. Something that would grab their full attention in the same way drugs had. I wanted to find a way to simulate a drug trip, then simulate the pain and misery of addiction. The only way to do that was to engage the audience's imagination. And the best way to engage the audience's imagination is with reader's theater.

Reader's theater is very similar to radio programs of the 1930's because the drama is read, with no visual blocking or movement. A group of actors takes the stage, usually dressed in black. They may be arranged in any way. They may stand or sit. They may hold their scripts in folders, or have their scripts set on stands. They may be lined up or arranged in any way on stage.

Often in reader's theater, the settings and images are much bigger than anything you might portray on stage. The setting may shift rapidly, and the action may be on a larger scale than the stage normally allows.

In addition to the character's dialogue and emotions, the actors must communicate setting, mood, plot, and action solely with their voices. A narrator may be used, but a narrator is not essential. The characters may take time narrating the story, or the story line may be communicated through dialogue. A notable example of story being delivered through dialogue was the radio dramatization of the *Star Wars* movies. The complex action of the sci-fi classics was presented solely through the characters' dialogue.

Because of the way Reader's Theater takes advantage of the audience's imagination, it has virtually no boundaries. There is no real limit to the number of characters; each actor may play one role or several. You may tell a concrete story in a concrete setting, such as the tale of a prisoner in a concentration camp. Or you may present something a little more abstract, like the drug trips in "River of Deception."

I co-wrote the script with a good friend who has seven years of first hand experience in drug use. Maurice was delivered from drugs after a ten day LSD flashback. He's a living testimony of how God can save anyone from any addiction.

In writing the script, we used popular drug images and lyrics to create the dream-like world of a drug trip. There are also direct and indirect references to famous celebrities who have died from drug use.

The central character (Voice One) takes two trips. The first is delightful and pleasant. The second trip begins peacefully like the first, but quickly shifts into a terrifying experience. Towards the end of the piece, the drug user stands on the verge of a third trip. She knows that death is imminent if she pursues her trip, but sees no way out. She cries for help, desperate to be free of her addiction. The piece ends with a passages from Proverbs and the Gospels, offering a ray of hope.

In staging this piece, we not only dressed the readers in black, we performed on a completely dark stage. Each reader held a candle to light their scripts. We also lined the front of the stage with candles, and arranged the readers in a staggered pattern. Voice One was placed at the down stage left corner, seated on the stage. Voice Five, which represents the deadly side of drug use, stood at back stage right. Voices Two, Three, and Four were in a diagonal line dividing One and Five.

“River of Deception” has become the most requested and most popular skit in the Dramamaniacs repertoire. I was told that the “biggest druggie at Floyd Central High School” was in the audience one night and asked questions about the drama the next day in school. Those who have experienced drugs praise the way it recreates the feelings and sensations of a drug high. Others praise its intensity and powerful style. My prayer is that “River of Deception” will have the same impact on your group it has had on ours.

# River of Deception

A Reader's Theater

by maurice may and john cosper, jr.

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 23:29-35; John 8:34-36

THEME: Drug Abuse

## CHARACTERS

Five Voices

(Voice 1 is a teenage girl dabbling with drugs.)

(Voices 2-4 can be male or female.)

(Voice 5 should be played by a male with a deep voice- the voice of death.)

[All cast members are on a dark stage with scripts and music stands. They should all be dressed in black, and if possible, the only lighting should be candlelight.]

- 1 I dream of a world that is here, but more there. A world where hate and sorrow do not exist. A world where the mind and the spirit and the body become one. A place where laughter flows like honey. No one can hurt me there; they can't even reach me. A world where freedom is king. No limits. No boundaries. And especially, no pain. [giggle] No pain. Freedom of mind. Freedom of soul. Freedom to choose. I only need to choose to go there. I only need follow the lead of others who've gone before me, who left behind the keys to the doorway of perception.
- 2 Come.
- 3 As you are.
- 4 Through the door.
- 3 Float down sea in a crystal ship.
- 2 On a river that's within.
- 4 To the magic place beyond time and space.
- 3-4 Alive inside your mind.
- 2 Come and see what eyes can't see.
- 3 And touch what others don't believe.
- 5 It's better when you're not alone.
- 4 You'll find it once you turn the key.

1 Okay. Give me the key. I'll turn it ...just so I can see...I can see...inside...and take a ride.

2 Awake, awake inside my dreams!

3 The doors swing open. I walk inside.

4 I trip and fall up into the light.

2-3 Flying high with the Phoenix.

4 'Til I plunge in the river, that leads to the ancient lake.

1 I sense a growing awareness of the shadows. And anxious bubbling of butterflies give rise to little bursts of energy inside my body. I feel the energy begin to grow. My mind follows as the energy leads. An electric current flows through the air around me, reaching every depth of my body. Something that was always there, until now invisible, floods my mind. A new world of freedom and spirit. The walls begin to breathe as I see through new eyes--which to my surprise can perceive more than I can feel. A sweet melody fills my ears; a melody I can see as well as hear. Notes dancing like madness in a collage of color, through my fingers, across my tongue. Their aroma sends me higher.

2 Higher in the sky, stretch your wings and you will fly.

3 Free of sorrow strife and pain, to the place where laughter reigns.

1 The dream is so real, but all too brief. I hear the laughter as it waves farewell, sending its delicious song with me. The melody fills my heart with a peace and joy like I've never known. It is my own special key to my new found paradise. I hear the song begging me to share it with everyone. But more than that, I feel it calling me back.

5 No one gets

4 Away with

5 Out

4 A passion to return.

1 So I return to the one place I was truly

5 Alive.

2 Come.

3 As you are.

4 Through the door.

3 Float down sea in a crystal ship.

2 On a river that's within.

5 Sin.

4 To the magic place beyond time and space.

3-4 Alive inside your mind.

2 Come and see what eyes can't see.

3 And touch what others don't believe.

5 It's better when you're not alone.

4 You'll find it once you turn the key.

1 One quick breath and sends me back to the place I love.

3 The river welcomes the visitor

2 While laughter dances on the shore.

3 To a symphony played on the leaves of the trees

4 Strummed by the voice of the wind and the breeze.

5 Never leave.

1 It's lovelier than I remembered, and every tree, rock, and flower welcomes me back. A rainbow of teddy bears picnic in the shade, and a mushroom tips his cap as I float by.

2 "Eat me," said the shroom. "And grow higher you will."

4 "Or drink from the vial and you'll grow higher still."

1 Once more I take flight on the wings of a Phoenix, soaring higher and higher, floating on the symphonies of color.

2 Higher, higher in the sky, stretch your wings and you will fly.

3 Free of sorrow strife and pain, to the place where laughter--

5 Pain!

1 Something goes wrong. My limbs limbs are on fire! I can't feel my breath! I watch my soul, my spirit, and my body break up, torn by a rip in the melody! Now I'm falling.

[2 and 3 begin a chant: "Falling. Falling."]

1 Crashing. The river that danced with my love song now screams for my death! There's no one to catch me!

4 Nothing to cling to, no one to save you. The water thirsts for blood.

5 Better people than you never made it this far.

1 I fight with the air, grasping at clouds for some soft landing. Something to break my fall.

5 No one...

1 I close my eyes in fear, but I still see through my other senses.

5 Gets out of here...

1 I curse at the wind, pleading, begging for the pain to

2-3-4 Stop!!!

5 Alive.

[Pause.]

1 I'm alive, but something inside of me is dying. The world I love has disappeared again. My every limb is shaking. I'm so scared now. Did it really happen? Was I really screaming? Was I really afraid for my life? How can that be? My world is peaceful. It's gentle. It's harmless! And yet...and yet it's killing me. I'm better off without it. I don't want to go back, but I have to go. I hear it calling me.

2 Come.

3 As you are.

5 Kurt Cobain, dead at 27.

4 Through the door.  
2 From which no one returns.  
5 Jim Morrison, dead at 27.  
3 Float down sea in a crystal ship.  
2 On a river that's within.  
5 River Phoenix, dead at 23.  
4 To a place where the demons wait.  
3-4 Alive inside your mind.  
5 Janis Joplin, dead at 27.  
2 Come and see what isn't real.  
3 And pain you were never meant to feel.  
2 It's worse when you're alone.  
5 Jerry Garcia, dead.

[On the cue "dead", 2 begins to chant, "Dead. Dead."]

4 Freedom ends.  
5 Shannon Hoon, dead.

[3 begins to chant with 2.]

4 When you turn the key.  
5 John Belushi, dead.

[4 begins to chant with 2 and 3.]

1 My heart is pounding. My soul is drenched with sweat. I stand at the door.  
5 Len Bias, dead.  
1 I can see the river. I can hear it calling me.

5 John Bondham, dead. Jimi Hendrix, dead.

1 And suddenly, I can see the truth.

5 No one gets out of here alive.

[The "dead" Chant grows louder and louder.]

1 It's not real. It was never real. It doesn't exist!

5 No one gets out of here alive!

1 The pain never went away! It only got worse! And now it won't let me get away!

5 No one gets out of here alive!

1 The dream isn't a dream at all! It's an illusion inside a nightmare! An artificial paradise governed by a symphony of death!

[The "dead" Chant continues to grow louder.]

5 No one gets out of here alive!

1 I want to be free!

5 No one gets out of here alive!

1 I want to live!

5 No one gets out of here alive!

1 [screams desperately] Let me go!!!!!!!!!!

[Chant stops. Allow a long pause.]

2 "Who has woe? Who has sorrow?"

3 "Who has strife? Who has complaints?"

4 "Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?"

2 "Those who linger over wine, who go to sample mixed bowls of wine."

1 I look in the mirror at a stranger. A stranger from a place that I don't belong to. Her face

was...twisted, hurting. I reached out my hand to help her, to set her free. But every time I reached for her, she reached out for me, calling me back into Hell.

4 "Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly."

3 "In the end it bites like a snake, and poisons like a viper."

1 All I wanted was love. Love without pain. Laughter without tears.

2 "Your eyes will see strange sights, and your mind confusing things."

1 I dreamed of a world which is neither here, nor there. A world that doesn't exist. Where the spirit is ripped in two, where love cannot stay, where pain is the only source of laughter.

4 ""They hit me...but I'm not hurt. They beat me, but I don't feel it! "

3 "When will I wake up so I can find another drink?"

1 Does it always end like this? Does it have to? Is there any way to be free again? Free from the lies? Free from the deception? Free from my self-destruction?

2 "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

3 "A slave has no permanent place in the family."

4 "But a son belongs to it forever."

1 "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

# 19

## Imagination

*Genesis 1:1, Psalm 104*

What is the greatest gift God ever gave man? Was it the gift of prophecy? The gift of teaching? The gift of tongues? Hardly! Of all God's attributes there is one that stands above all else, and that attribute is the greatest gift he ever gave us: Imagination!

No other creature on earth has the ability to think, imagine, and create. It was this gift which allowed Adam to name all the animals. This same gift allowed man to make tools and build shelter for his family. He then went on to build entire cities, form governments, and before he knew what he was doing, he had created civilization and culture.

But with the advent of civilization and culture came an unpleasant side effect. Man no longer had to spend all his time farming and hunting. He suddenly found himself with free time on his hands, and he was BORED! Then one magical day, man turned and looked at the world around him. He saw a wonderland of color, beauty, and majesty...and he said to himself, "Wowie! I've gotta try that!"

And so it was that man created art out of the desire to recapture the beauty of the world around us. He drew his materials from his environment, inventing paint, pencils, brushes, chisels, and musical instruments. Then he began to create: drawing, painting, sculpting, writing, acting, composing, singing...whatever it took to bring the artist's imagination to life.

Over the years, certain individuals got to be pretty good at what they do. Michaelangelo captured the ideal human form with his sculpture of *David*. Leonardo looked to the anatomy of birds in designing his flying machines. The beauty of nature was captured by Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* and in the photography of James Audubon. And the ups and downs of adolescence were brought to life on stage in the Broadway musical *Grease!*

But for all the great works of art man has created, it is still only an imitation of life. Only God is able to actually *create life*. Therefore, every artistic expression of man is merely an attempt to duplicate the creative work of God. A painter uses splashes of color on canvas to form a field of flowers, but God put the color in the flowers. A sculptor can form the image of a man out of clay, but God breathed life into his clay sculpture.

Like any other gift of God, some people are more gifted in their imaginations than others. And of those who have this gift, there are many different ways to express it: music, poetry, writing, visual arts, sculpture, acting, and directing, just to name a few. Realizing our imagination is a gift of God, how can we do anything but use it for his kingdom?

That is the challenge to the Christian artist: the actor, the playwright, the director, the dancer, the poet, the musician, the composer, the novelist, the painter, the sculptor. We are called to resist the temptation of fame, resist the temptation to accept the praise for our work, and to point those who admire our creative works to the ultimate Creator.

Imagination is the tool of the creative and the Creator. It is the very thing which makes God the all-powerful being he is because without it we would not exist! And as people created in God's image, art is the reflection of God in us. Those people blessed with the gift of imagination and creativity should be on their knees, thankful for the gift they have and the opportunity to use

one of God's greatest gifts. Imagination is from God, and when we open our hearts and use it for God, it is then that he can use us to touch other lives for the glory of Christ!

God Bless You In Your Drama Ministry!

1 Timothy 4:12

Luke 1:37