

Foreword

This production guide is dedicated to you, the hardworking directors of children's choral groups in churches everywhere, who, when working on a musical production, often find yourselves surrounded by more enthusiasm and good intentions than by practical skills and experience. Somehow, a few practical skills and a little experience, mixed with a healthy dose of enthusiasm and good intentions can make even the simplest musical production a positive experience for our children, and for our churches. It is our hope that this guide will help you solve some of the day-to-day problems as they arise during your work on this project. When beginning a musical project like MOSES AND THE FREEDOM FANATICS, you will be undertaking an enormous and time-consuming job. One that will, in the end, be well worth your time, we *promise*!

—Patricia Tarpey

The Production Staff

The trap that nearly every choral director has fallen into at one time or another is the assumption that since he/she initiated the musical play project, he/she is therefore responsible for all aspects of the production. Do *not* fall into that trap! While the choral director is probably going to be ultimately responsible for the final product, it is much less frustrating and far more efficient to have a Production Staff, made up of adults and possibly high school and college people who have talents that can be utilized.

Ideally, each production area should have a person in charge with some experience in that area. The number of people on each crew is up to the person in charge. Remember, this project should be a *shared* experience.

The Production Staff – Who are they, and what are their responsibilities?

Producer/Musical Director – This person will probably always be the choral director. As Producer, he/she will find the rest of the Production Staff, be responsible for the budget, and be the coordinator of schedules, places of rehearsal and performance, and all other production areas. As Musical Director, he/she will supervise and be responsible for all musical rehearsals.

Stage Director/Choreographer – It is good to find a person with some theatrical experience for this job. There will almost always be at least one person in your church who is active in a local educational or community theatre group. By all means, *use* this person and his/her valuable skills for this project. The Stage Director is responsible for staging the play, that is, setting the movement of the actors on stage (this is called blocking), and helping the actors develop their characters, so that they are believable. The Stage Director also determines the rehearsal schedules for the actors. He/she might want to have a Stage Manager to assist. In *MOSES AND THE FREEDOM FANATICS* there are only a couple of dance sequences which must be set. Since the dancing is minimal, the responsibility of choreographing also can go to the Stage Director, unless there is someone in your church whose talents are in the area of dance. If that is the case, give that person the responsibility of Choreographer.

Costumer – You want someone who sews very well, and one who is not afraid to experiment and be creative. This person will need a crew of about five people who also sew very well. If you can find a person who is especially good with home craft projects, be sure to ask that person to be involved with both the Costume and Prop crews.

Props – The best person for this job is someone who has a talent for arts and crafts. He/she will see that items like the placards for the opening scene, the staff for Moses, the pompons, the “bugs,” and possibly the frog heads get made and are maintained until the last performance.

Accompanist – If at all possible, this person should *not* be the choral director! The choral director will already have more than enough to do. The demands on the Accompanist’s time are also enormous, and he/she should not have any other major responsibilities on this project. The Accompanist should be available to play for all musical rehearsals and performances, and should be able to coach individual singers or small groups, if necessary.

Casting

CASTING THE PRODUCTION – WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

Generally speaking, you begin with what you have, which is a group of youngsters who meet regularly as a children’s choir in your church. It is usually best to limit yourselves to this group of children, because they and their families have already set aside a regular weekly rehearsal time in their schedules, and they have probably already shown evidence of commitment to the church’s music program. Let’s face it. You’re going to need *lots* of commitment for everyone in the next few weeks.

Introduce music over a period of 3 to 4 months prior to auditions, at regular choir rehearsal, so that the children can become acquainted with the music and the storyline.

Make “slides,” that is, copies of scenes from the play that you will use at the auditions in order to hear the children read for individual roles. Be sure that the slides are available to the children at least a week before auditions begin.

Have all of the Production Staff on hand for the auditions, so that the responsibility of choosing the particular child for each part does not fall on one person – especially the choir director.

Call an audition time, and announce it at least two weeks in advance, so that the children have time to prepare, and transportation logistics can be worked out.

Have children read in various groups, with each child reading for at least two different parts.

Audition Sheets - Have each Production Staff member fill out an Audition Sheet on each child as he/she auditions. These are good for reference later when the children are gone and the Production Staff is casting the play.

The Audition Sheet might take this form:

Name _____ Age _____

Auditioning for the following roles:

Height _____

Stage Presence _____

Posture _____

Voice Projection _____

Movement _____

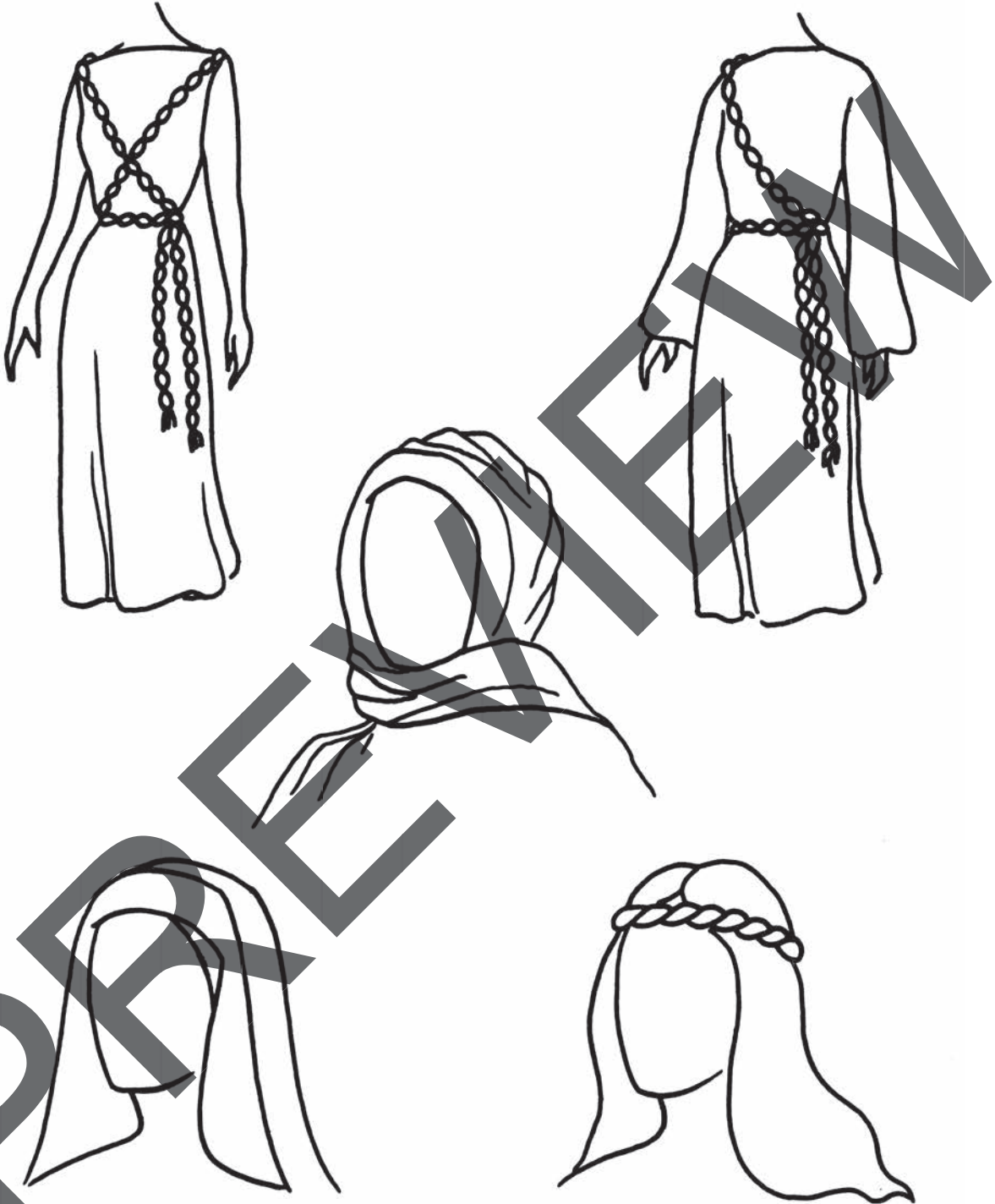
Sense of Character _____

Ability to take direction _____

Comments: _____

In considering the areas of Stage Presence, Posture, Voice Projection, Movement, Sense of Character, and Ability to take direction, it is a good idea to use some type of numbering system. For example, the numbers might range from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest score, and 1 being the lowest. This will give you numbers to be averaged out when the Production Staff begins exchanging its views.

FEMALE SLAVES



The costumes are made of simple fabrics. The rope belts, tied in various ways, are braided strips of the fabrics from the other costumes on stage. This coordinates them together, without their being exactly alike. Vary the headpieces as much as possible.



An interesting “palace” can be built for virtually no money, using cardboard boxes and stacking them in a brick-like fashion, make the walls. The boxes can be obtained for a minimal cost at a moving and storage company. Be sure that an opening is left in the wall towards center stage for Pharaoh’s entrances and exits. This opening should also be masked, perhaps with another wall made of boxes.

For visual interest, build platforms at various heights, so that all the cast is not on one level at any given time.

Again, when one’s imagination is set free, wonderful things can happen. Use your imagination on your set design, and you will have a much more interesting production than if you use a flat backdrop, or if you play it in front of curtains, or use nothing at all.

Lighting

Lighting needs are going to vary quite a bit from one production to another. If the performances are going to be during the day in a room that has a good amount of light anyway, stage lighting is not absolutely necessary. However, general lighting on the playing area is always helpful, just to focus the audience’s attention where you want it.

If the performance is to be at night, lighting on the playing area *is* necessary. Do keep this part of the production as simple as possible. If you have good general lighting on the stage, with a little added intensity in the major playing areas (center stage, stage left, and stage right), you will probably have enough illumination. A nice added touch, if you have the equipment, will be a follow-spot to light all the entrances and exits of the actors as they use the center aisle.

Do not let the lights become the focal point of the production! As with the set, the lighting should *enhance* the production. It should not be a distraction.

A FINAL WORD

It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of *organization* in every phase of this project. If the project goes smoothly and is enjoyable and a valuable learning experience for all concerned, it will be because the project was basically well-organized, from beginning to end.

We wish you well!

I offer my gratitude to Hal Hopson, Nancy Gray, Mark Ramsey, and Nancy Bloemendaal for their special contributions to this Production Guide.