



AMERICAN OPERA CLASSICS



ROBERT ALDRIDGE

Elmer Gantry

Libretto by Herschel Garfein

Phares • Risley • Rideout • Kelley • Buck

Florentine Opera Chorus • Florentine Opera Company

Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra • William Boggs



2 CDs

Robert Livingston
ALDRIDGE

(b. 1954)

Elmer Gantry (2007)

An Opera in Two Acts

Libretto by Herschel Garfein

based on the novel by Sinclair Lewis

Elmer Gantry	Keith Phares
Sharon Falconer	Patricia Risley
Frank Shallard	Vale Rideout
Eddie Fislinger	Frank Kelley
Lulu Baines	Heather Buck
Reverend Arthur Baines	Matthew Lau
T.J. Rigg	Jamie Offenbach
Mrs. Baines	Julia Elise Hardin
Revival Singer	William Johnson
Binch/Bully/Worker #1	Aaron Blankfield
Keely Family Singers	Sarah Lewis Jones / Linda S. Ehlers / Paul Helm / Nathan Krueger
Reporter	Peter C. Voigt
Revival Worker/Worker #2	Scott Johnson
Ice Cream Vendor	Matthew Richardson
Child	Katie Koester
Man #1	James Barany
Woman #1	Tracy Wildt
Woman #2	Kristin Ngchee
Tour Guide	Margaret Wendt
Women's Chorus Leader	Julie Alonzo-Calteaux

Florentine Opera Chorus

Chorus-master: Scott Stewart

Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra • William Boggs

**Director: John Hoomes • Producer/General Director: William Florescu
Musical Preparation: Jamie Johns • Off-Stage Piano: Anne Van Deusen**

**Producer and editor: Blanton Alspaugh (Soundmirror.com)
Recording engineers: John Newton and Byeong-Joon Hwang
Mixing/mastering engineer: Jesse Lewis**

Production Sponsors: Donald and Donna Baumgartner

**Keith Phares's performance generously sponsored
by the Marie Z. Uihlein Artist Fund**

With additional support from:

**Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin
and the National Endowment for the Arts
Milwaukee County Arts Fund
The United Performing Arts Fund**

Support for the recording provided by:

**The National Endowment for the Arts
Richard and Suzanne Pieper
Frieda and William Hunt Memorial Trust
Aaron Copland Fund for Music
Blan and Katharine Aldridge
Members of the Florentine Opera Board of Directors**

**ELMER GANTRY was premièred by Nashville Opera in November, 2007
and by Peak Performances at Montclair State University in January, 2008.**

**Published by C.F. Peters Corporation, © 2005, all rights reserved.
www.editionpeters.com**

**The creators dedicate this opera to their children:
Micaela Stark Aldridge, Hadi Roz Garfein, Lev Joseph Garfein.**

Act I

- ① Scene 1: The Old Home Sample Room, Cato, Missouri, 1905.
[Elmer, Men's Chorus, Frank, Bully] 5:20
- ② Scene 2: The President's Office, Terwillinger College and Seminary, Cato, Missouri, the next day.
[Men's Chorus, Rev. Baines, Elmer, Frank, Eddie, Lulu] 15:07
- ③ Scene 3: A field on the outskirts of Grauten, Missouri, 1906.
[Elmer, Frank, Lulu] 10:44
- ④ Scene 4: Outside Sharon Falconer's Revival Tent, Sautersville, Kansas, later that evening.
[Chorus, Ice Cream Vendor, Revival Worker, Revival Singer, Child, Sharon, Elmer, Keely Family Singers, Lulu, Frank] 23:02
- ⑤ Scene 5: The Elks Lodge Meeting Room, Zenith, Missouri, 1911.
[Sharon, T.J. Rigg, Men's Chorus, Rev. Baines, Elmer] 7:04
- ⑥ Scene 6: The Pastor's Study in the home of Eddie and Lulu Fislinger, Cato, Missouri, 1912.
[Lulu, Eddie] 8:07

Act II

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| 1 | Introduction | 0:51 |
| 2 | Scene 1: Sharon's suite, The Antlers Hotel, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1912.
<i>[Elmer, Sharon]</i> | 14:36 |
| 3 | Scene 2: The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle, construction site, Zenith, Missouri, 1913.
<i>[Tour Guide, Women's Chorus, Elmer, Sharon, Frank, T.J. Rigg, Eddie, Lulu, Rev. Baines, Mrs. Baines]</i> | 9:44 |
| 4 | Scene 3: Same setting, later that night.
<i>[Frank]</i> | 7:02 |
| 5 | Scene 4: A hotel room in Zenith, Missouri, a few months later.
<i>[Elmer, Lulu, Eddie]</i> | 7:40 |
| 6 | Scene 5: Sharon's private sanctuary in the Tabernacle, the same day.
<i>[Sharon, Elmer]</i> | 5:06 |
| 7 | Scene 6: The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle, very late that night.
<i>[T.J. Rigg, Worker 1, Worker 2]</i> | 1:31 |
| 8 | Scene 7: The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle, Opening Night, 1913.
<i>[Chorus, Revival Singer, Sharon, Elmer, Revival Worker, Eddie, Lulu, Mrs. Baines, Rev. Baines, T.J. Rigg]</i> | 19:25 |
| 9 | Epilogue: Another place, a few weeks later.
<i>[Elmer, Dr. Binch, Chorus]</i> | 6:19 |

Elmer Gantry

Music by Robert Livingston Aldridge (b. 1954) • Libretto by Herschel Garfein (b. 1958)

Elmer Gantry is an all-American opera. It presents us with a particular moment in American history, the period early in the twentieth century just before World War I, when popular religion set out to appropriate contemporary business models and when best-selling books argued that if Jesus were to come back today, he would be president of the Rotary Club. But the real subject of the opera is one that runs through *all* of American history, the pervasive and easily corrupted power of religion.

Elmer Gantry begins with sexual boasting and a bar-room brawl; it closes in an apocalyptic revival meeting. The title character is a former football player who has become a huckstering evangelist who serves as the business manager for an even more successful evangelist, Sister Sharon Falconer. In one stirring and amusing scene, Elmer stages a mock football game during a service and scores a touchdown for Jesus despite interference from some pitchfork-wielding little devils. One of the things that makes it particularly amusing is that we remember that Elmer had used the same metaphor in the opening scene of the opera, but that time the score was sexual. Sex and sports and religion – a volatile compound.

We also learn, early on, that Elmer Gantry is a hypocrite, a prototype for such much-publicized contemporary American figures as Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, and Ted Haggard. The difference is that Elmer is a *well-meaning* hypocrite who simply wants mutually exclusive things and enjoys all of them; he does whatever he wishes without going through internal struggles over choosing the right thing.

In addition to the world of evangelism, we explore other aspects of period Americana – a Bible College faculty meeting (CD 1 [2]), the hustle of traveling salesmen, and a meeting of the Elks Lodge (CD 1 [5]). The opera helps us realize that all of these groups, and the individuals within them, are using comparable methods to achieve the same secular economic goal, and

that things have not changed much in the subsequent century. We also experience characters, and the evolution of characters – unprincipled people unexpectedly do principled things, and vice versa; Elmer and Sharon learn something from each other, although neither one of them learns enough.

The source of the story is a section of Sinclair Lewis's once-controversial, now-classic, American novel, *Elmer Gantry* (1927). Both the composer, Robert Livingston Aldridge, and the librettist, Herschel Garfein, are Americans, Aldridge from Presbyterian stock, Garfein of Jewish heritage. They wrote their opera for American singers, more specifically for American singing-actors, who know how to internalize, then deliver, their own yeasty language, and how to sing many different kinds of American music. When there is a discussion a class in Old Testament Hebrew that Elmer has been skipping, Aldridge gives us some klezmer clarinet, making a little bow to his friend and librettist (CD 1 [3]).

Like most serious artists in America – or anywhere else – Aldridge and Garfein had to overcome major obstacles to bring their colorful, powerful and thought-provoking opera to the stage. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy to achieve.

The process all began at Christmas dinner in 1990, when Aldridge and Garfein were still in their early thirties. After the table was cleared they decided to watch a videocassette of the 1960 movie version of *Elmer Gantry* which featured Burt Lancaster as Elmer and Jean Simmons as Sharon. Aldridge said, "That's a great subject for an opera, and I could write the music for it"; he is, after all, the son of a minister, a preacher's kid. Garfein added, "And I could write the libretto." (Garfein, a composer of quality himself, comes from a theatrical family – his father is a stage and film director, his mother and sister are actors.) And the late mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt, not yet the legendary Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, said she would like to tackle the role of the fervent female evangelist Sharon Falconer.

Aldridge and Garfein had met at New England Conservatory; Aldridge was a founding member of the popular new-music collective Composers in Red Sneakers, which Garfein subsequently joined. Both had already won their spurs as composers, but neither one of them knew anything much about the opera world and how it operates. They found out the hard way – it was a seventeen-year journey from that Christmas dinner to the world première at the Nashville Opera on 16th November, 2007. American opera companies are not geared to further the ambitions of young composers, and commissioners are more interested in works by people who are already famous – even if their fame comes from their accomplishments in areas far removed from opera.

Everything began promisingly. First came the painstaking but exciting job of roughing out a scenario, which evolved into a more labor-intensive job of cutting and adding, shaping and revising. Ultimately *Elmer Gantry* emerged as an opera in two acts, with thirteen scenes and an epilogue.

In 1991 and 1992, Aldridge and Garfein travelled to North Carolina to experience the old-time religion firsthand – and to hear and assimilate the music of the old-time religion. They had a prestigious predecessor in this endeavor. In the summer of 1934 George Gershwin headed to South Carolina to study some of the regional African-American music he needed to know before he could compose *Porgy and Bess*. There are echoes of Gershwin in *Gantry*, and in fact the marimba-limned opening of the opera pays tribute to the opening of *Porgy*.

Elmer Gantry is full of hymns, gospel songs, marches, dances and all kinds of other period genre music that reflects the religious and popular music of the period of the story. One can hear other influences as well, notably Copland and Kurt Weill. But there is only one bit of pre-existing music in the opera, a familiar hymn Aldridge must have sung countless times as a dutiful young churchgoer – “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” composed in 1868 on a poem written in Canada in 1855.

All of the other “period” music which illumines the

score sounds authentic – even though Garfein wrote the words for all the hymns and Aldridge composed the music, which is not pastiche. Instead, the music is something denser and richer, something that probes deeper because of the sophisticated musical mind and experienced ear that Aldridge brings to the raw materials from the vernacular; Garfein charted a parallel course in finding the poetry in colloquial American English, even the slang, of the period.

Aldridge’s musical imagination makes the choral music, in particular, quite exceptionally difficult to sing – although it is catchy and easy to remember. Among other things, Aldridge has notated the kind of improvisational jubilation that marks choral and congregational singing of this kind.

Aldridge’s use of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” also points to the major shift in direction away from the novel that he and Garfein made as they experienced church services and revival meetings in North Carolina. Lewis’s novel is almost exhaustingly satirical, a brilliant cartoon, really, and Elmer is a one-dimensional and profoundly unpleasant character. Aldridge and Garfein may not have become converts to populist religion, but they recognized and felt its power for good as well as understanding how easily that power can be diverted and exploited for personal and political gain. They rounded out Elmer’s character – Gantry may not examine himself, or even understand himself, but he is at least an honest hypocrite whose enthusiasms are real, even if they do not run deep.

“What a Friend We Have in Jesus” is sung by Elmer’s college pal Frank Shallard, who has become a clergyman too, but one whose religious beliefs are constantly being tested by the realities of his world – including the success of Elmer. To a silent Elmer, who hears but does not understand, Frank asks “Is belief a gift? / How is conviction earned? / Fresh, boundless and unwavering faith, / Can that be learned?” (CD 2 [4])

Something similar happens to the music that delivers Eddie Fislinger’s sermon. “What is Love? It is the morning and the evening star.” This becomes one of the score’s leitmotifs, and a source of mirth when Elmer

passes these words off as his own in various contexts, appropriate and not. Eddie himself loses control over his own words as he prepares his sermon in the extraordinary aria that closes Act I. He starts to sing “It shines upon the cradle of the babe” but the words “*swindler bully*” emerge unbidden from his lips; “it catches its radiance,” he continues, “on the quiet *vermin lickspittle rutting lecherous ape*.” Eddie becomes a figure both comic and tragic as he forsakes his own beliefs and becomes as hypocritical in his own way as Elmer is in his (CD 1 [6]).

As the opera developed, Aldridge and Garfein worked together in Aldridge’s home – or burnt up the phone lines between Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. They also made a pact to listen to an opera every day. It was a pact frequently broken, but they did study several operas like *Boris Godunov*, *Die Meistersinger*, and *Peter Grimes* in which the chorus becomes the voice of the community, as well as the operas of Verdi that provide examples of complex musical characterization.

As their work progressed, Aldridge and Garfein made a studio recording of two extended scenes from the opera in order to apply for support from the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest “Opera for a New America” program. They received a \$13,000 grant that they used for a piano-accompanied workshop production in Boston in 1992. The laughter and applause you can hear on this recording from Florentine Opera in Milwaukee was present even on that earlier, incomplete opening night – only half the opera was performed, because that’s how much of it had been completed. Garfein was the stage director, and the “original cast” included Lorraine Hunt as Sharon, Metropolitan Opera baritone Vernon Hartman as Elmer, and Frank Kelley as Eddie – Kelley is the only singer who has consistently appeared in *Gantry* since the beginning, but it is fair to say that all of that first group of singers provided significant inspiration for Aldridge and Garfein to develop their roles. Eddie Fislinger’s aria that now ends the first act is quite specifically tailored to Kelley’s gift for communicating uncensored emotion and the ironic laughter Aldridge composed into this bitter scherzo is a

tribute to the coloratura skills Kelley has honed over decades of early-music performance. Similarly Sharon’s entrance aria [4] lay in the most lustrous part of Lorraine Hunt’s range and called for all of the womanly and spiritual radiance she later became internationally famous for. And is it going too far to hear in the sinuous vocal line of that aria, “The sun embraces the stony earth” with its rippling accompaniment and solo flute an echo of Norma’s entrance aria *Casta diva* in Bellini’s opera? Aldridge and Garfein even provide a comparable *cabaletta* with chorus, “Jesus could be comin’ tonight” (CD 1 [4]).

Aldridge and Garfein raised \$75,000 for a second workshop of what they thought was the complete opera two years later. But at that point the Boston opera company that had funneled the money for those workshops decided not to produce the work.

Aldridge and Garfein then began to shop their opera around to more than a dozen other American companies – at their own expense. Many companies expressed no interest; an occasional glimmer of promise would end in defeat. Meanwhile, Aldridge worked at orchestrating the whole score, and collaborated with Garfein on making many cuts in the hope of creating a more effective opera – and a more performable one, not to mention a more budgetable one. The collaborators slimmed a 4 1/2 hour piece down to one that now lasts about 2 hours and 25 minutes, according to the printed score, although most productions to date have made additional minor trims.

The chorus appears as Bible College faculty, farmers, members of the Elks Lodge, and various other congregations; Aldridge ensures variety not only by writing for full mixed chorus, but also for men’s chorus, women’s chorus, and even a “family” gospel quartet led by a solo gospel singer. Collectively the chorus represents the voice of the people, a *vox Americana*.

Aldridge and Garfein have also given solo arias to six of the principal singers, Sharon and Elmer of course, Frank Shallard and Eddie Fislinger, Lulu Baines and her father, Rev. Arthur Baines. Most of them do not achieve closure and court applause in the nineteenth-century manner, but instead evolve into other things. Lulu is a

little minx, the daughter of the president of the Bible College, one of Elmer's girlfriends, and ultimately the wife of Eddie Fislinger; her arietta evolves into a delicious *double entendre* trio. The words and music at first sound as innocent as something from *Hansel und Gretel*, but before long the trio is at once sexy, perverse, dreamlike, funny and sad (CD 2 [7]).

These arias develop remarkably vivid characterizations. Sister Sharon is always off in her own world; she seems to be in a state of perpetual trance. Elmer, on the other hand, is always out in the world. He doesn't have much of an inner life to expose, so most of his arias are public performances like his patter-song shilling for Pequot Farm Implements, which he interrupts with a parlor ballad about a dying farmer who bought the right implements and saved his property (CD 1 [3]). Towards the end he delivers a public aria of repentance, with chorus; he is still working the crowd. Later, when he needs to, he cannot repent convincingly, and, trying to divert attention, creates a disaster.

Elmer's one moment alone begins as an angry personal response to being rejected by Sister Sharon which turns into a ringing address to God who, through Sharon, has "opened him down to the bone." This is at once an accusation and a moment of triumph, for Elmer believes that God has filled him with "howling" words and that he will never be the same again – "Never the same!" Except this is ironic too – Elmer is always the same, whether he realizes it or not; his aria is self-dramatization, not self-revelation (CD 1 [4]).

Aldridge's remarkably supple score mingles the arias and choruses with recitative, conversations like the spooky one between T. J. Riggs and the electricians who are setting up the electric cross in Sister Sharon's new tabernacle (CD 2 [6]), a love duet (CD 2 [2]), a trio (CD 2 [5]), the gospel quartet (CD 1 [4]) which is actually a quintet, and, in an exercise of tremendous compositional virtuosity, an octet in which two quartets of opposing forces interact (CD 2 [3]).

Everything in the opera converges in the dazzling and apocalyptic final scene, the opening and dedication of Sister Sharon's The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle

(CD 2 [8]). This has celebratory choruses, the football ballet, moments of prayer, an offering ("What is Love?" for the last time). Revengeful figures from Elmer's past file forward to confess, repent and be forgiven; the influence of the finale of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is inescapable. Elmer is exposed, tries to repent, this time for real, but he cannot even do that; to distract attention, he directs a boy to throw the switch to illuminate the electric cross. It explodes and the tabernacle goes up in flames. Sister Sharon refuses to let Elmer rescue her; this is her Immolation Scene (CD 2 [9]).

The libretto has set all of this forth with clarity, ingenuity and theatrical daring, and the music rises to the occasion; one can hear the licking of the flames and then feel the hot flare. Finally we see Elmer again. He is a survivor, and he is on to the next thing, rewriting history as he goes. The fire has become fluid and the last word is not Elmer's; we hear the united voices of the dead singing Sharon's dying words about angels in the flames, singing and calling to one another. Elmer has left the stage, so we do not know if he is haunted by these voices; we do know that we are.

After the première in Nashville, the production moved on to Montclair State University in New Jersey. The University of Houston and the University of Minnesota have since produced it – *Elmer Gantry* is proving to be a piece that ambitious opera-training programs want to turn their students loose on. Florentine Opera's general director William Florescu decided to create the second professional production, bringing the original stage director and conductor (John Hoomes and William Boggs, respectively), but using new costumes and building a redesigned set. Florescu retained emerging star baritone Keith Phares in the title role, but also engaged some new singers, arranged for a national broadcast, and this Naxos recording.

Florescu says *Elmer Gantry* is a wonderful example of how composers today are unapologetic, indeed messianic, about the musical language they use. "Bob was not pandering or trite, or derivative, and Herschel's libretto is really excellent – what great words he gave Bob to set. And the piece breaks the mold of insider

opera – *Elmer Gantry* has demonstrated that a successful and important opera does not have to have its première on either of the coasts. I am very proud that we did it here in the flyover zone!”

Following the première in Nashville, one man turned to his wife and said, “This is better than any Broadway show. And to that we can say, Amen.

Richard Dyer

Richard Dyer covered music in The Boston Globe for 33 years and followed the fortunes of Elmer Gantry from the beginning. Since his retirement from the newspaper he has been creating podcasts for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, writing program notes, lecturing, and teaching at the Tanglewood Music Center.

The Bully Pulpit: *Elmer Gantry* by Sinclair Lewis

When Sinclair Lewis arrived in New York in September 1926, he was met by his publisher Alfred Harcourt. He handed Harcourt a heavy black bag. “What is it?” asked the publisher. “Dynamite!” replied the author in a stage whisper. The bag held the half-finished manuscript of *Elmer Gantry*, a novel about a silver-tongued savior of souls whose private life was an unabashed repertoire of hypocrisy and vice. It would indeed prove to be Lewis’s most incendiary work.

At the time, Lewis had published two of the five novels on which his critical reputation rests, *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922). The year before, Lewis had won – and refused – the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Arrowsmith*. With *Elmer Gantry* (1927) and the Nobel Prize winner *Dodsworth* (1930), Lewis gained a reputation as a sort of American Diogenes. His scathing wit, his all-seeing eye, and his cynical outlook made him the literary equivalent of that other favorite skeptic of the period, H.L. Mencken.

During the 1920s, the Puritanism that had long sustained American character seemed to be drowning in a sea of bathtub gin. (Mencken defined Puritanism as

“The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.”) One of the greatest blows to religion in America came during the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial at which Clarence Darrow bested William Jennings Bryan in debates of evolution versus creationism. The drowning of beloved female evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson in 1926 seemed to be a national tragedy until she showed up in Mexico, dressed to the nines. She had apparently been having an affair, and the event compromised her marriage as well as her career. Her awkward reappearance also caused Lewis to rewrite the death scene of the novel’s female evangelist Sharon Falconer.

Lewis’s biographer Mark Schorer described *Elmer Gantry* as “the noisiest novel in American literature, the most braying, guffawing, belching novel that we have.” Filled with extravagant writing, strobe light scenes of revivalist mayhem, and a vast quantity of Golly! and Gee!, the novel’s hectic prose is the perfect setting for one of fiction’s greatest scoundrels. Elmer lives as a hard-drinking, sweet-talking rover until he meets Sister Sharon. Elmer thinks he’s in love, but the poetry “gushing” in him is part ego, part greed. (To be honest, this also characterizes the good Sister.)

Certainly, naturalistic portraits of the clergy existed in American literature, Harold Frederic’s *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896), for example. In that novel, readers at least found a sympathetic character. But Lewis offered no such consolation with *Elmer Gantry*. What he tapped into with this novel touched the American psyche at a time of significant shifts in national character and religious practice. Lewis’s admittedly crude treatment of Gantry should have been interpreted as the burlesque its author intended, but the outrage was real and widespread. One pastor invited Lewis to a lynching party in Virginia, while another in Maine wondered if there was no “respectable and righteous way” of putting Lewis in jail. To understand this, we have to remember the legacy of Puritanism in the America of the 1920s.

That the Puritans came to North America to escape religious persecution in England is well known to every

schoolchild. What may be surprising is that religious conflict began among the Pilgrims as early as the 1660s. In the next decades, religious enthusiasm began to decline. New England clergy responded by adopting an emotional style of preaching known as the jeremiad, influenced by the prophecies of Jeremiah with its emphasis on joy, fervor, and anxiety about displeasing God. Also around this time, the Puritans lost political control of their territory to the British. In 1692, the Salem witch trials showed how extreme religious anxiety had become. John Winthrop's vision of a city of a hill had faded remarkably quickly.

British influence in New England helped liberalize society by bringing in European Enlightenment ideas. The colonists reacted with the first Great Awakening, an anti-intellectual religious movement that occurred between the 1730s and 1770s. Pastors like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards exhorted the faithful to remember that they were sinners in the hands of an angry God. The Presbyterian preaching family of William Tennent and his four sons led colonial religious revivals and founded a training seminary. These preachers used vivid, emotionally-charged sermons to remind their listeners of their sacred destiny as Christians. In fact, what we think of as manifest destiny or American exceptionalism originated in the jeremiads of the Great Awakening.

Increasingly, itinerant revivalists began to travel around the countryside, preaching outdoors and gathering converts in large numbers. The fire-and-brimstone theatrics of these preachers deeply offended the more conservative clergy. The revivalists' success and their disdain for traditional congregational churches presented a serious challenge to church authority.

By the 1820s, evangelical Protestant sects dominated religion in the United States. They stressed the importance of the conversion experience – religion through the heart rather than the head. This profound transformation came about through the powerful words of a preacher and the collective enthusiasm of fellow

worshippers. The conversion was the climax of the popular outdoor camp meeting or revivals that characterized the Second Great Awakening during the mid-nineteenth century. Gradually, these revivals became complex, highly-orchestrated events sometimes lasting several days.

The modern crisis of faith – one that many believe is still with us – came about by the end of the nineteenth century. A combination of factors led to an intellectual reaction against revivalism: Darwinism, increasing awareness of non-Christian faiths, and higher biblical criticism that aimed to analyze the Bible not as the divinely-inspired word of God but as an ancient artifact. In addition, proponents of what became known as Social Gospel sought to utilize the Bible to right social wrongs. By the 1920s, events like the Scopes trial and the “disappearance” of Sister Aimee seemed to offer proof of the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of American religion.

Elmer Gantry struck America in a tender spot during a time of doubt. Lewis's audaciously unflattering portrait of the clergy attacked an institution struggling to maintain its integrity. In his daring, Lewis had the full support of essayist H. L. Mencken who contended that “deep within the heart of every evangelist lies the wreck of a car salesman.” The Sage of Baltimore had praised both *Main Street* and *Babbitt* from his own bully pulpit in the pages of the *Smart Set*, noting ironically that “[Lewis's] apprenticeship in the cellars of the tabernacle was not wasted.” Lewis repaid the kindness by dedicating *Elmer Gantry* to Mencken “in profound admiration.” Of course, Lewis being Lewis, he added the rather disingenuous assertion that “no character in this book is the portrayal of any actual person.”

Leann Davis Alspaugh

Leann Davis Alspaugh writes about opera, literature, and the visual arts.

Synopsis

CD 1

Act I

① Scene 1: The Old Home Sample Room, Cato, Missouri, 1905.

Elmer Gantry, captain of the Terwillinger College football team, and his roommate Frank Shallard are getting drunk in a local bar. Elmer regales the patrons with stories of his sexual exploits. A bully picks a fight with him, saying he attends a “sissy bible school.” Elmer sucker punches him. The barroom erupts in chaos.

② Scene 2: The President’s Office, Terwillinger College and Seminary, the next day.

Elmer is called in to a prayer meeting by the college president, Rev. Baines. Captivated by the president’s pretty daughter, Lulu, enticed by the promise of a full scholarship to the seminary; and cajoled by Eddie Fislinger, head of the campus YMCA, Elmer fakes a conversion, to the chagrin of his roommate Frank. The scene ends amid a chorus of Hallelujahs.

③ Scene 3: A field on the outskirts of Grauten, Missouri, 1906.

Now in seminary, Elmer Gantry makes unauthorized use of his newfound oratorical skills by selling farm tools in a nearby town. He is also having a surreptitious affair with Lulu, despite her engagement to Eddie. He promises to meet Lulu that night, but then decides to go to a tent revival held by the famous traveling evangelist, Sharon Falconer.

④ Scene 4: Outside Sharon Falconer’s revival tent, Sautersville, Kansas, later that evening.

Elmer watches in awe as Sharon Falconer leads her tent meeting. Lulu arrives with Frank to warn Elmer that he is about to be expelled from seminary. Angry and defiant, he chases her away only to be treated with cool indifference by the departing Sharon. Elmer is left alone to rail against the world. He suddenly feels himself in

the grip of a true conversion. In a state of agonized delirium, he hears these words over and over: “*Never the same again.*”

⑤ Scene 5: The Elks Lodge Meeting Room, Zenith, Missouri, 1911.

Sharon Falconer appears before the Elks Lodge of Zenith. She attempts to enlist the aid of the city’s elders in realizing her dream: to build a grand tabernacle in their city. Elmer, now a successful businessman, intervenes on her behalf. The Elks sing in celebration of civic pride.

⑥ Scene 6: The Pastor’s Study in the home of Eddie and Lulu Fislinger, Cato, Missouri, 1912.

There is an undercurrent of tension in the home of the Rev. Eddie and Mrs. Lulu Fislinger. Eddie has begun preparing his Sunday sermon when he pauses over a newspaper story about the proposed building of Sharon and Elmer’s tabernacle. When he resumes his sermon, his hatred and envy of Elmer infect his theme of Christian Love.

CD 2

Act II

① Scene 1: Sharon’s suite, The Antlers Hotel, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1912.

Working as business manager within Sharon’s ministry, Elmer has helped her to become ever more successful. One night, he confesses the depth of his love for her; she responds by proclaiming the depth of her religious calling. They reach a passionate understanding.

② Scene 2: The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle construction site, Zenith, Missouri, 1913.

Sharon’s grand tabernacle is being built under Elmer’s supervision. Frank, now a minister in Zenith, pays a visit. Eddie, Lulu, and Rev and Mrs. Baines tour the site and privately express their displeasure with commercialized religion. The eight principal characters sing an octet in which they debate the merits of the old-time religion versus the new.

④ Scene 3: Same setting, later that night.

Frank expresses his doubts about God and yearns for a “fresh, boundless” faith.

⑤ Scene 4: A hotel room in Zenith, Missouri, a few months later.

Elmer has an assignation with Lulu. She sings him a suggestive “bedtime story”, then lets Eddie in the door to spy on them as she and Elmer make love.

⑥ Scene 5: Sharon’s private sanctuary in the Tabernacle, the same day.

In her private sanctuary, Sharon prays to God for help on the evening before the opening of her tabernacle. She also prays for advice about Elmer, who has asked her to marry him.

⑦ Scene 6: The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle, very late that night.

TJ Rigg, financier of the tabernacle, checks last-minute details in the building. He is awestruck by its cross of electric lights.

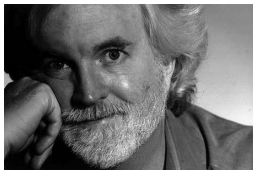
⑧ Scene 7: The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle, Opening Night, 1913.

Sharon and Elmer enchant their throngs of followers. Eddie and Lulu arrive to denounce Elmer as a philanderer and a sinner. Chaos follows, and a fire breaks out. Elmer tries to save Sharon, but she refuses his help. He escapes; she stays to comfort her flock with a last mystical vision as all are immolated.

⑨ Epilogue: Another place, a few weeks later.

Elmer embarks on a new career with the founder of the ‘New Thought’ movement . The ashes of the fire and the haunting voices of the past surround him.

Robert Livingston Aldridge



Robert Livingston Aldridge has written over sixty works for orchestra, opera, music-theater, dance, string quartet, solo and chamber ensembles. His music has been performed throughout the United States, Europe and Japan. He has received numerous fellowships and awards for his music from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, National Endowment for the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Massachusetts Artist’s Foundation, the Lila Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund, Meet the Composer, The American Symphony Orchestra League, the New Jersey Council on the Arts and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. His opera *Elmer Gantry*, based on the novel by Sinclair Lewis, with a libretto by Herschel Garfein, was given its fully-staged world première by Nashville Opera in November, 2007. He was commissioned by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra to compose a clarinet concerto for David Singer, and his symphonic oratorio *Parables* (also written with librettist Herschel Garfein) was first performed in May, 2010. Robert Livingston Aldridge has been Composer-in-Residence at the Brevard Music Festival since 2006. He has been a fellow at the MacDowell Colony on five occasions since 1987. In 1989, he was chosen to represent the New York Foundation for the Arts in a solo concert of his music at Lincoln Center. He was a founder of the Composers in Red Sneakers, a composer consortium which achieved international recognition in the 1980s. His compositions are exclusively published by Edition Peters. He received a Doctorate in Composition from the Yale School of Music, a Masters in Composition from the New England Conservatory of Music, and a Bachelors in English Literature from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He is a Professor of Music Composition and Theory at Montclair State University. More information about the composer can be found at robertaldrige.com.

Herschel Garfein



Herschel Garfein is active as a composer, librettist and director. He is the composer and librettist of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, a new opera based on Tom Stoppard's play. His other libretti include *Parables* for Robert Aldridge, and *Alzheimer's Stories* and *Edison Invents*, for Robert S. Cohen. Work as a composer includes the dance triptych *Mythologies*, *American Steel*, *Places to Live*, a *String Quartet*, and the music/theater piece *Sueños*. He has received awards and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Massachusetts Artists Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, the National Institute for Opera/Music Theater, and the MacDowell Colony. He teaches Music Composition and lectures in Script Analysis at the Steinhardt School, New York University.

Keith Phares

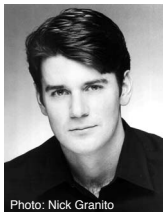


Photo: Nick Granito

Noted by the press for his commanding stage presence, vocal authority, and warm baritone voice, Keith Phares is acclaimed both on the opera and concert stage as one of today's most versatile artists. He has appeared in leading rôles with the San Francisco Opera, the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Washington National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Santa Fe Opera, and has performed in concert with the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Patricia Risley



Photo: Kristin Heisermann

Mezzo-soprano Patricia Risley's operatic performances encompass leading rôles in works of Mozart, Rossini, Handel, Gounod, Monteverdi, Strauss, Haydn, and Purcell with companies worldwide including those in New York City, Chicago, Madrid, Berlin, Houston, Santa Fe, Innsbruck, Salt Lake City, Palm Beach, and Denver as well as performances in contemporary repertoire including world premières and recent works of Bolcom, Pasatieri, Adès, Machover, Harbison, and Dove. Additionally, she has joined the New York Philharmonic, Boston Baroque, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Grant Park Music Festival, and Oregon Symphony as a concert soloist.

Vale Rideout



Vale Rideout has sung with Chicago Opera Theater, Nashville Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria, Castleton Festival Opera, Central City Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Boston Lyric Opera in rôles such as Peter Quint in *The Turn of the Screw*, Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Alfredo in *Die Fledermaus*. He has performed Britten's *War Requiem* with the New York Philharmonic and Los Angeles Philharmonic (both with Lorin Maazel), and the world première of Stucky's *August 4, 1964* with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

Frank Kelley



The versatile American tenor Frank Kelley has performed in concert and opera throughout North America and Europe. He is a regular at Boston Lyric Opera, Opera Boston and Florentine Opera, and has sung at Opera Theatre of St. Louis (world-première of *The Golden Ticket*), Wexford Festival Opera, Opéra de Lyon, Monte Carlo Opera and with such orchestras as the Boston Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, National Symphony and National Ars Centre Orchestra. He has recorded for Teldec, Harmonia Mundi and Erato.

Heather Buck



Heather Buck's international credits include leading rôles with Gran Teatre del Liceu (Barcelona) and London's Almeida Theatre. Highlights include Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte* (Santa Fe Opera; also English National Opera); Olympia in *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (De Vlaamse Opera); the title rôle in Wuorinen's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (New York City Opera); Angel in Dusapin's *Faustus, the Last Night* (Concertgebouw); Wolfgang Rihm's monodrama *Proserpina* (Spoleto Festival USA); and Mahler's *Symphony No. 2* (2008 Summer Olympics, Beijing).

Florentine Opera Chorus



Scott Stewart
Photo: Lindsey Gehl

The Florentine Opera Chorus was founded by John D. Anello in 1933 in the heart of Milwaukee's vibrant Third Ward immigrant community. Scott S. Stewart has acted as the Chorus-master and Associate Conductor of the Florentine Opera Company since 1977. With a wide and varied repertoire, more than fifty artists comprise the Florentine Opera Chorus each season, performing in all mainstage productions, as well as education and community outreach programs around the community.

Florentine Opera Company

The Florentine Opera Company's productions reflect the highest musical and theatrical standards, while supporting community and educational programs. As a leader in Wisconsin's art community, a nationally respected regional force, and the nation's sixth oldest opera company, the Florentine Opera Company has established itself during its 78-season history, as a significant presence in the cultural, educational and civic life of the state of Wisconsin and beyond. Audiences enjoy beautiful mainstage productions that include first-rate vocal artistry brought to life by established and emerging local, national and international opera stars. With a foundation of fiscal responsibility, the company continues to grow its artistic and educational programs, with a focus on presenting new works, most recently including the Midwest premiere of *Elmer Gantry* and the world premiere of Don Davis's opera *Rio de Sangre*. Through its outreach and in-school educational programming, the Florentine provides vital arts education experiences for children, nurtures new audiences, and expands cultural horizons for the next generation. Over 18,000 people in Southeastern Wisconsin are served every year through the Florentine's education and community enrichment programs. Additional information, tickets and more can be found at www.florentineopera.org.

Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra



Photo: Todd Daquist

In 52 years, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra has forged its own path, gaining respect artistically and serving its community. In addition to performing with the MSO and accompanying the Florentine Opera Company, our musicians provide a strong professional core within Milwaukee's arts community. The MSO has been a pioneer in new music, digital media, and arts education. Under the leadership of Music Director Edo de Waart, the MSO continues to thrive as a cornerstone organization among Wisconsin's cultural assets.

William Boggs



William Boggs, Artistic Director of Opera Columbus, has led some of his company's greatest successes. As the former General Director of Columbus Light Opera, where he received tenure, he produced over 200 performances of the works of Strauss, Lehár, Offenbach, Gilbert and Sullivan, Friml, Romberg, and Herbert. He also served as Music Director of the Welsh Hills Symphony Orchestra, the third conductor in its 60-year history. As an orchestral guest conductor he has appeared with the Columbus Symphony, Pro Musica Chamber Orchestra, Central Ohio Symphony Orchestra, Louisville Orchestra, and Orquesta Sinfónica del Estado de Mexico.

A Timeline of American Revivalism

• 1734

A religious fervor begins to sweep the town of Northampton, Massachusetts. Sinners are converted by the hundreds under the ministry of Rev. Jonathan Edwards. He details the occurrences in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Works of God* (1737), one of the seminal works of the Great Awakening.

• 1743

In response to Edwards and his disciples, the annual convention of Massachusetts Congregational ministers issues a condemnation of practices which lead to “disorderly tumults.”

• 1750

Edwards, attempting to instate open confession (one of the hallmarks of the Great Awakening), is fired from his church in Northampton. He turns to theological writing.

• 1780-1800

These years see the publication of several central works of American deism, a humanistic philosophy espousing faith based on reason: Ethan Allen’s *Reason the Only Oracle of Man*, Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man*. Deism is condemned by the clergy, embraced by the intelligentsia, including Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

• 1782

A survey at Princeton University, a bastion of the Presbyterian ministry, finds only two professed Christians in the student body.

• 1798

The Presbyterian minister James MacGreedy of North Carolina moves to Kentucky to begin a frontier mission. Over the next two years at his Red River church, the Great (or Western) Revival begins.

• 1801

On August 6th, the first camp meeting (precursor of the tent meeting) takes place, at Cane Ridge, KY. It lasts three days; 20,000 are said to attend. Some witnesses record that liquor was in abundant use and many virgins were undone.

• 1809

The Presbyterian Church disciplines MacGreedy and distances itself from revivalism.

• 1785-1840

Through its embrace of revivalism, and the labors of its “circuit

riders” (traveling frontier preachers), the Methodist Church grows from 15,000 to 850,000 souls. The Methodist ministers stress dramatic, personal conversion. Rev. Peter Cartwright tells of being struck down by a flash of divine light; when “convicted,” Rev. James B. Finley spends a week in a hollow log, weeping and reading the Bible.

• 1856-1861

Boston shoe salesman Dwight L. Moody moves to Chicago to make his fortune. He spends his free time as a YMCA organizer, until his fame as a preacher allows him to give up business. He unites with singer/composer Ira Sankey (who coined the term “gospel music”). They are the first great urban revivalists. They use publicity, advertising and organizational planning to conduct successful revivals throughout the U.S. and England (where in one tour they are heard by 1.5 million people).

• 1889

Mariah Woodworth-Etter, first of the famous woman revivalists, arrives to preach in Oakland, CA. At the height of her popularity, she speaks to racially mixed crowds of 2,500. Her husband cranks an ice-cream freezer at the refreshment stand, 50 feet from the pulpit.

• 1890

Etter holds weekly street parades to trumpet her prediction of an earthquake and tidal wave to strike the city on April 14. The date passes uneventfully. Etter flees Oakland the next day. Her chief civic supporters are sent to an insane asylum.

• 1891

Chicago outfielder Billy Sunday gives up baseball to begin spreading the word of God. Twenty years later “the baseball preacher,” famous for “sliding in” to the altar, will be preaching in New York in a tabernacle of 16,000 seats, with the Astors and Rockefellers in attendance.

• 1901, 1906

During revivals in Topeka, Kansas, and Los Angeles, California, congregants speak in tongues. The modern Pentecostal movement begins.

• 1926

Evangelist Aimee Semple MacPherson “disappears,” the purported victim of kidnapers. When she reappears in Los Angeles, 100,000 people line the streets to greet her rose-draped car.

• 1927

SINCLAIR LEWIS PUBLISHES *ELMER GANTRY*.

• 1947

After years of declining popularity in the 30s and 40s, revivalism is launched again by Pentecostal preachers Oral Roberts, A.A. Allen and Jack Coe.

• 1950-1960

A.A. Allen holds interracial revivals in Little Rock and Atlanta, hotbeds of segregationism. He publicly pledges to uphold integration in his services.

• 1956

Evangelist Jack Coe is arrested for practicing medicine without a license. During a service, he had urged a woman to remove the leg braces from her polio-stricken son, thus causing the boy irreparable physical damage. Coe is acquitted, but dies ten months later.

• 1968

Oral Roberts stuns evangelicals by accepting the stewardship of an Oklahoma Methodist church. He begins massive campaigns to build a university and medical center in Tulsa. Over the next twenty years he will repeatedly claim that God is going to “call him back” if he doesn’t meet fundraising goals.

• 1975

In the aftermath of two deaths at a Holiness church in Newport, Tennessee, the ACLU represents the church in an unsuccessful challenge to the state’s law prohibiting snake-handling.

• 1984

In a private prayer meeting, Evangelist Arthur Blessitt, famous for having carried a 12-foot cross around the world, helps future President George W. Bush to accept Jesus. Blessitt’s diary entry for April 4 says, “Led Vice President Bush’s son to Jesus today. This is great! Glory to God.”

• 1988

Evangelist Jimmy Swaggart, rumored to be visiting prostitutes, tearfully confesses to unspecified sins on national TV. The Assemblies of God order him not to preach for one year.

• 1988

In the Iowa Presidential caucus, televangelist Pat Robertson finishes second.

• 1989

Jim Bakker, head of PTL (Praise the Lord) Ministries, is convicted of defrauding his followers of \$158 million – the largest case of mail fraud in U.S. history. He is sentenced to 45 years in prison.

• 1991

Jimmy Swaggart is stopped for traffic violations in California. A prostitute is with him in the car. He later announces he will step down from the directorship of his worldwide ministries.

• 2001

On Pat Robertson’s “700 Club” telecast two days after the September 11 attacks, Rev. Jerry Falwell says God may have allowed the attacks because of the country’s moral decay. Addressing the ACLU, abortionists, feminists and gays, he says, “You helped this happen.” He apologizes a few days later.

• 2004

A film, “George W. Bush: Faith in the White House,” which recounts the Blessitt conversion experience, is released on DVD and shown at off-the-floor events at the Republican National Convention. Eventually, Bush carries 78% of the white evangelical vote (up from 68% in 2000).

• 2006

Ted Haggard (‘Pastor Ted’), leader of the National Association of Evangelicals, is alleged by male prostitute Mike Jones to have paid him for sex and bought methamphetamine over the course of a 3-year relationship. Haggard receives three weeks of pastoral counseling and emerges ‘completely heterosexual.’ However, the public uproar continues and Haggard resigns.

By Herschel Garfein. Sources: Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River* (Little, Brown, 1958); Patsy Sims, *Can Somebody Shout Amen?* (St. Martin’s, 1988); *The New York Times*; MSNBC; The Pew Resource Center.

Elmer Gantry

An Opera in Two Acts

Music by Robert Livingston Aldridge

Libretto by Herschel Garfein

Published by C.F. Peters Corporation © 2005.

Based on the novel by Sinclair Lewis.

Copyright © 1927 by Sinclair Lewis. Renewed 1955 by Michael Lewis.

CHARACTERS

ELMER GANTRY *A college football-player, later a businessman and preacher*

SHARON FALCONER *A traveling evangelist preacher*

FRANK SHALLARD *A college student and Elmer's best friend, later a minister*

EDDIE FISLINGER *Head of the Campus YMCA, later a minister*

LULU BAINES *Daughter of the college president, later married to Eddie*

REV. ARTHUR BAINES *President of Terwillinger College and Seminary*

MRS. BAINES *Wife of Rev. Baines, mother of Lulu*

T.J. RIGG *A wealthy industrialist in Zenith, and head of the Elks' Club*

REVIVAL SINGER *Employed by Sharon Falconer*

Dr. Evans Binch, Keely Family Gospel Singers, Revival Worker, Ice Cream Vendor, Tour Guide,

Bully, Worker 1 and 2, Child, Woman 1 and 2, Man, Men in the bar, Seminary Faculty, Men of the

Elks' Club, Women Ushers, Large SATB Chorus

SETTINGS

The action takes place in locations throughout the Midwest, during the years 1905-1913.

ELMER GANTRY was premièred by Nashville Opera, Nashville, Tennessee, November 16th, 2007.

Peak Performances, Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey, January 23rd, 2008.

CD 1

1 Act I, Scene 1

The Old Home Sample Room, Cato, Missouri, 1905.
(A workingman's saloon on a winter's night. The place is packed, smoky, loud. As the curtain rises, we see Elmer Gantry standing in the center of the room, drunk, expansive, and halfway through a story that has the attention of all. He is wearing a college letter sweater with a large "T" on the front. Frank Shallard is sitting

on a barstool. The other men on barstools have swiveled around to watch Elmer. Patrons at tables are turned across the backs of their chairs, or looking around each other to see his performance. One man on a barstool (the Bully) seems more interested in the reaction of the crowd than in Elmer himself. The Barkeep is listening to Elmer while keeping an eye on the customers. Suspended above him is a small ship's bell with a rope hung from its clapper. He rings it whenever a drink is ordered — a signature of the establishment.)

Choral Scene

Elmer: So she...*(signals crowd to repeat after him.)*

Crowd: She...

Elmer: She's half-naked and I'm trying to calm her down.

Crowd: Calm her down, gotta calm her down.

Elmer: See now fellas, I am one patient man. Right, Frank?

(He looks around for him.) Frank?

Frank *(Drunk)* Right, Hell-cat.

Elmer: WELL, where was I? Did I mention, her fat old landlord keeps

pounding on the door?

So it's time to act,

it's time to act and I say:

Juanita, my sweetheart, I love you, Juanita

I think that was her name.

(The Bully points to the barkeep, ordering Elmer a drink. The glass is handed through the crowd to him.)

Elmer toasts the Bully.)

Your health, my friend.

(The Bully gives him a salute.)

Elmer, Crowd:

I say, "Sweetheart" *(signals crowd to follow him)*

"I'm a football player." *(signals.)*

"Big ol' football player"

(All except the Bully):

Sweetheart!

I'm a football player!

Big ol' football player!

Elmer, Crowd:

I read your signals

When you called the play,

Our huddle was great and the snap was made

I'm runnin' for the end zone...*(signals.)*

The ball is in the air...*(signals.)*

Now who's gonna stop me

Halfway there?

Runnin' for the end zone.

The ball is in the air.

(The Crowd cheers and applauds Elmer, and he takes a casual sip, as if the story were over.)

Frank, Three men in the crowd, Elmer:

Result? *(signals to crowd)*

Result? Result? Result?

TOUCHDOWN!

Crowd: TOUCHDOWN! TOUCHDOWN!

Elmer, Crowd:

Ol' Elmer knows what to say.

Ol' Elmer gets what he wants.

Ol' Elmer knows when it's rough

you get tough

and you never can be tough enough.

...what to say.

...what he wants

when it's rough

you get tough

(The bully hops off his barstool. His voice rides over the crowd until he gets everyone's attention.)

Bully: It's strange!... Strange, ain't it guys? This big crowd plays football for a sissy Bible school.

Crowd: Oooh.

(Everyone senses an impending confrontation. The crowd rings Elmer and the Bully. Elmer affects a jovial demeanor, and will maintain it until the last moment.)

Elmer: Now fellas, I am one patient man. Right, Frank?

Frank: Hell-cat...

(Elmer puts his arm around the Bully.)

Elmer: I love to have a good time, coupla laughs... but boy! I just don't like ... makin' fun...

of JESUS! *(And on the last word, he punches the Bully.)*

(There is an all-out brawl. The bully is on the floor;

Elmer is kicking him savagely. The crowd shouts encouragement to the combatants, the bartender rings his bell furiously, a few other men start shoving each other aggressively, as the lights quickly fade. Fade up on):

② Act I, Scene 2

The President's office, Terwillinger Baptist College, Cato, Missouri.

The next day.

(President Baines and other faculty members are seated in armchairs and side-chairs which have been

pulled from their customary places and haphazardly arranged, as if in expectation of a meeting. Most of those in attendance are old men. Eddie Fislinger, an earnest young man who heads the college YMCA, stands to the side. As the lights come up, all vigorously strike up a hymn. During the singing, Lulu Baines enters from a rear door, quietly serves coffee from a tray, exits.)

Hymn

Baines, Eddie, Faculty:

Who's the man among us has not battled for the Lord?
Could there be a coward in our ranks?
Bring the doubter forward, he must surely bend his knee,
As to our Saviour we give thanks:
Praise God in the highest,
Praise and magnify the Lord.
Praise God, and remember,
We are fighting with a Bible and a sword.
When the war clouds gather in a dark and sullen sky,
And a salvo from the cannon's mouth has roared,
From the trenches, from the redoubts, there goes up a joyful cry,

"We are those who battle for the Lord!"

Praise God in the highest,
Praise and magnify the Lord.
Praise God, no surrender!

For the men who wield a Bible and a sword.
If you seek an answer, speed along His walls,
Faithfully inquire of each you see;
There may be a man among us who declined God's battle-calls,

But I tell you, brother, that man is not me.
Who's the man? Who's the doubter?
Let him stand before his Lord.
Every man among us must be righteous, brave and true,
As we fight on with a Bible and a sword.

(There is a knock on the front door. Elmer stands hesitant in the doorway.)

Recitative

Baines: Mr. Gantry, please come in. I'd like to present to you the faculty of the college and seminary. I believe you have studied under many of these gentlemen.

(Elmer enters, followed by Frank, who hangs back unobtrusively.)

Professor Eversley... the Reverend Mr. Hudkins... Dr. Ingle.... And of course, we know you as our victorious quarterback, the shining star of the Terwillinger Terriers. Haven't we seven victories this year?

Elmer: Nine, sir. We're nine and two so far this year.

The Faculty: Nine and two, nine and two.

Best in the conference, nine and two.

Baines *(Noticing Frank):* And this is Mr. ...?

Elmer: My friend, Frank Shallard.

Baines *(Ignoring Frank, who has proffered his hand):*

Yes, yes, Mr. Shallard.

Elmer: Senior class valedictorian.

Baines: Fine, fine. *(He ignores Frank.)*

Elmer: Whatever I've done, Frank can vouch for me.

Baines: Please sit down. *(Putting his arm around*

Elmer's shoulder, he leads him to a chair.

Frank, awkwardly fending for himself, also finds an empty chair. Gravely): Young man, we have followed the course of your football career with great pleasure.

Isn't that so, gentlemen?

The Faculty: 'Gantry scrambles through the brambles.'

'Third and nine — he'll trounce the line.'

'Pitch out, pop out, down and in, Terwillinger is gonna win.'

'What's the name that's do-or-die? G-A-N-T... R-Y!'

Baines *(Restoring order):* Gentlemen, please. *(To Elmer):* Your feats on the gridiron are not what have brought you here.

Elmer *(Rising, he addresses them contritely):* Sirs, if it's about certain... carousing...

Sometimes a guy's just gotta relax — you know!... and once, just once — last night! — I wandered into a tavern, an awful, sinful place — tell 'em, Frank.

Frank *(Starts to rise, but is immediately cut off):* Tha—

Baines: Nonsense. Didn't St. Paul himself say, "Take a bit of wine for your stomach?"

The Faculty: He did, he did.

Baines: We've brought you here for the sake of... your soul.

Elmer: Oh... yessir. My soul... means a lot to me.

Baines (*Appreciative*): Aah... Well said.

The Faculty (*Hushed and appreciative*): Indeed, well said.

Baines: We heard you were defending the blessed name of our Lord! You chose to stand up for Jesus! (*All the men quickly stand. To them*): All right. (*They just as quickly sit.*) We've asked someone here to entreat you. Head of the campus YMCA!

Edward Fislinger. (*Who now steps forward proudly.*)

Elmer (*Spoken aside, to Frank*): Eddie Fartslinger?!

Eddie: What is Love?

Yes! What is Love?

It is the Morning and the Evening star,
What is Love?

Baines (*Interrupts briskly*): Thank you, Edward. (*Eddie steps back, cowed.*)

(*To Elmer*): My young friend... young friends, I should say (*momentarily including Frank*) ... your courageous actions of yesterday have not gone unnoticed. We sense a change in you. We summon you to give you strength. We wish to see you continue in the good fight of faith whereunto you are called. Elmer Gantry, in great solemnity I ask you... (*he pauses for effect.*)

Elmer (*Weakly*): Sir?

Baines: Have you thought of studying for the ministry? Have you considered a life devoted to the Word of Jesus Christ?

Elmer (*Stunned*): Golly.

(*During the following, Lulu enters again and quietly circulates, collecting coffee cups.*)

Baines: It's a grave question, I know. I appreciate your discomfort. Take a moment to yourself. (*Silence. All eyes are on Elmer, who soon assumes a look of intent thoughtfulness. Pause. Lulu passes near them.*) Ah! the lovely bride.... Thank you, Lulu. Mr. Gantry, my daughter Lulu. She and Mr. Fislinger have recently announced their engagement. (*To her*): Mr. Gantry is a candidate for the seminary.

Lulu: Oh, how wonderful.

Elmer: Yes I am, Miss Baines. (*An awkward recovery*): Thinking about it, I mean. (*She smiles and passes on to stand by Eddie.*)

Baines: Mmm. The Lord can use big, strong men. Men who can be examples to others.

He has no use for mollycoddles.

(*Silence. Elmer is still rapt in apparent concentration.*)

Mmm. The dean of our seminary is prepared to offer you a full three-year scholarship.

(*Elmer springs to his feet, excited but unsure what to say.*)

Eddie: Something is stirring inside him!

Elmer: Sirs, I feel somethin' kinda stirrin' inside me.

(*Frank, unseen by the others, prompts with urgent hand signals that they should leave the room.*) Maybe if I could go and ... kinda pray by myself, it might help.

Baines: The Spirit is working within you. Stay, and let us all pray that God may call you.

(*Eddie and the men of the faculty fall to their knees, each joining his hands across the seat of his reversed chair and bowing his head.*)

Elmer: Sirs, somethin' is stirrin' inside me. And it says, oh yes I can hear it, it says, 'Go and kinda pray by yourself and ... and see what happens.'

The Others: The spirit begins to move in him.

God calls him. Will he listen?

Elmer (*Over*): It says, 'Go and kinda pray by yourself.'

Baines (*Over*): Go, then. With prayer we'll besiege the throne of grace for you. Go, then.

The Faculty: Go, then. Go, then.

Baines (*He kneels*): Brother Edward, will you lead us? (*As Eddie begins, Elmer and Frank remain frozen.*)

Lulu, who has remained sitting in a half-bowed attitude, looks demurely at Elmer. After a moment, Elmer and Frank quietly retreat to an adjacent room. Their recitative occurs simultaneously with the prayer led by Eddie. Eddie sings over the Faculty, pausing in silent meditation between his lines.)

Prayer and Recitative

The Faculty (*Under*): Open his heart. Teach him, teach him,

Teach him Thy way, O Lord, lead him on. (*Repeat*)

Open his heart and show him Thy way.

Teach him to know you, Lord Jesus.

Eddie: Dear Lord, open the heart of our brother Elmer Gantry. Yes, Lord! And, Lord, let him know the

wondrous love that You have vouchsafed the world.

Elmer: Lord! Did you get a load of that Lulu? What a nice, nice girl.

Frank: Hell-cat, you need a drink. Here, first-rate corn whiskey. I'm never without it.

Elmer: But, ooh that Fislinger! Oh, he's gonna get it!

Frank: Take it easy, Hell-cat.

Eddie: *Show Brother Elmer Thy way; Thy way, O Lord; teach him to know Thy way which is the only hope of man.*

Frank (*As Elmer drinks*): What a bunch of yammers in there!

Elmer: Mm hmn, and Prexy Baines offering me a three-year scholarship!

Frank: And all that drool about big strong men.

Elmer (*Dramatically*): But what about...

Both: ... his daughter!

Elmer: Beautiful.

Frank: Engaged to Eddie.

Elmer: There is no God.

Frank: I'm here to tell ya. (*They continue to drink.*)

Eddie: *Fill him with Your Holy Spirit, Lord.*

Elmer: Oh, that's better.

Frank (*Drinks*): Much better.

Elmer: I'd probably make a pretty good preacher!

(Grandly): What is Love? What is Love?

Frank (*Mocking*):...Lulu Baines

Elmer: Easy work... thousands of people listening to you. And you, up there, helping them to be happy.

Frank: Sure!

Elmer: And all those doe-eyed honeys like Lulu Baines sittin', looking up at you from the front row. And don't they give you a house for free? At the top, I bet you can make eight or ten thousand a year.

Eddie: *Lift the veil of worldliness from our brother Elmer, and oh! don't forget our brother, Frank.*

Frank: Have a drink, Hell-cat.

Elmer: Boy, it's worth thinking about. For you too, Frank! With your brains, you'd go right to the top. You could talk circles around those gazabos.

Frank: You can't be serious about this.

Elmer: How 'bout if I could get a scholarship for you, too?

Frank: No.

Elmer: Why not? What else would you do? Go practice law with your cousins in Toluca?

Sounds like a high old time.

Frank: It's honest, at least.

Elmer: There's nothing dishonest about this.

Frank: Hell-cat. I'm with you on football, and drinking and the ladies. But I don't believe in joking about religion.

Elmer: Who's joking? Look, Frank. I've always believed in God. I was baptized at sixteen, member of the church. I might have sinned a little along the way...

Frank: Ha!

Elmer (*Spoken, very oratorical*): Love, my friends, is the Morning and the Evening star.

(To Frank): I'm sure to be a better preacher than that angleworm Eddie. And you're comin' with me!

Frank: No sir.

Eddie: *Teach him to know you, Lord.*

Frank: Forget it.

Elmer (*After a pause, breezily*): O.K. Forget it. Let's go tell 'em to forget it.

Frank: O.K., Hell-cat. Wait. Peppermints, for our breath. (*He offers them. They both chew hurriedly.*)

Elmer: Let's go. Oh! Let me see your hands.

(Without thinking, Frank holds out his hands. Elmer suddenly seizes them, forcing Frank to the ground.)

Frank: Oww!

(Elmer falls to his knees alongside, keeping hold of Frank and screaming):

Ensemble

Elmer: Hallelujah, hallelujah, O thank you, Jesus!

(Aside): Trust me, Frank.

Hallelujah! *(Aside):* Trust me, trust me. *(Aloud):* Saved by grace! *(Aside):* Trust me, Frank. *(Aloud):* Hallelujah! *(Eddie and the others have rushed to the door, where they stare in amazement at the scene before them.)*

Eddie, Elmer:

ELMER GANTRY SAVED! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! *(Elmer and Frank are helped to their feet and guided back to the president's office.)*

All: Hallelujah, hallelujah! O thank you, Jesus.

Hallelujah, hallelujah! Thank you, Lord. (*Repeat*)

He is convicted by grace!

Eddie and Lulu: He is!

Elmer: I am!

All: And of the Word, he has had experience.

Eddie and Others: Magnificent! Great praise!

Eddie (*Aside*): But my, what a curious smell of peppermints!

Eddie, Lulu and Baines: My, what a curious smell of peppermints!

(*The following are sung simultaneously, until Elmer's solo*):

Lulu, Baines: Magnificent! Magnificent!

Elmer: Hallelujah, hallelujah, O thank you, Jesus!

(*Aside*): Trust me, Frank. (*etc*)

Frank: And that goes double for me! (*Aside*): What the devil have you done to us, Elmer?

Elmer (*Solo*): God just opened my eyes to this wonderful ole world.

He said, "Don't you wanna make people happy?"

He said, "Don't you wanna LOVE everyone?"

Baines and the Faculty:

The men God predestinates, He calls.

The men whom He calls, He justifies.

And the justified, He also glorifies;

They are elected and convicted by grace.

All: Magnificent! Magnificent! Magnificent!

Magnificent! Great praise!

Elmer: Trust me, Frank. Trust me, Frank. (*etc.*)

Hallelujah, hallelujah!

Hallelujah, hallelujah!

(*They all continue singing as Elmer and Frank exit triumphantly*)

Blackout

☐ Act I, Scene 3

Eighteen months later. A field on the outskirts of Grauten, MO.

(**Elmer and Frank** are setting up for a typical camp meeting: a wooden platform, several small tables strewn with pamphlets, a rough wooden bench for the old people. All around, neatly painted picket signs

say 'Meeting Today at Noon', 'Will You Act Now?', 'Tomorrow May Be Too Late', and 'One Last Chance'. It is a bright summer's day; both men are in shirtsleeves and ties. After a moment, Lulu Baines runs in. She and Elmer embrace; then Elmer moves her to one side. Elmer leaps dramatically onto the wooden platform. Frank will join him to play a supporting role in the presentation.)

Aria

Elmer: When you hear the truth do you know it?

If you believe in a thing, will you show it?

Say you're going along, day like today,

Sun streaming bright down and you set in your ways.

If you hear something new, can it turn you around?

Can you be turned?

When you hear the truth do you know it?

If you believe in a thing, will you show it?

Watch this:

(*with Frank*) Oh that first day

Oh that's what I ask folks

Oh that first day

Day folks open up

Turn around see for themselves Oh discover

PEQUOT FARM IMPLEMENTS. That's Pequot farm implements.

Some time ago, I was called to the bedside of a dying farmer.

He said, "Elmer, I've been stubborn 'round the farm and foolish in my fields.

My machinery all is rusted, and those bankers whom I trusted

Are now threatening to take the place away."

That very day, I got to work with the help of little John Junior,

Exchanging each old-fashioned tool for a brand-new Pequot type.

New spike-wheel coulters for his old, a new sidedresser good as gold

And for a ploughshare, the Pequot Model Five.

Well, pretty soon up comes his sorghum, twice a normal yield.

From his little bedroom window, old John can see the

wheat tow'ring head high in his field,
His barley and his beets, a bumper crop of peas,
I run tell him, "John, you're free and clear."
And at that moment, he smiled at me and died.
But his last words to me still are ringing in my ears.
He said, "At last I've seen the truth, and the truth has
set me free."

(with Frank) Oh that first day
Oh that's what folks tell me
Oh that first day
That day they listen to me. *(Repeat)*
Day they turn around, question themselves Oh ask
yourselves...

When you climb in a boat will you row it?
If you mean to play ball, will you throw it?
When you make no sense't all, will you stow it?
Now I'm asking you all, do you know it?
When you hear the truth do you know it?
If you believe in a thing, will you show it?

C'mon now:
(with Frank): Get some farm tools
Oh that's what I tell folks
World's best farm tools
PEQUOT FARM IMPLEMENTS.

Be back here tomorrow morning when I will discuss
livestock and hog oiling.
*(The crowd applauds Elmer's speech. Lulu runs up to
him; as they talk, he is distracted by some of his
departing customers.)*

Elmer: Lulu, what did ya think...? – nice to see ya –
what did ya think of my little
sermon?

Lulu: What if my father finds out?

Elmer: Aw, it's good honest business *(he waves
goodbye to someone)* and that's gotta be alright with the
Lord.

Lulu: What about Eddie?

Elmer: Lulu, I'm doing all this for you. Just trying to
get ahead, make some money, graduate school, then I'll
be able to get a good church somewhere. You know
how difficult it is for a preacher to get his first real
church. We can't decide until then.

Lulu: Decide!

Elmer *(Sheepishly)*: We can't get married until then.

Lulu: But you want to?

Elmer: Sure.

Lulu: Elmer Gantry!

Elmer: Just think for a moment of the difficulties.

Lulu: No, Elmer.

Elmer: Gosh, you look so beautiful when you say that.
(Stifling all argument, Elmer kisses her.)

Tonight... Behind the chapel... eight o'clock. Go on.

*(She looks at him with tender reproach, but says
nothing. She leaves, turning back to blow him a kiss.)*

Elmer *(to Frank)*: O.K.!

*(During the following exchange, Frank and Elmer are
involved in cleaning up the scene of the meeting. They
store their tools in a large crate, place the chairs and
tables nearby, cover all with a tarpaulin. Then they
right themselves for their return to the seminary. They
are practiced; they work quickly and efficiently.)*

Elmer: How 'bout my spiel [speak] on The Dying
Farmer, Frank? Think I got 'em.

Frank *(Angry)*: What about Lulu Baines? You didn't
tell me.

Elmer: Didn't I, Frank? *(With great expansiveness)* Oh
yes, what a sweetheart! I'm just crazy about her!

Frank: Don't give me that! We're breaking every rule
in the Terwillinger code, risking our careers selling this
junk...

Elmer: How'd we do?

Frank: Nine bucks... And the whole time, you're
jazzing the president's daughter!

What's gonna happen when he finds out?

Elmer: Oh Frank, you worry too much. That's your
problem. Worry, worry, worry. Stick around me, you'll
get over it.

Frank: Jerk.

(Pause. They continue their work.)

Elmer: What class have we got at three?

Frank: Old Testament Hebrew.

Elmer: Ugh! *(Pause)* All right. Go ahead.

Frank *(Reciting in Hebrew as they continue righting
themselves)*: Aron kodesh.

Elmer: What?

Frank: Aron kodesh. The holy ark. Oomi yicom b'mcom kadisho.

Elmer (*Pensive*): Uh oh; problem, Frank. Problem. You going to hear that revival woman tonight — Sharon Falconer?

(*From now until the end of the scene, workers enter to set up Sharon's tent on other parts of the stage. Some of the elements left behind by Elmer and Frank will be incorporated into the scene to come.*)

Frank: Nope. I find that revival stuff a little moist. You?

Elmer: That's the problem. Say it again...

Frank: Oomi yicom b'mcom kadisho.

Elmer: I thought I'd go. Get some preachin' ideas. So here's what: you meet Lulu, back of the chapel, eight o'clock, stall her a couple of minutes. Be nice to her; talk me up; I won't be long.

Frank: No! She's your problem.

Elmer: Our problem, Frank. If she talks, she's our problem.

(*Pause*)

Frank: Elmer, I take it back about the jerk. You are evil.

Elmer: Settled. Now, here we go: "Oomimicom bicomakamisho" — book of Genesis one-two.

Frank: Elmer! Psalms, 24: "Or who shall stand in His holy place?"

(*They depart, their voices trailing off.*)

Elmer: "Oomimicom bicomakamisho." Is that better? (*The transformation to the next scene continues during*):

Blackout

4] Act I, Scene 4

Later that evening, outside Sharon Falconer's revival tent on a vacant lot in Sautersville, Missouri.

(The scene encompasses part of the inside of a large revival tent, as well as the area outside the tent. The view into the tent can either be accomplished through a very wide 'realistic' opening into the tent, or by a more abstract 'cutaway' effect. In either case, the

intention is that the tent seem very large, and that part of its interior remain invisible. As the scene begins, the sound of a choral hymn comes from within the tent. It will continue under the action of the scene. Those who have not been able to find seats inside stand just outside the tent-flap, craning their necks to see, and singing along. Occasionally someone pushes through them, entering or leaving. Outside the tent, a carnival atmosphere prevails. It is a grander, more chaotic version of the "meeting" held by Elmer and Frank. A revival worker stands near a large banner which reads 'Old Time Revival Tonight', and a sign saying 'Sister Sharon Falconer Speaks - All are welcome'. People mill around in groups, talking or singing along; children play; a vendor hawks refreshments. After a few moments, Elmer enters the scene.)

Hymn

Chorus: Vessels of service, great and small,

Vessels we wish to be,

Filled with our Saviour's brimming Love,

Serving Him tirelessly.

Be like a vessel, rounded and true,

Made by your Saviour's hand,

Filled with devotion, ready now

To serve Him throughout the land.

Vessels of mercy He prepared,

Filled with His own dear blood.

Now let us serve Him, never emerging,

From that redeeming flood.

Serve Him in gladness, serve Him in joy,

Serve Him in faith and love;

'Til from this earth we part at last,

To serve Him in Heaven above.

Vessels of wrath He turned aside,

Willing that we might live;

With His last breath on that old cross,

He did our sins forgive.

Joyfully singing, take up your burden

Firm in your faith confessed.

Every service for Jesus Christ

By Jesus Christ is blessed.

Vessels abounding, trust complete,

separates himself from the group and they go through their drills for him.)

Women: Left, left; left, right, left.

We are soldiers fighting on the front line,

We are sailors throwing out the lifeline,

We are umpires spotting from the sideline,

If we come through, everything will go fine.

Elmer: O.K. Here we go...

I'm reachin' in my pocket when the plate comes around,

I got a sheepish look when I tell you what I found,

I say, "Excuse me, Miss, I'm in kind of a stew.

I've only got a five, but I'll sure give you two."

What do you do?

Women: We give you three dollars back.

Elmer: Wrong.

Take the five bills and smile to the gills, and this is

what you say:

"In the marts of men all shady deals with ease you can arrange,

But Heaven is not a banking house and the Holy Ghost doesn't make change."

Women: Heaven is not a banking house and the Holy Ghost doesn't make change.

We are soldiers fighting on the front line,

We are sailors throwing out the lifeline,

We are umpires spotting from the sideline,

If we come through, everything will go fine.

(Sharon has entered to oversee details of the preparations. She moves over to quiz the women.)

Sharon: All right, girls...

Here's a dear old thing in a homemade smock,

And the Spirit's going through her so her knees begin to knock.

Pretty soon she's shakin' and she falls on her back,

And she's kickin' up a storm 'til her bones are like to crack.

What's your tack?

Women: We ask her kindly to refrain.

Sharon: Wrong.

Lead her down the aisle with a sympathetic smile,

Let her writhe and rage at the side of the stage,

Just remember when she's hollering in Japanese or French,

There's a twelve-minute limit at the mourner's bench.

Women: Remember when she's hollering in Japanese or French,

There's a twelve-minute limit at the mourner's bench.

Elmer: With Jesus...!

Women: With Jesus our Saviour we shall prevail,

By lending strong hands and spirits hale.

We are soldiers fighting on the front line,

If we come through, everything will go fine.

(Sharon leaves to oversee other work. The women file off in formation. All around, the work of building the tabernacle continues.)

Recitative

Frank: Welcome to Zenith.

Elmer: I heard you were here, Frankibus. Great to see ya!

Frank: My church is a few blocks from here. Can I stop by sometime? We'll catch up on things.

Elmer: Love to. Next week?

Frank: Perfect.

Elmer *(Looking around)*: So, what do you think? Not bad for a seminary dropout.

Frank: Listen, Elmer. I'm glad you're getting on, but I wonder about all this soldier-sailor-money stuff.

(T.J. Rigg enters. He is followed by two Elks in full regalia who between them carry a very large rectangle of cardboard. A reporter and a press photographer are part of their entourage. T.J. is leading Sharon by the hand.)

T.J.: Looky who I found! *(Spoken)*: C'mon boys!

Elmer: Here's T.J.!

(They perform the ritual Elks greeting.)

Elmer, T.J.: Aah - WEEEEEE - Oh.

T.J.: Elmer Gantry — speak of the devil.

Quartet 2 *(Aside)*: Speak of the devil!

Sharon: T.J. says he has some joyful news.

T.J.: And how... Sixty thou!

(The Elks turn the cardboard around to reveal a huge check for \$60,000 made out to "Falconer Ministries." T.J. poses with Sharon and Elmer as the photographer takes their picture.)

(The following groups of lines are sung simultaneously):

Elmer: Thatsa lot of mazuma.

Faith such that all may see;
Jesus Himself did choose this lot,
A suffering servant He.

(The following lines are sung simultaneously with the hymn, and overlapping each other)

Vendor: O.K. Ice cream. I got ice cream. O.K. I got ice cream. O.K. O.K. Ice cream.

And lemonade — just made, too. O.K.

Revival Worker: Come on to the big revival. Come on. Come and hear the straight gospel from Sister Sharon. Come and hear and be changed forever. One night. One night only. First, last and only night.

Child near the tent: Where is she, Daddy? I can't see.
(A revival singer comes out of the tent.)

Revival Singer (To the crowd): Oh let me tell you what He did for me...

Revival Worker (To the crowd): Listen to the man.
(He goes in.)

Revival Singer *(Singing out above the crowd):*
“Vessels of mercy He prepared, and He filled them with His own blood, His own dear blood. Now let us serve Him, never emerging from that redeeming flood. And we'll serve Him in gladness...” *(etc.)*

Crowd near the tent: She's coming over! Here she comes. Is that her, daddy? Lord have mercy. Oh, Lord, yes. Oh, mercy. Yes, Sharon. Yes, Sharon. Is that her?
(From within the tent, Sharon Falconer's voice is heard, coming out over the hymn. The hubbub outside continues, but Elmer starts to listen.)

Aria

Sharon *(beginning o.s., growing louder as she approaches the tent opening):*

Oh...It's joy, isn't it? A joy so pure... A joy so pure...

Can you feel it? Friends outside the tent... Can you feel a little of that joy now? That's the Lord... That's the Lord...
(She is now visible at the tent opening. Her right hand is raised, palm forward, her hair is streaming and her face is flushed, perspiring. She wears a straight white robe tied with a ruby-colored cinch; its wide, slashed sleeves fall away from her bare arms. The congregants sense that she is about to address them. They stop the hymn.)
The sun embraces the stony earth,

Sweet rain caresses the land,
And pure is the joy that cradles the heart
Touched by Thee, touched by Thee.
No wonder the angels sing to each other.
(Some congregants are kneeling, heads bowed. Sharon slowly advances down this line of penitents, bestowing a silent or a whispered blessing.)

The crowd: Amen.

(Elmer goes down on his knees directly in Sharon's path and ostentatiously resumes the hymn. The chorus joins him.)

Elmer and crowd: Joyfully singing, take up your burden,
Firm in your faith confessed;
Every service for Jesus Christ
By Jesus Christ is blessed. Amen.

Sharon: Amen. *(She navigates around Elmer.)*

Elmer: Amen, Sister, amen.

Aria

A moment ago, a thought passed through me.

What was it? *Never the same again...*

I stood on this spot, same as now...

But different.

Was it her?

She was here; she left; I heard what she said;

What about it?

I've said the same stuff myself.

Was it me?

Did I imagine the thing that I heard?

Oh, let me hear it once more. What was it?

Never the same again...

(As a hymn is sung for the altar call, people stand and approach the mourner's benches — singly and in groups — to kneel and pray. Some, emotionally overcome, are helped up to the mourner's benches by Sister Sharon, who may whisper a few words of encouragement or bestow a blessing on them. Elmer hangs back along the edge of the tent, transfixed.)

Hymn

Gospel Quartet: Softly, through the darkest night of fear, Jesus is calling;
Bringing comfort to the far and near, calling to thee.
Ever strength'ning, ever holding fast, ever abiding

He whispers to the straying soul at last, "Come now to me."

And if you heed Him,

Trust and cleave to Him,

And call Him, "Jesus LORD!"

Then will He open His hand.

In faith He'll lead you on.

His blood was ransom for Man.

(For Jesus. Listen for His call.

(The altar call has concluded with several dozen people kneeling at the mourners' benches. There is silence.

Sharon begins to sing with a mystical quiet, as if coming out of a trance. The crowd will greet her first utterances with responses of "Hallelujah", "Praise God", etc.

Then, all will rise up and join her in song.)

Sharon: Jesus could be coming tonight.

He could split those eastern skies tonight;

Darken the stars, cover Heaven.

Ezekiel, Oh I heard Ezekiel, this very day,

Said Jesus will darken the stars, said He'll cover Heaven.

Turn water to wormwood.

Said He could lift us up on a mighty wind,

Show us the last things and take us out the way we come in.

Chorus, Sharon:

A stone, a stone, a pure white stone;

And in that stone a new name written.

A new name for the world.

A stone, a stone, a pure white stone;

Show us the last things and take us out the way we come in!

A rainbow, a rainbow, a rainbow round His throne;

A rainbow round His throne.

Circled 'round the throne of the Lamb.

A rainbow, a rainbow, a rainbow 'round His throne;

Show us the last things and take us out the way we come in!

My Lord's throne.

Oh redeem us now from a captive world.

A sword, a sword, a two-edge sword;

Cuttin' sin both left and right.

Out of his mouth a two-edge sword.

A sword, a sword, a two-edge sword;

Show us the last things and take us out the way we come in!

A glittering sword.

Under the sound of my voice.

A stone

— the last things;

Precious stone...

A rainbow

— the last things;

Bright rainbow...

A two-edge sword

— the last things;

A two-edge sword...

Sharon and All: Take us out the way we come in!

When the trumpet sounded for the seventh time,

The Lamb stood on Mt. Zion

and with Him a hundred forty four thousand

having their Father's name written in their foreheads.

All, Sharon:

THE REDEEMED OF EARTH. Lord, oh redeem us now

THE REDEEMED OF EARTH. From a captive world

THE REDEEMED OF EARTH. The redeemed by

Jesus Christ.

(Repeat)

(Lulu is heard calling from off-stage)

Lulu: Elmer...

Elmer: Aw, Hell! not her...

(He races out, angrily. Lulu has entered with Frank in tow.)

Quartet

Lulu: Trouble is brewing.

Frank: All our dreams have failed.

Lulu: Trouble is brewing.

Frank: And your schemes have failed.

Elmer: What now?

Lulu: My love, it won't defeat us.

Frank: My friend, we must confess.

Elmer: She blabbed. She must have blabbed.

Frank, Lulu: Reveal the truth;

Elmer: I don't care anymore.

Frank, Lulu: Mend what is torn;

Elmer: I'm not made for a boring life.

Frank, Lulu: Return to us.

Elmer: I've got plans. I'm movin' on.

Chorus (*off-stage*): *Made Himself humble for the world.*

Sharon (*off-stage*): Remember that as I leave you tonight.

(*Sharon appears at the tent entrance, wearing an overcoat and accompanied by several revival workers. She stops to observe the scene between Elmer, Lulu, and Frank.*)

Frank, Lulu: Return. (*They exit.*)

Elmer: I've got plans. I'm movin' on.

Oh, Sister Falconer...

Accept this praise from a fellow minister:

You sing beautifully.

You preach flawlessly.

I wondered, might you have a job for me?

Sharon: Tell me, Brother...

Elmer: Reverend Gantry! Elmer Gantry.

Sharon: Tell me, Brother, where's your Church?

Elmer: My church? My church is with you, Sister. I know my Bible; I can preach up a storm.

For instance: "What is Love...?"

Sharon (*interrupting*): Brother, have you behaved in a loving way to your girlfriend?

Elmer: Girlfriend? She's not my...

Sharon: Brother, I caution you against lying.

Elmer: Now Sister Falconer, I have never...

Sharon: Never lied? That's splendid. You have my blessing, Brother.

(*To all*): Goodbye, friends.

(*To him*): Please excuse me; I must catch a train. (*She leaves with her assistants.*)

(*The crowd leaves, streaming out from all exits of the tent and singing the last verse of the hymn. The vendors begin to pack up their wares. A few workers remain to close the tent, shut down the generator, etc. Oblivious to the scene around him, Elmer fumes over his treatment by Sharon.*)

Chorus (*exiting*): *Vessels abounding, trust complete, Faith such that all may see;*

Jesus Himself did choose this lot,

A suffering servant He.

Elmer (*simultaneously*):

Recit., Aria

Of course, I mean nothing to her.

"Catch a train."

Some jerk in a town she's leaving.

"Never lied."

Kicked out of school...

Now what?

My foot!

(*This last line he has shouted after her. The crowd has left. The lights of the tent are turned off. Elmer will be alone in the moonlight.*)

I'll show you.

"Where's your church?"

I'll see you again.

I'll catch up with you, Sister-so-pure!

Damn you! Damn You!

You're not the only one with holy thoughts!

I've had them!

There's still something pure in me.

I'll show you one day!

She wouldn't look, barely looked at me.

Why, what is it? — my clothes?

Is my suit-coat too cheap? Are the elbows worn down?

Anybody got any objection to my clothes?

(*He rips off his jacket and throws it to the ground*)

Is this "splendid"? Is this "splendid", damn you? Is this "splendid"?

(*Overcome by a revelation, he is suddenly quiet.*)

Oh dear God.

She is the sign to me.

She the signal-lamp and the path shining for me.

In that woman's face, You turned Your face to me.

And her scorn for me was not hers alone.

It was Yours — Your attack, Your grab at my soul.

She was Your knife that opened me down to the bone.

Now pour Your words in at the gaping hole.

There! Yes! There! There!

God sings, He howls words in my brain.

They blaze, flaming tongues in the nighttime air,

Saying: “Never the same. Never the same again, Elmer Gantry, Never the same again.”

Blackout

5 Act I, Scene 5

The Elks Lodge meeting room, Zenith, Missouri. 1911. (As the curtain rises, Sharon Falconer is standing at an upstage podium concluding a fiery address to the members of the Lodge, who sit ringing the stage facing her. They wear business suits and headgear topped with antlers, as befits their order. The Elks Lodge is a masculine shrine, all dark woods, brass and leather. Rev. Baines sits in a chair near the podium.)

Recitative and Arietta

Sharon: And God said, “Build me a tabernacle!”
(As she returns to her empty seat near Baines, the Elks applaud without enthusiasm. Baines does not applaud at all. T.J. Rigg, the head Elk, rises, goes to the podium, recites the ritual invocation.)

T.J.: Alces, alces, Benny Voley.

Elks: Aaah - WEEEEEE - Oh.

T.J.: Accephi this orati meo.

Elks: Say now what you mean to say-o.

T.J.: A big red-blooded thank you to Sister Falconer for her interesting proposal. And now with a different view we’ll hear from the Reverend Arthur Baines, president of our dandy Terwillinger College and Seminary in nearby Cato ...

T.J., Elks: Mis - sou - RAA - ah. [“Missouri”]

T.J.: Yes, and a real go-ahead He-man of the cloth he is. Welcome, booster Baines.

Elks: Hummina hummina hummina.

(Baines rises to the podium. He has aged since we last saw him, and his manner has become even fustier – if that is possible.)

Baines: Mmm. Thank you. With all due respect to our last charming speaker:

How well we know these revivalist clowns

Whose gaudy tents disfigure our towns!

They gull the guileless, they fleece our flocks,

They dun the dumbest, and the Devil mocks.

What sensual pageants they serve the unwitting!

What feverish rites they encourage as fitting!

These showish figures and carnival kinds

Must blithely imagine we’re out of our minds.

To line their own pockets, they ask for our trust;

I submit that this woman of hucksters is just —

— a more graceful exemplum.

I ask that you soundly reject her proposal.

(The Elks applaud warmly as Baines takes his seat and T.J. returns to the podium.)

Recitative

T.J.: A corking good speech, chock-full of vocabulary and pep, by a very Regular Guy.

Nit?

Elks: Hummina hummina.

T.J. (Gavelling): Let us vote. *(As fast as possible):* In the matter of whether the benevolent order shall support and further the plans of Miss Sharon Falconer to build a grand tabernacle in ZENITH one year from now. And whether the order shall advance MONIES and organize civic events to promote said tabernacle. *(Pause)* All opposed say nay.

Elks: Nay.

T.J.: All in favor, yea. *(There is silence, but before T.J. can gavel, Elmer, who has been sitting with his back to the audience in a row of Elks, rises.)*

Elmer: Will the brothers recognize me?

Elks: Hummina hummina.

T.J. (As Elmer moves to the podium): Brother Gantry, junior vice-president of the Pequot Farm Company.

Elmer: Alces, alces, Benny Voley.

Elks: Aaah - WEEEEEE - Oh.

Elmer: Accephi this orati meo.

Elks: Say now what you mean to say-o.

Elmer (Chiding): Gentlemen, gentlemen. Miss F. has told us the kind of joyful business story we should love to hear. *(He takes some documents from her.)* Look here. She shows “contributed income from civic sources — 2,620 dollars.” Look a little further. “Fully validated permanent conversions — 9,415.” My friends now that’s 25 cents per errant sinner. Sounds to me like something we love...

Elmer, Elks: Bu - LAAAACK Iiink! [“Black ink”]

Elmer: Four souls to the dollar, lent to the Lord as collateral on the well-balanced Christian go-ahead future of our city...

Elmer, Elks: Zip zip Zenith.

Elmer: What Bolsheviki cheapskate won’t lend to the Lord at that rate of return?

For lending is Charity, Charity Love, and...
What is Love?

It is the builder of every home.

Elks: Hummina.

Elmer: It is the paver of every highway.

Elks: Hummina hummina.

Elmer: The improver of every vacant lot.

Elks: Hummina hummina hummina.

Elmer: Can we vote again?

T.J. (Rising): All opposed nay.

A few Elks: Nay.

T.J.: All in favor, yea.

Elks: Yea!

T.J. (Gavelling): Motion passes. Thank you to our guests. *(To the Elks):* O.K., you bombsats! Let’s get together on the Zenith Booster Song.

Choral Song

T.J., Elks: Here is the song we love the best:

Pointing with pride to our S-U-C-C-E-S-S,
Pointing with pride to the way we get things done,

Ignoring the cries of the “R-U kidding?” pessimists,
We are the guys who never walk when they can run.

Oh we zoom zoom for Zenith, our zip zip city.

Make room for Zenith, with zeal, zap and zowie!

Zinovievsk and Zanzibar and Zurich may be twee,

But you’ll never find a zingier place than the zip zip city.

Zoom zoom zip zip *(etc.)*

(They continue to sing. Sharon, preparing to leave, goes up to Elmer. The Reverend Baines looks on coldly.)

Baines: The Gantrys of the world sustain the Falconers.

That is a boost that no one needs. *(Repeat)*

Elks: You could zig-zag your zeppelin across the

Zuiderzee,

But you’ll never find a zingier place —

A cleaner place, a friendlier place, a pleasanter place —

T.J.: With a better tax base!

Elks: — than the Zip Zip Zip City.

Blackout

¶ Act I, Scene 6

Six months later. The study in the home of Rev. Edward and Mrs. Lulu Fislinger.

(It is late afternoon. Eddie should be preparing his week’s sermon. Instead, he is browsing through the newspaper, drinking tea. Lulu calls to him from a distant room.)

Lulu: Sweetheart? *(Pause)* Eddie? What are you doing?

Eddie *(Not loud enough for her to possibly hear him):*

Working on my sermon.

Lulu *(Closer):* Eddie? *(A moment later, there is a light knock and she enters.)* Sweetheart...?

Eddie *(Not acknowledging her):* Working on my sermon.

Lulu: Oh, my precious man. *(She hugs him, evoking little response.)* I’m going out for a while. *(Pause, then as a goodbye):* Sweetheart.

(When she has left he begins absent-mindedly to formulate his sermon while still perusing the paper.)

Aria

Eddie: What is Love? It is the ...

What is Love?

What, my brethren, is Love?

It is the Eveni... the Morning and the Evening star,

It shines upon the cradle of the babe,

And casts its radiance upon the quiet tomb.

(He becomes distracted by the newspaper)

It is the air and ... and the light of... every heart...

(reading): “A grand outpouring of the spirit is expected again in Paris County when Sister Sharon Falconer returns for an uplifting week of Christian revival. Assisted by the Reverend Mr. Elmer Gantry, Sister Sharon has announced that all offerings to her mission will go towards construction of a grand tabernacle in Zenith, Missouri for the glory of God...” *(He flings the paper down.)* ‘Grand’ tabernacle... the ‘Reverend’ Mr. Gantry...

(laughing): Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.

You do test your servants. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.

You surely test your servants, Lord.

Ha ha ha ha ha.

(Trying to put thoughts of Elmer behind him, he resumes his sermon):

What is Love?

It is the Morning and the Evening star,

It shines upon the cradle of the *swindler bully!* babe,

And casts its radiance upon the quiet *vermin lickspittle*
rutting lecherous ape!

It is the air and the *bastard!* light of every heart;

Dear Lord, may it be Thy will to crush Elmer Gantry
utterly!

Turn him to dung!

Let dogs eat him in the street for the sake of Thy great
name.

(laughing): Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.

You do test your servants. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. You

surely test your servants, Lord.

Ha ha ha ha ha.

Gantry... Love Love... Gantry;

They should never share a sentence.

Love is what I offered.

Love he repaid with villainy.

I'll show him grimmer stuff.

Love can't endure all things;

Rage is now my portion.

Eddie... Rage Rage... Eddie.

(He launches into his sermon again with gleeful malice):

What is Rage?

What is Rage?

What, my brethren, is Rage?

It is the waking and the dreaming thought,

It shines upon the happy home of Eddie and his wife,

And casts its radiance on every mention of that *otiose*
backstabbing pustulent toad!

It is the blood and bloody sinew of my heart.

Dear Lord, may it be Thy will to crush Elmer Gantry
utterly!

Burn his tent! Kill his whore!

Let the stink of his corpse rise at Your trumpet blast!

(laughing): Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Oh dear me, ha ha, what
am I saying?

Ha ha ha ha.

You do test your servants. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.

You surely test your servants, Lord.

Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.

Blackout

End of Act I

CD 2

② Act II, Scene 1

Sharon's suite of rooms, The Antlers Hotel, Lincoln, Nebraska. Summer, 1912.

(The living room has one door, u.s., connecting to Sharon's bedroom and another, s.l., leading into the hotel hallway. The room is elegantly furnished — obviously the best which the town has to offer — and filled with a profusion of flowers standing in vases. It is late evening; the room is empty. Elmer knocks on the door, opens it a crack, peers around, then enters bearing a huge tray with a silver cover. A sheaf of papers is tucked under his arm.)

Duet

Elmer: Knock, knock. Here I am with the goods. All the figures from tonight and the week to date.

Sharon *(From the other room)* Elmer, I'm blind tired. Can't it wait? Can't it wait?

Elmer: Grand Tabernacle offerings — take a guess. Two-oh-nine. And freewill, fiftyeight.

Just relax, put your feet up.

Sharon: Elmer, really... *(As she enters, tying on a dressing gown.)*

Elmer: I predict eight-fifty clear.

Sharon: That's wonderful. I must say goodnight.

Elmer: Ta-dah... sandwiches! *(Flourishing the tray cover.)*

Sharon: Aren't you a dear?

(Pause. She eats a sandwich hungrily. He sits, preparing for a business meeting.)

Elmer: Oh! The hymns for tomorrow. Let's see... *(He consults his notes.)*

Sharon: Let's not.

Elmer: First 'Follow On', then 'Sunrise', then 'Verily' sung by the kid...

Sharon: Very good.

Elmer: Skipping 'He is Mine', adding 'Just in Time' after 'Hold the Line' — did I mention 'Sunrise'?

Sharon: You did.

(Pause. She makes an obvious move to the door. He follows.)

Elmer: Sharon...?

Sharon: Goodnight, Elmer.

Elmer: Goodnight. *(Brief pause; not leaving.)*

Sharon...? Do you like me?

Sharon: Yes.

Elmer: How much?

Sharon: Not very much. I can't like anyone very much.

Elmer: You could get to like me, though.

Sharon: It is possible. Good night.

Elmer: Sleep tight. I'll go. *(Pause.)* Sharon...? Can I stay and chat?

Sharon: You could answer that. Now please. Your room is down the hall.

Elmer: I could tuck you in.

Sharon: You've been very good. Try to keep it up.

Elmer: Can't I get you anything?

Sharon: Not at all!

(A moment's pause of indecision. Then he makes to leave.)

Elmer: Well, alright then. Well, goodnight then.

(Suddenly rapturous, he races to the window):

And what a thrilling night it is!

The moon full and a fierce wind blowing!

A perfect night for romance...

Sharon *(Sweetly):* Elmer, weren't you going?

Elmer: Oh, of course. Sweet dreams, if you're sure there's nothing more.

Sharon: I am sure. Thanks for asking. *(Pause.)* ... The door...?

(She accompanies him to the door. At the last moment, he breaks away and begins a vigorous inspection of the room.)

Elmer: Gosh, your flowers...

Sharon: Thriving.

Elmer: Where's your wardrobe?

Sharon: Arriving.

Elmer: Those pillows...

Sharon: They're perfect.

Elmer: I could fluff 'em.

Sharon: Not worth it.

Elmer: The heat!

Sharon: ...is hot.

Elmer: Too hot!

Sharon: No, it's not.

Elmer: No, it's chilly.

Sharon: No, it's right.

Elmer: Don't be silly...

Sharon: Say goodnight.

(She has him firmly by the arm, leading him to the door. He complies; but with his free arm he seizes a Bible from the sideboard.)

Elmer: Oh, Sharon, one last question; I know it's late...

Sharon *(Singsong):* Goodnight.

Elmer: But I'm puzzled by Matthew: twenty eight.

(Pause.) ...I know; goodnight.

Sharon: Goodnight, Elmer.

(He leaves. She shuts the door behind him and turns toward her bedroom. Then he bursts back in through the door. She gives a scream of surprise.)

Recit. and Duet

Elmer: No! I won't go. Let me tell you the truth!

You've made me crazy for you. Do you hear every word? Except for my mother, you're the only woman I've ever adored.

I love you! Hear me.

Oh Sharon! Sharon, you've changed me.

Half-baked; that's what I was.

And just too stupid to know it.

Until you came to show me — how can I say it? — you showed me my soul.

Yeah, my soul. My poor, dingy soul.

My soul sound asleep 'til you woke it.

In a silence undisturbed 'til you broke it.

Now you — so achingly pure —

Chance to look in my eyes and I'm sure,

I feel my soul strain at its shackles, trying to rush from me.

Oh had I wings, Sharon.

Oh had I wings I would fly to you.

Sharon: And be at rest?

Elmer: That's right. And be at rest.

Sharon: No rest for me. There's none for me, Elmer.

For I am given to the Lord.

Devotion binds me by a silver cord.

And I — whether cursed or blessed —

I can't be hurried or pressed,

I am! I'll decide when the Lord wants you to come to me.

(In her fury, she has overturned a chair. She rights it now, regaining her composure.)

I'm different. I'm not like your other women.

My kiss could be simple homespun,

Or a terribly passionate one;

And God, in an act of grace,

Will all sin from that kiss erase.

He sanctifies me that I may give my life to Him.

My fondest hope, Elmer,

My fondest hope is to serve him ever.

Elmer: With a perfect heart?

Sharon: That's right. With a perfect heart.

Elmer: As God requires...

Sharon: Yes. A perfect heart.

Elmer: As God requires, we can both submit.

I to you, you to Him.

(The following pairs of lines are sung simultaneously):

Sharon: He sanctifies me that I may give my life to Him.

Elmer: Oh had I wings, Sharon.

Elmer: I feel my soul strain at its shackles, trying to rush from me.

Sharon: My fondest hope, Elmer.

Sharon: My fondest hope... is to serve Him... with a perfect heart.

Elmer: ... As God requires... Oh Sharon... we can both submit... I to you,

Sharon: ... with a perfect heart... to serve Him ever.

Elmer: you to Him... with perfect hearts... each to the other, both to Him.

Sharon: He sanctifies me that I may give my life to Him...

Elmer: I feel my soul strain at its shackles, trying to rush from me...

Sharon: I feel my soul strain at its shackles, trying to rush from me...

Elmer: He'll sanctify me that I may give my life to you...

Sharon: My fondest hope, my fondest hope...

Elmer: Oh had I wings, oh had I wings...

Sharon: Is to serve Him... to serve Him... with a perfect heart

Elmer: ... I would fly to you... as God requires... we can both submit...

Sharon: with a perfect heart... to serve Him... to serve Him

Elmer: with perfect hearts... each to the other... both to Him

Sharon: ... ever.

Elmer: ... both to Him.

Elmer: And be at rest? *(Pause. They kiss.)*

Sharon: That's right. And be at rest.

Slow Fade

③ Act II, Scene 2

Six months later. The site of The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle, Zenith, Missouri.

(A revival worker (in uniform) is acting as a Tour Guide, leading a group of tourists through the construction site. This group includes Rev. Baines and Mrs. Baines, Eddie, and Lulu who will later sing as 'Quartet 2.' Meanwhile, a group of female revival workers is marching on and off-stage, practicing drills. Frank Shallard stands to one side, observing.)

Choral Scene

Women (Spoken, from off-stage): Left, left; left, right, left. *(Repeat, fading out.)*

Tour Guide (Spoken): This way please. *(Sung):* And God ordered Sister Sharon to take over the old Opera House of Zenith and on this site — quickly, please — to build a Grand Tabernacle. Directly behind us, up there, will rise a magnificent cross of a thousand electric lights! *(She hustles the group of tourists — including Quartet 2 — off-stage as a group of female revival workers enters from off-stage, led by Elmer. They are dressed in uniforms, and they enter marching in ranks. Elmer*

Sharon: "I have seen thy patience."

T.J.: ... And we'll indemnify it.

Elmer: Thatsa lot of mazuma.

Sharon: "I have heard thy prayers."

T.J.: ... And we'll publicize it.

Frank (*To Elmer*): Don't get carried away, old pal. People trust you.

Elmer: Thatsa lot of mazuma.

Sharon: "I will make thee to walk upon high places."

T.J.: We will beautify it and advertise it.

Frank: Don't get carried away.

Reporter (*Spoken*): Mr. Gantry, what do you say to those critics who fear that this tabernacle will commercialize the Christian faith?

Eddie (*a soft aside*): Amen.

Elmer: I don't say anything. Jesus said it a whole lot better than I can. Truly...

(Elmer, Sharon, Frank and T.J. sing as *Quartet 1*.)

Octet

Elmer: New wine has to go in new bottles, not in old. Modern life affects the way the story's told.

Times must change, and that's why Jesus said,

"Old bottles cannot hold this wine."

Sharon: We will shout the gospel to the deaf, dance it for the dim.

Be a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men.

Elmer: We have to light the gospel in electric lights, speed it out on trains,

Sing it on the radio, drop it out of planes.

Frank (*aside*): He's losing his bearings while counting his gains.

Qt. 1: New wine has to go in new bottles, not in old.

Modern life affects the way the story's told.

Times must change, and that's why Jesus said,

"Old bottles cannot hold this wine."

(Eddie, Lulu, Rev. Baines and Mrs Baines sing as *Quartet 2*.)

Qt. 2: Here we are, sheep in the midst of wolves.

Let's be wise as serpents, harmless as doves.

All: New wine has to go in new bottles, not in old. (*etc.*)

Baines and Eddie: Their wine is from the vine of

Sodom, their grapes are gall.

The old-time Hell will swallow them all.

They're the moneychangers and Pharisees of whom Jesus said,

"Old bottles cannot hold this wine."

Eddie and Qt. 2: We have to save the gospel from hypocrites, keep it in our care.

Be not prey to Satan's ruse, fall not in his snare.

Lulu (*aside, regarding Sharon and Elmer*): Look at that hussy returning his stare!

Elmer: We have to pitch the gospel in magazines, print it up in Braille,

Send it out in catalogs that offer it by mail.

Frank (*aside*): But it goes down in worth when it goes up for sale.

Qt. 2: Their wine is from the vine of Sodom, (*etc.*)

Frank: "Stand still," the prophet said. "Stand still And see salvation from the Lord."

If there's truth to being saved,

I'm sure it's a quiet working, a private urging,

And our meddling's in the way.

Lulu (*aside*): What are they doing at night, if they're so lovey-dovey by day?

Qt. 1: We will shout the gospel to the deaf, dance it for the dim.

Be a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men.

Qt. 2: If we hold the gospel unsullied and pristine,

The world will know those everlasting arms on which to lean.

Lulu (*aside*): They're prancing around like the king and the queen.

All: New wine / Their wine (*etc.*)

All: Stand still, stand still and see salvation from the Lord.

We have to sing the gospel, shout the gospel, save the gospel, keep the gospel,

hold and protect the gospel, dance the gospel, light the gospel, speed the gospel,

pitch the gospel, print the gospel, send the gospel.

TRULY...

Frank (*under*): If there's truth to being saved, I'm sure it's a quiet working!

Qt. 1: New wine has to go in new bottles (*etc.*)

Qt. 2: Their wine is from the vine of Sodom (etc.)

Qt. 1: Times must change. Times must change. (etc.)

Qt. 2: Moneychangers and Pharisees; moneychangers and Pharisees. (etc.)

All: Times must change, must change, must change;
And that's why Jesus said,

He said, "Your old bottles cannot hold this wine." (etc.)
(*The female revival workers march across the stage.*)

Women: We are soldiers fighting on the front line,
We are sailors throwing out the lifeline,
We are empires spotting from the sideline,
If we come through, everything will go fine.

All: "Old bottles cannot hold this wine."

Blackout

4 Act II, Scene 3

That night. The same setting.

(Work on the tabernacle has stopped for the night. Ladders and tools remain in view. Frank and Elmer have cleared space on one of the chorus risers. Around them are a few papers, two glasses, a half-empty bottle. On the other side of the stage there is a gaudy white piano (partially covered) which Frank will play. The two have been talking most of the evening. Elmer listens to Frank, says nothing.)

Frank: Is belief a gift?

How is conviction earned?

Aria Fresh, boundless and unwavering faith —
Can that be learned?

I have craved belief.

Lasting conviction I have sought.
Yet doubts have flooded my heart,
Casting conviction out.

The faith I lack torments me
When I hear the faithful sing.
Singing of the friend they have in Jesus,

Eyes closed, rocking to and fro,
God's assurance surrounds them
With a comfort I will never know.

(At the piano, he plays and sings):

*"What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear.*

*What a privilege to carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer."*

Is belief a gift?

How is conviction earned?

Fresh, boundless and unwavering faith —
Can that be learned?

I have craved belief.

Lasting conviction I have sought.

Yet doubts have flooded my heart,
Casting conviction out.

Days I put to useful purpose,
Nights are hard to bear.

For then, their singing comes to haunt me,
Mocking me in all I do;

An old song about their old friend, Jesus —
Laughable, yet true.

(At the piano again): "Can we find a friend so faithful?

Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness..."

But what if you can't pray?

*(He and Elmer regard each other silently as the lights
slowly fade to black.)*

5 Act II, Scene 4

One year later. The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle.

(As the lights come up, Elmer is heard talking on the telephone just off-stage. The telephone cord is long enough that he can come a few feet onto the stage while talking. Beneath the Grand Altar, amid cast-off clothes, a woman is lying with her back to the audience. We become aware that it is Lulu Baines.)

Canzonetta and Trio

Elmer (*off-stage*): ... 600 lightbulbs delivered tomorrow ... done! ...200 gardenias... done! ... Me?... nervous?... no, everything's fine... please don't call me for an hour, I'm at work on my sermon... Bye, darling...bye bye.

(He enters. To Lulu):

Got a bedtime story for me?

Lulu: Won't she tell you any?

Elmer: Sharon's kinda high and mighty. You still understand ole Elmer.

Lulu: Sure I do. *(The phone rings.)*

Elmer *(Nervously):* Oops. Stay right there.

(Just as he leaves, Lulu hurries to a door, lets Eddie in.)

Elmer *(off-stage):* Hello? ... Darling!

Lulu *(to Eddie):* You're late.

Elmer: Oh, yes, love you too...

Eddie: Did I miss...?

(She claps her hand over his mouth, pushes him back out the door, and resumes a seductive pose just as Elmer reappears.)

Elmer: Uh huh. OK... Bye bye. *(To Lulu):* Go ahead.

Lulu: A little man stands by a house;

Red in the face, for his burden is heavy.

A forest surrounds the house;

And deep in the house, a magic stove,

Delightfully warm and glowing.

But the threshold is slick and the hallway snug.

The man has to struggle and fuss and tug

Until the walls clutch at him, tumble him in;

And dashing his burden, he swoons by the stove.

(The phone rings.)

Elmer: Damn! Won't be long. *(He goes to answer it.)*

Lulu: Sweetheart, don't worry.

(She goes immediately to the door, lets in Eddie.)

Elmer *(off-stage):* Hello?

Eddie: What did I miss?

Lulu: Not much, but hurry.

(Lulu tries to get Eddie into a hiding place. He caresses her.)

Elmer *(off-stage):* Oh, yes sir! No, it's fine.

Eddie: Been a good girl?

Lulu: No. Been very naughty.

Eddie: Not a good girl? *(He is trying to embrace her, resisting her efforts to get him to hide. She reciprocates his caresses, all the while trying to move him to a hiding place, and keeping an alert eye on Elmer.)*

Lulu: Very naughty. You'll see.

Elmer *(off-stage):* I promise you you'll have your money Wednesday... Yep. You have my word, sir.

Eddie: We'll get him back for everything, won't we?

(His embrace is now frankly sexual.)

Lulu: Yes. *(She leads him to a hiding place.)*

Elmer *(off-stage):* Sounds good...

Eddie: You naughty girl.

Elmer *(off-stage):* So long.

Lulu: Your naughtiest girl.

(Elmer hangs up and walks back in, just as Eddie conceals himself and Lulu returns to the altar. As they sing the Trio, Elmer stalks Lulu around the altar; they engage in love-play in various places; and Eddie sings from his vantage point, transfixed by what he sees.)

Elmer, Lulu, Eddie:

A little man stands by a house;

Red in the face, for his burden is heavy.

A forest surrounds the house;

And deep in the house, a magic stove,

Delightfully warm and glowing.

But the threshold is slick and the hallway snug.

The man has to struggle and fuss and tug

Until the walls clutch at him, tumble him in;

And dashing his burden, he swoons by the stove.

Slow fade to black

6 Act II, Scene 5

Later that evening. Same setting.

(Sharon is kneeling in prayer.)

Sharon: Dear God, look into my heart.

I have been Your servant, Your follower, Your falconer.

Let tomorrow be my offering to you.

If I've been proud along the way, forgive me now.

If I have angered men or divided them, forgive me now.

Forgive me and your servant Elmer for all our words and deeds...

(A subtle lighting change, and Elmer is there, handing a book to her.)

Elmer: Shara! this Eastern mystic stuff, THIS is the future. Have a look.

(She reads the title from the cover of the book):

Sharon: The Seven Principles of New Thought Power with Key to World Religions by Dr. Evans Binch.

Elmer: This Binch guy is onto something. Here's what: we set up these New Thought seminars all over the place, we hire some teachers, pay 'em peanuts. And you and I retire to Ole Virginny while we keep on rakin' it

in. *(She hands him back the book. He starts to go.)*
“New Thought” Simple... “New Thought”... Beautiful!
(He is gone.)

Sharon: Sometimes he can be so convincing.
But God, look into my heart.
Know that I have loved You, Your falconer.
If this man can really love me, what should I do?
*(The same lighting change, and Elmer appears again,
rather bashfully holding out a ring box to her.)*
No, Elmer.

Elmer: Please, Shara, Marry me, my darling. Let me
take care of you. Even boss you around a little. *(He
starts to go.)* Will you? Will you? Will you?
(She is alone again. Long pause.)
Yes, my wonderful cast-iron statue of ignorance. Yes,
yes, yes.

Slow fade to black

☞ Act II, Scene 6

*One hour later. The same setting.
(In the darkness left by the previous scene, a huge cross
of electric lights flickers on, suspended in mid-air. After
a few seconds, it turns off. A moment's pause in the
darkness, then it flickers on again. T.J. Rigg is
standing facing upstage, looking up at the cross.)*

Recitative

T.J.: Oh, Lordy.

1st workman: What d'ya think, Mr. Rigg?

T.J.: Lord, that's beautiful.

(A 2nd workman is heard from off-stage.)

2nd workman: Joe, I had to put it into the same circuit
with the marquee and the dome lights.

1st workman: O.K.

(Pause. He stares at it appreciatively. To T.J.):

That's something, huh?

T.J.: I could just stare at that forever. *(To 2nd
workman, off-stage):* Everything O.K. down there?

2nd workman: I'd look into a new generator before long.

T.J.: Will do, will do. *(To both):* Thank you, men.

1st workman: 'Night, Mr. Rigg. Best of luck tomorrow.

T.J.: Goodnight, fellas.

(Alone on stage, he turns to regard the cross again as

*the lights fade. In the darkness, it is again the only
thing visible. After a moment, it is turned off.)*

☞ Act II, Scene 7

*The next evening. The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle.
(The stage of the opera house has been transformed
into a huge altar which rises up from the stage to
disappear above the proscenium. It is a grand modern
day retable, an intricate affair of carved scrollwork, all
white with gilt overlays. A few feet above floor level, to
serve as a backdrop to the baptismal font, it holds a
huge panoramic trompe l'oeil painting of the River
Jordan. Set above that, there is a small stage on which
are displayed the many crutches, braces, wheelchairs,
etc. that have been cast off during Sharon's previous
services. Higher up, panels feature other devotional
themes, an American flag, etc. Just in front of the
backdrop there are white thronelike chairs for religious
and civic dignitaries in attendance (T.J. Rigg, dressed
in Elks finery, occupies one); interspersed between
these chairs, flagpoles bearing the American flag, the
Christian flag, and the Missouri state flag; to the sides,
the robed choir stands, elevated on platforms and
backed by huge white half-shells. The edges of the
orchestra pit have been decorated with flounce-like
protuberances resembling the open petals of a lily. The
conductor wears white. Hanging high above the stage
is the cross of electric lights, not yet turned on.
Downstage is Sharon's central pulpit, a simple white
affair currently festooned with flowers. In front of that,
the mourner's benches of unfinished wood that we saw
in Act I. These benches are the only rustic element
remaining in the scene.)*

*(The lights come up suddenly and brightly onstage and
throughout the house. The Revival Singer leads the
choir and the congregants in a hymn.)*

Hymn

Revival Singer and Chorus:

Oh! that my nightly watch would cease to be,

So the dawn's glad promise may arise in me.

And oh! that my anxious fears would cease to be,

So a wondrous love may arise in me.

For Jesus poured out his blood on Calvary
That a wondrous love may arise in me.
Arise in me! oh arise in me!
He poured out His blood on Calvary.
Arise in me! oh arise in me!
To let a wondrous love arise in me.
Oh! that the stormy gust would cease to be,
So the sweet breath of calm may arise in me.
And oh! that my sinning heart would cease to be,
So an unblemished heart may arise in me.
For Jesus has paid the debt and set us free,
That an unblemished heart may arise in me.
Arise in me! oh arise in me!
Jesus paid the debt and set us free.
Arise in me! oh arise in me!
Let that unblemished heart arise in me.

Pantomime

(As the orchestra plays, Elmer runs onto stage wearing an all-white football uniform with a golden cross on the back. He carries a Bible bound in the shape of a football, which he opens and displays for the crowd. A revival worker brings an older minister (in clerical collar) up from the audience. The crowd chants):

Chorus: HAL, HAL, HALLELUJAH!

(Elmer gives the minister the football, indicates that he is to snap it to him. Three attractive female dancers in devil costumes appear onstage. Each has the number 6 on her back. They stand in a row, backs to the audience, and wiggle their bottoms suggestively. Then they turn and take up football positions in opposition to Elmer and the minister. At the moment of the snap, the chorus shouts):

Chorus: HIKE!

Pantomime of Elmer receiving the snap, breaking violently through the line of devils, making a touchdown, dancing in celebration. The devils, inert, are dragged off-stage.

Everyone resumes the hymn.)

Oh! that life's brackish stream would cease to be,
So the living waters may arise in me.
And oh! that all earthly things would cease to be,
So eternal life may arise in me.

Revival Singer: For Jesus has won from Death a victory,
And to all mankind He says, "Arise in me."

Chorus: "Arise in me, oh arise in me,"

To all mankind He says "Arise in me."

"Arise in me, oh arise in me,"

To all mankind He says, "Arise in me."

Revival Singer and Chorus:

"Arise in me, oh arise. Arise in me, oh arise. Arise.
Arise. Arise."

(The lights have been dimmed. A spotlight finds

Sharon, who makes a grand entrance.)

Sharon: Behold...

Chorus: BEHOLD!

(Pause)

Sharon: Behold the city is Thine.

Chorus: Thine, Thine alone

Behold, the city is Thine.

Sharon: This beautiful old opera house is Thine.

Chorus: Thine, Thine alone.

Sharon: And this wonderful symphony orchestra...

Chorus: Thine alone.

Sharon: This choir, so mighty in His praises...

Chorus, Revival Singer: Thine only, thine alone.

Behold, the city is Thine.

(In what follows, Sharon addresses the crowd in a profoundly personal way.)

Sharon: I say some crazy things sometimes. I've said I'm a priestess; I've said Jesus talks to me. I'm Joan of Arc.

(Elmer picks up her intimate tone, translating it.)

Elmer: She's crazy alright. She said she'd take over the biggest opera house in the state and fill it full of worshipful Christians!

Chorus: Thine, Sharon, thine alone.

Sharon: And I say angels came to my room.

I was twelve years old when they took me up.

Chorus: Thine, Sharon, thine alone. *(Repeat)*

Sharon: Took me West over prairies and canyons.

Below me, I saw grainfields falling in fiery sheaves.

An angel said, "People will fall with Holy Ghost fire when you speak."

Elmer: "People will fall when you speak."

Chorus: Fall with Holy Ghost fire. *(Repeat)*

Elmer, Sharon: “People will fall with Holy Ghost fire when you speak.”

People fall with Holy Ghost fire when she speaks.

Chorus: *Fall with Holy Ghost fire.*

Sharon (*over*): And they fall, they do fall.

Elmer (*ironically, to crowd*): She’s crazy, alright. She’s crazy alright.

(*He then takes over from Sharon.*)

Elmer: I fell with the fire. I was the greatest of sinners ‘til I heard her voice.

Chorus (*under*): *They fall with fire. They fall. They fall. They fall.*

Sharon: Our friend, Elmer Gantry. Our good friend in Christ...

Elmer: Then my frozen heart thawed;

Sin became grace;

And grace turned to Love.

Chorus: Grace turns to Love. (*Repeat*)

Sharon: Divine Love of God.

Elmer God’s Love by grace.

Revival Singer, Revival Worker: Oh, that first day.

Elmer: Yes, that first day.

Chorus: Grace turns to Love on that first day. (*Repeat*)

Elmer, Sharon: Grace turns to Love.

Elmer (*prompting crowd*): AND...?

Elmer, Chorus: WHAT IS LOVE?

It is the Evening and the Morning Star.

(*This is the cue for the collection. Above the heads of the crowd, a network of clotheslines runs from the rear of the house to the stage. People wishing to donate stand and attach dollar bills to these lines, which are then pulled slowly to the front by revival workers on the stage. As the lines fill and travel slowly forward, the effect created is of a graceful ballet over the heads of the audience.*)

(*Eddie and his companions are heard from the house*):

Eddie: Hey! that’s my sermon!

Lulu: Quiet, sweetheart.

Rev. Baines, Mrs. Baines: Not yet, Edward. Not yet.

Eddie: But he stole my sermon!

Lulu, Rev. and Mrs. Baines: I know. Be patient. Be patient.

Elmer, Chorus: What is Love?

It is the air and light of every heart.

(*To encourage the giving, the Revival Singer and the Revival Worker join Elmer onstage. They sing over the crowd.*)

The three men: Send it in. Send your love in. Send it on the down the line.

Eddie: He stole that. He stole all of it.

Lulu, Rev. and Mrs. Baines: Patience, sweetheart. Patience, Edward.

All: *For Love is the builder of every home; The kindler of fire on every hearth.*

Elmer: And tonight, folks, we’re gonna have some beautiful illustrated sermons, we’re gonna kindle that majestic cross of electric lights, and Sister Sharon’s gonna bring you a special message of healing. (*As the three men turn to take up new positions onstage, Eddie and his companions —*

“Quartet 2” — are again heard from the house.)

Qt. 2: Now. Now’s our chance.

Mrs. Baines: Brother Gantry, can you help me?

Elmer: Someone... (*turning back to the crowd*): ... Is someone in need?

Mrs. Baines: Yes, Brother. (*She moves toward the stage.*)

Elmer (*Locating her amidst the crowd*): Ma’am... there you are.

Mrs. Baines (*Half to Elmer, half to the crowd*): It’s not me, brother. It’s my son-in-law. He and my daughter have sinned horribly. Horribly.

Elmer: Is he present?

Mrs. Baines: Yes.

Elmer: I feel he’s present. They’re both here.

(*Becoming theatrical*): Oh, I feel a great sadness is on them... (*out to the crowd*): Will you come down? Will you let Jesus heal you?

Chorus, Elmer:

Let Him heal you. (*Repeat*) Come down and pray with Mom!

Elmer (*Peering into the house*) And... and I see two people... and there’s a third. And Hallelujah, they’re coming down!

(*The revival singer and the revival worker begin to*

sing, joined by Elmer. Meanwhile, Eddie, Baines and Lulu make their way to the front of the house.

The three, Elmer, Chorus:

Oh that first day

Oh that day I'm singing of

Oh that first day (*Repeted*)

(1): That day he promised me.

(2): Day folks open up

Dance down here!

Oh that first day.

(*Eddie leaps onto stage.*)

Elmer: Eddie...!

Eddie: Gantry...

Elmer: You know folks, the time ain't right with the Lord for healin'.

Chorus: No sir.

Elmer: Let's get this man some counselin' in the "Ninety-nine Room."

Elmer, Chorus: "Ninety-nine sheep are in the fold..." (*Revival workers, moving in time to the music, begin to steer Eddie off-stage.*)

Eddie (*desperately*): Jesus will listen to me if the Reverend won't.

Sharon: In my temple, everyone is heard. Tell your story. (*Meanwhile, Eddie's companions have joined him onstage. He and Lulu alternately address the congregation;*)

Rev. Baines and Mrs. Baines add their support.)

Eddie: I neglected a husband's duties.

Lulu: I was tempted by lust.

Eddie: I allowed my wife to wander.

Lulu: I betrayed my husband's trust.

Lulu, Qt. 2: Adrift and confused, I/she fell prey to an evil man.

A Christian man, in whose goodness I/she set store.

Elmer: Praise JESUS! You're forgiven!

Chorus: *Hallelujah!*

Qt. 2: Wait, there's more.

Sharon (*Aside*): What's the matter with him?

Chorus (*under all the following*): Here are poor, dear people in a sad, dark plight.

Lulu: I succumbed to that devil's advances.

Sharon: I know her...

Eddie: She was helpless to resist.

Lulu: He was expert in vile fornication.

Elmer: Aw, hell!

Eddie: They began a weekly tryst.

Sharon: Elmer's old girlfriend...

Elmer: She'll spill it all...

Chorus (*an outburst*): Here's a tale of sin coming to light.

(*Then, under the following*): Poor... dear... sad... dark.

Eddie, Qt. 2: Suspecting the worst, I/he followed her one day

To their place of assignation, where I/he hid from view.

Sharon, Elmer: I/She'll suspect the worst. I fear what they'll say.

I fear it all rings true.

Elmer (*Great show of sadness*): God love ya!

Chorus: POOR SINNERS!

Elmer (*Aside*): If they don't shut up, I'm through.

Sharon (*To Qt. 2*): Keep going.

Elmer (*To all*): Now I feel we could pray in silence.

Sharon: No. Ignore him! Keep going.

Revival worker, singer, T.J., Elmer, Sharon:

"Tell it all to Jesus.

Tell of hope and sadness, too.

This is gettin' ugly.

What's the big to-do?

If they don't shut up I'm through.

Keep going.

He acts like a guilty man.

Chorus:

"Tell it all to Jesus.

He will listen to you."

Oh God, You wouldn't let him betray me.

Elmer (*To all*): How 'bout we light up that ole rugged cross?

T.J.: Attaboy!

Sharon: No!

Elmer (*To her*): Or... let's open our Bibles.

Sharon: No! If sin is here, let's bring it to light.

Chorus, Sharon, Elmer:

If sin is here, let's bring it to light.

Tell it all! She'll never forgive me.

(All the following are sung simultaneously):

Eddie, Qt. 2: With tears in my/his eyes, I/he observed their filthy acts.

But imagine my/the surprise when he turned to face my/the hiding place

And I/you realized who he was.

Sharon: There are tears in my eyes. Oh God, You wouldn't. Oh, God.

Elmer: There are tears in her eyes. Oh God, I'll be good from now on.

T.J.: There are tears in her eyes. Oh Hell, what's going on?

Revival worker, singer: *Tell it all to Jesus, tell of hope and sadness, too. If you long for solace, He will listen to you. Tell it all to Jesus, He will listen to you.*

Chorus (under): The tears in their eyes are proof against lies.

They must bring sin to light and say who he was.

Crowd, Sharon: Bring sin to light and say who he was!

Eddie, Qt. 2: Imagine my/the surprise when I/you realized who he was.

Elmer, T.J.: Oh, God I'll be good from now on. / Oh, Hell! What's going on?

Crowd, Sharon: Say who he was! Say who he was!

Eddie, Qt. 2: I/You realized who he was.

Elmer, T.J.: I'll be good from now on. / What's going on?

All: Say who he was!

Elmer (After a very brief silence) It was me. It was me, Elmer Gantry.

Dear God in Heaven, You know it was me.

Lord, You picked me up once, now I've fallen again.

(Tearfully) I'm a lyin' adulterer, a prideful beast.

Look, sweet Jesus. Look, I'm on my knees.

At the feet of Your saint. Before all Your people.

Let Thy cross shine tenderly on me. *(This is both a heartfelt plea and an instruction to a boy whose job it is to throw the switch that controls the electric cross.)*

Sister, can there be forgiveness for me?

Sharon: In Heaven, or on earth? *(Pause)*

Elmer: Sharon...? *(To the boy):* Light it up, son. *(Brief pause)* Sharon...?

(The boy throws the switch. The cross lights. Instantly,

there is an explosion and all lights — including house and orchestra pit — go out. In the darkness, there is a moment of confusion, then pandemonium breaks out. People scream. After a few seconds, the lights come up on a radically different scene. Elements of the scenery are in tatters, smoke courses through, chairs are overturned, several people lie inert on the floor and many others have fled. From now until the end of the scene, time moves in a way that is more dreamlike than realistic.)

Chorus: Fire! Fire!

Smoke streams on crests of fire.

Cinders whirl in quickening spirals.

Crimson flames vault to the rafters.

Fire!

Sharon: God won't harm us! Go calmly! He's with us!

Elmer: One at a time! One at a time!

Quartet 2: Stay, people, stay.

Lulu: I'm frightened.

Eddie (To her): This is the end God wants for us.

Chorus, Qt. 2, Sharon, Elmer:

Smoke streams.

Cinders whirl.

Flames vault.

The Lord will come with fire, and

He rebukes with flames of fire.

Go calmly!

One at a time. One at a time.

Elmer: Sharon, come with me. There's a back way out.

T.J. (Overhearing): A back way out! That's for me.

That's for me. That's for me. *(He runs off.)*

Sharon: Don't talk to me!

Elmer: Sharon, don't be crazy!

Sharon: Stay away from me. *(To crowd, nearly frantic):* Please! If you love me, go calmly! If you love me, go calmly.

Chorus: *Smoke streams! Cinders whirl! Flames vault!*

Elmer: Sharon, come with me!

Chorus: Now the doors are ringed with flame.

Now the halls are caves of flame.

Those who fled are bursts of flame.

Their screams are flame. *(Repeat)*

Qt. 2: There's no escape now! There's no escape now!

Gehenna beckons! (*Repeat*)

Elmer: I'm begging you, please come with me.

Sharon: My people...

Elmer: I'm begging you!

Sharon: My people need me. I have to stay.

Elmer: Please let me save you, Sharon...

Sharon: My place is here, forever.

Sharon: My place is here with the Lord forever.

Elmer: Just take my hand and we'll fly together.

Sharon: I have to stay with the Lord forever.

Elmer (*Gently*): Take my hand. Take my hand. Come with me.

(*He lunges and tries to grab her hand.*)

Elmer: Take my hand! Take my hand!

(*She fights him off furiously.*)

Sharon: NEVER TOUCH ME!

(*He leaves.*)

Let God be true, and every man a liar

Qt. 2, Chorus, Sharon (*to herself*):

There's no escape now. There's no escape now.

Let God be true, and every man a liar.

Gehenna beckons. Gehenna beckons. Let God be true, and every man a liar.

Let God be true.

(*Controlling her panic, Sharon musters the last of her strength and sings out to the crowd*):

Sharon: No! Friends! Hear my voice. Hear me. I don't see Hell.

I see flashing eyes and singing and liquid fire and angels all around in the fire and calling to one another.

Sharon and All: And flashing eyes and singing and liquid fire and angels all around in the fire and calling to one another. I see flashing eyes and singing and liquid fire and angels

all around in the fire and calling to one another.

Sharon (*over*): Hear my voice. Hear me.

Very slow crossfade to:

9 Epilogue

(**Elmer and Dr. Evans Binch** enter separately downstage, shake hands. The final tableau of the previous scene remains in place upstage, lit in a way that suggests the devastated opera house. The chorus and Sharon are turned upstage or visible through a scrim.)

Elmer: Dr. Binch. Great pleasure.

Binch: New Thought welcomes you. We greet... all parts... of the being. The sadness you carry. (*Every phrase that passes Binch's lips appears to originate deep in his soul.*)

Elmer: Thank you, sir.

Binch (*Correcting him*): Hajji.

Elmer: You know, Hajji, Sister Sharon was reading your book in her last days. I bet she'd be getting a kick out of us working together and all.

Binch: She surrounds you.

Elmer: Well, I'm ready to start anytime. What do you say?
Binch (*Leading Elmer off*): I say "The oyster opens, showing a new pearl every day."

Elmer (*As they leave*): Gosh! You know, I really like that.
Chorus: *And flashing eyes and singing and liquid fire and angels all around in the fire and calling to one another.*

THE END







A
M
E
R
I
C
A
N

C
L
A
S
S
I
C
S





AMERICAN OPERA CLASSICS

Set just before World War I, Sinclair Lewis's incendiary novel *Elmer Gantry* tells a story of old-time religion, illicit romance and revenge. Robert Aldridge and Herschel Garfein's operatic adaptation is a 'marvelous amalgam of toe-tapping accessibility' (*Opera News*) full of hymns, gospel songs, marches and dance, evoking the period in a score which echoes Gershwin and Copland. This all-American production combines a first-rate cast of singers and a world-class orchestra for 'an intoxicating experience' (*The New York Times*).

www.naxos.com



Robert Livingston
ALDRIDGE
(b. 1954)

Elmer Gantry (2007)
An Opera in Two Acts

Libretto by Herschel Garfein
based on the novel by Sinclair Lewis

Elmer Gantry Keith Phares
Sharon Falconer Patricia Risley
Frank Shallard Vale Rideout
Eddie Fislinger Frank Kelley
Lulu Baines Heather Buck

Florentine Opera Chorus
Chorus-master: Scott Stewart

Florentine Opera Company
Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra
William Boggs

CD 1	69:24	CD 2	72:14
1-6 Act I	69:24	1 Introduction	0:51
		2-8 Act II	65:04
		9 Epilogue	6:19

A full track list, cast list and list of sponsors can be found on pages 2-5 of the booklet.

The libretto can be found in the booklet, and may also be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/669032.htm

Recorded at Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, Uihlein Hall, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, from 19th to 21st March, 2010 • Producer and editor: Blanton Alspaugh (Soundmirror.com) • Publisher: C.F. Peters
Performance photos: Richard Brodzeller
for Florentine Opera Company © 2010

Playing
Time:
2:21:38



All rights in this sound recording, artwork, texts and translations reserved. Unauthorised public performance, broadcasting and copying of this compact disc prohibited. © & © 2011 Naxos Rights International Ltd. Made in the USA.



8.669032-33

