

Village Arts to produce Colorado Springs playwright's Biblical work in virtual show

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May 24, 2020

At news of Lazarus' second death, Phil Ginsburg imagined what might be going through the minds of mourners.

"Oh god, again? Do I have to bring another gift? What is this?," says the local playwright and poet. His 2006 play of monologues, "Voices Beyond the Veil: The Story of God, Humanly Speaking," examines the lives of numerous Biblical characters through a more humorous lens.

There's Abraham, who entertains a visit from God in Genesis.

Religious nonprofits in the Pikes Peak region face unprecedented challenges

"He makes a meal that's not kosher — mixing milk and meat," Ginsburg says. "Abraham says 'Of all the things that have happened to me, he ate the meal, he didn't complain, I guess he liked it.' I tried to add humor to more of the situations. It gives a human feel to it."

The faith-based Village Arts of Colorado Springs, which creates music, dance, theater and the literary and visual arts, will produce about half of the monologues from Ginsburg's book in a two-part virtual performance slated for release this summer. It's taking the place of the organization's big summer show, the 2012 Broadway musical "Newsies," which it was forced to cancel because of the pandemic.

"There aren't just major characters, but minor characters he's given voice to," producer and director Nancy Holaday said. "People who wouldn't think about reading the Bible or going to church, I think they might watch this. It's real people telling real stories in real time."

Best of the Springs winners to be announced May 31

Holaday put out an audition notice, expecting maybe a dozen actors would reply. To her surprise, 200 people from around the globe sent in a submission thanks to Backstage, an audition website that found the notice and featured it online. Holaday met with 75 people, one at a time, on Zoom. Ginsburg also was able to join parts of the audition process. They wound up with a cast of more than 50, including Colorado Springs actors Sue Bachman and Chris Medina. Some are from the United Kingdom, while the actor farthest away is in Bulgaria.

The 90-minute show, broken into two parts, will feature monologues recorded by actors from their homes, sent to Holaday and professionally edited into one performance with a coherent story line. Ginsburg's play, first produced in 2012 at Colorado Christian University, was set in a jazz club where characters were bartenders, servers and the like. Holaday said she hopes to create a similar feel, with a jazz beat soundtrack woven throughout and a contemporary, darker vibe to it.

Most of the monologues are three to five minutes long. Some pieces require two or three actors. One piece features two actors as Adam and Eve, while another about Job features his three friends who gave him "terrible advice," Holaday said.

"We plan to do it as a 'Brady Bunch' screen, where they're all looking to the right and the left," she said.

Colorado Springs creatives dive into new projects

Ginsburg was inspired by “The Exonerated,” a TV show based on a play of the same name that debuted off-Broadway in 2000. It depicted prisoners on death row, who were innocent, talking about their lives and experiences through intimate one-on-one storytelling. He started to think what that could look like with characters from the Bible.

“Not religious people necessarily,” Ginsburg said, “but those called into a situation at a pivotal point and trying to come to grips with something that was transcendent.”

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