



# The Guide to Musical Theatre

## COTTON PATCH GOSPEL

Musical. Music, lyrics, score by Harry Chapin. Book by Tom May and Russell Treyz

Lambs Theatre, Off-Broadway - 21 October, 1981 (193 perfs)

### SYNOPSIS

This "Greatest Story Ever Retold" is based on the book *The Cotton Patch Version of Matthew and John* by Clarence Jordan in which the Gospel is presented in a setting of rural Georgia with country music songs, the final and perhaps best work of Harry Chapin. As this Gospel begins, they sing that "Somethin's a-brewin' in Gainesville."

Herod is the mayor of Atlanta and, inevitably, Christ is lynched by local thugs only to rise again. Drama critics loved this show and so did a broad spectrum of religious commentators. "A dream come true" wrote Contemporary Christian Music. "A breath of fresh air." Something good is happening. A reverential retelling of the book of Matthew.

It takes the Bible's passionate intensity and directness for contemporary meaning into the popular vein without diluting it." The *Episcopalian* called it "Powerful drama and a joyous celebration.

This musical succeeds mightily." The *American Baptist Magazine* said, "The show offers a vivid witness This is the Gospel." The *Long Island Catholic* summed up with, "Entertaining and inspiring, it will lift your spirits and renew your hope," and The *Messenger* concluded with, "Rollicking foot-stomping, hand-clapping new musical."

### STORY

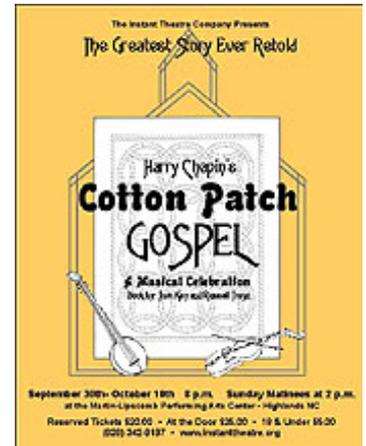
#### Act I

Matthew and some of Jesus' followers have come to this auditorium and set up their stage to present a play about Jesus, who lived not so long ago. The stage is set up simply, as they have no funds, but simply travel the country spreading the good news.

The show opens with the band singing "Something's Brewin' In Gainesville" to set the scene. Matthew, a disciple of Jesus and the narrator, introduces Mary and Joe who have Jesus in an abandoned trailer behind a motel. Jesus was "wrapped in a comforter and laid in an apple crate".

When Jesus was born, Herod was Governor of Georgia. The three wise men, some scholars from the Orient, followed a star to reach Jesus bearing gifts of a gold American Express card, some candles that smelled like peaches, and a bottle of Jade East. Joe has a vision where he is told by a messenger to get to Mexico because Herod will try to kill Jesus.

Herod calls a meeting of his closest advisers. He is worried as the *National Enquirer* claims that Jesus is supposed to be the future governor. Herod asks Mabry to 'take care' of the baby Jesus ("I Did It"). Mabry plants a bomb in the nursery where Jesus was supposed to be. Thankfully, Joe has taken Jesus to Mexico, but the explosion does murder fourteen innocent toddlers. A mother is in disbelief that her baby is really dead



("Mama Is Here").

When Herod passed away, Joe moved the family to Valdosta, Georgia. Jesus had a difficult time growing up, being the messiah and all ("It Isn't Easy"). Joe and Mary take Jesus to a High Society event. During the event they run out of wine, so Jesus turns water into wine.

At this same time, a new preacher named John the Baptiser has shown up in Georgia ("Sho Nuff"). Jesus went to hear him preach. John baptizes Jesus. Shortly after, Jesus is tested by the devil.

One day, walking along the Ogeechee river, Jesus saw two brothers Simon, nicknamed Rock and his brother Andy fishing. He tells them to cast their line with their left hand. Miraculously, they start catching fish. From that day forward they follow Jesus. Jesus then got the Zebedee boys, and the Johnson brothers, Phil and Nat. Lastly, Jesus meets Mathew, the narrator at the I.R.S. office. Lastly, Jesus recruits Jud (Judas).

Jesus and his disciples travel all over North Georgia preaching. One day, he went up on Stone Mountain. There he is confronted by Reverend Boyd Bissel who asks what makes Jesus think he is different from what the churches have been preaching for decades ("Turn It Around"). Jesus continues to tell parables and preach. After one of his sermons, on the way out of the crowd, an old crippled woman touches his leg. He heals her so that she may walk again ("Miracle On Stone Mountain")

A few days later, Jesus is stopped by a United States senator whose four year old daughter just died. Jesus brings the girl back to life ("Love the Lord Your God"). After this incident, Jesus becomes increasingly popular, being on the cover of Time and getting investigated by the F.B.I.

Jesus kept on preaching and performing miracles, but it became too much. So, he decided to train some of his disciples. At this meeting, he reveals to them that he plans to go to Atlanta for the Bible Society Convention. Additionally, at this convention, the authorities plan to lynch Jesus. However, on Sunday he will rise again. The Act closes with "Goin' To Atlanta" where the disciples sing about their excitement and Jesus expresses his concerns about being lynched and what Atlanta really means.

## Act II

The Act opens with the disciples asking themselves whether they are ready for the journey ahead ("Are We Ready?"). Jesus and the disciples temporarily parted when Jesus went into the Smoky Mountains for a private prayer meeting. He returned to the disciples by walking out to the middle of the lake while they were fishing. Jesus urges Rock to try to walk on water too. At first Rock succeeds, but then goes under and starts drowning. Jesus felt defeated, and they traveled to Valdosta in silence. When they arrived, the town did not greet them well, but instead gossiped as to why Jesus was back. Jesus cut off communication. When Jesus' family comes to see him, Jesus refuses to see them. That night, after supper, Mary and Joe reflect upon their son; how even though he is now the messiah, he is still their little boy in their hearts ("You Are Still My Boy").

At this time, the governor of Georgia was Harvey, a nephew of Herod. When John the Baptiser spoke out against Harvey, he had him killed. Upon hearing about this, Jesus starts gearing up the public and becoming more popular through various miracles. For example, he fed five thousand people with two cans of sardines and five boxes of Nabiscos.

Jesus calls all of his disciples together again. During the meeting Jesus mentions the lynching again. Rock responds by saying that the lynching business is nonsense and that he and the other disciples have Jesus' take over of the governorship all figured out ("We Gotta Get Organized"). Jesus expresses that he did not come to star on some t. v. show or be a politician. He calls Rock Satan and tells him to leave. The very next day however, Jesus is happy and back to normal and tells the gang its time to move out to Atlanta. They slowly made their way there with Jesus driving in an old beat up V.W. convertible while people celebrated. Jesus interacts with the crowd while the disciples realize that their time with Jesus is coming to the end, but they will cherish every moment ("We're Gonna Love It While It Lasts"). The crowd, expected miracles or an announcement of Jesus' intention to take over office. Instead, he went to a local church and chastised them for making a house of god into a shopping mall/bankers club instead of a place known for its commitment to God. The blind and needy then gathered with him in the church and he made them well ("Jubilation").

Outside, the crowd felt cheated and began to riot against Jesus along with the board of politicians

("Dangerous Man"). Jud then meets secretly with Dr. Caiphas, a member of the board. Jud express his concern about Jesus' Psychological health as he keeps saying he will take over by being murdered and resurrected. Dr. Caiphas convinces Jud that his concern is just and to keep him informed on the situation ("Jud").

Jesus performs the last supper with his disciples, breaking the bread as body and drinking the wine as blood. The disciples are confused "Hey, What's Goin' On?"). Jesus then goes into the garden and prays to God to relieve him of this agony. Jud enters at the end of the prayer with some unknown men. Jud kisses Jesus good-bye. Jesus is taken away by the men ("Jud Reprise"). In the morning, Dr. Caiphas brought Jesus to the present governor, Pilate. Pilate lists Jesus' crimes: vagrancy, inciting a riot, running a fast food joint by serving five-thousand people in a day. He interrogates Jesus, but Jesus doesn't say a word. Frustrated by his silence, Pilate send him away, and calls Mabry to let him know the exact details of Jesus' travel arrangements to Lee Correctional Institute ("Thank God for Governor Pilate").

Mathew then informs the audience of the news: as Jesus was being taken to a prison in Leesburg, two Klansmen jumped out of the woods and shot out the tire of the patrol car. Soon there were hundreds against the two police officers. The mob dragged Jesus into the woods, stripped him naked, flogged him using a cat-of-nine tails with bits of rock and glass. They put spikes through his hands to see if it would make him cry. They then strung him up, choking him as slow as possible.

The disciples reminisce of their time with Jesus and how quickly it went by "One More Tomorrow"). Later that afternoon a citizen came to Pilate to ask for the body. The man had the body locked in a family tomb under a huge slab. Pilate got the F.B.I., the National Guard, and the Highway patrol to watch the grave. Mary from Mobile, the other Mary, and Joanna come to put flowers on the grave when an angel flew past the police helicopters and smashed the marble slab to bits and said that Jesus was back from the dead. They later met Jesus on the road telling them to meet him on the mountainside. Pilate formulated a story of how Jesus followers had stolen the body while the guards were all asleep. Later on the mountain side, Jesus addressed his disciples one last time to pass on all of his wisdom and power, and to tell them to spread the word to all nations and races. He finishes by saying that he will always be with them in their hearts until the last inning. The Act ends with the disciples wondering how amazing it is that one man can change the world ("Well I Wonder").

## MUSICAL NUMBERS

### Act I

1. Something Brewing in Gainesville
2. Baby Born to God
3. I Did It
4. Mama Is Here/I Did It (Reprise)
5. It Isn't Easy
6. Sho 'Nuff
7. Turn It Around
8. When I Look Up
9. Ain't No Busy Signals
10. Spitball
11. Miracle on Stone Mountain
12. Love the Lord Your God
13. Blind Date
14. Goin' to Atlanta

### Act II

15. Are We Ready?
16. You Are Still My Boy
17. We Gotta Get Organized
18. We're Gonna Love It While It Lasts
19. Jubilation
20. Dangerous Man
21. Jud
22. Hey, What's Goin' On?
23. Jud (Reprise)
24. Thank God for Governor Pilate
25. One More Tomorrow
26. I Wonder (with Jubilation reprise)
27. Somethin's Brewin' in Gainesville (Reprise)

## **CAST:**

May be done by large, variable cost with male and female roles to suit your group, or by doubling with as few as five.

Matthew - Also plays: Messenger, Joe, Cattle Farmer, Herod, Politician, Jesus, John the Baptist, Satan I, Satan II, Satan III, Rock, Tourist, Reverend Boyd Bissel, Businessman, President, Senator, Television Preacher, Jud, Pilate, Angel.

Band/Disciples - Also plays: Heavenly Host, Herod's Men, Neighbours, Wedding Reception Guests, John's Choir, God, Heavenly Choir, Gospel Quartet.

The four band members are also:

Jim (plays Neighbour I, Joe in "You Are Still My Boy", Gossip II)

Jack (plays Woman in "Mama Is Here", Senator's Daughter, Timmy, Mary, Gossip IV)

Andy (plays Gossip I)

Tom (Plays Tanya, Gossip III)

## **SCENES AND SETTINGS**

One ext. Set. indicating the following locations

- Clayton: The hometown of Mary Hagler, mother of Jesus.
- Gainesville: The birthplace of Jesus Davidson.
- Valdosta: The town where Jesus grew up.
- Chattahoochee River: Running from northeast Georgia to the Alabama border, where John the Baptist baptised Jesus and many others
- Ogeechee River: Where Jesus recruits his first disciples, the fishermen Rock and Andy.
- Stone Mountain: The site of Jesus' sermon on the mount.
- Unadilla: Home of the Unadilla Travel Lodge, where Jesus first informs his disciples that he is to be lynched after they go to Atlanta.
- Atlanta: The capital of Georgia, and the site of several events in Jesus' life. It was the home of Governors Herod, Harvey, and Pilate. It was host to the annual Sunday School Teachers' Conference that Jesus visited when he was twelve. And it was where Jesus was arrested and convicted.
- Leesburg: Where Jesus was lynched.

### Referenced Locations

Opp: In Covington County, Alabama. One of the ancestral hometowns of the Hagler family.