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Sample assessment 2020

Stimulus book

Music Extension



Queensland
Government



Queensland Curriculum
& Assessment Authority

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Contextual information

Godspell overview

Godspell is a musical based on the New Testament¹ gospels. It centres on a group of people who follow a teacher and come together to create a community. By sharing stories about living good lives and singing about love, joy, thankfulness, judgment and hope, the group of individuals join together to face challenges and obstacles along the way. *Godspell* was originally imagined by John-Michael Tebelak in 1971 and was given new music and lyrics by American composer Stephen Schwartz.

The song *Beautiful City* was written by Stephen Schwartz in 1972 and featured in the 1973 film version of *Godspell*. The song was written in a folk rock style and was sung by Victor Garber. *Godspell* has since undergone various transformations. In the 2011 Broadway revival of *Godspell*, Schwartz rearranged the song in a contemporary pop ballad style. It was sung by Hunter Parrish in a solo performance. Throughout its various transformations, the fundamental theme of *Godspell* has remained intact: it is about a group of people coming together.

Contextual information

Quotes from an interview with Stephen Schwartz

‘I was influenced by the kind of music I was listening to at the time on the radio and records, the singer-songwriters that I admired, and what the pop music of the day was. I often refer to the score now as “pop pastiche”², because each of the songs has its own pop identity.’

‘This production also includes *Beautiful City*, which was originally written for the movie, but which I revised several years later ...’

‘Every time *Godspell* is done, it is basically created anew, because it grows out of the improvisations of the cast and the directorial concept. So it’s always interesting and exciting to see what each group doing the show comes up with.’

‘... the original *Godspell* was created at a time of great national dissension and division, centred on the Vietnam War.’

‘*Godspell*, at its heart, is about the formation of a community out of disparate people coming together over very basic and simple philosophical concepts, such as: “Always treat others as you would have them treat you” or ... “Anything you do for one of your brothers here, you do for me.” These are concepts that don’t seem very present now in our way of dealing with one another, and therefore I think they have great current relevance as something our society needs to try to return to.’

1 a collection of early Christian literature that, along with the Old Testament, forms the Holy Scriptures of Christianity

2 music that imitates pop-style music in a respectful way

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Historical context: 1973

The collection of improvised scenes that formed the basis of *Godspell* were created in the late 1960s when young Americans demonstrated against the Vietnam War, African-Americans demonstrated for civil rights, and women demonstrated for equal rights. Society made heroes of individuals who helped others. Music at this time included folk rock songs that were about social problems. There was a polarisation of views between the conservative parent generations and rebellious teenager generations. Changing social rules was a focus of the hippy movement³. Peace-loving political and social slogans were popular in protests against involvement in the Vietnam War and other conflicts.

Historical context: 2011

The celebration of bravery and charity after the events in New York on 11 September 2001 brought into focus the need for big cities to value community. In 2011, the world was more connected than ever before. Technology and the internet saw access to information and culture expand for growing numbers of people around the world. People felt the world, with all it had to offer, was now closer and more accessible, and became motivated to travel widely and experience the world. They celebrated and documented their experiences using social media. Present-day society appears polarised again, with people expressing differing viewpoints passionately and offering opinions about global and local communities.

Folk rock

By combining elements of folk music and early rock music, the fusion style known as folk rock borrowed music elements to create a new innovative sound in the 1960s. Folk elements, such as simple diatonic or modal melodies, primary chords, repetitive simple rhythmic patterns, expressive singing, and acoustic instruments such as guitar, tambourine, recorders/flutes, and hand drums were used in a homophonic texture. 1970s rock timbres were used to create more complex textures. Featured characteristics of the style were electric lead and bass guitars, full rock drum kit playing snare on beats 2 and 4, drum fills at the end of phrases, and more aggressive vocals.

Contemporary ballad

This song form can unify an audience. Its history can be traced from early folk narratives, through Victorian parlour songs, light opera and soul to the emotional songs of contemporary performers. Common features of pop ballads include the use of pop vocal techniques that express deep connection with the meaning of the lyrics such as breathy onset, glottal stops, sighing or bending of pitch. The tempo is usually slow, with minimal instrumentation in the texture. Long phrases that sometimes use word-painting techniques to enhance the meaning of the lyrics can be features of a pop ballad. This song form in musical theatre is often used to describe an emotion rather than tell the story.

³ peace-loving political/social movement of the 1960s

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Stimulus 1

***Beautiful City* by Stephen Schwartz (1973)**

View and listen to Stimulus 1 (length: 2 minutes and 55 seconds).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKLGg1JimAU>

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Stimulus 2

***Beautiful City* by Stephen Schwartz (2011)**

View and listen to Stimulus 2 (length: 3 minutes and 54 seconds).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La4vDsI3350>

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Schwartz, S 2011, *Beautiful City* (video recording), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La4vDsI3350>.

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