

The Piety Variety Gospel Show

By Scott Icenhower

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The year is 1960. "The Piety Variety Gospel Show" is a locally televised religious program that blesses folks between church services with music, religious news, and much more. But now the host, Brother Shelby Greene, faces a crisis. With new regulations that require him to start paying for his airtime, how will he raise the money and stay true to his calling? This is a comic tale about becoming a televangelist when selling religious items, having nice hair, and asking for money on air was something new. A singing quartet performs ten well-known hymns, and there is an option to include local talent acts. A band can accompany the quartet. About 90 minutes.

PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

Barn Dinner Theatre, Greensboro, NC.
June 2010.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 3 w with doubling or 4 m, 4 w, guest acts optional.)

BROTHER SHELBY GREENE: Host of show, former pastor, father of Shelia, 50+, sings.

SHELIA GREENE: Daughter of Shelby, director of show, 25+, doesn't sing.

HELEN HENSLEY: Quartet member, naïve, sweet, sings like Patsy Cline.

SHARON / SISTER MARY ETHEL: Quartet member / a nun wannabe who gives advice from the Bible during her own segment of the show. Usually doubled.

BRADLEY: Quartet member.

ROB / PARKS WILSON: Quartet member / an old man who sings and gives his testimony on air. Usually doubled.

GUEST ACTS: Optional. Use local talent such as cloggers, magicians, jugglers, etc.

BAND: Optional. A band can accompany the quartet.

SETTING

The drab and low-budget television set of "The Piety Variety Gospel Show." It is housed in a local TV station in 1960. There is a chair for Shelby and a bench for the quartet to sit on. In both acts the actors pretend to play out to the three cameras that are in the studio. Stage left is camera 1 (C1) center stage is camera 2 (C2) and stage right is camera 3 (C3). However, in ACT II the audience doubles as the studio audience that now attend the broadcast, and the actors may play out to them in addition to the three cameras.

The show is "broadcast" in black and white for Act I. But for Act II it's in color and the set gets a makeover to reflect success and "blessing."

COSTUMES

Nun outfit, Patsy Cline "cowgirl" outfit, old-man clothes for Parks Wilson. Actors should dress nicer in Act II, but use their own clothes in both acts.

PROPS

Clipboard and watch, letter and envelope, pile of "dog poop," paper towels, small table that can be carried by one person, large Bible, several mailed-in letters for Sister Mary Ethel, bucket that contains prayer request written on pieces of paper, area rug, decorative plant, nicer chair to replace one on stage at beginning, rotary telephone that rings or ringing SXF, underwear with a Bible verse written on it, prayer cloth that they sell, and one fortune cookie per performance.

SONG LIST

ACT I

Footprints of Jesus.....*Quartet*

GUEST ACT.....*OPTIONAL*

Just a Closer Walk.....*Helen Hensley*

The B-I-B-L-E.....*Quartet*

Church in the Wildwood.....*Parks/Quartet*

Sweet Hour of Prayer.....*Quartet*

I Am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger.....*Quartet*

In the Sweet By and By.....*Cast*

ACT II

When the Saints Go Marching In.....*Quartet*

GUEST ACT.....*OPTIONAL*

Crazy (Alt. lyrics.) *Helen Hensley*

Mansion Over the Hilltop.....*Quartet*

In the Garden.....*Bradley/Quartet*

Old Time Religion.....*Cast*

ACT I

(AT RISE: We hear the recorded curtain speech of the producing theatre. The CAST of "The Piety Variety Gospel Show" are waiting for this "commercial break" to end so they can return to the air. While the others are walking around checking notes and songs, etc., SHELBY GREENE is transfixed far stage right reading a letter. There's a pile of dog poop center stage that no one notices.)

RECORDED CURTAIN SPEECH VOICE: *(After the curtain speech, safety announcements, etc. have finished.)* And now back to "The Piety Variety Gospel Show" with your host Brother Shelby Greene.

(LIGHTS come up brighter. The show is back "ON AIR" but SHELBY doesn't move. He keeps reading the letter. EVERYONE stops and looks at him before they exit stage left.)

SHELIA: *(Tentatively enters from stage left and assesses the situation. Using a stage whisper SHE tries to get her father's attention.)* Dad. Daddee. Hey! *(Seeing nothing's working she moves into C1 position and points to herself to get that cameraman's attention.)* Well, we are **BACK ON THE AIR.** *(She looks over at Shelby – nothing.)* In case you missed that last act before the commercial break that was...*(Looking at her clipboard.)*...Dr. Wilcot and his Heavenly Hounds. The good doctor has taught those loveable animals to howl and bark several hymns and even a swing number. And we had them here. **ON LIVE TV.**

SHELBY: *(Realizing.)* On live TV, oh my, that's right. *(Looking to SHELIA for help.)* Right, we're back live, and we saw live stuff, didn't we?

SHELIA: Dr. Wilcot.

SHELBY: Yes, we saw Dr. Wilcot and those dogs. Dr. Wilcot is a local veterinarian who runs a canine ministry. He says if he can't train them up, he'll put them down.

SHELBY: *(Cont'd. Crosses to C2 and steps in the dog poop.)* Oh my! Well, there's one of them he needs to put down - right now! We need a cleanup at camera two. I need to cleanse my sole, as it were. Shelia, would you takeover for a moment? *(Starts to walk off stage on one heel or holding his shoe, muttering to himself.)* I'll bet it was that beagle who was scooting its butt across the carpet in the green room... *(Exits.)*

SHELIA: *(Cautiously moving to C2.)* While I admire Brother Shelby, I don't want to follow in his footsteps. But there is One whose footsteps we should follow. Let's have our studio singers tell us about that right now. *(Exits.)*

*(Studio QUARTET enters from stage left, crossing to center as they sing **Footprints of Jesus**. The little bit of choreography they do is altered by them trying to avoid the mess on the floor. During the song, SHELIA sneaks in and cleans up the mess with a lot of paper towels, then exits.)*

SHELIA: *(After the song has ended, reenters.)* In case you've just tuned in, you're watching "The Piety Variety Gospel Show" with my dad, Brother Shelby Greene. I'm Shelia Greene. Our ministry is to enhance your church experience with music, news and guidance between services.

SHELBY: *(Entering in time to finish Shelia's announcement.)* Thank you, Shelia. These local television stations maintain their FCC license by providing free airtime for the public good...or at least they used to. This broadcast is doing the public good. I hope they see that and let us continue. We're just like the major network shows "Lamp Unto My Feet," "Directions" and "Frontiers of Faith," except we have better music – and dogs. I'll never do that again. I promise.

SHELIA: It's ok, Dad. Dr. Wilcot apologized and gave you a coupon for free rabies shots, if you ever need one.

End of Freeview

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