

Jonah

Book, Lyrics and Music by

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The True Story of Jonah

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STORY OF THE MUSICAL

“The True Story of Jonah” follows the Biblical prophet Jonah as she washes up on shore and meets three friends: Athena, an eternal skeptic; Agnes, an indecisive fence-sitter; and Theo, a true believer in... pretty much everything. Jonah begins to tell her story to the trio, explaining that she was called by God to preach to Nineveh, the city at the center of an empire known for conquest and cruelty, but that she chose to run away instead. The trio adds quips and commentary as she tells of boarding a ship, running into a storm, being thrown overboard by the sailors, swallowed by a giant fish (or was it a whale?), and spit back out on land. Along the way they debate the veracity of her tale and the nature of belief, faith, and skepticism. Jonah finally accepts the action of her calling but continues to struggle with the heart of the message. She arrives at last in Nineveh only to give a half-hearted sermon –well actually, it’s just one line. The finale culminates in Jonah having a debate with God that essentially asks, “Who deserves forgiveness?”

The musical uses area staging, stress-free set pieces (arranged by humorous set movers), minimal costuming and ten easy and engaging songs. The gender designations in the script are based purely on voice parts (where applicable) and reflect the casting of the original production. Any role may be played by any actor who can sing the part.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The show was first produced under the name “Never a Truer Tale” by CAST (Christian Acting and Singing Troupe), a middle and high school theatre program at Peachtree Christian Church in Atlanta, Georgia. It was enjoyed by an audience of all ages and taken on tour to various churches in the Georgia and Florida area.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 3 w, 5 flexible and chorus)

JONAH: Prophet on a mission... reluctantly. Female/Mezzo.

ATHENA: A skeptic listening to Jonah's story. Female/Mezzo.

AGNES: An indecisive listener. Female/Alto.

THEO: A true believer in... pretty much everything. Male/Tenor.

GOD: Speaks in rhythm rather than singing. Any gender.

CAPTAIN: A ship's captain who has a tragic past...or at least, he likes to think he does. Male/Baritone.

FIRST MATE: The captain's right hand. Any gender.

GUIDES 1 & 2: Bit roles of 1-2 lines each. Any gender.

NINEVITE COMMANDER: Leader of the Ninevites, 1 line. Any gender.

SAILORS: 5 - 10+ Members of the captain's crew. May double as Ninevites. Any gender.

NINEVITES: 5 - 10+ Citizens of Nineveh. Any gender.

MOVERS: 4+ Silent entities that help create the set in Jonah's story. May double as Sailors and Ninevites in some scenes. Any gender. (See Production Notes)

NOTES: All gender recommendations are based on voice part. Any character may be played by any actor who can sing the part. Pronouns in the script reflect the casting of the original production and can easily be changed to fit any actor. Solos sung by Sailors and Ninevites need not each be sung by a different actor, allowing the size of the cast to be extremely flexible.

SONGS

Way-Hey-Ho

I Got a Call

By the Way

Down the Hatch

To You I Called

That's It

Nineveh

That's It (Reprise)

Make Up Your Mind

Finale

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PRODUCTION NOTES

COSTUMES: In the original production, all performers except Jonah wore black, adding simple but colorful tunics and sashes for the Sailors, and changing to uniform gray and red tunics for the Ninevites. The Movers added black “ninja” masks (see below). Jonah’s costume, though distinct from the others, was colorful and easy to move in.

THE FISH: The giant fish in the original production was a puppet made of flat foam sheet segments connected by fabric segments, as well as a hinged mouth. It was operated by the Movers, who moved the segments in a wave motion to simulate swimming, and who were able to “swallow” Jonah on stage after a little practice.

THE MOVERS: The Movers, while changing scenes and helping to facilitate the action, also provide a lot of comedy. They do this, not by playing up to the audience, but by being “conspicuously invisible.” They play it straight, but at times the actions they are called upon to perform (like dragging Jonah across the stage in a rolling chair or running past the Trio with tree and cloud props to simulate them traveling) are so ridiculous that it can’t help but be funny. On top of everything, they wear ski/ninja masks that cover everything but their eyes. This is ostensibly to make them less noticeable, but of course has quite the opposite effect. The original production had 4 Movers, but more could be added to provide more storm effects or underwater ambience.

SET: The sets are simple and allow for a great deal of creativity. The main requirement is that they be easily movable. The first scene depicts a docked ship and the surrounding port. After the first number, the Sailors clear away the port and change from an outside view of the ship to an inside view, all in the background as the main action continues on. Once Jonah is thrown overboard, the Sailors take the ship pieces offstage. When Jonah and the Trio arrive in Nineveh, the Ninevites bring columns or banners onstage with them as they sing, which then remain onstage until the end of the show.

For the ship, the original production used 2 low rectangular platforms for the deck, and several wooden trifold boards, painted on both sides to look like the sides of the ship. These stood side by side, overlapping at the edges, on the downstage side of the platforms to form the outer hull, with a freestanding mast sitting behind the platforms. After “Way-Hey-Ho,” the Sailors flip the pieces and line them up in similar fashion behind the mast and platforms to form the inner hull of the ship, creating the effect of now being on the ship, rather than outside it, and allowing more room for the action and choreography in “By the Way.” This modular design allows the entire ship to be quickly removed during “Down the Hatch” and was ideal for touring.

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Jonah

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on a busy port, with wooden shipping crates stacked in clusters and a docked ship SL, where SAILORS are moving cargo on and off.)

MUSIC CUE: WAY-HEY-HO

(ATHENA, AGNES, and THEO (i.e., the TRIO) enter SR, debating something. They settle on a cluster of crates in the DSR corner, and as they do, SAILOR #1 makes a bit of a production of "accidentally" dropping an old, tattered map from his pocket. Theo takes the bait.)

THEO: *(Picking up the map.)* Excuse me, sir, you dropped this scrap of paper!

SAILOR #1: *(Hamming it up.)* Oh, no! I wouldn't want to be losing this. It's too valuable!

THEO: Why, what is it?

SAILOR #1: This? This be the path to adventure, me lad! You wouldn't be interested in that, would you? For a price, o' course...

THIS BIT OF PAPER'S NOT JUST A SCRAP

SAILORS:

TO ME, WAY-HEY-HO!

SAILOR #1:

IT'S MUCH MORE THAN JUST A TREASURE MAP,
AND IT'S TRUE AS CERTAINLY AS I SAIL!

SAILORS:

NOTHING'S AS TRUE AS A SAILOR'S TALE!

SAILOR #1:

THE MOST SPECTACULAR SIGHTS YOU'LL SEE
IF ITS PATHS YOU CAREFULLY TREAD.
BUT OH, HAVE A CARE,
IF YOU VENTURE UP THERE...
FOR HERE THERE BE DRAGONS, MY FRIEND!

THEO: Dragons?! *(Starts counting out coins.)*

ATHENA:

AND THAT'S WHERE THIS TRANSACTION ENDS.

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(ATHENA yanks THEO back to where she and AGNES are standing. SAILOR #1 returns to their work.)

THEO: Aw, c'mon!

ATHENA: You can't believe every fish story that comes through here!

AGNES: She's right.

THEO: How do you know that? You can't prove they're NOT true!

AGNES: He's right.

ATHENA: Think of how ridiculous they are...

THEO: *(Overlapping.)* Just because you've never seen it...

AGNES: *(Over both of THEM.)* They're both right.

SAILORS:

TO ME, WAY-HEY-HO, HAUL AWAY!
A SHIPMAN KNOWS HOW TO TELL A TALE,
AND IT'S TRUE AS CERTAINLY AS I SAIL!
NOTHING'S AS TRUE AS A SAILOR'S TALE.

(SAILOR #2 approaches to tell the TRIO their story.)

SAILOR #2:

I SPOTTED AN ISLAND THAT PUZZLED ME

SAILORS:

TO ME, WAY-HEY-HO!

SAILOR #2:

IT DIDN'T APPEAR ON OUR MAP, YA SEE,
AND IT'S TRUE AS CERTAINLY AS I SAIL

SAILORS:

NOTHING'S AS TRUE AS A SAILOR'S TALE.

SAILOR #2:

THE ISLE HAD NARY A TREE NOR BUSH,
AND WAS SMOOTH JUST LIKE A BELL.
BUT OUR HEARTS FILLED WITH AWE,
FOR THE ISLAND WE SAW
WAS REALLY A SEA TURTLE'S SHELL!

SAILORS:

A TRUER TALE, NO ONE COULD TELL!

AGNES: A sea turtle?

SAILOR #2: Aye, sea turtle.

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THEO: A sea turtle as big as an island!

ATHENA: Couldn't it have just... been an island?

(SAILOR #2 moves off.)

SAILORS:

TO ME, WAY-HEY-HO, HAUL AWAY!
A SHIPMAN KNOWS HOW TO TELL A TALE
AND IT'S TRUE AS CERTAINLY AS I SAIL
NOTHING'S AS TRUE AS A SAILOR'S TALE.

(SAILOR #3 approaches.)

SAILOR #3:

WHEN I WAS WATCHING ONE MOONLIT NIGHT

SAILORS:

TO ME, WAY-HEY-HO!

SAILOR #3:

MY EYES BEHELD ME A EERIE SIGHT,
AND IT'S TRUE AS CERTAINLY AS I SAIL

SAILORS:

NOTHING'S AS TRUE AS A SAILOR'S TALE.

SAILOR #3:

A SHIP CAME SAILING OUT OF THE MIST,
ON HER DECK STOOD NOT A SOUL...
AND WHEN I CALLED, "OI!" TO THE LADS,
"SHIP AHOY!"
THE, FOG, WELL SHE SWALLOWED HER WHOLE!

SAILORS:

AS SURE AS THE SEA BILLOWS ROLL!

ATHENA: So, a ship sailed out of the fog, and then a ship
sailed... into the fog?

THEO: *(Wide-eyed.)* Did the fog eat it?

(SAILOR #3 moves off. DANCE BREAK.)

SAILORS:

TO ME, WAY-HEY-HO, HAUL AWAY!
A SHIPMAN KNOWS HOW TO TELL A TALE,
AND IT'S TRUE AS CERTAINLY AS I SAIL!
NOTHING'S AS TRUE AS A SAILOR'S TALE.

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(SAILOR #4 approaches.)

SAILOR #4: *(To THEO.)*

A MERMAID SAID SHE WOULD BE YOUR WIFE!

SAILORS:

TO ME, WAY-HEY-HO!

THEO:

HEY, I'M NOT FALLING FOR THAT AGAIN!

SAILOR #4:

BUT IT'S TRUE AS CERTAINLY AS I SAIL

SAILORS:

NOTHING'S AS TRUE AS A SAILOR'S TALE

(CAPTAIN and FIRST MATE join SAILOR #4.)

CAPTAIN:

A HYDRA!

FIRST MATE: *(Correcting.)*

KRAKEN!

SAILOR #4: *(Correcting.)*

LEVIATHAN!

ALL THREE: *(Look at each other and shrug.)*

...BROKE OUR VESSEL ALL APART...

SAILORS:

TRUER TALES NEVER HAVE EVER BEEN TOLD:

THE GREAT SAILOR LEGENDS OF OLD!

(JONAH comes stumbling out onto the stage from L, covered in seaweed and looking worse for wear. ALL stare.)

JONAH: *(Looking around.)* It's kind of a weird story.

TRIO: *(Exchanging glances, then to JONAH.)* Try us!

(Music concludes. The scene rolls directly into the next song.)

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MUSIC CUE: I GOT A CALL

(SAILORS appear to return to work, while actually changing the ship set from "in port" to "at sea." JONAH, meanwhile, joins the TRIO DSR and sings as she pulls seaweed off herself.)

JONAH:

I GOT A CALL FROM THE LORD, YOU SEE
...HE TALKED TO ME...

ATHENA: Do you hear any voices right now?

JONAH: No, it wasn't like that!

AGNES: You mean like your conscience?

ATHENA: *(Eyebrow raised.)* Or an imaginary friend?

JONAH:

NO, MORE LIKE A PROPHECY...

ATHENA: Alright, fine. What did "He" "say"?

(LIGHTS shift to indicate a change in time and place. JONAH steps away from the TRIO and closer to CS during the flashbacks.)

AGNES: Whoa, what's happening?

THEO: *(Looking around in awe.)* It's a flashback...

(GOD speaks as a disembodied voice.)

GOD: Jo, I've got a job for you.

THERE'S A CITY WHOSE WICKEDNESS CAN'T BE IGNORED.

JONAH:

OF COURSE, SAY THE WORD AND I'M THERE.

GOD:

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LIKE IT.

JONAH:

JUST TELL ME WHERE.

GOD:

NOW, THIS MAY NOT BE EASY—

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JONAH:

ADONAI, PLEASE...
I WORSHIP THE LORD, THE GOD OF HEAVEN,
WHO MADE THE SEA AND THE LAND.
YOU KNOW YOU CAN GIVE ME ANY TRIAL,
I'LL ALWAYS OBEY YOUR COMMAND!

GOD: I'm glad you feel that way...

AGNES: So, where did He send you?

GOD: *(To JONAH.)* Nineveh.

JONAH: *(To the TRIO.)* Nineveh.

TRIO:

...NINEVEH?

JONAH: *(Nodding.)*

CITY BATHED IN BLOOD AND TEARS...

AGNES: Their empire has conquered every nation and
people they can get their hands on, and the city of
Nineveh is apparently the worst of them all.

THEO: I've heard some horrific stories about how they treat
their captives.

ATHENA: I wish I could tell you THOSE are just tall tales...

JONAH:

HE'D NEVER ASKED QUITE SO MUCH OF ME,
AND FRUSTRATINGLY,
I JUST COULDN'T MAKE HIM SEE...
(To GOD.) PLEASE DON'T SEND ME THERE.

GOD:

I WILL SEND YOU THERE:
I NEED YOU TO GO.

JONAH:

BUT COULDN'T YOU—

GOD:

NO

JONAH:

BUT WHAT IF THEY—

GOD:

GO!

JONAH:

YOU CAN'T REALLY MEAN TO SEND ME THERE!
THEY DON'T WANT YOUR WISDOM, THEY DON'T CARE!
THEY WILL MOCK YOUR MERCY TO YOUR FACE,
NO ONE'S LESS DESERVING OF YOUR GRACE.

End of Freeview

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