Ben Ing
in association with the
All Community Theater (A.C.T.) players
presents

Christmas Choir

By Pat Cook

Produced by special arrangement with Pioneer Drama Service, Inc. Englewood, Colorado
PRODUCER’S NOTE:

The decision to produce my first show during a pandemic was daunting but paraphrasing Lauryn Hill, “God will make a way.” We had been living a socially distanced life during a pandemic for almost 6 months and were reliant on connecting virtually. FUMC SM had moved to online services and in an After Church Coffee Hour over Zoom, Dorothy Nichols had returned from Texas. She mentioned resurrecting A.C.T. for some sort of Christmas performance, and having worked with her before I figured my technical background in the entertainment industry might come in handy.

My curiosity was piqued. I googled random plays and musicals before finding this show. It seemed appropriate- it contained a hopeful Christmas message, a light comedic touch would provide relief from the pandemic, it was adaptable for virtual performance and music is a foundation for our church.

Dorothy came on board as director and creative collaborator while I explored virtual performances over Zoom. We decided to “film” a performance to be streamed at a later date but remained committed to maintaining live interaction over Zoom. Moving through rehearsals, we had to overcome unanticipated technology impediments. Actors struggled with tech issues working remotely but were resilient in adapting and growing. Most importantly, how do you synthesize the intimacy of community mediated through cameras and the internet?

This story of coming together to build community was heightened by our challenge of distanced isolation. As the actors have grown their characters, we have become a cohesive group. We hope the sincerity and conviction that has transpired during this show will be embraced by the whole church to bring the whole community little closer to one another and closer to a God who emphasizes connection. As we all move through these times of fears, uncertainties, difficulties and inconveniences I hope we all remember “God will make a way.”

Enjoy the show!
Linda Diane Anderson (Gwen) is a veteran of the A.C.T. stage, makes her Zoom screen debut in this show. She is grateful for Dorothy and Ben for their vision, perseverance, and patience. Linda Diane dedicates her performance to the memory of her beloved cousin Lisa Le Fors who encouraged the best in her.

Wynn Battig (George) for those with long memories, might be remembered for his role as Andrew Campbell in Brigadoon at First UMC in the Sixties and as a street person in Cyrano de Bergerac at the Morgan-Wixson in the Seventies. After a very long hiatus, he brought us the wanna-be forceful but verbally-challenged and inept mayor of River City in The Music Man and later a chorus member and the judge in Hello, Dolly! In retirement and after a stroke, he’s still doing things he enjoys doing and amateur theater remains one of them.

Jack Fry (Paul) While performing by way of virtual rehearsals has presented many technical difficulties, I am thankful for the opportunity to interact with this team of talented friends, especially during these difficult times. Above all, I appreciate the innovative direction by Dorothy Nichols, the technical skills of Ben Ing and the patience of my wife, Marj, who has endured the many hours of my isolation during virtual rehearsals.

Kendra Gorlitsky (Laraine) returns to “the stage” as the harried mother who gets interrupted constantly at the choir rehearsal. This was not hard to imagine as she only lasted a few years in the FUMC choir before duty called at home. Truth is, she loves the chaos of being a mom and scout master, but unlike Laraine, she hardly ever raises her voice (don’t ask for confirmation of this, please). Best of all is rejoining beloved friends in the cast, having previously enjoyed portraying Irene in Hello, Dolly! and Rona in Putnam County Spelling Bee. What a gift FUMC has in Dorothy, Ben, and Adam!

Carmen Herrera (Charlotte) Having spent 20 years in network television working on sitcoms, behind the camera, it was such fun to be in the other side. Now I have a taste of what the actors experienced. Here’s looking at you Cowboy.

Mark Labella (Jonathan) began performing at age eight. After serving the US NAVY as a Hospital Corpsman, he chose to study Medical Technology and Medicine. While in school, he still continued to compete in hip hop dance competitions. After earning both BSMT and MD degrees, he decided to pursue his passion for the arts. His started with a featured role on NBC’s Chicago Fire and Always Dies First. His first professional production was Chicago’s Musical Theater Festival’s One Thousand Words, followed by a series regular role on the The Exchange.

Michael Lamb (Ron) invites everyone who enjoys this zoom production to safely share in the joy and wonder of the true meaning of Christmas with friends and loved ones throughout the world. Thanks to Ben and Dorothy for helping this little choir find its voice!

Cindy McQuade (DeDe) began acting on her church stage in 2009. She has carried the enthusiasm since childhood. It’s a Wonderful Life was her most happy and joyful debut and she got to do it twice! From Dolly to Dede, from the Sanctuary to the Social Hall,
Monica College with a degree in Broadcast Journalism, and currently works on-air part time at KCRW when he’s not working at the church. In his free time, David enjoys hikes and walks in Palisades Park with his wife Jen.

Chris Reagh (Joy) returns for the third time to be in an A.C.T. performance. She participated in Scrooge, and Hello, Dolly! This year we are doing the play on the Zoom platform, and it is a quite different experience working with this medium. It was a challenge to get this right. What I enjoyed most about doing this play is to get to see all my church friends again and being able to connect as we social distance during this pandemic. Thank you, Ben, for finding this play to do, and Dorothy, for the choreography on such a hard palette of a platform to work with. The two of you are amazing and inspiring.

Carol Reich (Gladys) Carol has happily performed in a number of plays here at FUMC: The Cotton Patch Gospel, It’s A Wonderful Life, The Music Man, Hello, Dolly! and Directed Music for The Wizard of Oz. Among many favorite roles were Eulalie McKecknie Shinn, the Mayor’s Wife, in The Music Man, and most “unusual” role was that of Pontius Pilate, in The Cotton Patch Gospel. I admired David Bremer’s performance of John the Baptist, who preached the coming of Jesus in The Cotton Patch Gospel, and David Mayhan and Cindy McQuade, in Hello, Dolly! Special thanks to Ben Ing, the inspiration behind this play, Adam Guerroro for production, along with Ben, and patient Dorothy Nichols, Director!!

Sarah Rold (Phoebe) Thank you to this amazing cast for all of their hard work and the joy of spending time with them. Thank you so much to Ben and Dorothy for making all of this possible, you’re both huge blessings! Thank you for all of your hard work and the joy of spending time with you.

Emily Payne (Mary Lou) has been Production Designer for C.A.S.T. and A.C.T. at First UMC since 2006. This is her first performance on the stage, and not behind it. Thank you to Ben for all his work on the technical side and to Dorothy for her direction. A special thank you to Sarah and David, her angry panda laughing partners.

Dan Nessel (Michael) Having performed in numerous productions with the FUMC players Dan is happy to be a part of yet another creative adventure. To corral the creative bunch in the role of the Director of a crazy Christmas choir via Zoom has been a unique blast.

Preparing us all for a bit of Commercials and/or TV, Brady Bunch style we hope the audience enjoys a laugh, some familiar faces and the warm Christmas spirit. Thank you Ben and Dorothy for your dedication!!

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David Penson (Understudy) originally hails from Phoenix, Arizona, and has actively attended church here at First UMC since 2005. He graduated Santa
also to Molly and Adam for your help. Thanks to Emily and David for being my partners in crime and for lots of laughs. Finally, I wouldn’t have been able to do this without my patient and wonderful husband and the support of him and our two boys. I love you very much!

Larry Young (Understudy) has been a part of a number of choirs over the years, but never as dysfunctional as this one! The role of an understudy is to jump in when needed and try to help keep the production going. Well, I did my best! Here’s hoping the finished product adds some pleasure and joy to your holiday season.

WHO’S WHO, the crew

Adam Guerrero (Technical Assistant) Hey all! it’s me, Adam. I’ve been around. Happy to be a part of this show and help “I.T.” as much as I can to support our cast and get them connected virtually. It’s been great to see the evolution of our actors online during rehearsal. Hope you all enjoy!

Ben Ing (Producer & Technical Director) carrying on a family tradition, has not only been a veteran of multiple A.C.T. shows but is also the father of children who grew up in C.A.S.T. Ben’s introduction to FUMC SM was a first date with Karen (née King) occurring after a cancelled church rehearsal for her. Christmas Choir is Ben’s first official behind the scenes role for A.C.T. and his first producing gig after a long career in the technical arts of the entertainment industry. Ben would like to thank the cast for their commitment, patience and trust in our ability to pull off this technical juggernaut. Mostly Ben would like to thank Dorothy for agreeing to sign on to this project, her amazing ability in working with actors, her partnership in constructing this show and her inspiration of bringing A.C.T. to the church as an artistic community and creative outlet for many of us.

Molly Smith Martin (Costume Design, program cover art designer) is excited to be back at the sewing machine for this production of Christmas Choir! She is thrilled to be part of the project and while there were technology struggles abound, she hopes everyone can enjoy this bit of comedic theatre safely from their homes. Happy Christmas one and all.

Mulan (Howling Dog) is making her acting debut in “Christmas Choir.” As in so many other areas of her life, we can already tell, she will be a howling success.

Dorothy Nichols (Director) Dorothy is an award winning writer, dancer, choreographer, director, producer and actress. She wants to thank Ben Ing for asking her to be a part of this fun, first-time, Livestream, project. She also wants to thank this outstanding cast for learning and incorporating the new, sometimes difficult, technology. It’s not easy acting in a room by yourself and making it look like you are actually with 12 other people but this cast managed to pull it off! Merry Christmas and much love to you all!
SPECIAL THANK YOUS

Many helping hands have contributed countless hours to make this production a success. We thank all of them from the bottom of our hearts:

Marjorie Pope for being our music consultant.

Jeff Rizzo for his advice, encouragement and use of his recording studio.

The A.C.T. program is made possible through donations. If you wish to help offset the costs of this production, donations can be made to First UMC Santa Monica with A.C.T. noted in the memo. www.santamonicaumc.org/give.

We appreciate all of our donors and those who have helped to bring our group together during this time of social distancing. It has brought joy into our Wednesday evening rehearsals.

UPCOMING SERVICES AT FIRST UMC:

Sunday, December 20, 10 a.m: Fourth Sunday of Advent
Part 1 of the Annual Service of Lessons and Carols. Special music with harp and organ.

Thursday, December 24:
Christmas Eve Family Worship - 4 p.m.
A Christmas Eve service for everyone in the community! Celebrate through worship with Christmas carols, re-telling the Christmas story, and rejoicing together! Presented by the First UMC Youth.

Sunday, December 27, 10 a.m: First Sunday after Christmas
Part 2 of the Annual Service of Lessons and Carols. Special music with solo Offertory and organ.

To participate in all of these services:
Go to the First UMC Facebook Live page (@santamonicaumc), or watch the service ANYTIME on the website: www.santamonicaumc.org/livestream, or on the First UMC YouTube page: www.youtube.com/c/SantaMonicaUMC.