

## NOTES FROM THE PRODUCERS ON STAGING

When *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN* was originally produced at the Williamstown Theatre Festival as well as Off-Broadway in New York, the actual sanctuary of a working church was used. As a result, staging was confined to the aisles (center, far left, far right) and to a shallow space upstage. (In a case like that, due to the fact that churches are not usually "raked," the placement of six-inch risers is recommended whenever possible to help sight lines.)

As the audience filed in and was seated, all members of the cast except for *THE PRIEST* and *THE STRANGER* also entered the house, little by little, and took their reserved seats among the "congregation." Some sat in silence, some read programs, some spoke quietly with their neighbors in the unsuspecting audience. The lights on the playing area were pre-set very low, and a random scattered pattern of subtle colors was projected across the ceiling of the church. The play officially began with *THE CHOIR MASTER* entering from U.R. with a lit taper, going to two candles U.R. and U.L., lighting them, extinguishing the taper, and then going to the piano D.L. (audience level) and beginning the opening number. The feeling was one of being in a church . . . yet there was an air of something different about it. As the music began, *THE CHILD* suddenly stood up in the midst of the audience and began singing "When I Consider The Heavens." She was followed by individual cast members joining in until everyone was singing, at which point the cast moved down the aisles and re-assembled together D.C. to finish the opening number. Ceiling lights went down and the stage lights came up brighter as they finished the number and then went up onto the stage.

Although this had the effect (as the New York Daily News critic said) of "pulling us right into the performance and welding audience and actor into a common bond," other considerations should be contemplated. For instance, if the play is in fact performed in a working church space, the audience often enters with a reverence reserved more for Sunday morning than with the excited anticipation of an evening in the theatre. (An announcement to the effect that it is all right to applaud and even laugh in this space helps "break the ice" and relaxes the audience

for what's in store.) More important: if communities are to be producing this play, it is quite probable that the case will be recognizable to or even be friends with audience members, so that the surprise of actors "hidden" in the congregation will not be possible. We suggest, therefore, another option: after the audience is seated, the individual characters can appear one by one on stage, each in the final acts of dressing to go to church. In silence, THE PRIEST can don his vestments, GRANDAD tie his bow tie, CELIA button up her dress, THE CHILD put on overalls, etc. Those case members can leave the stage, exit, and *then* enter the theatre from the back of the house to take their respective seats, followed by THE CHOIR MASTER who lights the candles, crosses to the piano, begins playing, etc.

With this staging, the audience would be reminded that after all, this is a *play* and not a real church service. (Occasionally, we encountered audience members who did not know whether or not they were expected to take part in the ritual along with the actors!) This staging option will also allow the individual performers a wonderful moment of preparation prior to entering the house. If the play is done on a traditional proscenium stage where the play's "congregation" might be facing the audience, the device could work equally well.

All aisles can be used throughout the play, especially during the musical numbers "We Believe" and "In The Mirror's Reflection." (In the New York production, "Mirror's Reflection" was performed from all over the house.) If this is done, the musical director must make sure all voices are arranged equally in terms of soprano, alto placement, etc.

The play is performed without an intermission and should run approximately one and a half hours.