

Robert Livingston Aldridge (b. 1954)

**Elmer Gantry (2007)**  
**An Opera in Two Acts**

**Libretto by Herschel Garfein**

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*Elmer Gantry* was premièred by Nashville Opera, Nashville, Tennessee, November 16, 2007.

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**CHARACTERS**

*Elmer Gantry* ..... A college football-player, later a businessman and preacher  
*Sharon Falconer* ..... A traveling evangelist preacher  
*Frank Shallard* ..... A college student and Elmer's best friend, later a minister  
*Eddie Fislinger* ..... Head of the Campus YMCA, later a minister  
*Lulu Baines* ..... Daughter of the college president, later married to Eddie  
*Rev Arthur Baines* ..... President of Terwillinger College and Seminary  
*Mrs Baines* ..... Wife of Rev Baines, mother of Lulu  
*T.J. Rigg* ..... A wealthy industrialist in Zenith, and head of the Elks' Club  
*Revival Singer* ..... Employed by Sharon Falconer  
*Dr Evans Binch, Keely Family Gospel Singers, Revival Worker, Ice Cream Vendor, Tour Guide, Bully, Worker 1 and 2, Child, Woman 1 and 2, Man, Men in the bar, Seminary Faculty, Men of the Elks' Club, Women Ushers, Large SATB Chorus*

**SETTINGS**

*The action takes place in locations throughout the Midwest, during the years 1905-1913.*

**CD 1**

**[1] Act I, Scene 1**

*The Old Home Sample Room, Cato, Missouri, 1905. (A workingman's saloon on a winter's night. The place is packed, smoky, loud. As the curtain rises, we see Elmer Gantry standing in the center of the room, drunk, expansive, and halfway through a story that has the attention of all. He is wearing a college letter sweater with a large "T" on the front. Frank Shallard is sitting on a barstool. The other men on barstools have swiveled around to watch Elmer. Patrons at tables are turned across the backs of their chairs, or looking around each other to see his performance. One man on a barstool (the Bully) seems more interested in the reaction of the crowd than in Elmer himself. The Barkeep is listening to Elmer while keeping an eye on the customers. Suspended above him is a small ship's bell with a rope hung from its clapper. He rings it whenever a drink is ordered—a signature of the establishment.)*

**Choral Scene**

**Elmer**

So she...(signals crowd to repeat after him.)

**Crowd**

She...

**Elmer**

She's half-naked and I'm trying to calm her down.

**Crowd**

Calm her down, gotta calm her down.

**Elmer**

See now fellas, I am one patient man. Right, Frank?  
(He looks around for him.) Frank?

**Frank**

(Drunk) Right, Hell-cat.

**Elmer**

WELL, where was I? Did I mention, her fat old landlord keeps pounding on the door?

So it's time to act, it's time to act and I say  
Juanita, my sweetheart, I love you, Juanita  
I think that was her name.

*(The Bully points to the barkeep, ordering Elmer a drink. The glass is handed through the crowd to him. Elmer toasts the Bully.)*

Your health, my friend.

*(The Bully gives him a salute.)*

**Elmer, Crowd**

I say, "Sweetheart" (signals crowd to follow him)

"I'm a football player." (signals.)

"Big ol' football player"

*(All except the Bully)*

Sweetheart!

I'm a football player!

Big ol' football player!

**Elmer, Crowd**

I read your signals

When you called the play,

Our huddle was great and the snap was made

I'm runnin' for the end zone...(signals.)

The ball is in the air...(signals.)

Now who's gonna stop me

Halfway there?

Runnin' for the end zone.

The ball is in the air.

*(The Crowd cheers and applauds Elmer, and he takes a casual sip, as if the story were over.)*

**Frank, Three men in the crowd, Elmer**

Result? (signals to crowd)

Result? Result? Result?

TOUCHDOWN!

**Crowd**

TOUCHDOWN! TOUCHDOWN!

**Elmer, Crowd**

Ol' Elmer knows what to say.

Ol' Elmer gets what he wants.

Ol' Elmer knows when it's rough

you get tough

and you never can be tough enough.  
...what to say.  
...what he wants  
when it's rough  
you get tough  
(*The bully hops off his barstool. His voice rides over the crowd until he gets everyone's attention.*)

**Bully**

It's strange!... Strange, ain't it guys? This big talker plays football for a sissy Bible school.

**Crowd**

Oooh.  
(*Everyone senses an impending confrontation. The crowd rings Elmer and the Bully. Elmer affects a jovial demeanor, and will maintain it until the last moment.*)

**Elmer**

Now fellas, I am one patient man. Right, Frank?

**Frank**

Hell-cat...  
(*Elmer puts his arm around the Bully.*)

**Elmer**

I love to have a good time, coupla laughs... but boy! I just don't like ... makin' fun... of JESUS!  
(*And on the last word, he punches the Bully.*)  
(*There is an all-out brawl. The bully is on the floor; Elmer is kicking him savagely. The crowd shouts encouragement to the combatants, the bartender rings his bell furiously, a few other men start shoving each other aggressively, as the lights quickly fade. Fade up on)*)

**[2] Act I, Scene 2**

*The President's office, Terwillinger Baptist College, Cato, Missouri.  
The next day.  
(President Baines and other faculty members are seated in armchairs and side-chairs which have been pulled from their customary places and haphazardly arranged, as if in expectation of a meeting. Most of those in attendance are old men. Eddie Fislinger, an earnest young man who heads the college YMCA, stands to the side. As the lights come up, all vigorously strike up a hymn. During the singing, Lulu Baines enters from a rear door, quietly serves coffee from a tray, exits.)*

**Hymn**

**Baines, Eddie, Faculty**

Who's the man among us has not battled for the Lord?  
Could there be a coward in our ranks?  
Bring the doubter forward, he must surely bend his knee,  
As to our Saviour we give thanks  
Praise God in the highest,  
Praise and magnify the Lord.  
Praise God, and remember,  
We are fighting with a Bible and a sword.  
When the war clouds gather in a dark and sullen sky,  
And a salvo from the cannon's mouth has roared,  
From the trenches, from the redoubts, there goes up a joyful cry,  
"We are those who battle for the Lord!"  
Praise God in the highest,  
Praise and magnify the Lord.  
Praise God, no surrender!  
For the men who wield a Bible and a sword.  
If you seek an answer, speed along His walls,  
Faithfully inquire of each you see;  
There may be a man among us who declined God's battle-call,

But I tell you, brother, that man is not me.  
Who's the man? Who's the doubter?  
Let him stand before his Lord.  
Every man among us must be righteous, brave and true,  
As we fight on with a Bible and a sword.  
(*There is a knock on the front door. Elmer stands hesitant in the doorway.*)

**Recitative**

**Baines**

Mr Gantry, please come in. I'd like to present to you the faculty of the college and seminary. I believe you have studied under many of these gentlemen.  
(*Elmer enters, followed by Frank, who hangs back unobtrusively.*)  
Professor Eversley... the Reverend Mr Hudkins... Dr Ingle.... And of course, we know you as our victorious quarterback, the shining star of the Terwillinger Terriers. Haven't we seven victories this year?

**Elmer**

Nine, sir. We're nine and two so far this year.

**The Faculty**

Nine and two, nine and two.  
Best in the conference, nine and two.

**Baines**

(*Noticing Frank*) And this is Mr ...?

**Elmer**

My friend, Frank Shallard.

**Baines**

(*Ignoring Frank, who has proffered his hand*)  
Yes, yes, Mr Shallard.

**Elmer**

Senior class valedictorian.

**Baines**

Fine, fine. (*He ignores Frank.*)

**Elmer**

Whatever I've done, Frank can vouch for me.

**Baines**

Please sit down. (*Putting his arm around Elmer's shoulder, he leads him to a chair. Frank, awkwardly fending for himself, also finds an empty chair. Gravely*) Young man, we have followed the course of your football career with great pleasure. Isn't that so, gentlemen?

**The Faculty**

'Gantry scrambles through the brambles.'  
'Third and nine — he'll trounce the line.'  
'Pitch out, pop out, down and in, Terwillinger is gonna win.'  
'What's the name that's do-or-die? G-A-N-T... R-Y!'

**Baines**

(*Restoring order*) Gentlemen, please. (*To Elmer*) Your feats on the gridiron are not what have brought you here.

**Elmer**

(*Rising, he addresses them contritely*) Sirs, if it's about certain... carousing...  
Sometimes a guy's just gotta relax — you know!... and once, just once — last night! — I wandered into a tavern, an awful, sinful place — tell 'em, Frank.

**Frank**

*(Starts to rise, but is immediately cut off)* Tha—

**Baines**

Nonsense. Didn't St. Paul himself say, "Take a bit of wine for your stomach?"

**The Faculty**

He did, he did.

**Baines**

We've brought you here for the sake of... your soul.

**Elmer**

Oh... yessir. My soul... means a lot to me.

**Baines**

*(Appreciative)* Aah... Well said.

**The Faculty**

*(Hushed and appreciative)* Indeed, well said.

**Baines**

We heard you were defending the blessed name of our Lord! You chose to stand up for Jesus! *(All the men quickly stand. To them)* All right. *(They just as quickly sit.)* We've asked someone here to entreat you.

Head of the campus YMCA!

Edward Fislinger. *(Who now steps forward proudly.)*

**Elmer**

*(Spoken aside, to Frank)* Eddie Fartslinger?!

**Eddie**

What is Love?

Yes! What is Love?

It is the Morning and the Evening star,

What is Love?

**Baines**

*(Interrupts briskly)* Thank you, Edward.

*(Eddie steps back, cowed.)*

*(To Elmer)* My young friend... young friends, I should say *(momentarily including Frank)* ... your courageous actions of yesterday have not gone unnoticed. We sense a change in you. We summon you to give you strength. We wish to see you continue in the good fight of faith whereunto you are called. Elmer Gantry, in great solemnity I ask you... *(he pauses for effect.)*

**Elmer**

*(Weakly)* Sir?

**Baines**

Have you thought of studying for the ministry?

Have you considered a life devoted to the Word of Jesus Christ?

**Elmer**

*(Stunned)* Golly.

*(During the following, Lulu enters again and quietly circulates, collecting coffee cups.)*

**Baines**

It's a grave question, I know. I appreciate your discomfiture. Take a moment to yourself. *(Silence. All eyes are on Elmer, who soon assumes a look of intent thoughtfulness. Pause. Lulu passes near them.)* Ah! the lovely bride.... Thank you, Lulu. Mr Gantry, my daughter Lulu. She and Mr Fislinger have recently announced their engagement. *(To her)* Mr Gantry is a candidate for the seminary.

**Lulu**

Oh, how wonderful.

**Elmer**

Yes I am, Miss Baines. *(An awkward recovery)*

Thinking about it, I mean. *(She smiles and passes on to stand by Eddie.)*

**Baines**

Mmm. The Lord can use big, strong men. Men who can be examples to others.

He has no use for mollycoddles.

*(Silence. Elmer is still rapt in apparent concentration.)*

Mmm. The dean of our seminary is prepared to offer you a full three-year scholarship.

*(Elmer springs to his feet, excited but unsure what to say.)*

**Eddie**

Something is stirring inside him!

**Elmer**

Sirs, I feel somethin' kinda stirrin' inside me.

*(Frank, unseen by the others, prompts with urgent hand signals that they should leave the room.)* Maybe if I could go and ... kinda pray by myself, it might help.

**Baines**

The Spirit is working within you. Stay, and let us all pray that God may call you.

*(Eddie and the men of the faculty fall to their knees, each joining his hands across the seat of his reversed chair and bowing his head.)*

**Elmer**

Sirs, somethin' is stirrin' inside me. And it says, oh yes I can hear it, it says, 'Go and kinda pray by yourself and ... and see what happens.'

The Others The spirit begins to move in him.

God calls him. Will he listen?

**Elmer**

*(Over)* It says, 'Go and kinda pray by yourself.'

**Baines**

*(Over)* Go, then. With prayer we'll besiege the throne of grace for you. Go, then.

**The Faculty**

Go, then. Go, then.

**Baines**

*(He kneels)* Brother Edward, will you lead us?

*(As Eddie begins, Elmer and Frank remain frozen.)*

*Lulu, who has remained sitting in a half-bowed attitude, looks demurely at Elmer. After a moment, Elmer and Frank quietly retreat to an adjacent room. Their recitative occurs simultaneously with the prayer led by Eddie. Eddie sings over the Faculty, pausing in silent meditation between his lines.)*

**Prayer and Recitative**

**The Faculty**

*(Under)* Open his heart. Teach him, teach him,  
Teach him Thy way, O Lord, lead him on. *(Repeat)*  
Open his heart and show him Thy way.  
Teach him to know you, Lord Jesus.

**Eddie**

*Dear Lord, open the heart of our brother Elmer Gantry. Yes, Lord! And, Lord, let him know the wondrous love that You have vouchsafed the world.*

**Elmer**

Lord! Did you get a load of that Lulu? What a nice, nice girl.

**Frank**

Hell-cat, you need a drink. Here, first-rate corn whiskey. I'm never without it.

**Elmer**

But, ooh that Fislinger! Oh, he's gonna get it!

**Frank**

Take it easy, Hell-cat.

**Eddie**

*Show Brother Elmer Thy way; Thy way, O Lord; teach him to know Thy way which is the only hope of man.*

**Frank**

*(As Elmer drinks)* What a bunch of yammers in there!

**Elmer**

Mm hmh, and Prexy Baines offering me a three-year scholarship!

**Frank**

And all that drool about big strong men.

**Elmer** *(Dramatically)* But what about...

**Both**

... his daughter!

**Elmer**

Beautiful.

**Frank**

Engaged to Eddie.

**Elmer**

There is no God.

**Frank**

I'm here to tell ya. *(They continue to drink.)*

**Eddie**

*Fill him with Your Holy Spirit, Lord.*

**Elmer**

Oh, that's better.

**Frank**

*(Drinks)* Much better.

**Elmer**

I'd probably make a pretty good preacher!  
*(Grandly)* What is Love? What is Love?

**Frank**

*(Mocking)* ...Lulu Baines

**Elmer**

Easy work... thousands of people listening to you. And you, up there, helping them to be happy.

**Frank**

Sure!

**Elmer**

And all those doe-eyed honeys like Lulu Baines sittin', looking up at you from the front row. And don't they give you a house for free? At the top, I bet you can make eight or ten thousand a year.

**Eddie**

*Lift the veil of worldliness from our brother Elmer, and oh! don't forget our brother, Frank.*

**Frank**

Have a drink, Hell-cat.

**Elmer**

Boy, it's worth thinking about. For you too, Frank! With your brains, you'd go right to the top. You could talk circles around those gazabos.

**Frank**

You can't be serious about this.

**Elmer**

How 'bout if I could get a scholarship for you, too?

**Frank**

No.

**Elmer**

Why not? What else would you do? Go practice law with your cousins in Toluca?  
Sounds like a high old time.

**Frank**

It's honest, at least.

**Elmer**

There's nothing dishonest about this.

**Frank**

Hell-cat. I'm with you on football, and drinking and the ladies. But I don't believe in joking about religion.

**Elmer**

Who's joking? Look, Frank. I've always believed in God. I was baptized at sixteen, member of the church. I might have sinned a little along the way...

**Frank**

Ha!

**Elmer**

*(Spoken, very oratorical)* Love, my friends, is the Morning and the Evening star.  
*(To Frank)* I'm sure to be a better preacher than that angleworm Eddie. And you're comin' with me!

**Frank**

No sir.

**Eddie**

*Teach him to know you, Lord.*

**Frank**

Forget it.

**Elmer**

*(After a pause, breezily)* O.K. Forget it. Let's go tell 'em to forget it.

**Frank**

O.K., Hell-cat. Wait. Peppermints, for our breath. *(He offers them. They both chew hurriedly.)*

**Elmer**

Let's go. Oh! Let me see your hands.  
(Without thinking, Frank holds out his hands. Elmer suddenly seizes them, forcing Frank to the ground.)

**Frank**

Oww!  
(Elmer falls to his knees alongside, keeping hold of Frank and screaming)

**Ensemble**

**Elmer**

Hallelujah, hallelujah, O thank you, Jesus!  
(Aside) Trust me, Frank.  
Hallelujah! (Aside) Trust me, trust me. (Aloud) Saved by grace!  
(Aside) Trust me, Frank. (Aloud) Hallelujah!  
(Eddie and the others have rushed to the door, where they stare in amazement at the scene before them.)

**Eddie, Elmer**

ELMER GANTRY SAVED! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!  
(Elmer and Frank are helped to their feet and guided back to the president's office.)

**All**

Hallelujah, hallelujah! O thank you, Jesus.  
Hallelujah, hallelujah! Thank you, Lord. (Repeat)  
He is convicted by grace!

**Eddie and Lulu**

He is!

**Elmer**

I am!

**All**

And of the Word, he has had experience.

**Eddie and Others**

Magnificent! Great praise!

**Eddie**

(Aside) But my, what a curious smell of peppermints!

**Eddie, Lulu and Baines**

My, what a curious smell of peppermints!  
(The following are sung simultaneously, until Elmer's solo)

**Lulu, Baines**

Magnificent! Magnificent!

**Elmer**

Hallelujah, hallelujah, O thank you, Jesus!  
(Aside) Trust me, Frank. (etc)

**Frank**

And that goes double for me! (Aside) What the devil have you done to us, Elmer?

**Elmer**

(Solo)  
God just opened my eyes to this wonderful ole world.  
He said, "Don't you wanna make people happy?"  
He said, "Don't you wanna LOVE everyone?"

**Baines and the Faculty**

The men God predestinates, He calls.  
The men whom He calls, He justifies.  
And the justified, He also glorifies;

They are elected and convicted by grace.

**All**

Magnificent! Magnificent! Magnificent!  
Magnificent! Great praise!

**Elmer**

Trust me, Frank. Trust me, Frank. (etc.)  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
(They all continue singing as Elmer and Frank exit triumphantly)

**Blackout**

**[3] Act I, Scene 3**

*Eighteen months later. A field on the outskirts of Grauten, MO. (Elmer and Frank are setting up for a typical camp meeting a wooden platform, several small tables strewn with pamphlets, a rough wooden bench for the old people. All around, neatly painted picket signs say 'Meeting Today at Noon', 'Will You Act Now?', 'Tomorrow May Be Too Late', and 'One Last Chance'. It is a bright summer's day; both men are in shirtsleeves and ties. After a moment, Lulu Baines runs in. She and Elmer embrace; then Elmer moves her to one side. Elmer leaps dramatically onto the wooden platform. Frank will join him to play a supporting role in the presentation.)*

**Aria**

**Elmer**

When you hear the truth do you know it?  
If you believe in a thing, will you show it?  
Say you're going along, day like today,  
Sun streaming bright down and you set in your ways.  
If you hear something new, can it turn you around?  
Can you be turned?  
When you hear the truth do you know it?  
If you believe in a thing, will you show it?  
Watch this  
(with Frank) Oh that first day  
Oh that's what I ask folks  
Oh that first day  
Day folks open up  
Turn around see for themselves Oh discover  
PEQUOT FARM IMPLEMENTS. That's Pequot farm implements.  
Some time ago, I was called to the bedside of a dying farmer.  
He said, "Elmer, I've been stubborn 'round the farm and foolish in my fields.  
My machinery all is rusted, and those bankers whom I trusted  
Are now threatening to take the place away."  
That very day, I got to work with the help of little John Junior,  
Exchanging each old-fashioned tool for a brand-new Pequot type.  
New spike-wheel coulters for his old, a new sidedresser good as gold  
And for a ploughshare, the Pequot Model Five.  
Well, pretty soon up comes his sorghum, twice a normal yield.  
From his little bedroom window, old John can see the wheat  
tow'ring head high in his field,  
His barley and his beets, a bumper crop of peas,  
I run tell him, "John, you're free and clear."  
And at that moment, he smiled at me and died.  
But his last words to me still are ringing in my ears.  
He said, "At last I've seen the truth, and the truth has set me free."  
(with Frank) Oh that first day  
Oh that's what folks tell me  
Oh that first day  
That day they listen to me. (Repeat)  
Day they turn around, question themselves Oh ask yourselves...  
When you climb in a boat will you row it?  
If you mean to play ball, will you throw it?

When you make no sense't all, will you stow it?  
Now I'm asking you all, do you know it?  
When you hear the truth do you know it?  
If you believe in a thing, will you show it?  
C'mon now  
(with Frank) Get some farm tools  
Oh that's what I tell folks  
World's best farm tools  
PEQUOT FARM IMPLEMENTS.  
Be back here tomorrow morning when I will discuss livestock and hog oiling.  
(The crowd applauds Elmer's speech. Lulu runs up to him; as they talk, he is distracted by some of his departing customers.)

**Elmer**  
Lulu, what did ya think...? – nice to see ya – what did ya think of my little sermon?

**Lulu**  
What if my father finds out?

**Elmer**  
Aw, it's good honest business (he waves goodbye to someone) and that's gotta be alright with the Lord.

**Lulu**  
What about Eddie?

**Elmer**  
Lulu, I'm doing all this for you. Just trying to get ahead, make some money, graduate school, then I'll be able to get a good church somewhere. You know how difficult it is for a preacher to get his first real church. We can't decide until then.

**Lulu**  
Decide!

**Elmer**  
(Sheepishly) We can't get married until then.

**Lulu**  
But you want to?

**Elmer**  
Sure.

**Lulu**  
Elmer Gantry!

**Elmer**  
Just think for a moment of the difficulties.

**Lulu**  
No, Elmer.

**Elmer**  
Gosh, you look so beautiful when you say that.  
(Stifling all argument, Elmer kisses her.)  
Tonight... Behind the chapel... eight o'clock. Go on.  
(She looks at him with tender reproach, but says nothing. She leaves, turning back to blow him a kiss.)

**Elmer**  
(to Frank) O.K!  
(During the following exchange, Frank and Elmer are involved in cleaning up the scene of the meeting. They store their tools in a large crate, place the chairs and tables nearby, cover all with a tarpaulin. Then they right themselves for their return to the seminary. They are practiced; they work quickly and efficiently.)

**Elmer**  
How 'bout my spiel [speel] on The Dying Farmer, Frank? Think I got 'em.

**Frank**  
(Angry) What about Lulu Baines? You didn't tell me.

**Elmer**  
Didn't I, Frank? (With great expansiveness) Oh yes, what a sweetheart! I'm just crazy about her!

**Frank**  
Don't give me that! We're breaking every rule in the Terwillinger code, risking our careers selling this junk...

**Elmer**  
How'd we do?

**Frank**  
Nine bucks... And the whole time, you're jazzing the president's daughter!  
What's gonna happen when he finds out?

**Elmer**  
Oh Frank, you worry too much. That's your problem. Worry, worry, worry. Stick around me, you'll get over it.

**Frank**  
Jerk.  
(Pause. They continue their work.)

**Elmer**  
What class have we got at three?

**Frank**  
Old Testament Hebrew.

**Elmer**  
Ugh! (Pause) All right. Go ahead.

**Frank**  
(Reciting in Hebrew as they continue righting themselves) Aron kodesh.

**Elmer**  
What?

**Frank**  
Aron kodesh. The holy ark. Oomi yicoom b'mcom kadisho.

**Elmer**  
(Pensive) Uh oh; problem, Frank. Problem. You going to hear that revival woman tonight — Sharon Falconer?  
(From now until the end of the scene, workers enter to set up Sharon's tent on other parts of the stage. Some of the elements left behind by Elmer and Frank will be incorporated into the scene to come.)

**Frank**  
Nope. I find that revival stuff a little moist.  
You?

**Elmer**  
That's the problem. Say it again...

**Frank**  
Oomi yicoom b'mcom kadisho.

**Elmer**

I thought I'd go. Get some preachin' ideas. So here's what you meet Lulu, back of the chapel, eight o'clock, stall her a couple of minutes. Be nice to her; talk me up; I won't be long.

**Frank**

No! She's your problem.

**Elmer**

Our problem, Frank. If she talks, she's our problem.  
(Pause)

**Frank**

Elmer, I take it back about the jerk. You are evil.

**Elmer**

Settled. Now, here we go "Oomimicom bicomakamisho" — book of Genesis one-two.

**Frank**

Elmer! Psalms, 24 "Or who shall stand in His holy place?"  
(*They depart, their voices trailing off.*)

**Elmer**

"Oomimicom bicomakamisho." Is that better?  
(*The transformation to the next scene continues during*)

**Blackout**

**[4] Act I, Scene 4**

*Later that evening, outside Sharon Falconer's revival tent on a vacant lot in Sautersville, Missouri.*

*(The scene encompasses part of the inside of a large revival tent, as well as the area outside the tent. The view into the tent can either be accomplished through a very wide 'realistic' opening into the tent, or by a more abstract 'cutaway' effect. In either case, the intention is that the tent seem very large, and that part of its interior remain invisible. As the scene begins, the sound of a choral hymn comes from within the tent. It will continue under the action of the scene. Those who have not been able to find seats inside stand just outside the tent-flap, craning their necks to see, and singing along. Occasionally someone pushes through them, entering or leaving. Outside the tent, a carnival atmosphere prevails. It is a grander, more chaotic version of the "meeting" held by Elmer and Frank. A revival worker stands near a large banner which reads 'Old Time Revival Tonight', and a sign saying 'Sister Sharon Falconer Speaks — All are welcome'. People mill around in groups, talking or singing along; children play; a vendor hawks refreshments. After a few moments, Elmer enters the scene.)*

**Hymn**

**Chorus**

Vessels of service, great and small,  
Vessels we wish to be,  
Filled with our Saviour's brimming Love,  
Serving Him tirelessly.  
Be like a vessel, rounded and true,  
Made by your Saviour's hand,  
Filled with devotion, ready now  
To serve Him throughout the land.  
Vessels of mercy He prepared,  
Filled with His own dear blood.  
Now let us serve Him, never emerging,  
From that redeeming flood.  
Serve Him in gladness, serve Him in joy,  
Serve Him in faith and love;  
'Til from this earth we part at last,  
To serve Him in Heaven above.  
Vessels of wrath He turned aside,

Willing that we might live;  
With His last breath on that old cross,  
He did our sins forgive.  
Joyfully singing, take up your burden  
Firm in your faith confessed.  
Every service for Jesus Christ  
By Jesus Christ is blessed.  
Vessels abounding, trust complete,  
Faith such that all may see;  
Jesus Himself did choose this lot,  
A suffering servant He.  
(*The following lines are sung simultaneously with the hymn, and overlapping each other*)

**Vendor**

O.K. Ice cream. I got ice cream. O.K. I got ice cream. O.K. O.K. Ice cream.  
And lemonade — just made, too. O.K.

**Revival Worker**

Come on to the big revival. Come on. Come and hear the straight gospel from Sister Sharon. Come and hear and be changed forever. One night. One night only. First, last and only night.

**Child near the tent**

Where is she, Daddy? I can't see.  
(*A revival singer comes out of the tent.*)

**Revival Singer**

(To the crowd) Oh let me tell you what  
He did for me...

**Revival Worker**

(To the crowd)  
Listen to the man.  
(He goes in.)

**Revival Singer**

(*Singing out above the crowd*)  
"Vessels of mercy He prepared, and He filled them with His own blood, His own dear blood. Now let us serve Him, never emerging from that redeeming flood. And we'll serve Him in gladness..."  
(*etc.*)

**Crowd near the tent**

She's coming over! Here she comes. Is that her, daddy? Lord have mercy. Oh, Lord, yes. Oh, mercy. Yes, Sharon. Yes, Sharon. Is that her?  
(*From within the tent, Sharon Falconer's voice is heard, coming out over the hymn. The hubbub outside continues, but Elmer starts to listen.*)

**Aria**

**Sharon**

(*beginning o.s., growing louder as she approaches the tent opening*)  
Oh...It's joy, isn't it? A joy so pure... A joy so pure...  
Can you feel it? Friends outside the tent... Can you feel a little of that joy now? That's the Lord... That's the Lord...  
(*She is now visible at the tent opening. Her right hand is raised, palm forward, her hair is streaming and her face is flushed, perspiring. She wears a straight white robe tied with a ruby-colored cinch; its wide, slashed sleeves fall away from her bare arms. The congregants sense that she is about to address them. They stop the hymn.*)  
The sun embraces the stony earth,  
Sweet rain caresses the land,  
And pure is the joy that cradles the heart  
Touched by Thee, touched by Thee.

No wonder the angels sing to each other.  
(Some congregants are kneeling, heads bowed. Sharon slowly advances down this line of penitents, bestowing a silent or a whispered blessing.)

**The crowd**

Amen.  
(Elmer goes down on his knees directly in Sharon's path and ostentatiously resumes the hymn. The chorus joins him.)

**Elmer and crowd**

Joyfully singing, take up your burden,  
Firm in your faith confessed;  
Every service for Jesus Christ  
By Jesus Christ is blessed. Amen.

**Sharon**

Amen. (She navigates around Elmer.)

**Elmer**

Amen, Sister, amen.

**Aria**

A moment ago, a thought passed through me.  
What was it? *Never the same again...*  
I stood on this spot, same as now...  
But different.  
Was it her?  
She was here; she left; I heard what she said;  
What about it?  
I've said the same stuff myself.  
Was it me?  
Did I imagine the thing that I heard?  
Oh, let me hear it once more. What was it?  
*Never the same again...*  
(As a hymn is sung for the altar call, people stand and approach the mourner's benches — singly and in groups — to kneel and pray. Some, emotionally overcome, are helped up to the mourner's benches by Sister Sharon, who may whisper a few words of encouragement or bestow a blessing on them. Elmer hangs back along the edge of the tent, transfixed.)

**Hymn**

**Gospel Quartet**

Softly, through the darkest night of fear, Jesus is calling;  
Bringing comfort to the far and near, calling to thee.  
Ever strength'ning, ever holding fast, ever abiding  
He whispers to the straying soul at last, "Come now to me."  
And if you heed Him,  
Trust and cleave to Him,  
And call Him, "Jesus LORD!"  
Then will He open His hand.  
In faith He'll lead you on.  
His blood was ransom for Man.  
Listen for Jesus. Listen for His call.  
(The altar call has concluded with several dozen people kneeling at the mourners' benches. There is silence. Sharon begins to sing with a mystical quiet, as if coming out of a trance. The crowd will greet her first utterances with responses of "Hallelujah", "Praise God", etc. Then, all will rise up and join her in song.)

**Sharon**

Jesus could be coming tonight.  
He could split those eastern skies tonight;  
Darken the stars, cover Heaven.  
Ezekiel, Oh I heard Ezekiel, this very day,  
Said Jesus will darken the stars, said He'll cover Heaven.  
Turn water to wormwood.  
Said He could lift us up on a mighty wind,

Show us the last things and take us out the way we come in.

**Chorus, Sharon**

A stone, a stone, a pure white stone;  
And in that stone a new name written.  
A new name for the world.  
A stone, a stone, a pure white stone;  
Show us the last things and take us out the way we come in!  
A rainbow, a rainbow, a rainbow round His throne;  
A rainbow round His throne.  
Circled 'round the throne of the Lamb.  
A rainbow, a rainbow, a rainbow 'round His throne;  
Show us the last things and take us out the way we come in!  
My Lord's throne.  
Oh redeem us now from a captive world.  
A sword, a sword, a two-edge sword;  
Cuttin' sin both left and right.  
Out of his mouth a two-edge sword.  
A sword, a sword, a two-edge sword;  
Show us the last things and take us out the way we come in!  
A glittering sword.  
Under the sound of my voice.  
A stone  
— the last things;  
Precious stone...  
A rainbow  
— the last things;  
Bright rainbow...  
A two-edge sword  
—the last things;  
A two-edge sword...

**Sharon and All**

Take us out the way we come in!  
When the trumpet sounded for the seventh time,  
The Lamb stood on Mt Zion and with Him a hundred forty four thousand having their Father's name written in their foreheads.

**All, Sharon**

THE REDEEMED OF EARTH. Lord, oh redeem us now  
THE REDEEMED OF EARTH. From a captive world  
THE REDEEMED OF EARTH. The redeemed by  
Jesus Christ.  
(Repeat)  
(Lulu is heard calling from off-stage)

**Lulu**

Elmer...

**Elmer** Aw, Hell! not her...

(He races out, angrily. Lulu has entered with Frank in tow.)

**Quartet**

**Lulu**

Trouble is brewing.

**Frank**

All our dreams have failed.

**Lulu**

Trouble is brewing.

**Frank**

And your schemes have failed.

**Elmer**

What now?

**Lulu**

My love, it won't defeat us.

**Frank**

My friend, we must confess.

**Elmer**

She blabbed. She must have blabbed.

**Frank, Lulu**

Reveal the truth;

**Elmer**

I don't care anymore.

**Frank, Lulu**

Mend what is torn;

**Elmer**

I'm not made for a boring life.

**Frank, Lulu**

Return to us.

**Elmer**

I've got plans. I'm movin' on.

**Chorus**

*(off-stage) Made Himself humble for the world.*

**Sharon**

*(off-stage) Remember that as I leave you tonight.  
(Sharon appears at the tent entrance, wearing an overcoat and accompanied by several revival workers. She stops to observe the scene between Elmer, Lulu, and Frank.)*

**Frank, Lulu**

Return. *(They exit.)*

**Elmer**

I've got plans. I'm movin' on.  
Oh, Sister Falconer...  
Accept this praise from a fellow minister  
You sing beautifully.  
You preach flawlessly.  
I wondered, might you have a job for me?

**Sharon**

Tell me, Brother...

**Elmer**

Reverend Gantry! Elmer Gantry.

**Sharon**

Tell me, Brother, where's your Church?

**Elmer**

My church? My church is with you, Sister. I know my Bible; I can preach up a storm.  
For instance "What is Love...?"

**Sharon**

*(interrupting)* Brother, have you behaved in a loving way to your girlfriend?

**Elmer**

Girlfriend? She's not my...

**Sharon**

Brother, I caution you against lying.

**Elmer**

Now Sister Falconer, I have never...

**Sharon**

Never lied? That's splendid. You have my blessing, Brother.  
*(To all)* Goodbye, friends.  
*(To him)* Please excuse me; I must catch a train. *(She leaves with her assistants.)*  
*(The crowd leaves, streaming out from all exits of the tent and singing the last verse of the hymn. The vendors begin to pack up their wares. A few workers remain to close the tent, shut down the generator, etc. Oblivious to the scene around him, Elmer fumes over his treatment by Sharon.)*

**Chorus**

*(exiting) Vessels abounding, trust complete,  
Faith such that all may see;  
Jesus Himself did choose this lot,  
A suffering servant He.*

**Elmer**

*(simultaneously)*

**Recit., Aria**

Of course, I mean nothing to her.  
"Catch a train."  
Some jerk in a town she's leaving.  
"Never lied."  
Kicked out of school...  
Now what?  
My foot!  
*(This last line he has shouted after her. The crowd has left. The lights of the tent are turned off. Elmer will be alone in the moonlight.)*  
I'll show you.  
"Where's your church?"  
I'll see you again.  
I'll catch up with you, Sister-so-pure!  
Damn you! Damn You!  
You're not the only one with holy thoughts!  
I've had them!  
There's still something pure in me.  
I'll show you one day!  
She wouldn't look, barely looked at me.  
Why, what is it? — my clothes?  
Is my suit-coat too cheap? Are the elbows worn down?  
Anybody got any objection to my clothes?  
*(He rips off his jacket and throws it to the ground)*  
Is this "splendid"? Is this "splendid", damn you? Is this "splendid"?  
*(Overcome by a revelation, he is suddenly quiet.)*  
Oh dear God.  
She is the sign to me.  
She the signal-lamp and the path shining for me.  
In that woman's face, You turned Your face to me.  
And her scorn for me was not hers alone.  
It was Yours — Your attack, Your grab at my soul.  
She was Your knife that opened me down to the bone.  
Now pour Your words in at the gaping hole.  
There! Yes! There! There!  
God sings, He howls words in my brain.  
They blaze, flaming tongues in the nighttime air,  
Saying "Never the same. Never the same again, Elmer Gantry,  
Never the same again."

**Blackout**

**[5] Act I, Scene 5**

*The Elks Lodge meeting room, Zenith, Missouri. 1911.  
(As the curtain rises, Sharon Falconer is standing at an upstage podium concluding a fiery address to the members of the Lodge,*

who sit ringing the stage facing her. They wear business suits and headgear topped with antlers, as befits their order. The Elks Lodge is a masculine shrine, all dark woods, brass and leather.

**Rev Baines**

(sits in a chair near the podium.)

**Recitative and Arietta**

**Sharon**

And God said, "Build me a tabernacle!"

(As she returns to her empty seat near Baines, the Elks applaud without enthusiasm. Baines does not applaud at all. T.J. Rigg, the head Elk, rises, goes to the podium, recites the ritual invocation.)

**T.J.**

Alces, alces, Benny Voley.

**Elks**

Aaah - WEEEEEE - Oh.

**T.J.**

Accepti this orati meo.

**Elks**

Say now what you mean to say-o.

**T.J.**

A big red-blooded thank you to Sister Falconer for her interesting proposal. And now with a different view we'll hear from the Reverend Arthur Baines, president of our dandy Terwillinger College and Seminary in nearby Cato ...

**T.J., Elks**

Mis - sou - RAA - ah. ["Missouri"]

**T.J.**

Yes, and a real go-ahead He-man of the cloth he is. Welcome, booster Baines.

**Elks**

Hummina hummina hummina.  
(Baines rises to the podium. He has aged since we last saw him, and his manner has become even fustier – if that is possible.)

**Baines**

Mmm. Thank you. With all due respect to our last charming speaker  
How well we know these revivalist clowns  
Whose gaudy tents disfigure our towns!  
They gull the guileless, they fleece our flocks,  
They dun the dumbest, and the Devil mocks.  
What sensual pageants they serve the unwitting!  
What feverish rites they encourage as fitting!  
These sideshow figures and carnival kinds  
Must blithely imagine we're out of our minds.  
To line their own pockets, they ask for our trust;  
I submit that this woman of hucksters is just —  
— a more graceful exemplum.  
I ask that you soundly reject her proposal.  
(The Elks applaud warmly as Baines takes his seat and T.J. returns to the podium.)

**Recitative**

**T.J.**

A corking good speech, chock-full of vocabulary and pep, by a very Regular Guy.  
Nit?

**Elks**

Hummina hummina.

**T.J.**

(Gavelling) Let us vote. (As fast as possible) In the matter of whether the benevolent order shall support and further the plans of Miss Sharon Falconer to build a grand tabernacle in ZENITH one year from now. And whether the order shall advance MONIES and organize civic events to promote said tabernacle. (Pause) All opposed say nay.

**Elks**

Nay.

**T.J.**

All in favor, yea. (There is silence, but before T.J. can gavel, Elmer, who has been sitting with his back to the audience in a row of Elks, rises.)

**Elmer**

Will the brothers recognize me?

**Elks**

Hummina hummina.

**T.J.**

(As Elmer moves to the podium) Brother Gantry, junior vice-president of the Pequot Farm Company.

**Elmer**

Alces, alces, Benny Voley.

**Elks**

Aaah - WEEEEEE - Oh.

**Elmer**

Accepti this orati meo.

**Elks**

Say now what you mean to say-o.

**Elmer**

(Chiding) Gentlemen, gentlemen. Miss F. has told us the kind of joyful business story we should love to hear. (He takes some documents from her.) Look here. She shows "contributed income from civic sources – 2,620 dollars." Look a little further. "Fully validated permanent conversions – 9,415." My friends now that's 25 cents per errant sinner. Sounds to me like something we love...

**Elmer, Elks**

Bu - LAAAACK liink! ["Black ink"]

**Elmer**

Four souls to the dollar, lent to the Lord as collateral on the well-balanced Christian go-ahead future of our city...

**Elmer, Elks**

Zip zip Zenith.

**Elmer**

What Bolsheviki cheapskate won't lend to the Lord at that rate of return?  
For lending is Charity, Charity Love, and...  
What is Love?  
It is the builder of every home.

**Elks**

Hummina.

**Elmer**

It is the paver of every highway.

**Elks**

Hummina hummina.

**Elmer**

The improver of every vacant lot.

**Elks**

Hummina hummina hummina.

**Elmer**

Can we vote again?

**T.J.**

(*Rising*) All opposed nay.

**A few Elks**

Nay.

**T.J.**

All in favor, yea.

**Elks**

Yea!

**T.J.**

(*Gavelling*) Motion passes. Thank you to our guests. (*To the Elks*) O.K., you wombats! Let's get together on the Zenith Booster Song.

**Choral Song**

**T.J., Elks**

Here is the song we love the best  
Pointing with pride to our S-U-C-C-E-S-S,  
Pointing with pride to the way we get things done,  
Ignoring the cries of the "R-U kidding?" pessimists,  
We are the guys who never walk when they can run.  
Oh we zoom zoom for Zenith, our zip zip city.  
Make room for Zenith, with zeal, zap and zowie!  
Zinovievsk and Zanzibar and Zurich may be twee,  
But you'll never find a zingier place than the zip zip city.  
Zoom zoom zip zip (*etc.*)  
(*They continue to sing. Sharon, preparing to leave, goes up to Elmer. The Reverend Baines looks on coldly.*)

**Baines**

The Gantrys of the world sustain the Falconers.  
That is a boost that no one needs. (*Repeat*)

**Elks**

You could zig-zag your zeppelin across the  
Zuiderzee,  
But you'll never find a zingier place —  
A cleaner place, a friendlier place, a pleasanter place —

**T.J.**

With a better tax base!

**Elks**

— than the Zip Zip Zip City.

**Blackout**

**[6] Act I, Scene 6**

*Six months later. The study in the home of Rev Edward and Mrs Lulu Fislinger.*

(*It is late afternoon. Eddie should be preparing his week's sermon. Instead, he is browsing through the newspaper, drinking tea. Lulu calls to him from a distant room.*)

**Lulu**

Sweetheart? (*Pause*) Eddie? What are you doing?

**Eddie**

(*Not loud enough for her to possibly hear him*)  
Working on my sermon.

**Lulu**

(*Closer*) Eddie? (*A moment later, there is a light knock and she enters.*) Sweetheart...?

**Eddie**

(*Not acknowledging her*) Working on my sermon.

**Lulu**

Oh, my precious man. (*She hugs him, evoking little response.*) I'm going out for a while. (*Pause, then as a goodbye*) Sweetheart. (*When she has left he begins absent-mindedly to formulate his sermon while still perusing the paper.*)

**Aria**

**Eddie**

What is Love? It is the ...  
What is Love?  
What, my brethren, is Love?  
It is the Eveni... the Morning and the Evening star,  
It shines upon the cradle of the babe,  
And casts its radiance upon the quiet tomb.  
(*He becomes distracted by the newspaper*)  
It is the air and ... and the light of... every heart...  
(*reading*) "A grand outpouring of the spirit is expected again in Paris County when Sister Sharon Falconer returns for an uplifting week of Christian revival. Assisted by the Reverend Mr Elmer Gantry, Sister Sharon has announced that all offerings to her mission will go towards construction of a grand tabernacle in Zenith, Missouri for the glory of God..." (*He flings the paper down.*) 'Grand' tabernacle... the 'Reverend' Mr Gantry...  
(*laughing*) Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.  
You do test your servants. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.  
You surely test your servants, Lord.  
Ha ha ha ha ha.  
(*Trying to put thoughts of Elmer behind him, he resumes his sermon*)  
What is Love?  
It is the Morning and the Evening star,  
It shines upon the cradle of the *swindler bully!* babe,  
And casts its radiance upon the quiet *vermin lickspittle rutting lecherous ape!*  
It is the air and the *bastard!* light of every heart;  
Dear Lord, may it be Thy will to crush Elmer Gantry utterly!  
Turn him to dung!  
Let dogs eat him in the street for the sake of Thy great name.  
(*laughing*) Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.  
You do test your servants. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. You surely test your servants, Lord.  
Ha ha ha ha ha.  
Gantry... Love .... Love... Gantry;  
They should never share a sentence.  
Love is what I offered.  
Love he repaid with villainy.  
I'll show him grimmer stuff.  
Love can't endure all things;  
Rage is now my portion.  
Eddie... Rage .... Rage... Eddie.

*(He launches into his sermon again with gleeful malice)*  
What is Rage?  
What is Rage?  
What, my brethren, is Rage?  
It is the waking and the dreaming thought,  
It shines upon the happy home of Eddie and his wife,  
And casts its radiance on every mention of that *otiose*  
*backstabbing pustulent toad!*  
It is the blood and bloody sinew of my heart.  
Dear Lord, may it be Thy will to crush Elmer Gantry utterly!  
Burn his tent! Kill his whore!  
Let the stink of his corpse rise at Your trumpet blast!  
*(laughing)* Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Oh dear me, ha ha, what am I  
saying?  
Ha ha ha ha.  
You do test your servants. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.  
You surely test your servants, Lord.  
Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.

**Blackout**

**End of Act I**

**CD 2**

**[2] Act II, Scene 1**

*Sharon's suite of rooms, The Antlers Hotel, Lincoln, Nebraska. Summer, 1912.*  
*(The living room has one door, u.s., connecting to Sharon's bedroom and another, s.l., leading into the hotel hallway. The room is elegantly furnished—obviously the best which the town has to offer—and filled with a profusion of flowers standing in vases. It is late evening; the room is empty. Elmer knocks on the door, opens it a crack, peers around, then enters bearing a huge tray with a silver cover. A sheaf of papers is tucked under his arm.)*

**Duet**

**Elmer**

Knock, knock. Here I am with the goods. All the figures from tonight and the week to date.

**Sharon**

*(From the other room)* Elmer, I'm blind tired.  
Can't it wait? Can't it wait?

**Elmer**

Grand Tabernacle offerings — take a guess.  
Two-oh-nine. And freewill, fiftyeight.  
Just relax, put your feet up.

**Sharon**

Elmer, really... *(As she enters, tying on a dressing gown.)*

**Elmer**

I predict eight-fifty clear.

**Sharon**

That's wonderful. I must say goodnight.

**Elmer**

Ta-dah... sandwiches! *(Flourishing the tray cover.)*

**Sharon**

Aren't you a dear?  
*(Pause. She eats a sandwich hungrily. He sits, preparing for a business meeting.)*

**Elmer**

Oh! The hymns for tomorrow. Let's see... *(He consults his notes.)*

**Sharon**

Let's not.

**Elmer**

First 'Follow On', then 'Sunrise', then 'Verily' sung by the kid...

**Sharon**

Very good.

**Elmer**

Skipping 'He is Mine', adding 'Just in Time' after 'Hold the Line' — did I mention 'Sunrise'?

**Sharon**

You did.  
*(Pause. She makes an obvious move to the door. He follows.)*

**Elmer**

Sharon...?

**Sharon**

Goodnight, Elmer.

**Elmer**

Goodnight. *(Brief pause; not leaving.)*  
Sharon...? Do you like me?

**Sharon**

Yes.

**Elmer**

How much?

**Sharon**

Not very much. I can't like anyone very much.

**Elmer**

You could get to like me, though.

**Sharon**

It is possible. Good night.

**Elmer**

Sleep tight. I'll go. *(Pause.)* Sharon...? Can I stay and chat?

**Sharon**

You could answer that. Now please. Your room is down the hall.

**Elmer**

I could tuck you in.

**Sharon**

You've been very good. Try to keep it up.

**Elmer**

Can't I get you anything?

**Sharon**

Not at all!  
*(A moment's pause of indecision. Then he makes to leave.)*

**Elmer**

Well, alright then. Well, goodnight then.  
*(Suddenly rapturous, he races to the window)*  
And what a thrilling night it is!  
The moon full and a fierce wind blowing!  
A perfect night for romance...

**Sharon**

*(Sweetly)* Elmer, weren't you going?

**Elmer**

Oh, of course. Sweet dreams, if you're sure there's nothing more.

**Sharon**

I am sure. Thanks for asking. *(Pause.)* ... The door...?  
*(She accompanies him to the door. At the last moment, he breaks away and begins a vigorous inspection of the room.)*

**Elmer**

Gosh, your flowers...

**Sharon**

Thriving.

**Elmer**

Where's your wardrobe?

**Sharon**

Arriving.

**Elmer**

Those pillows...

**Sharon**

They're perfect.

**Elmer**

I could fluff 'em.

**Sharon**

Not worth it.

**Elmer**

The heat!

**Sharon**

...is hot.

**Elmer**

Too hot!

**Sharon**

No, it's not.

**Elmer**

No, it's chilly.

**Sharon**

No, it's right.

**Elmer**

Don't be silly...

**Sharon**

Say goodnight.  
*(She has him firmly by the arm, leading him to the door. He complies; but with his free arm he seizes a Bible from the sideboard.)*

**Elmer**

Oh, Sharon, one last question; I know it's late...

**Sharon**

*(Singsong)*  
Goodnight.

**Elmer**

But I'm puzzled by Matthew twenty eight.  
*(Pause.)* ...I know; goodnight.

**Sharon**

Goodnight, Elmer.  
*(He leaves. She shuts the door behind him and turns toward her bedroom. Then he bursts back in through the door. She gives a scream of surprise.)*

**Recit. and Duet**

**Elmer**

No! I won't go. Let me tell you the truth!  
You've made me crazy for you. Do you hear every word?  
Except for my mother, you're the only woman I've ever adored.  
I love you! Hear me.  
Oh Sharon! Sharon, you've changed me.  
Half-baked; that's what I was.  
And just too stupid to know it.  
Until you came to show me — how can I say it? — you showed me my soul.  
Yeah, my soul. My poor, dingy soul.  
My soul sound asleep 'til you woke it.  
In a silence undisturbed 'til you broke it.  
Now you — so achingly pure —  
Chance to look in my eyes and I'm sure,  
I feel my soul strain at its shackles, trying to rush from me.  
Oh had I wings, Sharon.  
Oh had I wings I would fly to you.

**Sharon**

And be at rest?

**Elmer**

That's right. And be at rest.

**Sharon**

No rest for me. There's none for me, Elmer.  
For I am given to the Lord.  
Devotion binds me by a silver cord.  
And I — whether cursed or blessed —  
I can't be hurried or pressed,  
I am! I'll decide when the Lord wants you to come to me.  
*(In her fury, she has overturned a chair. She rights it now, regaining her composure.)*  
I'm different. I'm not like your other women.  
My kiss could be simple homespun,  
Or a terribly passionate one;  
And God, in an act of grace,  
Will all sin from that kiss erase.  
He sanctifies me that I may give my life to Him.  
My fondest hope, Elmer,  
My fondest hope is to serve him ever.

**Elmer**

With a perfect heart?

**Sharon**

That's right. With a perfect heart.

**Elmer**

As God requires...

**Sharon**

Yes. A perfect heart.

**Elmer**

As God requires, we can both submit.  
I to you, you to Him.  
*(The following pairs of lines are sung simultaneously)*

**Sharon**

He sanctifies me that I may give my life to Him.

**Elmer**

Oh had I wings, Sharon.

**Elmer**

I feel my soul strain at its shackles, trying to rush from me.

**Sharon**

My fondest hope, Elmer.

**Sharon**

My fondest hope... is to serve Him... with a perfect heart.

**Elmer**

... As God requires... Oh Sharon... we can both submit... I to you,

**Sharon**

... with a perfect heart... to serve Him ever.

**Elmer**

you to Him... with perfect hearts... each to the other, both to Him.

**Sharon**

He sanctifies me that I may give my life to Him...

**Elmer**

I feel my soul strain at its shackles, trying to rush from me...

**Sharon**

I feel my soul strain at its shackles, trying to rush from me...

**Elmer**

He'll sanctify me that I may give my life to you...

**Sharon**

My fondest hope, my fondest hope...

**Elmer**

Oh had I wings, oh had I wings...

**Sharon**

Is to serve Him... to serve Him... with a perfect heart

**Elmer**

... I would fly to you... as God requires... we can both submit...

**Sharon**

with a perfect heart... to serve Him... to serve Him

**Elmer**

with perfect hearts... each to the other... both to Him

**Sharon**

... ever.

**Elmer**

... both to Him.

**Elmer**

And be at rest? *(Pause. They kiss.)*

**Sharon**

That's right. And be at rest.

**Slow Fade**

**[3] Act II, Scene 2**

*Six months later. The site of The Waters of Jordan  
Tabernacle, Zenith, Missouri.*

*(A revival worker (in uniform) is acting as a Tour Guide, leading a group of tourists through the construction site. This group includes Rev Baines and Mrs Baines, Eddie, and Lulu who will later sing as 'Quartet 2.' Meanwhile, a group of female revival workers is marching on and off-stage, practicing drills. Frank Shallard stands to one side, observing.)*

**Choral Scene**

**Women**

*(Spoken, from off-stage)* Left, left; left, right, left. *(Repeat, fading out.)*

**Tour Guide**

*(Spoken)* This way please. *(Sung)* And God ordered Sister Sharon to take over the old Opera House of Zenith and on this site – quickly, please – to build a Grand Tabernacle. Directly behind us, up there, will rise a magnificent cross of a thousand electric lights! *(She hustles the group of tourists – including Quartet 2 – off-stage as a group of female revival workers enters from off-stage, led by Elmer. They are dressed in uniforms, and they enter marching in ranks. Elmer separates himself from the group and they go through their drills for him.)*

**Women**

Left, left; left, right, left.  
We are soldiers fighting on the front line,  
We are sailors throwing out the lifeline,  
We are umpires spotting from the sideline,  
If we come through, everything will go fine.

**Elmer**

O.K. Here we go...  
I'm reachin' in my pocket when the plate comes around,  
I got a sheepish look when I tell you what I found,  
I say, "Excuse me, Miss, I'm in kind of a stew.  
I've only got a five, but I'll sure give you two."  
What do you do?

**Women**

We give you three dollars back.

**Elmer**

Wrong.  
Take the five bills and smile to the gills, and this is what you say  
"In the marts of men all shady deals with ease you can arrange,  
But Heaven is not a banking house and the Holy Ghost doesn't  
make change."

**Women**

Heaven is not a banking house and the Holy  
Ghost doesn't make change.  
We are soldiers fighting on the front line,  
We are sailors throwing out the lifeline,  
We are umpires spotting from the sideline,  
If we come through, everything will go fine.  
*(Sharon has entered to oversee details of the preparations. She moves over to quiz the women.)*

**Sharon**

All right, girls...  
Here's a dear old thing in a homemade smock,  
And the Spirit's going through her so her knees begin to knock.  
Pretty soon she's shakin' and she falls on her back,  
And she's kickin' up a storm 'til her bones are like to crack.  
What's your tack?

**Women**

We ask her kindly to refrain.

**Sharon**

Wrong.  
Lead her down the aisle with a sympathetic smile,  
Let her writhe and rage at the side of the stage,  
Just remember when she's hollering in Japanese or French,  
There's a twelve-minute limit at the mourner's bench.

**Women**

Remember when she's hollering in Japanese or French,  
There's a twelve-minute limit at the mourner's bench.

**Elmer**

With Jesus...!

**Women**

With Jesus our Saviour we shall prevail,  
By lending strong hands and spirits hale.  
We are soldiers fighting on the front line,  
If we come through, everything will go fine.  
(*Sharon leaves to oversee other work. The women file off in formation. All around, the work of building the tabernacle continues.*)

**Recitative**

**Frank**

Welcome to Zenith.

**Elmer**

I heard you were here, Frankibus. Great to see ya!

**Frank**

My church is a few blocks from here. Can I stop by sometime?  
We'll catch up on things.

**Elmer**

Love to. Next week?

**Frank**

Perfect.

**Elmer**

(*Looking around*) So, what do you think? Not bad for a seminary dropout.

**Frank**

Listen, Elmer. I'm glad you're getting on, but I wonder about all this soldier-sailor-money stuff.  
(*T.J. Rigg enters. He is followed by two Elks in full regalia who between them carry a very large rectangle of cardboard. A reporter and a press photographer are part of their entourage. T.J. is leading Sharon by the hand.*)

**T.J.**

Looky who I found! (*Spoken*) C'mon boys!

**Elmer**

Here's T.J.!  
(*They perform the ritual Elks greeting.*)

**Elmer, T.J.**

Aah - WEEEEEE - Oh.

**T.J.**

Elmer Gantry — speak of the devil.

**Quartet 2**

(*Aside*) Speak of the devil!

**Sharon**

T.J. says he has some joyful news.

**T.J.**

And how... Sixty thou!  
(*The Elks turn the cardboard around to reveal a huge check for \$60,000 made out to "Falconer Ministries." T.J. poses with Sharon and Elmer as the photographer takes their picture.*)  
(*The following groups of lines are sung simultaneously*)

**Elmer**

Thatsa lot of mazuma.

**Sharon**

"I have seen thy patience."

**T.J.**

... And we'll indemnify it.

**Elmer**

Thatsa lot of mazuma.

**Sharon**

"I have heard thy prayers."

**T.J.**

... And we'll publicize it.

**Frank**

(*To Elmer*) Don't get carried away, old pal.  
People trust you.

**Elmer** Thatsa lot of mazuma.

**Sharon**

"I will make thee to walk upon high places."

**T.J.**

We will beautify it and advertise it.

**Frank**

Don't get carried away.

**Reporter**

(*Spoken*) Mr Gantry, what do you say to those critics who fear that this tabernacle will commercialize the Christian faith?

**Eddie**

(*a soft aside*) Amen.

**Elmer**

I don't say anything. Jesus said it a whole lot better than I can.  
Truly...  
(*Elmer, Sharon, Frank and T.J. sing as Quartet 1.*)

**Octet**

**Elmer**

New wine has to go in new bottles, not in old.  
Modern life affects the way the story's told.  
Times must change, and that's why Jesus said,  
"Old bottles cannot hold this wine."

**Sharon**

We will shout the gospel to the deaf, dance it for the dim.  
Be a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men.

**Elmer**

We have to light the gospel in electric lights, speed it out on trains,  
Sing it on the radio, drop it out of planes.

**Frank**

(*aside*) He's losing his bearings while counting his gains.

**Qt 1**

New wine has to go in new bottles, not in old.  
Modern life affects the way the story's told.  
Times must change, and that's why Jesus said,  
"Old bottles cannot hold this wine."  
(Eddie, Lulu, Rev Baines *and* Mrs Baines *sing as Quartet 2.*)

**Qt 2**

Here we are, sheep in the midst of wolves.  
Let's be wise as serpents, harmless as doves.

**All**

New wine has to go in new bottles, not in old. (*etc.*)

**Baines and Eddie**

Their wine is from the vine of  
Sodom, their grapes are gall.  
The old-time Hell will swallow them all.  
They're the moneychangers and Pharisees of whom  
Jesus said,  
"Old bottles cannot hold this wine."

**Eddie and Qt 2**

We have to save the gospel from hypocrites, keep it in our care.  
Be not prey to Satan's ruse, fall not in his snare.

**Lulu**

(*aside, regarding Sharon and Elmer*) Look at that hussy returning  
his stare!

**Elmer**

We have to pitch the gospel in magazines, print it up in Braille,  
Send it out in catalogs that offer it by mail.

**Frank**

(*aside*) But it goes down in worth when it goes up for sale.

**Qt 2**

Their wine is from the vine of Sodom, (*etc.*)

**Frank**

"Stand still," the prophet said. "Stand still  
And see salvation from the Lord."  
If there's truth to being saved,  
I'm sure it's a quiet working, a private urging,  
And our meddling's in the way.

**Lulu**

(*aside*) What are they doing at night, if they're so lovey-dovey by  
day?

**Qt 1**

We will shout the gospel to the deaf, dance it for the dim.  
Be a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men.

**Qt 2**

If we hold the gospel unsullied and pristine,  
The world will know those everlasting arms on which to lean.

**Lulu**

(*aside*) They're prancing around like the king and the queen.

**All**

New wine / Their wine (*etc.*)

**All**

Stand still, stand still and see salvation from the Lord.  
We have to sing the gospel, shout the gospel, save the gospel,  
keep the gospel, hold and protect the gospel, dance the gospel,  
light the gospel, speed the gospel, pitch the gospel, print the  
gospel, send the gospel.  
TRULY...

**Frank**

(*under*) If there's truth to being saved, I'm sure  
it's a quiet working!

**Qt 1**

New wine has to go in new bottles (*etc.*)

**Qt 2**

Their wine is from the vine of Sodom (*etc.*)

**Qt 1**

Times must change. Times must change. (*etc.*)

**Qt 2**

Moneychangers and Pharisees; moneychangers and Pharisees.  
(*etc.*)

**All**

Times must change, must change, must change;  
And that's why Jesus said,  
He said, "Your old bottles cannot hold this wine." (*etc.*)  
(*The female revival workers march across the stage.*)

**Women**

We are soldiers fighting on the front line,  
We are sailors throwing out the lifeline,  
We are umpires spotting from the sideline,  
If we come through, everything will go fine.

**All**

"Old bottles cannot hold this wine."

**Blackout**

**[4] Act II, Scene 3**

*That night. The same setting.  
(Work on the tabernacle has stopped for the night.  
Ladders and tools remain in view. Frank and Elmer have cleared  
space on one of the chorus risers. Around them are a few papers,  
two glasses, a half-empty bottle. On the other side of the stage  
there is a gaudy white piano (partially covered) which Frank will  
play. The two have been talking most of the evening. Elmer listens  
to Frank, says nothing.)*

**Frank**

Is belief a gift?  
How is conviction earned?

**Aria**

Fresh, boundless and unwavering faith —  
Can that be learned?  
I have craved belief.  
Lasting conviction I have sought.  
Yet doubts have flooded my heart,  
Casting conviction out.  
The faith I lack torments me  
When I hear the faithful sing.  
Singing of the friend they have in Jesus,  
Eyes closed, rocking to and fro,  
God's assurance surrounds them  
With a comfort I will never know.  
(*At the piano, he plays and sings*)

"What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear.  
What a privilege to carry  
Ev'rything to God in prayer."  
Is belief a gift?  
How is conviction earned?  
Fresh, boundless and unwavering faith —  
Can that be learned?  
I have craved belief.  
Lasting conviction I have sought.  
Yet doubts have flooded my heart,  
Casting conviction out.  
Days I put to useful purpose,  
Nights are hard to bear.  
For then, their singing comes to haunt me,  
Mocking me in all I do;  
An old song about their old friend, Jesus —  
Laughable, yet true.  
(At the piano again) "Can we find a friend so faithful?  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness..."  
But what if you can't pray?  
(He and Elmer regard each other silently as the lights slowly fade  
to black.)

**[5] Act II, Scene 4**

One year later. The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle.  
(As the lights come up, Elmer is heard talking on the telephone just  
off-stage. The telephone cord is long enough that he can come a  
few feet onto the stage while talking. Beneath the Grand Altar,  
amid cast-off clothes, a woman is lying with her back to the  
audience. We become aware that it is Lulu Baines.)

**Canzonetta and Trio**

**Elmer**  
(off-stage) ... 600 lightbulbs delivered tomorrow ... done! ...200  
gardenias... done! ... Me?...nervous?... no, everything's fine...  
please don't call me for an hour, I'm at work on my sermon... Bye,  
darling...bye bye.  
(He enters. To Lulu)  
Got a bedtime story for me?

**Lulu**  
Won't she tell you any?

**Elmer**  
Sharon's kinda high and mighty. You still understand ole Elmer.

**Lulu**  
Sure I do. (The phone rings.)

**Elmer**  
(Nervously) Oops. Stay right there.  
(Just as he leaves, Lulu hurries to a door, lets Eddie in.)

**Elmer**  
(off-stage) Hello? ... Darling!

**Lulu**  
(to Eddie) You're late.

**Elmer**  
Oh, yes, love you too...

**Eddie**  
Did I miss...?  
(She claps her hand over his mouth, pushes him back out the door,  
and resumes a seductive pose just as Elmer reappears.)

**Elmer**  
Uh huh. OK... Bye bye. (To Lulu) Go ahead.

**Lulu**  
A little man stands by a house;  
Red in the face, for his burden is heavy.  
A forest surrounds the house;  
And deep in the house, a magic stove,  
Delightfully warm and glowing.  
But the threshold is slick and the hallway snug.  
The man has to struggle and fuss and tug  
Until the walls clutch at him, tumble him in;  
And dashing his burden, he swoons by the stove.  
(The phone rings.)

**Elmer**  
Damn! Won't be long. (He goes to answer it.)

**Lulu**  
Sweetheart, don't worry.  
(She goes immediately to the door, lets in Eddie.)

**Elmer**  
(off-stage) Hello?

**Eddie**  
What did I miss?

**Lulu**  
Not much, but hurry.  
(Lulu tries to get Eddie into a hiding place. He caresses her.)

**Elmer**  
(off-stage) Oh, yes sir! No, it's fine.

**Eddie**  
Been a good girl?

**Lulu**  
No. Been very naughty.

**Eddie**  
Not a good girl? (He is trying to embrace her, resisting her efforts  
to get him to hide. She reciprocates his caresses, all the while  
trying to move him to a hiding place, and keeping an alert eye on  
Elmer.)

**Lulu**  
Very naughty. You'll see.

**Elmer**  
(off-stage) I promise you you'll have your money Wednesday...  
Yep. You have my word, sir.

**Eddie**  
We'll get him back for everything, won't we?  
(His embrace is now frankly sexual.)

**Lulu**  
Yes. (She leads him to a hiding place.)

**Elmer**  
(off-stage) Sounds good...

**Eddie**  
You naughty girl.

**Elmer**  
(off-stage) So long.

**Lulu**

Your naughtiest girl.  
*(Elmer hangs up and walks back in, just as Eddie conceals himself and Lulu returns to the altar. As they sing the Trio, Elmer stalks Lulu around the altar; they engage in love-play in various places; and Eddie sings from his vantage point, transfixed by what he sees.)*

**Elmer, Lulu, Eddie**

A little man stands by a house;  
Red in the face, for his burden is heavy.  
A forest surrounds the house;  
And deep in the house, a magic stove,  
Delightfully warm and glowing.  
But the threshold is slick and the hallway snug.  
The man has to struggle and fuss and tug  
Until the walls clutch at him, tumble him in;  
And dashing his burden, he swoons by the stove.

**Slow fade to black**

**[6] Act II, Scene 5**

*Later that evening. Same setting.  
(Sharon is kneeling in prayer.)*

**Sharon**

Dear God, look into my heart.  
I have been Your servant, Your follower, Your falconer.  
Let tomorrow be my offering to you.  
If I've been proud along the way, forgive me now.  
If I have angered men or divided them, forgive me now.  
Forgive me and your servant Elmer for all our words and deeds...  
*(A subtle lighting change, and Elmer is there, handing a book to her.)*

**Elmer**

Shara! this Eastern mystic stuff, THIS is the future. Have a look.  
*(She reads the title from the cover of the book)*

**Sharon**

The Seven Principles of New Thought Power with Key to World Religions by Dr Evans Binch.

**Elmer**

This Binch guy is onto something. Here's what we set up these New Thought seminars all over the place, we hire some teachers, pay 'em peanuts. And you and I retire to Ole Virginny while we keep on rakin' it in.  
*(She hands him back the book. He starts to go.)*  
"New Thought" Simple... "New Thought"... Beautiful!  
*(He is gone.)*

**Sharon**

Sometimes he can be so convincing.  
But God, look into my heart.  
Know that I have loved You, Your falconer.  
If this man can really love me, what should I do?  
*(The same lighting change, and Elmer appears again, rather bashfully holding out a ring box to her.)*  
No, Elmer.

**Elmer**

Please, Shara, Marry me, my darling. Let me take care of you.  
Even boss you around a little. *(He starts to go.)* Will you? Will you?  
Will you?  
*(She is alone again. Long pause.)*  
Yes, my wonderful cast-iron statue of ignorance. Yes, yes, yes.

**Slow fade to black**

**[7] Act II, Scene 6**

*One hour later. The same setting.  
(In the darkness left by the previous scene, a huge cross of electric lights flickers on, suspended in mid-air. After a few seconds, it turns off. A moment's pause in the darkness, then it flickers on again. T.J. Rigg is standing facing upstage, looking up at the cross.)*

**Recitative**

**T.J.**

Oh, Lordy.  
1st workman What d'ya think, Mr Rigg?

**T.J.**

Lord, that's beautiful.  
*(A 2nd workman is heard from off-stage.)*

**2nd workman**

Joe, I had to put it into the same circuit with the marquee and the dome lights.

**1st workman**

O.K.  
*(Pause. He stares at it appreciatively. To T.J.)*  
That's something, huh?

**T.J.**

I could just stare at that forever. *(To 2nd workman, off-stage)* Everything O.K. down there?

**2nd workman**

I'd look into a new generator before long.

**T.J.**

Will do, will do. *(To both)* Thank you, men.

**1st workman**

'Night, Mr Rigg. Best of luck tomorrow.

**T.J.**

Goodnight, fellas.  
*(Alone on stage, he turns to regard the cross again as the lights fade. In the darkness, it is again the only thing visible. After a moment, it is turned off.)*

**[8] Act II, Scene 7**

*The next evening. The Waters of Jordan Tabernacle.  
(The stage of the opera house has been transformed into a huge altar which rises up from the stage to disappear above the proscenium. It is a grand modern day retable, an intricate affair of carved scrollwork, all white with gilt overlays. A few feet above floor level, to serve as a backdrop to the baptismal font, it holds a huge panoramic trompe l'oeil painting of the River Jordan. Set above that, there is a small stage on which are displayed the many crutches, braces, wheelchairs, etc. that have been cast off during Sharon's previous services. Higher up, panels feature other devotional themes, an American flag, etc. Just in front of the backdrop there are white thronelike chairs for religious and civic dignitaries in attendance (T.J. Rigg, dressed in Elks finery, occupies one); interspersed between these chairs, flagpoles bearing the American flag, the Christian flag, and the Missouri state flag; to the sides, the robed choir stands, elevated on platforms and backed by huge white half-shells. The edges of the orchestra pit have been decorated with flounce-like protuberances resembling the open petals of a lily. The conductor wears white. Hanging high above the stage is the cross of electric lights, not yet turned on. Downstage is Sharon's central pulpit, a simple white affair currently festooned with flowers. In front of that, the*

*mourner's benches of unfinished wood that we saw in Act I. These benches are the only rustic element remaining in the scene.)*  
*(The lights come up suddenly and brightly onstage and throughout the house. The Revival Singer leads the choir and the congregants in a hymn.)*

#### Hymn

##### Revival Singer and Chorus

Oh! that my nightly watch would cease to be,  
So the dawn's glad promise may arise in me.  
And oh! that my anxious fears would cease to be,  
So a wondrous love may arise in me.  
For Jesus poured out his blood on Calvary  
That a wondrous love may arise in me.  
Arise in me! oh arise in me!  
He poured out His blood on Calvary.  
Arise in me! oh arise in me!  
To let a wondrous love arise in me.  
Oh! that the stormy gust would cease to be,  
So the sweet breath of calm may arise in me.  
And oh! that my sinning heart would cease to be,  
So an unblemished heart may arise in me.  
For Jesus has paid the debt and set us free,  
That an unblemished heart may arise in me.  
Arise in me! oh arise in me!  
Jesus paid the debt and set us free.  
Arise in me! oh arise in me!  
Let that unblemished heart arise in me.

##### Pantomime

*(As the orchestra plays, Elmer runs onto stage wearing an all-white football uniform with a golden cross on the back. He carries a Bible bound in the shape of a football, which he opens and displays for the crowd. A revival worker brings an older minister (in clerical collar) up from the audience. The crowd chants)*

##### Chorus

HAL, HAL, HALLELUJAH!

*(Elmer gives the minister the football, indicates that he is to snap it to him. Three attractive female dancers in devil costumes appear onstage. Each has the number 6 on her back. They stand in a row, backs to the audience, and wiggle their bottoms suggestively. Then they turn and take up football positions in opposition to Elmer and the minister. At the moment of the snap, the chorus shouts)*

##### Chorus

HIKE!

*Pantomime of Elmer receiving the snap, breaking violently through the line of devils, making a touchdown, dancing in celebration. The devils, inert, are dragged off-stage. Everyone resumes the hymn.)*

Oh! that life's brackish stream would cease to be,  
So the living waters may arise in me.  
And oh! that all earthly things would cease to be,  
So eternal life may arise in me.

##### Revival Singer

For Jesus has won from Death a victory,  
And to all mankind He says, "Arise in me."

##### Chorus

"Arise in me, oh arise in me,"  
To all mankind He says "Arise in me."  
"Arise in me, oh arise in me,"  
To all mankind He says, "Arise in me."

##### Revival Singer and Chorus

"Arise in me, oh arise. Arise in me, oh arise. Arise.  
Arise. Arise."

*(The lights have been dimmed. A spotlight finds Sharon, who makes a grand entrance.)*

##### Sharon

Behold...

##### Chorus

BEHOLD!

*(Pause)*

##### Sharon

Behold the city is Thine.

##### Chorus

Thine, Thine alone  
Behold, the city is Thine.

##### Sharon

This beautiful old opera house is Thine.

##### Chorus

Thine, Thine alone.

##### Sharon

And this wonderful symphony orchestra...

##### Chorus

Thine alone.

##### Sharon

This choir, so mighty in His praises...

##### Chorus, Revival Singer

Thine only, thine alone.

Behold, the city is Thine.

*(In what follows, Sharon addresses the crowd in a profoundly personal way.)*

##### Sharon

I say some crazy things sometimes. I've said I'm a priestess; I've said Jesus talks to me. I'm Joan of Arc.  
*(Elmer picks up her intimate tone, translating it.)*

##### Elmer

She's crazy alright. She said she'd take over the biggest opera house in the state and fill it full of worshipful Christians!

##### Chorus

Thine, Sharon, thine alone.

##### Sharon

And I say angels came to my room.  
I was twelve years old when they took me up.

##### Chorus

*Thine, Sharon, thine alone. (Repeat)*

##### Sharon

Took me West over prairies and canyons.  
Below me, I saw grainfields falling in fiery sheaves.  
An angel said, "People will fall with Holy Ghost fire when you speak."

##### Elmer, Sharon

"People will fall when you speak."

##### Chorus

Fall with Holy Ghost fire. *(Repeat)*

**Elmer, Sharon**

"People will fall with Holy Ghost fire when you speak."  
People fall with Holy Ghost fire when she speaks.

**Chorus**

*Fall with Holy Ghost fire.*

**Sharon**

*(over)* And they fall, they do fall.

**Elmer**

*(ironically, to crowd)* She's crazy, alright. She's crazy alright.  
*(He then takes over from Sharon.)*

**Elmer**

I fell with the fire. I was the greatest of sinners 'til I heard her voice.

**Chorus**

*(under)* They fall with fire. They fall. They fall. They fall.

**Sharon**

Our friend, Elmer Gantry. Our good friend in Christ...

**Elmer**

Then my frozen heart thawed;  
Sin became grace;  
And grace turned to Love.

**Chorus**

Grace turns to Love. *(Repeat)*

**Sharon**

Divine Love of God.  
Elmer God's Love by grace.

**Revival Singer, Revival Worker**

Oh, that first day.

**Elmer**

Yes, that first day.

**Chorus**

Grace turns to Love on that first day. *(Repeat)*

**Elmer, Sharon**

Grace turns to Love.

**Elmer**

*(prompting crowd)* AND...?

**Elmer, Chorus**

WHAT IS LOVE?

It is the Evening and the Morning Star.  
*(This is the cue for the collection. Above the heads of the crowd, a network of clotheslines runs from the rear of the house to the stage. People wishing to donate stand and attach dollar bills to these lines, which are then pulled slowly to the front by revival workers on the stage. As the lines fill and travel slowly forward, the effect created is of a graceful ballet over the heads of the audience.)*  
*(Eddie and his companions are heard from the house)*

**Eddie**

Hey! that's my sermon!

**Lulu**

Quiet, sweetheart.

**Rev Baines, Mrs Baines**

Not yet, Edward. Not yet.

**Eddie** But he stole my sermon!

**Lulu, Rev and Mrs Baines**

I know. Be patient. Be patient

**Elmer, Chorus**

What is Love?

It is the air and light of every heart.

*(To encourage the giving, the Revival Singer and the Revival Worker join Elmer downstage. They sing over the crowd.)*

**The three men**

Send it in. Send your love in. Send it on down the line.

**Eddie**

He stole that. He stole all of it.

**Lulu, Rev and Mrs Baines**

Patience, sweetheart. Patience, Edward.

**All**

*For Love is the builder of every home;  
The kindler of fire on every hearth.*

**Elmer**

And tonight, folks, we're gonna have some beautiful illustrated sermons, we're gonna kindle that majestic cross of electric lights, and Sister Sharon's gonna bring you a special message of healing.  
*(As the three men turn to take up new positions onstage, Eddie and his companions—"Quartet 2"—are again heard from the house.)*

**Qt 2**

Now. Now's our chance.

**Mrs Baines**

Brother Gantry, can you help me?

**Elmer**

Someone... *(turning back to the crowd)* ... Is someone in need?

**Mrs Baines**

Yes, Brother. *(She moves toward the stage.)*

**Elmer**

*(Locating her amidst the crowd)* Ma'am... there you are.

**Mrs Baines**

*(Half to Elmer, half to the crowd)* It's not me, brother. It's my son-in-law. He and my daughter have sinned horribly. Horribly.

**Elmer**

Is he present?

**Mrs Baines**

Yes.

**Elmer**

I feel he's present. They're both here.  
*(Becoming theatrical)* Oh, I feel a great sadness is on them... *(out to the crowd)* Will you come down? Will you let Jesus heal you?

**Chorus, Elmer**

Let Him heal you. *(Repeat)* Come down and pray with Mom!

**Elmer**

*(Peering into the house)* And... and I see two people... and there's a third. And Hallelujah, they're coming down!

*(The revival singer and the revival worker begin to sing, joined by Elmer. Meanwhile, Eddie, Baines and Lulu make their way to the front of the house.)*

**The three, Elmer, Chorus**

Oh that first day  
Oh that day I'm singing of  
Oh that first day (*Repeat*)  
(1) That day he promised me.  
(2) Day folks open up  
Dance down here!  
Oh that first day.  
(*Eddie leaps onto stage.*)

**Elmer**  
Eddie...!

**Eddie**  
Gantry...

**Elmer**  
You know folks, the time ain't right with the  
Lord for healin'.

**Chorus**  
No sir.

**Elmer**  
Let's get this man some counselin' in the  
"Ninety-nine Room."

**Elmer, Chorus**  
"Ninety-nine sheep are in the fold..."  
(*Revival workers, moving in time to the music, begin to steer Eddie off-stage.*)

**Eddie**  
(*desperately*) Jesus will listen to me if the  
Reverend won't.

**Sharon**  
In my temple, everyone is heard. Tell your story.  
(*Meanwhile, Eddie's companions have joined him onstage. He and Lulu alternately address the congregation; Rev Baines and Mrs Baines add their support.*)

**Eddie**  
I neglected a husband's duties.

**Lulu**  
I was tempted by lust.

**Eddie**  
I allowed my wife to wander.

**Lulu**  
I betrayed my husband's trust.

**Lulu, Qt 2**  
Adrift and confused, I/she fell prey to an evil man.  
A Christian man, in whose goodness I/she set store.

**Elmer**  
Praise JESUS! You're forgiven!

**Chorus**  
*Hallelujah!*

**Qt 2**  
Wait, there's more.

**Sharon**  
(*Aside*) What's the matter with him?

**Chorus**  
(*under all the following*) Here are poor, dear people in a sad, dark  
plight.

**Lulu**  
I succumbed to that devil's advances.

**Sharon**  
I know her...

**Eddie**  
She was helpless to resist.

**Lulu**  
He was expert in vile fornication.

**Elmer**  
Aw, hell!

**Eddie**  
They began a weekly tryst.

**Sharon**  
Elmer's old girlfriend...

**Elmer**  
She'll spill it all...

**Chorus**  
(*an outburst*) Here's a tale of sin coming to light.  
(*Then, under the following*) Poor... dear... sad... dark.

**Eddie, Qt 2**  
Suspecting the worst, I/he followed her one day  
To their place of assignation, where I/he hid from view.

**Sharon, Elmer**  
I/She'll suspect the worst. I fear what they'll say.  
I fear it all rings true.

**Elmer**  
(*Great show of sadness*) God love ya!

**Chorus**  
POOR SINNERS!

**Elmer**  
(*Aside*) If they don't shut up, I'm through.

**Sharon**  
(*To Qt 2*) Keep going.

**Elmer**  
(*To all*) Now I feel we could pray in silence.

**Sharon**  
No. Ignore him! Keep going.

**Revival worker, singer, T.J., Elmer, Sharon**  
"Tell it all to Jesus.  
Tell of hope and sadness, too.  
This is gettin' ugly.  
What's the big to-do?  
If they don't shut up I'm through.  
Keep going.  
He acts like a guilty man.

**Chorus**

"Tell it all to Jesus.  
He will listen to you."  
Oh God, You wouldn't let him betray me.

**Elmer**

(*To all*) How 'bout we light up that ole rugged cross?

**T.J.**

Attaboy!

**Sharon** No!

**Elmer**

(*To her*) Or... let's open our Bibles.

**Sharon**

No! If sin is here, let's bring it to light.

**Chorus, Sharon, Elmer**

If sin is here, let's bring it to light.  
Tell it all! She'll never forgive me.  
(*All the following are sung simultaneously*)

**Eddie, Qt 2**

With tears in my/his eyes, I/he observed their filthy acts.  
But imagine my/the surprise when he turned to face my/the hiding place  
And I/you realized who he was.

**Sharon**

There are tears in my eyes. Oh God, You wouldn't. Oh, God.

**Elmer**

There are tears in her eyes. Oh God, I'll be good from now on.

**T.J.**

There are tears in her eyes. Oh Hell, what's going on?

**Revival worker, singer**

*Tell it all to Jesus, tell of hope and sadness, too. If you long for solace, He will listen to you. Tell it all to Jesus, He will listen to you.*

**Chorus**

(*under*) The tears in their eyes are proof against lies.  
They must bring sin to light and say who he was.

**Crowd, Sharon**

Bring sin to light and say who he was!

**Eddie, Qt 2**

Imagine my/the surprise when I/you realized who he was.

**Elmer, T.J.**

Oh, God I'll be good from now on. / Oh,  
Hell! What's going on?

**Crowd, Sharon**

Say who he was! Say who he was!

**Eddie, Qt 2**

I/You realized who he was.

**Elmer, T.J.**

I'll be good from now on. / What's going on?

**All**

Say who he was!

**Elmer**

(*After a very brief silence*) It was me. It was me,  
Elmer Gantry.  
Dear God in Heaven, You know it was me.  
Lord, You picked me up once, now I've fallen again.  
(*Tearfully*) I'm a lyin' adulterer, a prideful beast.  
Look, sweet Jesus. Look, I'm on my knees.  
At the feet of Your saint. Before all Your people.  
Let Thy cross shine tenderly on me. (*This is both a heartfelt plea and an instruction to a boy whose job it is to throw the switch that controls the electric cross.*)  
Sister, can there be forgiveness for me?

**Sharon**

In Heaven, or on earth? (*Pause*)

**Elmer**

Sharon...? (*To the boy*) Light it up, son. (*Brief pause*) Sharon...?  
(*The boy throws the switch. The cross lights. Instantly, there is an explosion and all lights — including house and orchestra pit — go out. In the darkness, there is a moment of confusion, then pandemonium breaks out. People scream. After a few seconds, the lights come up on a radically different scene. Elements of the scenery are in tatters, smoke courses through, chairs are overturned, several people lie inert on the floor and many others have fled. From now until the end of the scene, time moves in a way that is more dreamlike than realistic.*)

**Chorus**

Fire! Fire!  
Smoke streams on crests of fire.  
Cinders whirl in quickening spirals.  
Crimson flames vault to the rafters.  
Fire!

**Sharon**

God won't harm us! Go calmly! He's with us!

**Elmer**

One at a time! One at a time!

**Quartet 2**

Stay, people, stay.

**Lulu**

I'm frightened.

**Eddie**

(*To her*) This is the end God wants for us.

**Chorus, Qt 2, Sharon, Elmer**

Smoke streams.  
Cinders whirl.  
Flames vault.  
The Lord will come with fire, and  
He rebukes with flames of fire.  
Go calmly!  
One at a time. One at a time.

**Elmer**

Sharon, come with me. There's a back way out.

**T.J.**

(*Overhearing*) A back way out! That's for me.  
That's for me. That's for me. (*He runs off.*)

**Sharon**

Don't talk to me!

**Elmer**

Sharon, don't be crazy!

**Sharon**

Stay away from me. (*To crowd, nearly frantic*) Please! If you love me, go calmly! If you love me, go calmly.

**Chorus**

*Smoke streams! Cinders whirl! Flames vault!*

**Elmer**

Sharon, come with me!

**Chorus**

Now the doors are ringed with flame.  
Now the halls are caves of flame.  
Those who fled are bursts of flame.  
Their screams are flame. (*Repeat*)

**Qt 2**

There's no escape now! There's no escape now!  
Gehenna beckons! (*Repeat*)

**Elmer**

I'm begging you, please come with me.

**Sharon**

My people...

**Elmer**

I'm begging you!

**Sharon**

My people need me. I have to stay.

**Elmer**

Please let me save you, Sharon...

**Sharon**

My place is here, forever.

**Sharon**

My place is here with the Lord forever.

**Elmer**

Just take my hand and we'll fly together.

**Sharon**

I have to stay with the Lord forever.

**Elmer**

(*Gently*) Take my hand. Take my hand. Come with me.  
(*He lunges and tries to grab her hand.*)

**Elmer**

Take my hand! Take my hand!  
(*She fights him off furiously.*)

**Sharon**

NEVER TOUCH ME!  
(*He leaves.*)  
Let God be true, and every man a liar

**Qt 2, Chorus, Sharon**

(*to herself*)

There's no escape now. There's no escape now.  
Let God be true, and every man a liar.  
Gehenna beckons. Gehenna beckons. Let God be true, and every man a liar.  
Let God be true.

(*Controlling her panic, Sharon musters the last of her strength and sings out to the crowd*)

**Sharon**

No! Friends! Hear my voice. Hear me. I don't see Hell.  
I see flashing eyes and singing and liquid fire and angels all around in the fire and calling to one another.

**Sharon and All**

And flashing eyes and singing and liquid fire and angels all around in the fire and calling to one another. I see flashing eyes and singing and liquid fire and angels all around in the fire and calling to one another.

**Sharon**

(*over*) Hear my voice. Hear me.

**Very slow crossfade to**

**[9] Epilogue**

(*Elmer and Dr Evans Binch enter separately downstage, shake hands. The final tableau of the previous scene remains in place upstage, lit in a way that suggests the devastated opera house. The chorus and Sharon are turned upstage or visible through a scrim.*)

**Elmer**

Dr Binch. Great pleasure.

**Binch**

New Thought welcomes you. We greet... all parts... of the being.  
The sadness you carry. (*Every phrase that passes Binch's lips appears to originate deep in his soul.*)

**Elmer**

Thank you, sir.

**Binch**

(*Correcting him*) Hajji.

**Elmer**

You know, Hajji, Sister Sharon was reading your book in her last days. I bet she'd be getting a kick out of us working together and all.

**Binch**

She surrounds you.

**Elmer**

Well, I'm ready to start anytime. What do you say?

**Binch**

(*Leading Elmer off*) I say "The oyster opens, showing a new pearl every day."

**Elmer**

(*As they leave*) Gosh! You know, I really like that.

**Chorus**

*And flashing eyes and singing and liquid fire and angels all around in the fire and calling to one another.*

**THE END**