



Celebrate Life in Superstar.

The Songsters are Stars

By DICK BAUMBACH
Elmira Area Correspondent
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Horseheads — Seventy people are shining like stars these days as a group known as Celebrate Life makes the rounds throughout the diocese presenting the hit Broadway musical Jesus Christ, Superstar.

Back in November, 1968, neither the organizers of Celebrate Life knew what would happen to the group nor did anyone have any idea that the now famous rock opera would become its vehicle for praising the Lord.

It was in the latter part of 1968 that Ray Defendorf, founder of

Celebrate Life got together with one of the priests assigned to St. Mary Our Mother Church to expand a small group of young people who were taking part in a Sunday Folk Mass.

That original group was composed of 12 youths. Since that time Defendorf believes that 450 to 500 youths have been a part of the group.

There are still several original members singing in the current Jesus Christ, Superstar production.

"What we've seen is some of the singers meet each other through Celebrate Life and then go off and get married. What's interesting is that some of the members have come back as husband and wife teams and again are singing with us. We've also had some of our members who went off to college return to us when they graduated," Defendorf said.

Since its creation, Celebrate Life has given more than 500 concerts throughout the northeast part of the country. The majority of the performances have been in New York State.

Asked how the group came to be called Celebrate Life, Defendorf said, "The name came from a button that someone had seen. When we started thinking about a name, the name on the button really said it all, and that is the philosophy of the group."

Defendorf added, "But, Celebrate Life is more than a name we have taken as our own. To celebrate life is a challenge from God to live our lives fully, prayerfully and joyfully."

The director said the explanation of Celebrate Life is used at the closing of every show the group puts on.

"It's our message. Our way of saying thanks to the people for coming to hear us and we are trying to give them a gift to celebrate life."

Defendorf sees Celebrate Life "as a youth apostolate, which hopefully will give its members the impetus to continue their apostolates when they move on and away from the group."

The group, right from the director to the program designer, are all volunteers. "We want the volunteer effort. It makes for a stronger bond between us."

At present several adults are members and help Defendorf in producing the current production.

Defendorf said that while he could list many people who have helped Celebrate Life, he would be afraid he might miss someone. "All I see when I think of Celebrate Life is a group of people who come together to praise God and to have fun with each other."

Part of the mythology of some of the "ethnics" is that the Irish have oppressed the other groups. Doubtless there is some ground for reasonable complaints, but Charles Shanabruch (no Irishman, he), in a recent brilliant study of the response of the Archdiocese of Chicago to immigration, concludes that, while the protests of the other groups were understandable, by and large, the Irish leadership of the Archdiocese did not seek to oppress the newcomers. On the contrary, he argues, the political skills with which the leadership responded to pressures from the new groups, the older groups, and the hostile American society were extraordinary. The surprising phenomenon is not that there were complaints but that the enterprise held together at all.

In a romantic age like the present one, careful scholarship like Dr. Shanabruch's will be ignored, but the Irish-baiters should take seriously the possibility that they have missed the whole point of the American Catholic immigration experience. Maybe the Irish got them more than anyone else could.

From a completely different quarter, Rosemary Reuther (La Furiosa) has recently engaged in another form of Irish-baiting. Attempting a public psychoanalysis of our reluctant columnist, she announced that I was anti-left because I suffered from the guilt feelings of an "Irish poor boy" who had become affluent. Granted that even for La Furiosa this is a bit much, the real point is not my family's income or my own (about which Ms. R. knows nothing and which in any case is none of her business — or anyone else's), but the use of the extra adjective.

If I were a guilt-ridden parvenu (I'm not either, incidentally), how does it improve the brilliance of La Furiosa's description to add the ethnic adjective — unless, of course, that makes me even worse. And Irish "nouveau riche" apparently is worse than any other kind. Can you imagine Ms. R. speaking about a "black poor boy" or a "Jewish poor boy" or a "Chicano poor boy"? Of course not.

In fact, she was engaging in ethnic bigotry. Perhaps one ought not to be surprised. Mrs. Reuther's folk hero, Daniel Berrigan, recently turned anti-Jewish in his attack on Israel. Bigotry now seems to be in fashion with the New Left.

It is built into the structure of romantic radicalism to have scapegoat groups — whites, men, older people, middle-Americans, ethnics. Now add the battered and bedraggled Irish.

Still, I imagine, we might survive.

Remember the good old days when the men would talk in the living room and the women in the kitchen? Then we became middle class and there was CFM and the men and women talked together in the same room. Now that we've entered the feminist era, the women are in the living room (though we don't call it that any more) and the men are in the kitchen.

That, dear friends, is what we call progress.

I realize, of course, that the most thoughtful people in the "movement" don't want that at all. They view equality between men and women not as a means of setting people against one another but of bringing them together in a more free and open unity; they seek not to separate but to unite. But the "movement" just now is dominated by the man-haters (all movements end up in the hands of kooks — that's why I want no part of any movement) whose aim is permanent conflict between men and women. Only when feminism exorcises the man-haters will it appeal to that 95 per cent of American womankind who are between Mary Daly and "The Total Woman."

Most women don't hate men. And vice-versa.

Similarly, the temptation of some Catholics in the so-called "ethnic movement" (I'm not part of that either) is to turn the movement into an Irish-baiting phenomenon. The poor micks are a natural target for everyone on the right and on the left.

Thus, Michael Novak celebrated St. Patrick's day by calling on the Irish to share power according to a quota system with the other ethnic groups in the Church. I'm all for it. The American hierarchy has had three presidents and three secretaries-general since the Council (five men since one lucky prelate has had both jobs). The way I count them, there have been two Germans, one Welshman, one Italian and one Pole.

What about getting us an Irish officer of the hierarchy, Mike?

The Church 1975



Fr. Andrew Greeley

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Church And Politics



Sister Frances

They squat along the side of the road, a woman holding her small child tightly to her breast. At her side, in a small parcel, are her only possessions. The child is crying and the mother shows great fear. They have no food, few clothes, and no money.

Such a scene is a common one these days as we are becoming more and more aware of the plight of the world's refugees. Recently, television and newspapers have carried numerous stories of the newest addition to the millions of refugees throughout the world — the Vietnam orphan.

Victims of a tragedy brought on by the most celebrated war in modern times, the orphans have become the center of our national concern. The sight of these small homeless babies has hit at the heart of Americans' sense to generosity. Once again, the average American is looking for ways to respond to the cry for help from a suffering people. In many ways it is encouraging to see that we can respond when needed. However, let us not be so eager in our response that we miss many of the factors now at work in Vietnam.

It is impossible for the United States to absorb all the orphans of the Vietnam war. So if we are to be consistent in our concern, it is absolutely necessary that we

begin to act so as to assure aid to that ravaged country. For anyone at this point to press for more military aid for the government of General Thieu would be ludicrous. If we have been unable to secure a victory with the amount of money already invested in Vietnam, millions more will not make any difference.

The government of South Vietnam has demonstrated that they are incapable of maintaining order and assuring the rights of their citizens. The government does not need our support — however, the people do.

Americans have a moral obligation to provide aid for food, medicine and shelter for the citizens of Vietnam. This aid should be provided regardless of the political outcome of the present conflict.

Generosity which is true charity cannot be hinged on the particular political ideology which is pleasing to our leaders. If we want to "save face" in front of the world community we can do so by responding to the plight of these refugees and victims of war in a way which is free of any political strings whatsoever. To do so, not only is morally right but also may prove that Americans do care for people and that concern has no limits.

We have become accustomed to the slogan of "peace with honor." True honor is based on a sense of justice and justice in turn leads to true peace. Before us lies the opportunity to respond in honor and justice which can lead to a safer world. Hopefully, the orphans and refugees will not become a cause célèbre for the next few weeks only to disappear once our consciences are eased.

Our call as Christians gives us cause to express concern in talking about our call to respond. We only need to look to the Gospel of St. Matthew which clearly states, "Blessed are the peacemakers for theirs is the kingdom of God."

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