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## THE STAGE

# Life of Mary Magdalene Presented as Musical

By Bob Koenig

Philadelphia (NC) — Sal Ponti has succeeded in writing a musical about the life and times of Mary Magdalene that has been on the stage in Los Angeles for 20 months and has been praised by both an official of the Los Angeles archdiocese and a Los Angeles Times critic.

Msgr. Joseph Pollard, director of communications for the Los Angeles archdiocese, described "Magdalene" as "a special event."

The musical "is well-written and never contrary to Catholic dogma," Msgr. Pollard said, "and I would highly recommend everyone see it because of its wonderful, uplifting message, one which

would apply to people of all ages and all faiths."

Calling the musical "a good show," Los Angeles Times critic John Mahoney said it "is without abuse to anyone's faith."

After that praise, Ponti, a 1956 graduate of St. Joseph College in Philadelphia, said he hopes to have "Magdalene" on the stage in New York. He said he hoped the musical's continuing run in Los Angeles, where it is the longest-running stage production in the city, indicates that it could succeed on Broadway.

In an interview with the Catholic Standard and Times, Philadelphia archdiocesan newspaper, Ponti, composer, lyricist and director of "Magdalene," said the musical

traces Mary Magdalene's bawdy life to her conversion by Jesus Christ at the finale.

Working on "Magdalene" has taught him a great deal about show business, Ponti said. "What I've learned, in 25 words or less, is to keep going, to keep trying and creating, and not to worry about what is going to happen in the future," he said. "The obstacles have been phenomenal, and that's the challenge."

The playwright said he is especially careful not to let the show get into the "wrong hands." "I don't want 'Magdalene' to become 'The Best Little Whorehouse in Judea,'" he said.

The story of how "Magdalene" came to be could be material for another

show, a tragi-comedy.

A graduate of St. Madeleine Sophie Parish School and LaSalle College High School in Philadelphia, Ponti studied political science at St. Joseph College, but his primary interest was music. He said he began writing songs at the age of 15 and at 17 had written a tune, "I'm In Love," which, with the aid of "idolmaker" Bob Marcucci, helped launch the career of teen star Fabian.

After what he called the required period of being a "struggling actor in New York," Ponti said, he went to Hollywood and in 1961 landed the lead in a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer special effects fantasy, "Atlantis, The Lost Continent." When the film was released, he recalled, "I got more fan letters than

Liz Taylor." And then, nothing.

"Even today, to be totally honest, I can't understand what happened," he said. "One week I was at some plush pool in Hollywood; the next week I was making deliveries to the same house."

"A lot of guys turn to booze and drugs," Ponti said of his Hollywood dream turned nightmare. "I turned to writing and composing."

The "fabulous idea" for "Magdalene," he said, came to him after he had already succeeded in writing and producing several musical reviews. He found a home for his show at the La Cava Dinner Theater in a Los Angeles suburb and struggled to obtain the necessary financial backing.

"Magdalene" opened in March 1981.

He said much business has come from church group sales and from publicity received when local choirs have sung some of the show's tunes.

Ponti said he is now examining the possibility of a road company doing "Magdalene," and the ultimate goal, a New York opening.

Describing his view of success, he said he knows he has "made it."

"Making it" to me," he said, "is having the time to pursue and create and to be free of the stress of wondering if I'm going to wind up in some flea bag hotel. It's enjoying the pursuit and not having the pressure."

## Recent Movie Ratings

- Following is a list of recent movies rated by the U.S. Catholic Conference Department of Communication on the basis of moral suitability.
- The first symbol after each title is the USCC rating. The second symbol is the rating given by the Motion Picture Association of America.
- These are the USCC symbols and their meanings: A-I, general patronage; A-II, adults and adolescents; A-III, adults; A-IV, adults with reservations (this rating is given to certain films which, while not morally offensive in themselves, require caution and some analysis as a protection to the uninformed against wrong interpretations and false conclusions); O, morally offensive. The word "recommended" in parentheses is inserted behind the titles of those films that merit such a designation.
- These are the MPAA symbols and their meanings: G, general audiences, all ages admitted; PG, parental guidance suggested, some material may not be suitable for children; R, restricted, under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian; X, no one under 17 admitted (age limit may vary in certain areas).
- A**  
The Amityville Horror II: The Possession, O (R)  
Annie, A-I (PG)  
Airplane II, O (PG)  
Author, Author, A-III (PG)
- B**  
Barbarosa, A-II (PG)  
Best Friends, A-III (PG)  
The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, O (R)  
Blade Runner, O (R)  
The Boat A-III (R)  
Bugs Bunny 3rd Movie:  
1001 Rabbit Tales, A-I (G)
- C**  
The Chosen, A-II (PG)  
Conan the Barbarian, O (R)  
Concrete Jungle, O (R)  
Creepshow, O (R)
- D**  
The Dark Crystal, A-I (PG)  
Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid, A-III (PG)  
Diner, A-III (R)  
Diva, A-III (R)
- E**  
Endangered Species A-III (R)  
E.T., the Extra-Terrestrial, A-I (PG)
- F**  
Fast Times at Ridgemont High, O (R)  
Fighting Back, O (R)  
Firefox, A-III (PG)  
First Blood, A-III (R)  
Five Days One Summer, A-II (PG)  
48 Hours, O (R)  
Frances, A-IV (R)
- G**  
Gandhi, A-II (PG) (Recommended)  
Going All the Way, O (R)  
Gregory's Girl, A-II (PG)
- H**  
Halloween III, O (R)  
Heidi's Song, A-I (G)  
Key, Good Looking, O (R)  
Honkytonk Man, O (R)
- I**  
I Love You, O (R)  
I, the Jury, O (R)  
Inchon, A-III (PG)  
Independence Day, A-IV (R)
- J**  
Jinxed, A-III (R)  
Joni, A-I (G)
- K**  
Kiss Me Goodbye, A-III (PG)
- L**  
The Last Unicorn, A-I (G)  
Le Beau Marriage, A-III (PG)  
The Long Good Friday, A-IV (R)  
Love Child, A-IV (R)
- M**  
The Man from Snowy River, A-II (PG)  
Mephisto, A-IV  
A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy, A-III (PG)  
The Missionary, O (R)  
Monsignor, O (R)  
My Favorite Year, A-III (PG)
- N**  
National Lampoon's Class Reunion, O (R)  
Night Shift, O (R)
- O**  
On Golden Pond, A-III (PG)  
An Officer and A Gentleman, O (R)
- P**  
Piaf — The Early Years, A-III  
The Pirate Movie, A-III (PG)  
Poltergeist, O (R)  
Porky's, O (R)
- Q**  
"Q," O (R)
- R**  
The Road Warrior, O (R)  
Rocky III, A-III (PG)  
Rollover, A-III (R)
- S**  
The Secret of Nimh, A-I (G)  
The Sender, O (R)  
Six Pack, A-III (PG)  
Six Weeks, A-III (PG)  
Sophie's Choice, A-III (R)  
Soup for One, O (R)  
Split Image, A-II (R)  
Spring Fever, A-III (PG)  
Star Trek II, The Wrath of Khan, A-II (PG)  
Still of the Night, A-II (PG)  
Summer Lovers, O (R)
- T**  
Tempest, A-III (PG)  
Tex, A-II (PG)  
That Championship Season, A-III (R)  
The Thing, O (R)  
Things Are Tough All Over, O (R)  
Timerider, A-III (PG)  
Tootsie, A-III (PG)  
The Toy, A-III (PG)  
Trail of the Pink Panther, A-III (PG)  
The Treasure of the Four Crowns, A-II (PG)  
Tron, A-III (PG)
- V**  
The Verdict, A-II (R)
- W**  
The World According to Garp, A-II (R)  
Wrong Is Right, A-III (R)
- Y**  
The Year of Living Dangerously, A-III (PG)  
Yes, Giorgio, O (PG)  
Young Doctors in Love, O (R)

## TELEVISION



Left, Mariette Hartley, Shelby Balik and Paul Scott as Candy Lightner and her two surviving children visit the grave of her 13-year-old daughter, whose death resulted in the formation of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. "M.A.D.D.: The Candy Lightner Story," a new NBC movie, airs March 14. Dick Van Dyke, right, plays three diverse characters — a young boy's father, a stern librarian and a comical old man — in "The Wrong Way Kid," airing March 15 on "The CBS Library" series. (NC photos)

## BOOKS

**"The Word Remains: A Life of Oscar Romero,"** by James R. Brockman. Orbis Books (Maryknoll, N.Y. 1982) 241 pp., \$12.95

By Jaime Fonseca  
NC News Service

In describing the final weeks before Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, El Salvador, was killed by an assassin's bullet in March 1980, Jesuit Father James R. Brockman documents the efforts of the Salvadoran churchman to end government repression of organizations suspected of being subversive.

One of the efforts concerned Americans. It was a letter Archbishop Romero wrote to President Jimmy Carter Feb. 17 to tell him that any further U.S. aid "instead of favoring greater justice and peace in El Salvador, will undoubtedly sharpen the injustice and the repression of the organized people, whose struggle has often been for the respect of their most basic human rights."

Archbishop Romero quoted from a document issued the year before in Puebla, Mexico, by the Latin American bishops. The document discussed the self-determination of peoples in overcoming crises and choosing their rulers.

"It would be unjust and deplorable for foreign powers to intervene and frustrate the Salvadoran people... To keep them from deciding on their own the economic and political course that our nation should follow," Archbishop Romero added.

The book gives the social and political context and the motivations which prompted the churchman to write this message. Almost three years later, the letter, along with other documents of great theological and moral value, remains so relevant that the title "The Word Remains" is strikingly apt.

Father Brockman wrote this biographical work, after three months of interviewing friends and associates of the churchman and of examining files in El Salvador. The book incarnates the man in a narrative of tribulations, challenges, and accomplishments of the Church in El Salvador since 1977. By then American missionaries were being expelled by the military for helping peasants and others to get organized, and native priests and catechists were being murdered for preaching liberation from want and from sin. One outstanding case was that of Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande, who had turned rural parish of aguilares into a hub of Christian communities.

The author quotes one of the letters to Archbishop Romero from a peasant: "Bishop, we wish to tell you that your homilies and talks move us to continue stronger and more forceful in this struggle to build a more just order, beginning first with ourselves."