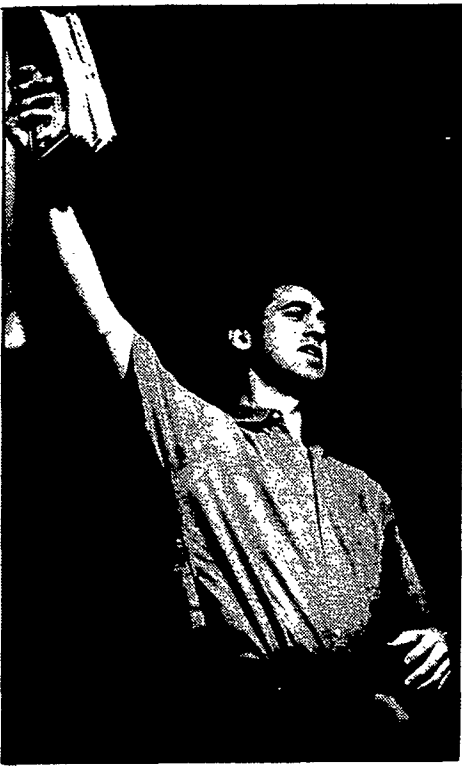
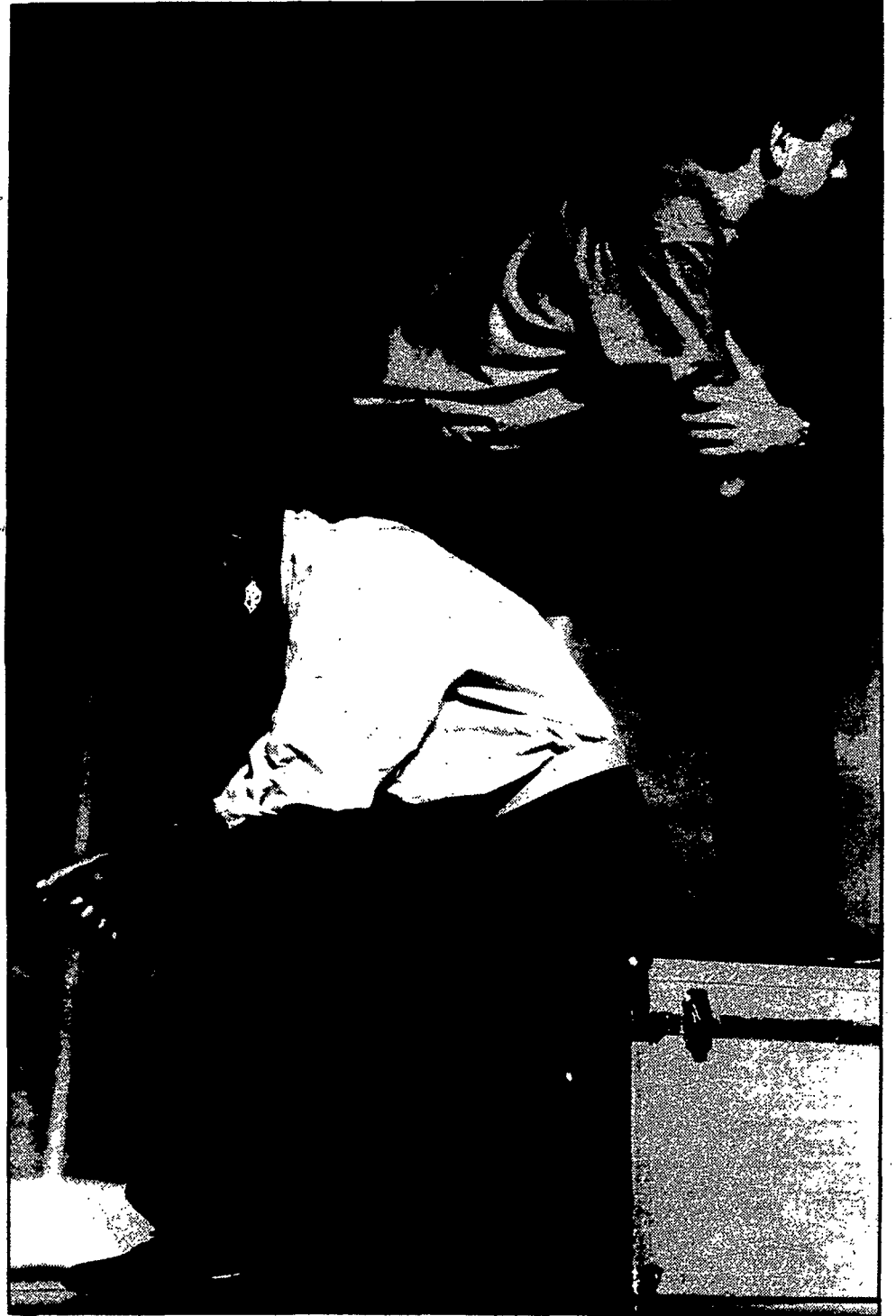


Features



Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal

Shown are scenes from last Friday's production of *Between the Times* (clockwise from top left): Tom Amandes holds a handful of money—before the bills come in; cast members (from left to right) Tom Amandes, Paul Amandes, Glenda Baker, Jamie O'Reilly perform in the opening number; a welfare mother and a farmer who lost his land contemplate their situations; the rich man portrayed by Glenda Baker suffers through the devil's vacation slides.



'Between the Times' — a musical to help the economics go down

By Lee Strong

"Economic Justice for All," the bishops' controversial 1986 pastoral letter on Catholic social teaching and the U.S. economy, is written in simple, clear, direct language to make it easy to read and understand.

But can you dance to it?

Probably not. Yet several hundred people who gathered Friday, Nov. 6, at Cardinal Mooney High School discovered you can certainly sing it.

These people witnessed the New York state debut of *Between the Times*, a dramatic and musical interpretation of the pastoral. The show was written by Tom and Paul Amandes in conjunction with the staff of Chicago Call to Action, a social-justice organization. As explained in the opening song, the title refers to the fact that Christians must live and work in the time "between the paradise of Eden and the glory yet to come."

Tom Amandes, an actor and musician living in Chicago, first got the idea of creating a musical after reading the first draft of the pastoral in 1985. "I was just finishing a run as young Carl Sandburg (in *The Courtship of Carl Sandburg*) when I began thinking about the pastoral," Amandes explained. "I wanted to do something different with it" than had been done with earlier pastorals.

Amandes and his brother, Paul, a musician working with National Public Radio's "Flea Market," converted sections of the first draft — along with portions of testimonies given to the panel writing the pastoral — into dialogue, songs and skits.

They began performing the show in parishes in the Chicago archdiocese. Since its inception, the show has been revised to reflect the pastoral's final draft. Two troupes now tour the country. The company that performed in Rochester was in the middle of a 43-performance, 49-day tour.

"The show has really taken off on a national scale beyond our expectations," Paul Amandes said, noting that the troupes had performed the show four times in 1985, 13 times in 1986, and 108 times so far this year. "People see the show," he explained, "then go back to their par-

ishes and invite us to perform there."

That is, in fact, how the show came to Rochester. Several Rochesterians had seen the show in other cities, and suggested that it be brought to this diocese. Friday's performance was sponsored by the Office of Social Ministry.

Between the Times consists of nine scenes, each focusing on one aspect of the pastoral. Considering the weighty subject matter, the show was surprisingly lively, entertaining and humorous. In an interpretation of "The Rich Man and Lazarus" parable, for example, the rich man (Glenda Baker) found hell in an eternal showing of the devil's vacation slides.

Another humorous section was "Pass the Buck," a game-show parody. The audience laughed knowingly as contestants (Tom Amandes and Jamie O'Reilly) representing the Church were asked if they practiced what they preached about just wages, employee rights, investments and property. Audience members were asked to rate the Church on a scale of one to 10 — with Rochesterians offering scores ranging from four to eight — and to decide what valuable prizes the Church should receive, through the Sunday collection, of course.

Yet laughter was not the only response *Between the Times* evoked. In "Greyed-in Blues" and "The Quota," the show took a more serious turn, presenting the hard-luck stories of a jobless steel worker, a single mother on welfare, a farmer who lost his land and a woman who remained poor despite working full-time in a factory. Each expressed disillusionment and confusion about why he or she had become trapped in an unfortunate situation.

The show presented many of the pastoral's major themes — the dignity of people and work, the idea that economic rights are as essential as political rights, the need to continue the "American experiment" and the belief that individuals must take personal responsibility for ending economic injustice. In segments about the Church and the U.S. government, *Between the Times* asserted that the audience is the Church and the government, and if those institutions are unjust it is because the audience allows them to be.

In large part the show worked because of

the obvious professionalism and commitment of the cast members. They smoothly handled such difficulties as arriving late because of a missed flight and an ongoing problem with the microphones. They also handled the question-and-answer session at the end of the show with humor and sensitivity.

"Questions are an important part of the show. They give people a chance to react to what they've seen and to share answers," Tom Amandes said, citing one performance in which a man got up and said he could feel sorry for the single mother in "Greyed in Blues" because her poverty wasn't her fault, but that the farmer and the steel worker caused their own problems.

"Then a woman stood up and told how she and her husband had lost their farm. Other people stood up and told their stories or responded to the man," Tom Amandes recalled. "There was no anger or arguing — it was just people talking to each other. That's what we're trying to do."

The show also has produced negative reactions. People regularly walk out. At one college, a student asked if the writers got their ideas from Karl Marx — and got a round of applause from other students.

No one walked out of the Rochester performance, however. In fact, most people seemed to respond enthusiastically and positively. Yet some did question parts of the show and of the pastoral. During the question session and in conversations with the cast after the show, audience members raised such issues as foreign competition, methods of creating jobs and living in a world that doesn't always share Christian values.

That's the kind of thinking the Amandes brothers hoped to inspire by writing their play. "We're not trying to offer answers," Tom Amandes said. "The issues are too complex. People have to work out their own solutions." Likewise, Paul Amandes said the biggest compliment he has received is when someone says "I don't agree with your show, but now that I've seen it, I'm going to read the pastoral!"