

Local Gospel opera debuts on film

By CHRISTIE L. CHICOINE
CS&T STAFF WRITER

A tie-dye clad Jesus, the Beatitudes sung in sign language, Christ's Passion and Mary's lullaby, and a hoe-down that addresses final judgment.

All this and more can be seen and heard in "The Word, A Gospel Opera," a two-hour film produced by 35-year-old Bill Monaghan, a member of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Richboro, who depicts Jesus in the production.

"It's a reinterpreted way of singing the message," said Monaghan, who is also a teen music minister at three parishes, and a product of Catholic grade school and high school in the Archdiocese.

The recently-released motion picture version of Monaghan's contemporary stage musical, which debuted in 1995, is based on the Gospels, psalms and other inspirational works. [See sidebar for upcoming performances.]

"The Word" is comparable to "Godspell" or "Jesus Christ Superstar," but includes a resurrection scene.

Featuring cast members ranging from high school and college-age students, adults and extras, the high-energy musical covers the story of salvation from the beginning of the Old Testament through Jesus' teachings, death and resurrection.

The local production, shot in Philadelphia, Bucks and Montgomery counties, features Philadelphia as the New Jerusalem.

In "The Word," numerous performers assemble for the number "Blessed and Happy," which features the Beatitudes in sign language. Among the performers are individuals with special needs, as well as relatives and friends of the entire cast.

"The Word" is a mix of energetic and meditative songs. "It's a con-

stant rise and fall," Monaghan said. "It's very happy with a couple of serious moments, and then, all of a sudden, you're in the Passion."

The Stations of the Cross are acted out through music that features soulful wailing.

The character of Jesus is removed from the cross before a song titled, "Lullaby (Close Your Eyes)."

That scene in particular, Monaghan said, is very moving, especially for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one.

The resurrection scene has a dramatic beginning, "then turns into total joy," Monaghan said.

There's even a message about final judgment — set to a hoe-down. "You're singing this cheerful tune, but if you listen to the words, you're like, 'Oh, I better watch out!'"

Monaghan said he is proud of the product and the cast who made it possible.

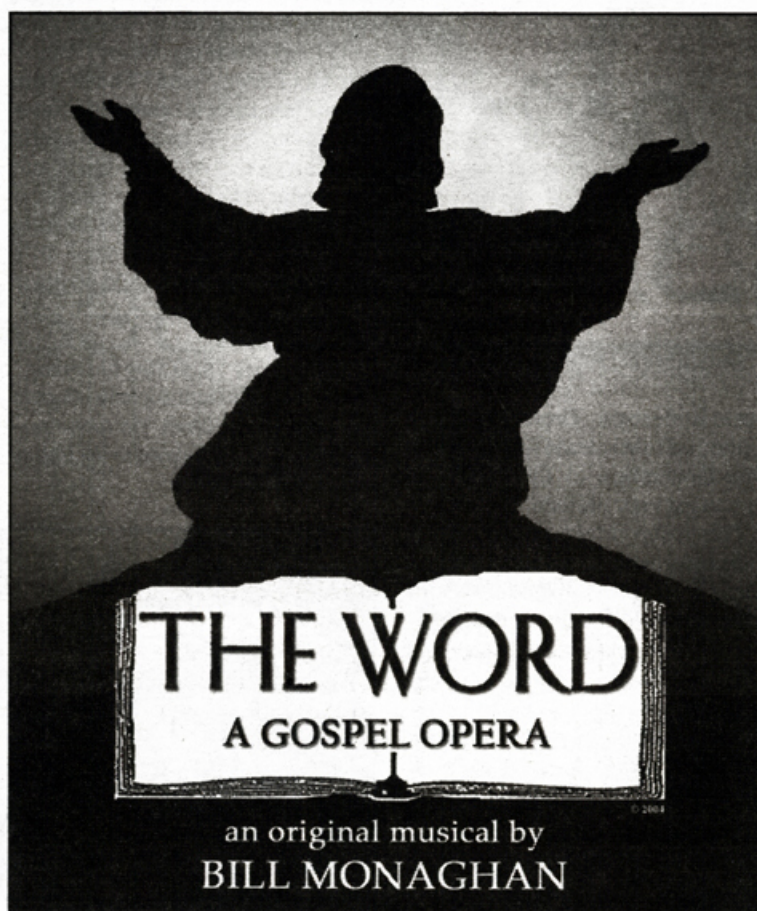
"I'm constantly humbled," Monaghan added of his work, which promotes Jesus and His work. "It's not ... about me [but whatever Jesus wants me to do]," he said.

Monaghan, who is president of Monaghan Music LLC, is the teen music minister at the parishes of St. Vincent de Paul in Richboro, St. Andrew in Newtown and St. Joseph in Warrington. For the parish and school of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Southampton, he also served as a youth music minister for 10 years.

He graduated from Nativity of Our Lord School in Warminster in 1984 and Archbishop Wood High School in Warminster in 1988.

From the University of Scranton, he received a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in music in 1992.

In addition to numerous Catholic schools, Monaghan also works as



(Courtesy photo)

a consultant for the Archdiocese, assisting primarily with music and faith-oriented programs for youth and young adults.

Monaghan said his interest in music began when he was a young boy; he recalled singing loudly in his church pew, hoping to win a prize.

Besides singing, Monaghan plays the piano, guitar, bass, drums, tin whistle and harmonica. He teaches music lessons and performs regu-

larly with his bands, Celtic Pride, and Some Assembly Required. Celtic Pride includes traditional and modern Irish music; Some Assembly Required includes Monaghan's music, as well as music of the Beatles, Billy Joel and Elvis, among others.

Other works in progress for Monaghan include a 9/11 In Memoriam album, as well as an album of psalms, specifically tailored to Sunday Mass.

And then there is "All That Your Heart May Desire," a single he produced in honor of his late brother, Michael. A Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class, who was an aviation structural mechanic, 21-year-old Michael Monaghan was one of five Navy personnel killed in a helicopter crash in 1998 in California's Sequoia National Forest while conducting a

search and rescue training operation.

Bill Monaghan, his brother Jim, and their bands, annually conduct a memorial concert at Archbishop Wood High School in honor of Michael, a 1995 alumnus.

Proceeds from the annual concert, and from Monaghan's single, "All That Your Heart May Desire," are directed toward the scholarship fund.

"I love my brother," he said. "I love being able to do this in his name."

This year's Michael S. Monaghan Memorial Scholarship Concert, featuring, "30 Shows in 30 minutes: A Tribute to Broadway" and "Songs Mike Liked," is at 7 p.m. Saturday, April 8.

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"The Word, A Gospel Opera," will be shown at 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, March 24-25, and at 9:45 a.m. Wednesday, April 12 at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Southampton, and at 7 p.m. April 12 at St. Vincent de Paul in Richboro. There is no admission to the screenings; free-will offerings will be accepted.

For information on how to bring the screening or the stage show of "The Word" to your parish, CCD class, Catholic school or university, or to purchase "The Word" in DVD or CD formats, contact Bill Monaghan by e-mail at thewordagospelopera@yahoo.com.

For further information about Monaghan's bands and music, check out the Web sites www.monaghanmusic.com and www.thewordagospelopera.com.



(Courtesy photo)

A TIE-DYE CLAD JESUS — Bill Monaghan of St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Richboro, depicts Jesus in "The Word, A Gospel Opera," Monaghan's contemporary stage musical, which is now on film.



(Courtesy photo)

MONAGHAN'S MUSIC — Bill Monaghan performs at an annual concert at Archbishop Wood High School in Warminster. Proceeds go to a scholarship in his late brother's name.



(CS&T File Photo/Sarah Webb)

PRAISE ON THE PARKWAY — Bill Monaghan leads youth and young adults in contemporary worship music prior to Prayer on the Parkway's Eucharistic Adoration last September.