

New Majority slates premiere of rock opera

By ETHEL KIMMONS

A contemporary rock opera "Truth of Truths," that has been recorded but never performed before, will be presented to suburban audiences by The New Majority. Originally a club for 18-year-old Catholics at St. Valentine's parish in Redford Township, The New Majority has expanded its age limit and opened its membership to pre-teens. The group has also made a name for itself in show biz.

"Truth of Truths" will be The New Majority's first production. Club member John Wright suggested to Jim Ann Lepper, the group's moderator, that they attempt to put on "Jesus Christ Superstar." After the success of that staggering effort, they followed up the next year with "Godspell." "Truth of Truths" is a show from a two-record LP album made by Studio 111 publishing company in Lebanon, Ind.

"IT HAD NEVER been performed," Mrs. Lepper said, "because of a copyright mix-up. We got permission from the publishing company. And we got the original handwritten music where the conductor made changes. It is difficult for our orchestra to read. It was a challenge."

In this rock opera, everything is sung as in "Jesus Christ Superstar." The only narration is the voice of God. There are 48 singers in the cast, plus a 22-piece orchestra and a live piece rock band. Everyone is part of the chorus and steps out to perform one of their several roles. Only the actor who portrays Jesus does not play other parts.

The opera goes from the Old Testament to the New Testament or, as one of the singers said, "It goes from creation till the end of the world."

Keith McFadden, who takes the role of Jesus, just happens to have a beard. He didn't grow it for the part, as a matter of fact, he said he's on his third beard.

A REDFORD TOWNSHIP resident, McFadden attends Village United Presbyterian Church. He is a senior at Redford Union and sings in the choir at school as well as at church.

With The New Majority, McFadden appeared as Herod in "Jesus Christ Superstar" and John the Baptist and Judas in "Godspell."

"Truth of Truths" performances will be given beginning March 12 and 13 at West Bloomfield High School. Curtain time is 8 p.m. The show will be given March 20 and 21 at 8 p.m. and March 28 at 3 p.m. at Claremont Auditorium in Livonia. It moves to Mercy High School in Farmington on May 8 at 8 p.m. and May 9 at 7 p.m.

Although called a rock opera, music in "Truth of Truths" switches from rock to classical. One cast member said, "There are lots of Simon and Garfunkel type songs—pretty—also hard rock numbers."

The song "Let My People Go" is a spirit song. Members of the orchestra are mostly high school students from Redford Union and Thurston. Some older members are from the Redford Symphony. The rock band is basically from Redford Union.

A nonprofit organization, The New Majority turns any show proceeds over to charities. A \$700 profit from "Jesus Christ Superstar" went to Children's leukemia.

"Godspell" made \$400 which the club gave to St. Valentines.

MRS. LEPPER, who produces the shows said this year the show "was backed off by St. Valentines completely. They will get the profit."

Besides having St. Valentines as an angel, the group has been donated rehearsal space for all its shows by Village Presbyterian.

A resident of Redford Township, Mrs. Lepper belongs to St. Valentines parish and lives just a block from the church. Jeannette Senkowski, who is directing

"Truth of Truths," also resides in Redford Township. She was one of the main characters in "Godspell."

Others appearing in "Truth of Truths" include John Wright of Southfield as John the Apostle. He was Jesus Christ in "Jesus Christ Superstar."

Wright's wife Annette, who plays Mary Magdalene, was the original Mary Magdalene in "Superstar." She met her husband when both were appearing in that show. DENNY BURTON of Garden City portrays David. He sang at meetings of the Charismatic church group. Betty Lepper of Redford Township plays Bathsheba.

She has been in The New Majority since "Superstar." Betty and her husband were the first marriage in the group. "We didn't meet there," she said, "but it helped it along."

Paula Mekus, who portrays the Virgin Mary, still attends West Bloomfield High School although her family now lives in Redford Township and goes to St. Valentines.

Mrs. Lepper said the group had thought of performing in Detroit's Music Hall but it's \$1,000 a night so we decided to wait another year.

She said "Jesus Christ Superstar" was originally planned for just one night at Redford Union. It was so successful we did 11 performances over a three month period and went from place to place.

"WHEN WE DID Godspell in Thurston, the school forgot to get clearance for the gym for dress rehearsal so we rehearsed with basketballs flying a trampoline, horse and volleyball ball. Oddly they show at Thurston was the best one we did."

"Jesus Christ Superstar" was done blue jeans style, Mrs. Lepper said. Although we rented a Roman outfit for Pontius Pilate and Jesus wore a white shirt. In "Godspell" the kids made their own costumes."

For "Truth of Truths," Glendia Talbot of Sterling Heights, a college freshman made 40 costumes on a \$200 budget.



Jesus (Keith McFadden of Redford Township) after Resurrection, with John the Apostle and Mary Magdalene (John Wright and his wife Annette of Southfield) appear in "Truth of Truths" (Staff photo by Barbara McClellan)

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