

“We’re Gonna Change This Land”: An Oral History Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of *Good News: A Christian Folk-Musical*

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On Thursday, June 1, 1967, Bob Oldenburg finished work on a new eighteen-song musical that he and a team of amateur song writers had been writing and arranging since the previous fall. Nine days later, on Saturday, June 10, 1967, a hastily assembled volunteer choir of one-hundred young people, after only six days of practice, gave the premier performance of the fifty-five minute long work to the campers at Glorieta Baptist Assembly in New Mexico. The musical was titled *Good News: A Christian Folk-Musical*.

Good News was unlike any other evangelical church music that had come before. Instead of traditional piano and organ accompaniment, *Good News* featured students playing folk and rock-influenced rhythms on guitars, banjos, piano, electric bass, and drums. The songs and drama in *Good News* dealt honestly with taboo issues of the day such as hypocrites, skeptics, hippies, and the “generation gap.” That first performance of *Good News* in the hot summer New Mexico desert launched a new and influential, albeit short-lived, genre of evangelical church music: the Christian youth musical.² Moreover, it introduced pop-styled music to Southern Baptist churches. Many of the common elements of today’s evangelical church music (such as the use of pop-styled music in worship, the use of rhythm instruments, the use of a praise team singing with microphones in front of the choir, and the use of sound amplification and stage lighting to name a few) can be traced back to *Good News*.

Though labeled a “musical,” *Good News* is better classified as a compilation of eighteen Christian-themed folk songs for choir and soloists accompanied by rhythm instruments. A character, known in the script only as “The Reactor,” serves as a protagonist. At several points during the work “The Reactor” addresses the choir from the crowd as if he were a heckler. After considering the gospel message given by the choir, “The Reactor” chooses to reject Christ and walks out of the performance.

Far more interesting than the actual music of *Good News* is the story of its creation. *Good News* was birthed in the mind of an ambitious sixteen-year-old guitar player who longed for a medium to communicate the joy of Christ in a way that would appeal to fellow teens. It was crafted by an unlikely team of amateur musicians who, in spite of opposition,

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² For a fuller history of *Good News* and the Christian Youth Musical genre, see William R. Bishop, “Christian Youth Musicals: 1967–1975” (D. M. A. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

worked tirelessly to complete the work. No one, not even those who created it, could have conceived then how this experimental “musical” would go on to alter the course of evangelical church music.

What made *Good News* a major milestone in the history of evangelical church music is not the music itself. The real reason is two-fold. First, *Good News* led to mass numbers of teenaged Baby Boomers getting involved in their church youth choirs, as *Good News* allowed them to communicate the gospel message through their own music and their own language. Many of those youth are still serving in church music ministries today. Second, Broadman’s publication of *Good News* helped introduce and legitimize pop-styled church music and the use of guitar, bass, and drum set in church music. Had *Good News* been released by another publisher it might not have had the widespread acceptance among conservative evangelicals that it enjoyed. By virtue of being published by Broadman Press, conservative evangelicals, especially Southern Baptists, were more open to accepting this new type of musical drama.

To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of this groundbreaking and historically significant work, the author has compiled quotations from many who were involved in the creation of *Good News*, sang *Good News* in their church youth choirs, or were directly impacted by the legacy of *Good News*. Each quotation, unless otherwise noted, was taken from recorded telephone interviews conducted by the author between May 2013 and October 2016. The quotations have been edited for grammar and some words have been inserted by the author in brackets for clarity. The title in parenthesis beside each speaker’s name reflects their position or role in 1966 and 1967.

It is the author’s goal that this article will shed light on the historical impact of *Good News* as well as preserve the thoughts, memories, and opinions of those who were involved in its production so that future church music historians can better understand their motivations and intentions.

Youth Choirs Before *Good News*

ELWYN RAYMER (Music Editor, The Baptist Sunday School Board Church Music Department): [Music for youth choirs before *Good News* was] pretty bland—most of the time it was music written for adult choirs with no regard for youth voices. It was pretty much a bland diet, I think that’s the reason why some of the youth musicals [did so well], because it was fresh and new.

BILLY APPLING (Minister of Music): I remember when I first started there was nothing written for kids. You did things that adults did. The kids didn’t come, and we weren’t reaching kids singing what the adults were singing.

Up with People

The musical motivation most directly tied to the creation of *Good News* was not the Beatles, Bob Dylan, or any other pop-music super act of that era. Instead, *Good News* was based on the music and performance style of *Up with People*, a traveling singing group established in 1965 by the quasi-religious group Moral Rearmament that featured a trio of

young, guitar-playing singers backed by a large choir of teenagers. The songs performed by Up with People were upbeat, energetic, and catchy and featured lyrics emphasizing positive thinking, morality, and patriotism. When Up with People performed in Nashville in January 1966 they established a local spin-off group called Sing Out South.

EDDIE LUNN (*Good News* co-creator): Up with People did five shows that week [early January 1966] in Nashville. Out of those shows they spun off a group in Nashville called Sing Out South. The trio for that group was Cabot Wade, Ted Overman, and myself. Bill Cates played piano, and his brother Bob Cates played drums.³

STEPHEN HALL (Youth Choir Member, later, Church Music Historian): In Southern Baptist churches ministers working with youth were just as confused as those in any other church in 1966. Where could they turn next in an attempt to interest their young people? They had already used over and over the ideas of hootenanny, youth services, youth cantata and even choir trips and tours. Youth had been fed a steady diet of Billy Graham movies (*The Restless Ones*, *For Pete’s Sake*, etc.), the Spurrllows and similar groups and still youth interest and participation was sagging—badly. Even youth revivals did not excite them much anymore. And to top everything else, there was something new outside the church (as if there was not already enough competition) attracting many young people. The “Up with People” movement was in full swing in 1966 and was making its presence nationally known through the group “Sing Out ’66.” How were ministers of music supposed to compete with the folk sound and moral message of “Sing Out” without the young people involved rejecting them as negativists who were more concerned about losing their youth choirs than not having any youth to whom they could minister?⁴

BOB OLDENBURG (*Good News* Co-Creator and Arranger): I moved to Nashville in January of 1966. At that time, Up with People was just beginning its real impact on the youth culture of the day. And all across the country, where the Up with People groups would sing, they would leave in their path a group formed. Now the young people they impacted were not the regular kids off the street—these were kids in the church. All of the sudden, the ministers of music in Nashville discovered that the kids were leaving the church in droves, and the youth music programs were going down the drain. . . . [They] started saying something to the [Church] Music Department “Hey, we’ve got to do something!” and they said, “Just do what you’re doing—they’ll come back.”⁵

³ Bill Cates’s song “Do You Really Care?” was included in *Good News*.

⁴ Stephen Frederic Hall, “The Christian Folk Musical; A Foundational Study” (MCM thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973), 42. Hall performed *Good News* in 1967 as a member of the Belmont Heights Baptist Church youth choir.

⁵ Bob Oldenburg, “Music in Youth Ministry” (videotaped lecture given at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978.), DVD.

The Germ of An Idea: Spring 1966

Eddie Lunn (b. 1949) was just 16 years old when he approached Baptist Sunday School Board employee Cecil McGee (1917–2007) in the spring of 1966 with his idea to create a religious version of *Up with People*. McGee, who was the Drama Consultant for the Baptist Sunday School Board’s Church Recreation Department, knew that he lacked the musical skills needed to create Lunn’s vision; however, McGee thought that Bob Oldenburg (1935–2004), who had just been hired by the Church Recreation Department a few weeks earlier, might be interested in what Lunn and fellow *Sing Out South* leader Ted Overman (b. 1946) were proposing.

EDDIE LUNN: When *Sing Out South* was, in the words of Genesis 1, without form and void, there were auditions for the trio and rhythm players. I was picked to play guitar and Ted played bass. Ted came over to my house and we were talking about how to lead this group and keep it together. So as we started talking, time starting flying and we came to this statement in the wee hours of the morning; “Isn’t it a shame that the church doesn’t have something like this.” Not just the church in general; the specific Southern Baptist church that we both went to. We started talking about that and I said, “You know, I’ve got a friend named Cecil McGee that I’d like to run this by” and he said, “Oh yeah, let’s do that.” That’s what led to my call to Cecil which in turn led to Cecil’s brilliant decision to forward the idea to Bob Oldenburg and ultimately to the first meeting with Bob, me, Cecil, and Ted. The fact that Cecil took my ideas seriously is a credit to Cecil. Cecil and I met in 1960 and I did some dramas for him when I was a kid. Cecil and I had a great relationship. I felt like I could pick up the phone and call him and he would always answer. When Cecil heard the idea, he was smart enough to know that he should turn it over to the new guy at the Board, Bob Oldenburg.

BOB OLDENBURG: They came to Cecil and said, “Hey Cecil, we like what we’re doing in *Sing Out South*. We like what’s happening [and] we’re able to express good morals and good things and we have an excitement about ourselves. We’re able to express ourselves in the language and the music that we can understand. Why can’t we do something like this in the church?” Well Cecil, when you say something like that to him, it’s like saying “sic” to a dog—he went after it. Of course, Cecil’s music ability (cough) lacks a little bit (laughter in the room). But, he knew that I had some music training, so he turned to me and said, “Bob, why don’t we think about this as a possibility?”⁶

BILLY RAY HEARN (*Good News* Choir Director): Bob [Oldenburg] was the natural one to do it. He had been trained as a musician and a youth worker in college and seminary. He had served several large Texas churches as organist and as youth director. He was now employed by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board as a church recreation consultant. He was in touch with young people every day. He and several

⁶ Oldenburg, “Music in Youth Ministry.”

other young composers had already begun composing songs with the new “folk sound.”⁷

EDDIE LUNN: Our thought was, “What if there was a tool out there that could enliven youth church music?” We wanted it to be more attractive than a cantata and involve a lot of people. What we came up with was basically a copy of *Up with People*. If you look at the staging it’s a twin. We had a trio, two guitars and bass out front and two-hundred kids behind with choreography. Literally, it’s a twin.

Testing Christian Folk Music at Glorieta: Summer 1966

In the spring of 1966, the team of Oldenburg, McGee, Lunn, and Overman presented their idea for a folk music-styled evangelistic musical work to Dr. William J. Reynolds (1920–2009), the second-in-command at the Baptist Sunday School Board’s Church Music Department. Reynolds was reluctant to commit to the idea (there were no songs written yet; only vague ideas) and suggested that since this project was coming out of the Church Recreation Department, they should conduct a test at Church Recreation Week at both Glorieta Baptist Assembly in New Mexico and Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly in North Carolina that summer to see how young people would respond to religious folk music. They agreed to meet again after the test.

It was during the folk music “test” at Glorieta in the summer of 1966 that Billy Ray Hearn (1929–2015) met Oldenburg and learned of his plans to write Christian folk music. Hearn, who would later go on to become one of the founding fathers of the Contemporary Christian Music Industry, was at this time serving as Minister of Music at the First Baptist Church of Thomasville, Georgia.

EDDIE LUNN: I can’t remember now exactly how that went down, but I’m pretty sure the conversation went something like this. Reynolds said “The Church Music Department isn’t putting a penny into this thing. If you guys want to play with it during your weeks at Ridgecrest and Glorieta, go for it and we’ll see what the results are. Then we’ll talk dollars.” So that summer [of 1966], the Recreation Department decided to experiment with a large number of young people singing contemporary-folk and gospel songs accompanied by guitars, basses, drums, etc. rather than the traditional piano and organ. The experiment took place during Recreation Week at Glorieta and Ridgecrest.

BOB OLDENBURG: We didn’t put it in the regular schedule—it was an afternoon activity. We said “if you want to come and learn some new songs and sing together, come over to the little auditorium.” So they started coming into the little auditorium, about 40 or 50 of them, and we learned several of the songs that Eddie Lunn taught them. Now Eddie was one of the leaders of *Sing Out South* . . . and Eddie taught them those songs along with some other folk songs. At the end of the week, we presented them

⁷ Billy Ray Hearn, Liner notes, Bob Oldenburg and Lanny Allen, *Real: A Soul Experience*, The Sounds of Celebration, First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas (Light Records LS-5571, Stereo LP, 1972).

as a fellowship. The audience just went wild, and, of course, they wanted to know ‘Where can we get this?’ ‘How can we take this home and teach it to our kids?’⁸

BILLY RAY HEARN: I remember sitting in “Room N” at the Glorieta Baptist Assembly in New Mexico with Bob Oldenburg and several other Baptist recreation consultants from Nashville. I had just rehearsed about fifty high school young people who were attending the youth conference in a musical program using a daring new style—“religious folk music.” There were ten or twelve guitar players, a tambourine, and a make-shift electric bass. The enthusiasm of the group and the excitement they created brought about a serious discussion by the leaders. The result was that Bob Oldenburg would put together a complete program of original music and drama that would give Christian youth a statement of their faith using the new singing style.⁹

The Creation of *Good News*: Fall 1966–Summer 1967

The folk music “tests” at Glorieta and Ridgecrest in the summer of 1966 were a resounding success. However, the leaders of the Church Music Department were still reluctant to take on the risk of publishing pop-styled music for the church. Despite this, the team of Oldenburg, McGee, Lunn, and Overman pressed on, and in the fall of 1966 began writing songs for what would become *Good News*.

Work on *Good News* continued from November 1966 until June 1967. During that time it was decided that *Good News* would be premiered at Glorieta in June of 1967 and then performed there every Saturday night throughout the summer. In the spring of 1967, the team of Oldenburg, McGee, Lunn, and Overman choose Billy Ray Hearn to conduct the premier performance.

BOB OLDENBURG: [The folk music test at Glorieta] was at the end of the summer [1966]. From September to the first of November we approached the music department and said, “Hey, we need to come up with some sort of an instrument—a tool that the kids can use in their churches that is of this type.” They said, “Well, it’s more of the fellowship type of music so you all do it.” And we said, “That’s what we wanted to know.” . . . The four of us sat down and we just brainstormed for several hours on a Thursday afternoon up there in Nashville—cold, windy, nasty weather—and we asked the Lord to give us the direction for it. Those days went fast because a lot of things developed quickly.¹⁰

BOB BOYD (Secretary of the Church Recreation Department): Bob Oldenburg came into the department around the time that I became head of the [Church Recreation] Department. He was a real talented guy and a good musician. In my mind, the Church Recreation Department was an agency that developed programs and then trained churches to utilize those programs to reach youth. So when Bob and Eddie Lunn and all them started talking about it, I said, “It sounds good to me.” From then on, Bob and

⁸ Oldenburg, “Music in Youth Ministry.”

⁹ Hearn, Liner notes.

¹⁰ Oldenburg, “Music in Youth Ministry.”

Cecil McGee, and to some extent, Frank Hart Smith,¹¹ all worked to develop this thing. It had little spurts and starts, but eventually you could see that it was going to be a real product. I wondered if the Church Music Department would want to take it over completely, but then they didn't want it at all.

BOB OLDENBURG: [Our] purpose was to create, compose, and compile a folk musical with a Christian theme expressing the excitement of sharing Christ. One driving desire seemed to fill their minds . . . to express the joy of abundant living through the medium of teen-age musical expression. It wasn't difficult to think of ideas. They came in torrents and floods. The problem was pinpointing priorities—what were the most important things to say and sing. Slowly and surely, through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, ideas crystallized, concepts cemented, and a progression developed.¹²

EDDIE LUNN: There were no assigned topics or even an idea of what topics to cover or any kind of script when we got started writing. I had never written a song in my life—neither had Ted or Cecil. Only Bob had ever written songs prior. There was no plan or form—it was without form and void. Most of the actual arrangement came together during the six days of rehearsal at Glorieta. I had zero contribution to the music writing prior to co-writing one of the songs and co-writing the music to another while we were at Glorieta. My main job during the song writing process was to add the guitar chords to the score.

BOB BOYD: There was an enormous amount of resources that were given to creating *Good News*. Bob Oldenburg gave nearly all of his time to the project and Cecil gave a considerable amount of his time. Frank Hart Smith worked on it here and there. There was a lot of time that went into testing it at Rec Lab and at Glorieta. I doubt that there were many pieces of music produced that ever took that much time. The resources that the Sunday School Board put into it were enormous. Looking back, I'm amazed that I didn't panic and stop it.

EDDIE LUNN: There were a whole bunch of people who contributed lyrics or music to *Good News*. Betsy McCully and Bill Cates were both with *Up with People*. Betsy later married Ted Overman. Johnny Fullerton was a Nashville trumpet player who knew Bob from Belmont Heights [Baptist Church] in Nashville. Frank Hart Smith worked with Bob and Cecil at the Church Recreation Department. Rick Watley and Roger Copeland were friends of Bob and they submitted a song to us at Rec Lab in February 1967. I believe they were both recreation ministers from Texas.

¹¹ Frank Hart Smith (1926–1991) worked for the Church Recreation Department alongside Bob Boyd, Bob Oldenburg, and Cecil McGee. Though not primarily a musician by training, he did contribute lyrics to two songs in *Good News*: "We're Gonna Change This Land" and "Sunday's Child."

¹² Bob Oldenburg, "Good News Is Here!" *Church Recreation*, Jan, Feb, Mar 1968, 8–9.

BILLY RAY HEARN: It was only eight months later [April 1967] that he [Oldenburg] called me to come to Nashville to preview the complete new program to be called “*Good News*,” *A Christian folk musical*. He wanted me to direct the first performance.¹³

EDDIE LUNN: When we played *Good News* for Billy Ray the first time we finished with the very last song and turned to Billy Ray and said, “What do you think?” He said “Well . . . well . . . well . . . I just don’t like it.” He had a different idea—his idea was not based on *Up with People*. Instead, he saw it as a select group of ten or twelve kids with a banjo, piano, etc. He didn’t see the need for the mass choir. Billy Ray saw it more as pure hootenanny.

BOB BOYD: When I heard the first dribs and drabs of *Good News*, the one thing that I could not abide with was drums. I just could not imagine drums in my church by my pulpit. I grumbled and mumbled about it, but I didn’t do anything about it because they were integral to the product itself.

Test at “Rec Lab”: February 1967

In February 1967, Bob Oldenburg and Eddie Lunn took the songs that had been written to that point and previewed them to a group of church recreation leaders and youth pastors at an event called “Rec Lab” held at Highland Lakes Baptist Encampment. Oldenburg passed out photocopies of his handwritten scores to the attendees and led them in sight-reading the songs from *Good News* while he accompanied from the piano and Lunn played the guitar. As it happened, Dr. William L. Howse (1905–1977), a prominent leader at the Baptist Sunday School Board, was in attendance.

BOB OLDENBURG: By February [1967], when we had Rec Lab down here at Highland Lakes, we had about ten numbers that we brought down there to youth ministers, recreators, and so forth, and we presented it to them. And several of them got involved in it. They sang them—and it just so happened that Dr. Howse was going to visit Rec Lab the last night of the week. And we presented to him those songs we had learned . . . and he said, “Man, that is something else!—we’ve got to do something with that.” He went back to the Board—of course he at that time was over all of the church programs services: Church Music, Church Training, Sunday School, and all of them—and he went directly to [the] Church Music [Department] and said, “Y’all listen to what Church Recreation is doing—they’ve got something, so you better take note of it.”¹⁴

EDDIE LUNN: I was there with Bob [Oldenburg] at Highland Lakes. I was invited for the purpose of “previewing” this new church music form. There was a curiously positive interest from the group. There were even two guys who pitched a song to us: “Stand Amazed.”¹⁵ It made it in.

¹³ Hearn, Liner notes.

¹⁴ Oldenburg, “Music in Youth Ministry.”

¹⁵ The “two guys” were Rick Watley and Roger Copeland.

The Roles of the Church Recreation Department and the Church Music Department

From the beginning, the Baptist Sunday School Board’s Church Music Department did not want to be involved in the creation of *Good News*. This caused a major problem for Oldenburg and McGee as the Church Recreation Department was not allowed to publish any music; any and all music produced by the Baptist Sunday School Board had to be produced by the Church Music Department. In the end, the conflict was resolved only when Dr. James L. Sullivan (1910–2004), the President of the Baptist Sunday School, forced the Church Music Department to produce *Good News*. Reynolds assigned Church Music Department Music Editor Elwyn Raymer (b. 1935) the task of making *Good News* a publishable product.

EDDIE LUNN: In the early thinking of the vision, Bill Reynolds and some other people in that department were thinking, ‘Are y’all trying to do a Beatles thing or a rock thing?’ And we really weren’t. We’d already asked ourselves that question and we knew that was too much of a jump. It wouldn’t have made sense; the people would have rejected it summarily without even listening. Up with People was the model, and the genre was hootenanny.

PHILLIP LANDGRAVE (Composer and Church Music Professor): The Music Department was not the father of *Good News*—the Sunday School Board Recreation Department gave birth to it. They went to the Music Department and asked them to publish it, and they said, “Not on your life! We don’t do that kind of music.” But James Sullivan, who was the head of the Sunday School Board, liked the idea, so he went to the Music Department and said, “You *will* publish *Good News*.”

BOB BOYD: I talked with both [Dr. W. Hines] Sims (1908–1997) and [Dr. William J.] Reynolds, and they had very similar reactions.¹⁶ They both thought, “We don’t think this is church music and this is not something that church choirs should be doing.” They thought it was downgrading the kind of music that they were trying to promote. The final “yes” came from Dr. Sullivan. He said, “This is good, we ought to do something with this,” and of course Church Music went with it and they assigned it to Elwyn Raymer to work on it because we [Church Recreation] were not a music producer, but our staff were the ones who wrote it. If Dr. Sullivan had been hands off and said, “Music is the Music Department’s business; that’s it. They’ve decided so forget it,” that would have been the end of it. Had that happened, he [Oldenburg] might have gone somewhere else to get it produced. I’m just guessing at that based on his personality.”

BOB OLDENBURG: It [*Good News*] did not start in the Church Music Department. Let me set your mind straight on that—in fact, the Church Music Department *refused* to let it start there. We were in the Church Recreation Department.¹⁷

¹⁶ In 1967, Dr. W. Hines Sims was the Secretary of the Church Music Department. Dr. William J. “Bill” Reynolds’ actual title at the time was “Supervisor, Music Publications Section.” Reynolds would succeed Sims as Secretary of the Church Music Department in 1971.

¹⁷ Oldenburg, “Music in Youth Ministry.”

ELWYN RAYMER: We [the Church Music Department] weren't really enthused about it because it didn't seem to be good music. That's the position I took. I didn't want to do it or get involved with it.

Rehearsals at Glorieta: June 1967

In the summer of 1967, Glorieta hosted twelve consecutive weeks of summer camps. Each week was for a particular Southern Baptist entity: Church Training Week, Sunday School Week, Church Music Week, WMU Week, etc. Oldenburg, McGee, Lunn, and Hearn arrived just days before the start of the first week of summer activities.¹⁸ They, with the help of Glorieta Staff Activities Director Jim Stanton (1938–2016),¹⁹ worked to assemble a choir from the college-aged “staffers” who worked at the camp. The team only had six days to teach the new songs to the make-shift choir before the scheduled premier concert on Saturday night, June 10, 1967.

EDDIE LUNN: A letter was sent to all the staffers explaining the concept of *Good News*. Everybody signed it: Bob, Billy Ray, Cecil, and myself. I think it was sent on Baptist Sunday School Board letterhead. We also said in the letter, “If you play an instrument, bring your instrument.” The kids knew something different and fun was going to happen, and they came in excited.

BOB OLDENBURG: We finished it, took it out to Glorieta at the last of May/first of June, and taught it to 90 staffers. During that week of teaching it to them, it went through a lot of changes because by that time we didn't even have the instrument or the vehicle by which it was going to be communicated to the audience, whether it was dialog or what. And the guy who is now in the Church Recreation Department [Don Mattingly] was our first Reactor. During that week we threw out two songs and added another song.²⁰

DON MATTINGLY (Glorieta Staff): I graduated from Baylor and then got in my car and drove straight to Glorieta for my job. My first afternoon there, Oldenburg found me and said, “I've got something I want to talk to you about. Meet me upstairs in New Mexico Hall tonight at 6:30.” So the first night I got there they introduced the idea of *Good News* to me. Some of the manuscripts they had of the music were just pencil—they weren't published or typeset at all. I just saw some legal-size-pad pieces of paper with words on it. They said, “There's a part in it called ‘The Reactor’ and we want to ask you if you would be willing to play this part.” I said, “Absolutely.” They said, “We need you to go through these practices, and we need you to learn the music because we haven't decided whether the Reactor should become a Christian at the end of it, or whether he doesn't. You think about and let us know which way the Reactor should

¹⁸ Before rehearsals began at Glorieta in June 1967, Ted Overman had returned to Up with People and had no further involvement in *Good News*.

¹⁹ Stanton also served at the Minister of Music at First Baptist Church, Greensboro, AL. He only worked at Glorieta during the twelve weeks of camps.

²⁰ Oldenburg, “Music in Youth Ministry.”

act.” By the first time we practiced it, I was completely assured that the Reactor character should walk out and reject Christ.

EDDIE LUNN: The part of “The Reactor” was inserted at Cecil’s request to fill the need for a theatric continuity line. All the music sung by the Reactor was written at Glorieta. I think Bob wrote all those tunes and lyrics in one night during the rehearsal week.

LOU STANTON (Glorieta Staff, Wife of the late Jim Stanton): Jim and I met at Glorieta in 1966 and married in 1967. On our honeymoon we stopped in Nashville to call some friends. One of the people he called was Bob Oldenburg, and that was when we first heard of *Good News*. We still didn’t know what we were getting into when we left to go back to Glorieta for that summer married as staffers. Jim was the Director of Staff Activities and also directed the staff choir, which was one of the optional staff activities. It was put out there as “come if you want to.” He usually had about fifty or sixty kids who, had it not been for *Good News*, would have just been singing the normal songs that you would normally find for youth choir.

EDDIE LUNN: Rehearsals for the staff choir began Monday, June 5, 1967, and the first presentation came on Saturday, June 10, 1967. These dates are significant in that they are the exact dates of the “Six Day War” in the Middle East.

DON MATTINGLY: The feeling among the staffers in the choir was growing excitement as we got closer to that first presentation. We had never sung songs like that! As we started putting it together and practicing it more and more they really got into it.

EDDIE LUNN: There was an excitement in that room that you couldn’t describe. The rehearsals had to occur all day long because of the staffers’ work schedules. Bob and the production team would begin rehearsal at 5:30 am with the breakfast staff and end at 10:00 pm when all the staffers had curfew. On that first day, every two hours or so, we’d have to go back through the description of the musical and explain what we were going to do to every new group who came in. We generally had about twenty to thirty singers at a time in each group. That first day was really weird, but the enthusiasm and buy-in from the staffers was 100% from day one.

DON MATTINGLY: Rehearsals were a come-and-go kind of affair. We started with who was there and people would join as they could get there and leave when they had to.

EDDIE LUNN: We were unaware of the rehearsal arrangements until day one. That first night it hit us that we were not going to have the whole choir together until Saturday night. So on day two we told the staffers, “Hey guys, we’re not going to be all together until Saturday night so we’ve got to be good in rehearsal.”

EDDIE LUNN: The rehearsals with the Glorieta staffers revealed that several songs had to be rearranged or rewritten. Some songs rehearsed on one day would be completely different the next day. The song “Sunday’s Child” had to be rewritten because the music just didn’t work. The third night of rehearsals Billy Ray and I said “Let’s rewrite this song.” We spent from about 1:00 to 3:00 am rewriting the music for Frank

Hart Smith's lyrics. Another song that had to be totally rewritten was "Wake Up and Live." Billy Ray rewrote that one. You can really hear his enthusiastic spirit in that song.

BILLY RAY HEARN: In sixty-something years in the music business, that song ["Wake Up and Live"] was the only song I ever wrote.

DON MATTINGLY: Billy Ray, when he was around, was leading. But [Jim] Stanton had a strong drama background, and he was the guy that we leaned on after all those other guys left. A lot of the way *Good News* evolved that summer was due to Jim. He made a big contribution by making that choir really good.

EDDIE LUNN: Bob was the keyboard accompanist for rehearsals and the first performance. He also led devotionals during rehearsals. Billy Ray was the choir director during the rehearsals and the first performance as well as the recording a few weeks later. He had a good sense of what songs "worked" and which didn't, and if a song didn't work with the staffers in the choir he'd recommend that we rewrite it. Cecil was the theatrical advisor and also led some of the rehearsal devotionals, Jim Stanton was the unsung hero of *Good News*. He was tasked with producing *Good News* every Saturday night after we all left. My job was to lead the instrumentalists. I rehearsed the instrumentalists just like we did the staffers in the choir. The instrumental rehearsals went on all day due to staff work schedules.

LOU STANTON: Jim was very excited about the possibilities that he saw and heard in *Good News*. He felt that he was not creative enough to take part in the actual composition of it, but, when they told him what they planned to do, he could sense that it was unique. However, when he heard it, he had to admit that he was a little bit nervous because of the drums and the guitars.

EDDIE LUNN: Jim worked tirelessly to make difficulties disappear for other people without ever thinking about personal recognition. No, he did not have any input into the creative or production side, but he, nonetheless, took on the job of making sure God's will in *Good News* was carried out flawlessly. Jim took over the staff choir from Billy Ray Hearn just like a champion Olympic 4x100 relay team hands off a baton—brilliantly! And he did it without ever thinking about where the awards stand was located.

The Debut Performance at Glorieta: June 10, 1967

After just six days of rehearsal, the staff choir and instrumentalists premiered *Good News* late in the evening of Saturday, June 10, 1967, in the Holcomb Auditorium at Glorieta. Despite fears that the audience might reject this new form of pop-styled church music, those in attendance loved the new musical and gave a standing ovation at its conclusion.

It is hard to overstate the historical significance of this event. All pop-styled church choir music written for the evangelical church in the past fifty years can trace its lineage to this first performance of *Good News*. Had the audience's response been negative, it might

have dramatically changed the history of contemporary church music, especially for Southern Baptists.

PHILIP H. BRIGGS (Youth Pastor): In June 1967, staffers of Glorieta Assembly began rehearsing the music. On Saturday night of Church Training Week, *Good News* premiered—without printed scores or scripts. Thereafter, on Saturday nights throughout the summer, the staff choir presented the musical.²¹

EDDIE LUNN: On the night of the premier, there were three hours of programming in the chapel ahead of the performance. Right before we went on stage, because the night’s activities had gone longer than planned, we had to scramble backstage to get permission for the staffers to stay up past curfew. Jim [Stanton] is the one who got the permission for the staffers to stay out past curfew for the premier. Some of the Glorieta leadership really didn’t like the concept of *Good News* or the extra burden that it was putting on Glorieta and the staffers. They made their position clear, but Jim got them to concede to letting the staff stay out that night. Had Jim not been there to do that—you talk about a train wreck!

Once that was taken care of, we said, “What are we going to say?” And so Cecil went out and said “We understand it’s late—we did not plan on having to start so late. We understand that there are children here and if you need to leave please feel free to get up and leave. We’re going to take some time to get set up, but if you want to stay, we’ll be presenting it in about fifteen minutes.” Bob and I—Billy Ray was backstage with the cast—we were looking out and we were both scared that 50% of the people would leave. When Cecil came back up on the stage [fifteen minutes later to start the show] I couldn’t tell that there was any difference. I turned to Bob, because by then he was away from the door, and I said, “Bob, nobody has left!” He said, “What?!” and he came over to the door and looked and he was stunned!

LOU STANTON: Jim was a little fearful about how it would be accepted.

EDDIE LUNN: We were all so excited that we started that first song about twenty or thirty [beats per minute] faster than it should have been!

DON MATTINGLY: It took the crowd a little bit before they really got into it because it was so different. But by the time it was over they were clapping and really experiencing something new.

LOU STANTON: It was stunning! It was so different from any church music that we had ever done or I had ever heard before. Then, as we began to let it develop over the next several weeks and began to see the impact that it was having on the lives of the staffers, we really felt like this was something that God was going to be able to use.

²¹ Philip H. Briggs, “Patterns in Southern Baptist Youth Ministry,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 25, no. 4 (October 1991): 7–8.

DON MATTINGLY: I think we all were nervous that first night. I don't think it really hit us that we were in on something that might change youth ministry or the type of music done in churches. We were just a group of high school and college students at Glorieta that got into something that we really enjoyed.

LOU STANTON: I really don't remember any negative reactions. I remember a little bit of maybe shock when it begins with the choir all running down the aisle. But by the time it was over they were very much into it.

PHILIP H. BRIGGS: This author was in attendance at both Highland Lake and Glorieta when *Good News* was presented and was startled by what he heard and saw. Opposition was not absent, but sounds of protest were lost among the positive notes of "give us more!" It was a never-to-be-forgotten happening that spread like a prairie fire across the Southern Baptist Convention and into the publishing of new youth musicals.²²

EDDIE LUNN: Bob Oldenburg, Cecil, Billy Ray, and I all left Glorieta the next day [June 11, 1967] and left it [*Good News*] in the hands of Jim Stanton.

DON MATTINGLY: In weeks one and two people hadn't heard about it. But as the summer went on, the excitement really grew. There was a buzz out in the audience before it even started. We started sensing that before the first beat in weeks three, four, five, six, and so on. They had heard of it, and the word about *Good News* was getting out. In the early weeks it was kind of a dead hall—the hall wasn't always full in those early weeks. But as the summer went on the crowds got bigger and bigger and bigger until it got to where there were just as many people in there for *Good News* as there would be for the main nightly service prior to the performance. I don't know how the word got out . . . maybe the people working at Glorieta told the people "be sure not to miss this!"

Recording the Demonstration Album: July 1967

When the Church Music Department became involved in the production of publication of *Good News* in the spring of 1967, they scheduled a recording to take place in August 1967. When Dr. Reynolds heard the report of the positive response from the debut performance on June 10, he decided to move the recording date up to July 15 so that it could be recorded right before the start of Church Music Week. This decision was most likely made because Reynolds and Elwyn Raymer were already planning to be at Glorieta for Church Music Week. Reynolds's decision had historical ramifications as well. At the mid-point of summer a new group of staffers came to work at the Glorieta and replaced those who had served in the early weeks. The decision to move the recording to mid-July meant that the original cast is the cast heard on the recording.

²² Ibid., 8.

BOB OLDENBURG: The audience response was positive and it continued to build until the middle of the summer when the Church Music Department said, “Ok, we’ll go ahead and record it—we’re not saying we’ve got a product—but we’ll go ahead and record it.” We spent all night after the sixth week of the summer, just before Church Music Week started and recorded it with the staffers out there.²³

EDDIE LUNN: The recording was made on July 15, 1967. JoAnn Shelton from the Radio and Television Commission was the producer of the recording. Elwyn Raymer was there but at the time he was not too excited about the whole concept. As Music Editor for the Church Music Department it was his job to transcribe the work into a useable form for publishing.

DON MATTINGLY: The hardest thing that happened was when they did the recording. We stayed up all night. It just killed everybody because then they had to go back to making beds in the dorm buildings and working in the kitchen. That’s one of the longest nights that I can remember.

LOU STANTON: I remember when they made the recording. They made it at night so the auditorium would be quiet. Of course, the staffers had already worked hard all week long and they were so tired they could hardly stand up when they were recording. I remember one of the girls stood up and said, “Ok y’all, come on and stand up! We’re going to do some calisthenics!” So she led everyone in calisthenics so they would wake up to finish the recording.

EDDIE LUNN: Yes, they recorded us literally all night! If you listen to the recording of the song “The Greatest Miracle” on the record, you will notice on the second bridge the acoustic guitar fades out and then fades back in about eight bars later. That is because we recorded it around 3:00 am and during the take my left hand just went numb. Oldenburg, who was on keys, looked over at me like “What happened?!” all I could do was show him my hand trying to regain feeling. When it did, I started playing again. That ended up being the take they put on the album.

Publishing *Good News*: January 1968

The recording and score of *Good News* were released on January 2, 1968. An astounding 72,576 copies of the score were sold in 1968 alone, making it the highest selling choral product sold by Broadman Press that year.²⁴ While LifeWay, the successor to the Sunday School Board, has never released official sales totals for *Good News*, Oldenburg later estimated that it sold between 300,000 and 400,000 copies. Due to Baptist Sunday School Board

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Clifton J. Allen, ed., *Annual to the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969* (Nashville: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969), 162. In 1968 *Good News* even outsold *Baptist Hymnal* (1956).

policies, Oldenburg did not receive any royalties from sales of *Good News* because he was an employee of the Board at the time it was written.²⁵

BILLY RAY HEARN: Elwyn Raymer from the Baptist Sunday School Board came to Glorieta to write it down and put it in a form that could be sent out to the churches so they could perform it.²⁶

ELWYN RAYMER: There's nowhere where you'll see my name on *Good News*—because I didn't want any identity with it. I thought, I have to do this, but I hate it, I think it's trite, it's intellectually boring . . . anything you want to say negative I said. It's filled with imperfections if you rake through it—it's got a lot of terrible mistakes in it, but no one cared—it hit a nerve. That's where I had to come face to face with the impact that that little imperfect work was having on young people. It changed my life.

BOB OLDENBURG: [The] Church Music [Department] went ahead and started taking orders in the bookstore; by about the second after they started taking orders, they said "We've got more than enough orders to pay for the production of this piece," and they went ahead and produced it. And they had to go into the tenth printing before they had enough to fill the orders that had already come in before it was released in January [1968]. So it was a product that developed out of a felt need.²⁷

Churches Performing *Good News*

Even before its publication in January 1968, churches across America began performing *Good News* from photocopies of the original scores given to the staff choir members at Glorieta. Though the creators of *Good News* never designed the work to be performed as church music—they thought of it as music for fellowships or evangelistic events—many churches performed *Good News* as part of worship services. For the majority of these churches, it was the first time guitars, drums, or bass had ever been used in their sanctuaries. Other churches did not allow *Good News* to be performed in their sanctuaries—or at all!

BILLY RAY HEARN: We saw youth choirs go from ten to a hundred in a matter of weeks. And it was because of the music.²⁸

BOB OLDENBURG: When *Good News* first came as a piece that churches could use, our church in Nashville was one of the first ones that got it . . . our young people learned it quickly and took it out to the State Fair of Tennessee. And there on the midway . . . they had a flatbed truck and they put up a huge guitar behind it, similar to the symbol

²⁵ Oldenburg, "Music in Youth Ministry."

²⁶ Charlie Peacock, *At the Crossroads: An Insider's Look at the Past, Present, and Future of Contemporary Christian Music* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 57.

²⁷ Oldenburg, "Music in Youth Ministry."

²⁸ "Interview: Billy Ray Hearn," *Creator*, March 1981, 17.

that was on the recording of *Good News*—and right there on the midway, they sang *Good News* to thousands and thousands of people for the fourteen days [of the fair].²⁹

LOU STANTON: When we came home [to Greensboro, Alabama,] after we had finished our summer work [at Glorieta], there were several students from Alabama—some in Tuscaloosa, some in Birmingham, some in Mobile—they all wanted to do it again. They all came to Greensboro and practiced and performed it for Greensboro Baptist Church. That was truly breaking the mold for that church! It was accepted very well. And then that group performed in Tuscaloosa—still without written music. After we performed it in Tuscaloosa there were several of the [University of Alabama] BSU kids who wanted to know if they could come and sing it with us. Our group grew and changed a little—it was no longer strictly Glorieta people. We performed it around the state five or six times between September and Christmas 1967.

LLOYD BELL (Minister of Music): I listened as I looked at the music and—as many other church musicians might then have done—mentally shook my head. What would everyone think about us doing that kind of thing? Why, I had even heard that some groups actually were going into places like shopping centers and making spectacles of themselves! The group was called together and the recording played. They responded electrically to the idiom! What was I to do? They *did* like it. But something also changed me. The youth in the church who had never been in a choir came to join us. We now had one hundred in choir. If that was their language, leading many to first-time testimonies, then I simply had to relent—and away we soared! Who was I to sit so squarely on traditional ideas? If God was speaking—really speaking—whatever the way, we must not hinder it. That was a wonderful year! We took out *Good News* to more than twenty locations. Before long I had entered into the spirit of it all so that the happiness radiated from me as well as the other singers. A new closeness sprang up among the entire group, and I felt a true bond with each individual.³⁰

AUBIE McSWAIN (Minister of Music): The World’s Fair was in San Antonio, Texas. The year was 1968. I was minister of music at North Side Baptist Church in Weatherford, Texas. We had a good youth choir. They were invited to sing at the World’s Fair. . . . A fellow music minister suggested that we sing *Good News*, the new youth musical that was doing great things in reaching people for Jesus. I already had said, “I can never do that kind of music in a service in an auditorium where people have assembled to worship God.” You see, my problem was that *Good News*, with its beat, guitars, and drums reminded me of my past. I had been a nightclub entertainer. . . . When I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior, I felt the only songs I should sing were traditional anthems, sacred hymns, or gospel songs and that my duty as a minister of music was to lead choirs to do the same. . . . Now, I searched for the nerve to play the recording of *Good News* to one of the youth choirs, and I was amazed to find that they wanted to learn it. We then combined the two youth choirs and began our rehearsals. . . . The choir grew to over 188 voices, and we saw scores saved who were in our own church and

²⁹ Oldenburg, “Music in Youth Ministry.”

³⁰ Lloyd Bell, “The Now-Time Singers in Church Music,” *The Church Musician* (January 1974): 21.

youth program. Among those were two electric guitar players, two drummers, and an electric bass player, all of whom formerly had played in their own dance bands.³¹

FENTON MOREHEAD (Youth Pastor): *Good News* was a hit with our people [at First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach, Florida]. More than that, it was a springboard into the rest of the youth musicals, which God used in a powerful way.

HARLAN HALL (Minister of Music): I checked it out, and I knew instinctively that the youth would love it. And then I started hearing that everybody in Texas was doing it, and I said, “Well, we’ll give it a shot,” and it took off. It did what I wanted it to do; it pulled kids in off the street and into our choir.

GEORGE GAGLIARDI³² (Youth Choir Member): Back then I thought that if I was going to play guitar, the only way I could play was in a local garage band. Our church was pretty staunchly conservative so I was dealing with all kinds of false guilt about playing. But there was no other place to play! When *Good News* was finally presented in our church, it was understood after the fact that it was one of the things that contributed to the minister of music being fired—there was quite an uproar. In my town [Paris, TX] in the 1960s, people thought “this is outrageous!”

DAVID O. DYKES³³ (Youth Choir Member): I grew up in the First Baptist Church, Florala—named because the town is on the Florida-Alabama line. We had never sung anything other than choral music and cantatas, but our new music minister wanted us to do *Good News*. Because it had drums and guitars, the deacons wouldn’t let us do it in the sanctuary so we did it in the high school auditorium, which turned out to be a good thing because a lot of unchurched people came. Now, looking back at it as a pastor, I would have loved to have been in that meeting where the pastor was talking to the four or five deacons in that church about doing *Good News*. I can just hear one of those old deacons saying, “Ain’t no way we’re gonna have them drums and guitars in *our* church!”

HARRY COWAN (Minister of Music): In New Orleans [First Baptist Church, New Orleans] I did *Good News*. We had guitars and drum set and some brass and piano. This was a breakthrough in the church. It ruffled some feathers—I had a seminary professor [from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary] whose son played guitar in my youth choir and that man wouldn’t let his son play with the group because he didn’t think the guitar should be used in church.

DON MATTINGLY: When I got to Southwestern Seminary, I wound up getting to be the youth director at Sagamore Hill Baptist Church [in Fort Worth]. . . . The first year I was at Southwestern Seminary [1968] we did a thing called “Youth Lab”—it was for

³¹ Aubie McSwain, “The Group within a Group—Yes or No?” *The Church Musician* (September 1971): 22–23.

³² Inspired by *Good News* and Ralph Carmichael and Kurt Kaiser’s youth musical *Tell It Like It Is*, George Gagliardi went on to write his own Christian youth musical, *A New Kind of Dream*, in 1969.

³³ Dr. Dykes is currently serving as Senior Pastor of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, TX.

college students who were youth ministers and other young youth ministers. I got the idea that we would bring the kids from Sagamore Hill out to do *Good News* and I would be Reactor. That was the last time I ever did the Reactor—at Southwestern Seminary with my kids singing. They were blown away by that 100-voice youth choir. This was the first Youth Lab ever held at Southwestern.

Reactions to *Good News*

PHILLIP LANDGRAVE: The real breakthrough for Southern Baptists, for example, came in 1967–1968 with the publication of the “folk musical” *Good News* by Bob Oldenburg and others, published with some fear and trembling by Broadman Press. For the Baptist publisher to put its stamp of approval on the folk-pop-rock styles was indeed a *coup d’église*. The howls of protest were drowned out by the clamors for more of the same. The quiet debates concerning appropriateness were overwhelmed by the thunder of people walking aisles and the roaring of choir lofts bulging with new faces and old faces carrying brighter looks. Everyone wanted to get in on the act, and quite a significant number did.³⁴

MARTHA OLDENBURG (Wife of the late Bob Oldenburg): Right away the kids loved it just because it wasn’t a hymn. At that point, we were listening to other things on the radio and nothing we did in church sounded like that. The grandmas in the church didn’t like it because it put them out of their comfort zone. Most pastors were on the fence—they knew what it could do for young people, but they needed to keep their jobs and make all their folks happy.

BOB OLDENBURG: There was a resistance to the type of music that [*Good News*] was. This is noticed all across the country, where pastors have even stood up after the young people have started a presentation, *Good News*, for instance, and stopped it and said, “We will not have this in our church.” [Other] church youth groups [had] to go outside of their church buildings in order to do it. In other places it wasn’t allowed in the church at all.³⁵

EDDIE LUNN: In hindsight, the fact that some churches wouldn’t allow it to be performed in their sanctuaries was great! That was a totally unintended benefit that probably contributed to its popularity and its effectiveness as an evangelistic tool.

The Effect of *Good News* on the History of Church Music

BILLY RAY HEARN: I believe this was the birth of a new form in the history of musical style. However, it was not meant to be a serious musical form in its beginnings. I don’t

³⁴ Phillip Landgrave, “Church Music and the ‘Now Generation.’” *Review and Expositor: A Baptist Theological Journal* 69, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 196. Landgrave wrote his own youth musical, *Purpose: A Contemporary Musical for Youth*, published by Broadman Press in 1968 and recorded by Elwyn Raymer.

³⁵ Oldenburg, “Music in Youth Ministry.”

think anyone in those days thought it should be performed as a service in the church. This is the reason everyone connected with it was from the Church Recreation Department.³⁶

BILLY RAY HEARN: When we did *Good News* we never said it should in the church service—we said this is something to do after church at night as a fellowship or as a special event, but it didn't take long for pastors to want it in the church.

DON MATTINGLY: After *Good News*, the purpose and the music done by youth choirs changed. It changed the direction of youth choir music forever.

EDDIE LUNN: There was never a vision of it changing church music for young people. It was only our desire to draw young people closer to the church by having something they actually enjoyed and could be enthusiastic about.

FENTON MOREHEAD: Those youth musicals were the catalyst of the revolution of church music in the Jesus Movement that is Contemporary Christian Music today. Jesus Music, as it was called then, really started out of those musicals. God used those youth musicals, and *Good News* was the first one.

MARTHA OLDENBURG: *Good News* has broadened our horizons as Southern Baptists to accept different kinds of music.

HUGH T. McELRATH (Church Music Professor and Hymnologist): History will probably judge a principal turning point in the story of Baptist church in recent decades to be the performance and publication of the message musical *Good News* in 1967. This work represented a culmination of the various secular trends influencing the music of Baptists during the 1950s and 1960s. . . . The influence of the lighter musical styles which *Good News* represented has pervaded all present-day areas of church music: vocal solo literature and older children's choral music as well as music for youth and adult choirs and instrumental ensembles.³⁷

MARTHA OLDENBURG: I know that at that point he [Bob Oldenburg] was not worried about or even ever considered what this might do to the history of church music, he was concerned about the kids who were unreached right then. He was always focused on how it was going to bring God glory and edify the folks who are here on the earth. Everything he ever wrote was like that.

EDDIE LUNN: I think *Good News* changed the objectives of the creators of church music—let's write something that will reach people outside of the four walls of the church. It also took church music to a younger age of people.

³⁶ Hearn, Liner notes.

³⁷ Hugh T. McElrath, "Turning Points in the Story of Baptist Church Music," *Baptist History and Heritage* 19, no. 1 (January 1984), 13–14.

LOU STANTON: I was talking to my son the other day. He is the music director at a church here. His style is about as far as you can get from Jim’s style. Jim was a very formal church music person—pipe organs and the whole bit. But his son kept telling him, “Dad, what I am doing in church now is the equivalent of what you did back then with *Good News*. You broke the ice—you’re the one who started all this! I’m just following in your footsteps but going in a little bit different direction.” Jim had to admit that he was right; he could see exactly where he was coming from.

MARTHA OLDENBURG: When my two sons went on the staff of Fellowship Church in Grapevine [Texas], Bob and I went out there one Sunday when Bob was on vacation. We were sitting in the auditorium and the music started—and it was loud and “in-your-face.” He looked at me and rolled his eyes, and I leaned over and said; “You started it—you started this.” He just grinned. Later when we got outside he said, “I’m pretty sure I never intended it to sound like this.”

The Lasting Legacy of *Good News*

EDDIE LUNN: [*Good News*] became very popular very quickly. I think partly because of the guitars and drums. Interestingly, the guitars and drums forced it out of church sanctuaries. It was performed in many secular venues; high school auditoriums, city squares, and public places like that. Due to that, you weren’t just drawing from your Baptist church youth population—you were drawing from those kids and their friends and other bystanders who happened to see it. To me, that helped create its popularity. That enabled it to reach more non-Christian or non-churched people. Also, *Good News* brought in youth other than just singers. In my youth choir in the mid-1960s it was guys and girls singing with a trained director and a trained pianist—that was it. *Good News* brought in different kinds of instrumentalists. It also brought in off-stage people: sound technicians, lighting people, choreographers, gaffers, logistics handlers, even make-up artists. Kids could be a part of this and experience the same joy and benefit as the singers, but never have to sing a note.

BOB OLDENBURG: As a writer, I have sort of ambivalent feelings [about *Good News*]. I was excited about being in the beginning of the development of it. But it’s sort of like having a baby in your family and then letting everybody else raise it. Because you have no control after it leaves your hand. And it just started happening all over the country. I’d get letters, I’d see bulletins from churches, [and] I’d read state papers and see where groups were doing it. It just seemed to be taking the Baptist churches and others that related to them by virtual storm.

ELWYN RAYMER: I consider *Good News* a really trite piece of work, but at the same time, if you’re a realist, you can’t just dismiss it because it met a need in a lot of people even with all those imperfections.

BILLY APPLING: When folk musicals came, the choir rooms began to be full. They could play the acoustic guitar and that was cool. This transformed youth choirs and it

made the music accessible to the kids. Sunday afternoons were an exciting time because they had something to sink their teeth into. . . . The musicals allowed kids to be kids and to do tuneful and lively songs that had a message.

FENTON MOREHEAD: Through *Good News* the church began to recognize this new form of music and recognize it as valid. Because youth choirs did these youth musicals, the traditional church began to see the light that the old way isn't always the best way to reach people. I believe God used *Good News* to open the eyes of the traditional church that a new kind of music was coming that could not be denied.

STEPHEN F. HALL: First, it [*Good News*] gave young people an opportunity to involve themselves in an exciting activity which could be used as a vehicle for sharing their lasting decisions for Christ made either at a performance of this musical or as a direct result of its performance. This would include both members of the audience and members of the cast. Finally, with its predominance of folk idioms as the overall style of the musical, *Good News* proved to be at once interesting to the young people and at the same time relatively inoffensive to the adult members of the churches. This point should not be overlooked, for had the door not been opened gradually through folk music in the church, as typified by this material, it is doubtful that subsequent musicals using rock, soul and other idioms could have knocked the door down without considerable difficulty even with the huge volume of sound produced by their monstrous amplifiers.³⁸

BOB BOYD: I hope somewhere that church musicians today will be able to get a glimpse of the development of today's church music and the part that *Good News* played. It has blown my mind to think that *Good News* was a part of great sweep of the development—or some might argue the de-development—of church music.

MARTHA OLDENBURG: The words that [Bob] wrote remain true—the harmonies and beat have changed, but the truth has not changed. The truth has to stay the same, but you have to write for today. The ultimate goal is to bring God the glory. We have to write for the times in which we live, but the words have to remain constant. He was writing for the young people of that day.

Conclusion

Good News was the highest-selling piece of choral music published by Broadman Press in the 1960s. While today the music of *Good News* has largely been forgotten, its legacy lives on as one of the very first pieces of contemporary church music written for evangelical churches. While some church music historians have noted the historic role that *Good News* played in bringing about contemporary church music, most of those involved in the creation of *Good News* never received their due recognition. Most continued their lives and ministries post-*Good News* in obscurity.

³⁸ Hall, "The Christian Folk Musical," 48.

Bob Boyd served in various positions for the Baptist Sunday School Board until his retirement in 1990. He and his wife still live in Nashville.

Frank Hart Smith continued working for the Church Recreation Department of the Baptist Sunday School Board until retiring in 1990. He is today remembered as one of the pioneers of church recreation and sports ministry. He died of kidney disease in 1991.

Dr. William J. Reynolds succeeded Dr. W. Hines Sims as Secretary of the Church Music Department in 1971 and remained in that position until 1980. He was the editor of the 1975 *Baptist Hymnal*, the first denominational-published hymnal to include songs from Christian youth musicals. Among them was “Do You Really Care?” from *Good News*. Reynolds later taught hymnology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and remained an active teacher, writer, and scholar until his death in 2009.

Elwyn Raymer worked at the Church Music Department until 1973, when he left to work for Buryl Red’s Triune Music. Raymer, who was initially hesitant to work with the pop-styled *Good News*, helped produce Buryl Red and Ragan Courtney’s hugely successful musical *Celebrate Life!* Raymer still lives in the Nashville area.

Cecil McGee continued to serve as Drama Consultant for the Church Recreation Department for several years after *Good News*. Later in life he moved to Titusville, Florida and operated a Christian retreat center. He died in 2007.

Jim Stanton served as a minister of music at several churches in Alabama before working for the Alabama Baptist Convention and, later, the Baptist Sunday School Board. He retired from ministry in 2001. Stanton passed away in April 2016. His wife, Lou, still lives in Alabama, and his son is a minister of music.

Billy Ray Hearn’s involvement in *Good News* propelled him to a position at Word Music in Waco, Texas. He consulted with Ralph Carmichael and Kurt Kaiser as they were writing their first Christian youth musical: *Tell It Like It Is*. Hearn went on to establish Myrrh Records in 1972, the first record label devoted to “Jesus Music” and Christian rock. Hearn remained active in the Contemporary Christian Music industry well into his 80s. He passed away in Nashville in April 2015.

The Church Music Department asked Eddie Lunn and Bob Oldenburg to write a follow-up musical to *Good News*. The work, titled *Happening Now!*, was a commercial failure. After graduating from Baylor University, Lunn returned to Nashville to lead his family’s business. He and his wife, Saralu, who was a member of the *Good News* staff choir at Glorieta in 1967, live in the Nashville area. Fifty years after being the lead guitar player for *Good News*, Lunn still plays his guitar every Sunday morning for the Kindergarten Sunday School classes at Brentwood Baptist Church.

Bob Oldenburg left the Church Recreation Department in 1969 to return to First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas, the same church he had served before coming to the Sunday School Board in 1966. In 1971 Ralph Carmichael asked Oldenburg to write a new youth musical for his publishing house, Lexicon Music. The musical, *Real: A Soul Experience*, was co-written by Oldenburg and his close friend and FBC San Antonio co-worker Lanny Allen. *Real* was the last of three youth musicals that Oldenburg helped create. Oldenburg went on to serve in several other churches before his death from cancer in 2004. His wife, Martha, lives in the Dallas area. Several of his sons are active in church ministry.

The men who wrote *Good News* fifty years ago never intended to change the direction and history of church music. Instead, they were simply men of God who sincerely desired to create a vehicle that would enable Christian teenagers of their era to communicate the gospel

in their own language and musical style. In accomplishing this goal, they *did* change the direction of evangelical church music by introducing pop-styled music and rhythm instruments to evangelical churches. Every contemporary worship leader, songwriter, media volunteer, choral arranger, praise team member, and youth worship band player serving in the field of church music today owes a debt of gratitude to pioneers like Cecil McGee, Ted Overman, Jim Stanton, Billy Ray Hearn, Eddie Lunn, and Bob Oldenburg, who paved the road to contemporary worship music fifty years ago.