



Members of the South Jordan Utah Glenmoor Stake and the Cheltenham England Stake perform Faith, the Musical in the Conference Center Theater.

Musical Brings Saints Together across Oceans and Time

Rehearsal can be tricky when those involved in the production are separated by the Atlantic Ocean.

From August 4 through 13, members of the South Jordan Utah Glenmoor Stake joined with Saints from the Cheltenham England Stake at the Conference Center Theater in Salt Lake City, Utah, to perform *Faith, the Musical*, which portrays the story of the approximately 500 men, women, and children of the Willie handcart company who set out from Iowa City in June 1856, responding to a prophet's call to "come to Zion."

The two groups rehearsed 7,000 miles (11,265 km) apart for four months, communicating by telephone, e-mail, and Internet video software.

Despite the distance, the members involved in the musical were unified as they learned about the pioneers' sacrifices and made their own.

Much of the musical's text has been taken from the journals of the Oakey family, which tell of the family's trials and triumphs as they left

England, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, traveled across the midwestern plains, and pulled a handcart through icy rivers to reach the Salt Lake Valley.

Only one or two stake productions are performed in the Conference Center Theater each year, so getting the production to Salt Lake took some work and a lot of faith, said Ben Lowater, Cheltenham England Stake president, who plays the part of main character Thomas Oakey.

David R. Markham, director and composer of the musical, said this is the first time a group of people from another nation has been brought to the Conference Center Theater. "I think the uniqueness is [we're] this big ocean apart, but we're all on the same wavelength," he said.

Other members of the cast and choir agreed that preparing for the musical increased their own faith.

Blake Earl, a member of the Glenmoor stake, coordinated much of the interaction between the British and American Saints. "I think the biggest blessings have been the appreciation

for the pioneers and the unification that has occurred between us [and the members in England] as we've worked on a common purpose, even seven hours apart," Brother Earl said.

According to Brother Markham, the creative process of capturing the story of the faith of the early pioneers has taken more than 1,000 hours—"one hour for every mile those wonderful Saints pushed and pulled their handcarts," he said.

In one scene President Lowater, playing the part of Thomas Oakey, carries his daughter's body into the Salt Lake Valley.

"I think only by [acting out] their experiences . . . living in their shoes, and experiencing some of the emotions that they felt . . . do you . . . really get the feeling that they must have felt," he said. "So my appreciation for their dedication, their commitment, the consecration of their lives to the gospel has changed dramatically." ■

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