

BRINGING

Abish TO LIFE

BY JADE SWARTZBERG AND SHARI WHYTE



One small Book of Mormon story has made a big difference in the lives of the youth of Silverdale, Washington.

Mentioned by name only once, Abish and her story may be easy to miss, hidden in Alma's account of Ammon's mission and King Lamoni's conversion. But the youth of the Silverdale Washington Stake have not missed her and have shared her story of faith through an original musical production called, quite fittingly, *Abish*.

The play was written and directed by stake leaders and involved the youth in a variety of ways through acting, singing, playing in the live orchestra, costuming, set design, lighting, and sound. The production, which was presented as a part of a stake youth conference, took a lot

of time and dedication. It also took a lot of faith.

Faith Like Abish

Miranda Feltzman is not a member of the Church; she had never heard of the Book of Mormon before she was invited to audition for the musical. A stake leader knew her and felt prompted to call her. It took courage for Miranda to try out for the play, but she did, and landed a lead role—the part of Abish.

“I was really worried initially—it was my first time playing a lead role in a musical. But everyone was really supportive and had faith in me, and eventually I learned to have that sort of faith in myself,” recalls Miranda.

That faith helped her understand the role she was playing, although at first she was worried she wouldn't be able to. “I realized that Abish really was almost exactly like me and every other young man or woman out there at some point in their life. She has to learn fairly quickly to stick to her convictions no matter what, even if the entire world—or the court in this case—seems set against her.”

Abish's story taught the youth that with God, anything is possible. They learned this as they juggled hectic high school schedules and play rehearsals to make the production happen.

Steven Connell of the Silverdale Second Ward found himself turning to prayer for help. “There were many times when nothing seemed to be going right. I wanted to devote all my time to the play and not have to deal with



The story of Abish is in the 19th chapter of Alma. Her name is mentioned in verse 16. She witnesses the miraculous conversion of King Lamoni, his queen, and his household. See Alma 19:16-18, 28-29. (Above) Miranda Feldtman plays the role of Abish.

anything else, but I couldn't do that. There was homework, finals, and just everyday high school life that demanded my attention. I had to pray that the production would be what Heavenly Father expected and that it would be a great missionary tool for the youth and the others in the audience."

Kyle Hollenback of the Poulsbo Second Ward also learned that faith and prayer were just as important in their lives as they were in the story. "I prayed that I would receive the strength and confidence to somehow find the talent to sing and perform. We prayed as a cast and crew



that we would be guided by the Lord and that all the little kinks in the play would get worked out."

True Scripture

Abish's testimony of Jesus Christ began "on account of a remarkable vision of her father" (Alma 19:16). She later had the opportunity to be courageous and bold in exercising her faith and bearing her testimony. Many of the youth also had the chance to catch their own personal visions of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon as they saw the scriptures come to life and learned to relate to the people of long ago.

As Steven Connell worked on his character, King Lamoni became a very real person to him. During the scene in which Lamoni feels the weight of his mistakes and longs to have his sins forgiven, Steven was so overcome by emotion that he cried. "I really felt that through faith in Jesus

Christ, we can change everything about our own lives and start over again to be new and better people," says Steven.

Kyle Hollenback, who played Ammon, learned something not found by simply reading the Book of Mormon. "Sometimes people get in the mode of reading the Book of Mormon as a history book, but getting into our characters gave me a better understanding of the reality of this book," he says. "I can relate to Ammon in that when called upon, I can be a little bold, like acting in this play."

Kendra Hollenback shares her brother's new understanding. "After *Abish* the Book of Mormon doesn't seem like a history book anymore. It's real. You can't just expect to get a testimony without working on it. You have to read the Book of Mormon and pray about it."

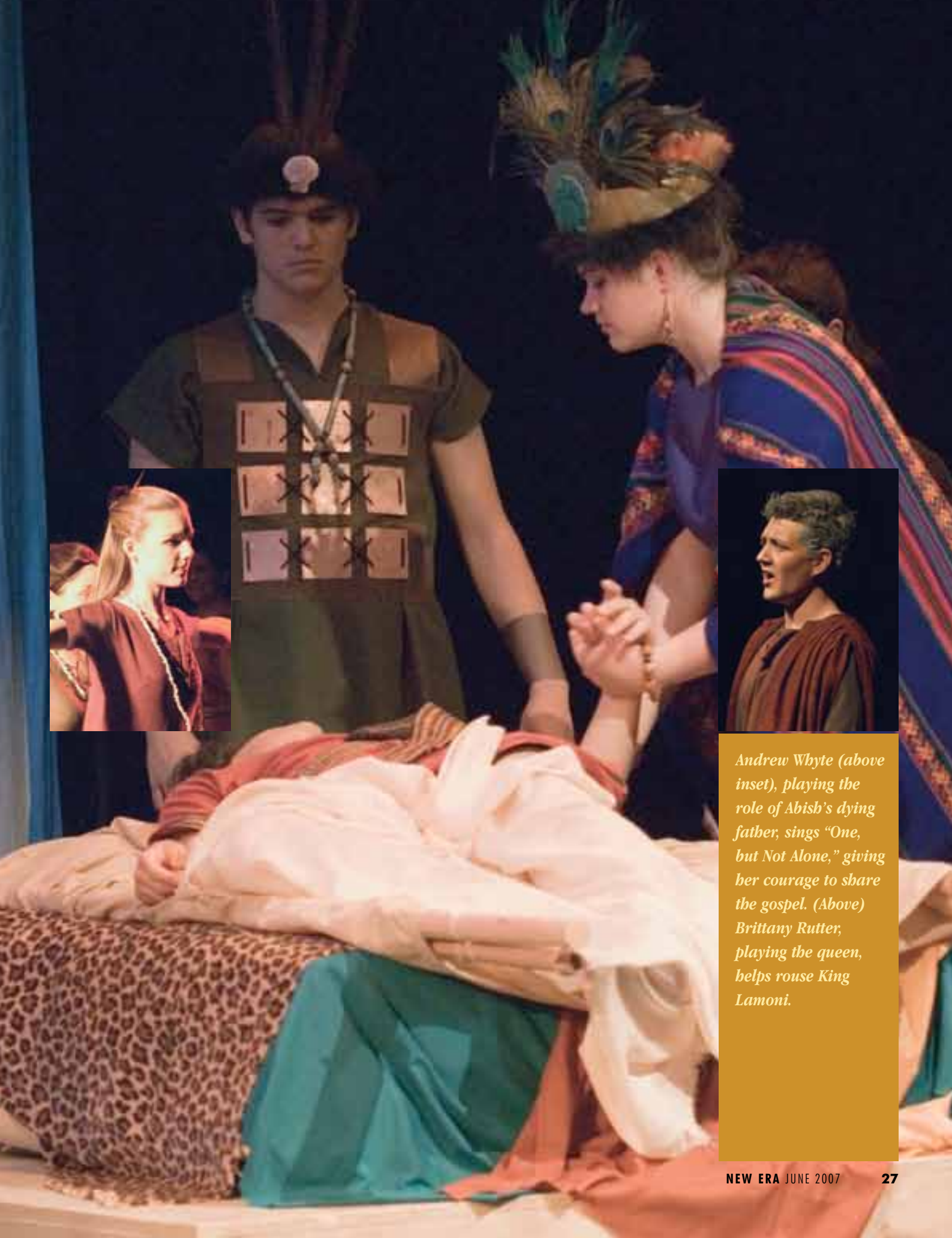
An Invitation

Abish's message invites all to find and share the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through her faith and courage she made it possible for many to hear the word of the Lord and become converted. Many of the youth chose to be bold like Abish in sharing their testimonies as they invited their friends to attend the production.

"There were so many people from school who came out of curiosity and have now been introduced to the Book of Mormon," says Christina Willey of the Poulsbo Second Ward, who helped with stage management.

Those who came were touched by the spirit of the production. From his place in the orchestra, where he played the clarinet, Scott Daly of the Silverdale First Ward was able to see that the audience was affected by what was happening onstage. "There was one scene where the queen's servants and family kneel to pray," he says. "During this moment, the lights in the auditorium begin to fill the room with brightness. Then I could see every smiling and crying face in the audience. The play definitely





Andrew Whyte (above inset), playing the role of Abish's dying father, sings "One, but Not Alone," giving her courage to share the gospel. (Above) Brittany Rutter, playing the queen, helps rouse King Lamoni.

strengthened my testimony of the Book of Mormon.”

Like most of the youth involved in the play, Abish herself was not necessarily a great leader. She was primarily a poor, humble servant who put her trust in her Heavenly Father and risked her job and her friends in order to bear her testimony. And she was probably a little scared.

Knowing that the play would be many people’s first introduction to the Church, Andrew Whyte of the Bainbridge Island Ward was nervous in his role as

Abish’s father. But he was comforted and strengthened. “The Spirit helped me to put my trust in the Lord, comforted me, prompted me to pray and gave me the assurance that I would remember



all my lines and sing my whole soul out,” he says.

As a dancer in the play, Stacie Brown of the Poulsbo Second Ward learned that many people can be inspired through Abish’s story. “Every time Miranda got up on stage and did a scene, it looked like she had been a member all her life. I know that I felt the Spirit each time she performed.”

Besides inspiring others, Miranda says she was able to witness firsthand what Latter-day Saints are really about. “I would never have traded that time in my life for anything else in the world.” **NE**

Want to know about women in the Bible? Read “For She Loved Much: Women in the New Testament” in this month’s *Ensign*, p. 40.



Steven Connell (above) played King Lamoni. He had been in plays before, “but nothing like this. Through all of the rehearsals I had to have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost to lead and direct me in how I should play this real person.”