



FINDING CREATIVE WAYS TO SERVE CHURCHES

The pandemic restrictions led to Christian theatre company LAMPS producing a new kind of show.

Sam Pullen-Campbell explains more

When Baptist minister Chris Matthewman (Kislingbury and Upton, Northants) founded Christian Theatre Company LAMPS Collective back in 2014, he expected to face some challenges, but global pandemics weren't one of them.

LAMPS were quick to rise to the creative challenges posed by the crisis however, and *The Passion Stories* are the result.

**I will speak using stories; I will tell secret things from long ago.
Psalm 78:2**

The stories are extracts from an early success in the company's repertoire - their original take on the Easter story - *The Passion*. The play, co-written by Chris and artistic director Sam Pullen-Campbell, features the events of Holy Week as seen through the eyes of Simon Peter, Mary Magdalene and a young centurion named Marcus.

Between 2016 and 2019 *The Passion* toured all over the UK and was performed in a huge assortment of venues from cathedrals to pubs and tiny Welsh chapels. Spring 2020 would have seen the first performance of the

show in a prison, which hugely excited the company.

March 2020 saw the advent of Covid-19 however, which quickly put paid to live performances so an alternative had to be found.

Committed to offering churches creative resources but limited by lockdown, the cast of *The Passion* decided to record a selection of monologues from the show on their mobile phones at home. The state of isolation in which the actors had found themselves suddenly had parallels with that experienced by the disciples in the hours between the Crucifixion and Resurrection, and these helped them to identify with their characters even more.

They found too that the simplicity of the close-up filming added an extra degree of intimacy and authenticity to the

performances, and the stories, performed direct to camera, are immediate, vivid and compelling. They were released via YouTube one per day throughout Holy Week 2020.

When it became apparent that Covid was going to prevent touring with live Christmas shows too, LAMPS got the camera crew in. Their one-woman show *Bread and Starlight*, which tells the story of Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, was filmed in a local church and released as an Advent resource for churches. Split into themed sections the play was supported by written studies. This allowed churches to use the film in short chunks with small groups to explore the approach to Christmas in a new way over the weeks of Advent, or to have group showings of the entire film for their communities at Christmas. For those opting to do the latter, LAMPS offered post-show Zoom chats for audiences with the creative team. This added a 'live' interactive element to the film showings and meant people got to meet and talk with the actress playing Elizabeth, the writer and the musical director, whilst sitting in their own front rooms enjoying a mince pie!

When touring live was made impossible for the second Easter running, *The Passion Stories* were re-released, this time accompanied by six written studies, making the resource an original, creative and thoughtful way in which to engage with the Easter story afresh. The language of the play and the studies is deliberately contemporary and accessible, making them ideal for outreach projects too.

Response to the combination of stories and written material was hugely positive, with people from all over the world engaging online and using the material.

'I live in Bermuda and wanted to reach out and say a huge thank you for compiling such powerful portrayals and studies for The Passion'

(Online user of *The Passion Stories*)

Not being able to share the whole show, however, was frustrating and in summer 2021 LAMPS hit the recording studio. The result was a powerful audiobook version of *The Passion*, the stories of all three characters wound together and interspersed with Heidi Cottrell's spine-tingling original music to create a memorable audio experience. Without a visual dimension to the recordings LAMPS discovered that the intimacy of the monologues seemed to be enhanced still further, and once again listeners responded with enthusiasm.

As they emerge from the pandemic, the LAMPS team are grateful to have still found creative ways to serve churches and are delighted to have preserved some of their favourite shows for posterity and future use.

The team have missed touring live enormously, however, and can't wait to be back on the road. "We've been reminded forcefully of the sheer pleasure and fun of connecting with other people through performance, as well as the power and intimacy of live theatre. The telling of a story from one person to another is both the most basic and yet in some ways most exciting way of communicating, and we are confident we have stories worth telling!"

LAMPS have also used the last 18 months to write and devise a brand new show. *'Fishers'* is a collection of different stories about Jesus and his early ministry, tales told by fishermen round a night-time campfire. Tales of storms stilled, loved ones revived and broken people made whole, they're ancient stories but full of hope, and LAMPS are very much looking forward to sharing them.



Actress Emma Jane Ramsden,
who plays Elizabeth

The resource is free to churches and individuals, with the option of donating to the work of LAMPS if desired and will remain available for Easter 2022, though the company hopes very much to be touring the full show live again by then

The recording of *The Passion* is now available to buy as a digital download.

Both *The Passion* and *Fishers* will be touring live in 2022. For more details of these productions, how to book a show and to download recordings, please see www.lampscollective.com

Sam Pullen-Campbell is
LAMPS artistic director
LAMPS is a collective of
Christian artists that produce
fabulous live events and
creative resources for the
church.

Its aim is to create work to
inspire, challenge, entertain
and provoke thought about
the nature of God, life and
the universe.

LAMPS is an acronym which
stands for Love, Action,
Music, Poetry and Stories



'I would go so far as to call it life changing in my understanding of Scripture' (R Dennett, Oxon. Audience member - The Passion)