**Zacchaeus Character Sketches**

**Jesus Christ**

Jesus was and is the Son of God. He is the second member of the Divine Trinity. He is the Alpha and the Omega and yet approximately 2000 years ago, He entered human history through His incarnation. Fully God and fully man, He was born, grew and ultimately walked among us teaching, healing and saving those whose hearts were open to Him. As a Torah-observant Jew, He had great affinity with the religious leaders of His day and yet was in constant conflict with them. While never excusing sin or whitewashing its deadly effect, He consistently preached love and forgiveness to the least, the last and the lost. Zacchaeus fit those categories perfectly. He needed love and forgiveness to be sure, and despite his powerful position in Jericho as a chief publican, he was looked upon as the least worthy of grace. And yet, Jesus saw him through eyes of love and upset the religious apple cart by dining with this known Roman collaborator and local gangster. All of this is set against the backdrop of the greater mission of Jesus, which is to give his life for the sins of the world in Jerusalem. Because Jesus invested a few hours with this lost soul, many others found forgiveness in Jericho and the story of His loving interaction with Zacchaeus is still inspiring countless people who feel “shorted” in life to this day.

The Actor that portrays Jesus must be able to sing comfortably in the Baritone and high tenor ranges. He must also have an excellent sense of rhythm to successfully execute the spoken word (rap) passages. He must be comfortable with his shirt off for the crucifixion scene and able to project authority and loving empathy. The Jesus character dominates Act 2, but does not appear in Act 1. Arguably the most important role to fill in Zacchaeus: The Musical, the person who portrays Jesus must possess exceptional talent and an electrifying stage presence.

**Zacchaeus**

As early as he can remember, Zacchaeus has been the butt of most of the jokes of the other children in Jericho and the recipient of patronizing sympathy from the adults. His father Ezra loves Zacchaeus his only son deeply but is frustrated that the lumber business he works so hard to establish will die with him. Ever since Zacchaeus reached early adulthood, there has been tension between him and his father because he desperately wants to please his father but is physically unable to handle the rigors of the lumber business. This does not stop Zacchaeus from begging his father for a chance to work with him…publicly. This embarrasses Ezra because Zacchaeus is so persistent, but Ezra is also very protective of Zacchaeus and afraid that he will strain himself and die. The tension finally comes to a head in Act one and sets up the next step of the story line which is Zacchaeus asking Phineas secretly if he can work for him disclosing financial secrets of the business people of Jericho. Zacchaeus says to the confused Miriam “If I can’t make my father proud, I can make him jealous. If we can’t please the crowd, we can make them not forget us. No more coming up short. Everything can change, if I have your support.” Zacchaeus wants one thing he has never received; respect. He wants the favor of, and the respect of his father. He wants respect for becoming a successful business man in Jericho. He wants to impress the father and family of Miriam with his earning power, making it possible for them to wed and build a family of their own. Zacchaeus is so tired of coming up short in every area of his life. He becomes so despondent and depressed after his father and all the business people of Jericho publicly shame and reject him that he contemplates suicide. He then becomes desperate enough to “dance with the devil” to get what he longs for. That’s when he contacts Phineas secretly. He explains that, because no one pays any attention to him, he could covertly collect useful financial information from the business people of Jericho and feed it to Phineas. He convinces Phineas that there are many who are hiding large portions of their taxable income from him. Phineas agrees. Zacchaeus prospers under the cover story that he works for a wealthy foreign merchant who desires to remain anonymous. He marries in a beautiful ceremony with family and the new friends that money can buy. Everything seems perfect, until his own father has a bit too much wine. He demands to know how Zacchaeus is making so much money and creates a terrible scene, effectively ruining Zacchaeus’ big day. Zacchaeus snaps and the tables are turned as he tells his own father to get lost, permanently severing all ties with him and his family.

We see Zacchaeus meeting nervously with Phineas in an open location demanding to know why they are not discussing business matter under the curtain of night in a secret place. Phineas opens his heart to Zacchaeus, taunting him by saying that he too was once happily married and able-bodied. He lets Zacchaeus know that being a secret tax collector will catch up to him eventually and that he will not be able to operate covertly anymore. Sooner or later, the people of Jericho will find out. Zacchaeus, emboldened by the fact that he has made himself indispensable to Phineas, asserts that he is ending their collaboration. Zacchaeus notices people running excitedly towards the Jordan river and tries to blend in with the crowd. He hears John the Baptizer preaching about Jesus, but when Jesus appears and is baptized, Zacchaeus is unable to see over the crowd. After everyone, including Jesus leaves with great joy, Zacchaeus remains, utterly dejected, at the end of his rope, hatred filling his heart. He decides there and there to stage a hostile takeover by contacting the Roman soldiers who worked for Phineas and offering them double pay if they will switch their allegiance to him. Zacchaeus, flanked by his newly acquired bodyguards, publicly confronts Phineas and violently seizes his ornate cane. After callously beating Phineas to the ground, he announces himself as the new chief publican in Jericho, shocking family and friends. In this way, he reinvents himself and secures his new position. When Miriam finds out, she tearfully runs away, Zacchaeus following her. The rest of the musical spirals toward the iconic meeting of Jesus of Nazareth on the Jericho main road, and Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree. We see the public repentance of Zacchaeus and the powerful ministry of Jesus among his “tax collector and sinner” friends. Following dinner, Jesus explains that He must leave for Jerusalem. Zacchaeus vows to follow Jesus anywhere, but explains that he must honor his public promises by taking a few days and making financial restitution towards all the people of Jericho he mistreated. After Jesus gives Zacchaeus some cryptic promises, He departs for Jerusalem. Zacchaeus then honors his commitments to the cheated people of Jericho, giving away a great deal of his fortune to them all. There is lot of rejoicing in Jericho, and then we see many who were initially skeptical believing in the authenticity of the claims of Jesus because of the amazing heart change of Zacchaeus. Many choose to believe in Jesus as Messiah, including his estranged father, Ezra, who publicly apologizes and reconciles with Zacchaeus. The audience is suddenly transported to Jerusalem where Jesus is already carrying His cross up the Via Dolorosa. He pauses to sing to the weeping women of Jerusalem. We then see Zacchaeus and Miriam, their commitments honored, leaving and then arriving in Jerusalem. They are shocked that the streets are almost empty, yet they can hear many women weeping in the distance. Just then, Phineas, completely healed and barely recognizable, runs across the stage nearly running into Zacchaeus and Miriam. After they question him, they find out he was healed by Jesus and followed him instantly to Jerusalem. However, he explains to their horror that Jesus was arrested, tried and convicted and is now hanging on a Roman cross. They go to Him and witness the seven last words of Jesus and others interacting with Him in His final moments. Jesus dies, is taken down from the cross, and laid in the lap of His mother Mary who sings a reprise of the lullaby prayer we heard at the top of the show. The soldiers then take the body of Jesus as Mary transitions into the next song. She moves from despair to faith, as does the crowd that is gathered. The lights are dimmed as the song transitions seamlessly into the next and until Jesus victoriously emerges from the tomb. There is a brilliant resurrection scene and the lights fade. Jesus disappears temporarily and the lights come back up for the finale song. Immediately following, the Pastor comes to make some very short remarks and tie the story all together. Following those remarks, Zacchaeus and the cast sing the closing song, and the musical is over.

The man who portrays Zacchaeus must be physically smaller than many of the other cast members. He must be comfortable singing in both the baritone and high tenor ranges. He also must possess a very good sense of rhythm to be able to execute the spoken word (rap) portions of the songs well. He must be able to project neediness, rejection, bitterness and heartfelt repentance. This is also one of the most demanding roles, if not the most demanding role in the entire production, so the man who does this part must possess stamina and a great memory to keep all the lyrics straight.

**Miriam**

Miriam is the love interest of Zacchaeus. She is an exceptionally kind and compassionate individual. She loves Zacchaeus for who he is and is not bothered by his height or his sense of inferiority. She is a great encourager to him and is with him in the good and bad times. When she marries him, she does not know that he is already working secretly as an assistant to the chief publican (tax collector) in Jericho. When she finds out, she retreats into their beautiful home, ashamed to show her face to the people of Jericho for a time, but is elated when Jesus interacts with Zacchaeus, and he repents of his many sins publicly. She enthusiastically embraces the message of Jesus and becomes His follower the same time as Zacchaeus.

**Ezra**

Ezra is the father of Zacchaeus. Ezra is frustrated with life. Outwardly, we can see that he is an insanely hard worker and that he has a passionate hatred for the Roman government and their occupation of Jericho. He is very vocal in his disdain for the Jewish turncoat/Roman collaborators, the tax collectors. His nemesis is a man named Phineas who always seems to show up when Ezra comes into some profit in his lumber business. He probably lives with the fear that he had since Zacchaeus was born, that Zacchaeus would die prematurely, or be hurt because of his size and lack of physical strength. He’s a good man, but a tortured man. There’s nothing more frustrating than working as hard as he does and having nothing to show for it, all because an evil weasel of a man can come, in the powerful name of an occupying force and simply steal it all away.

The actor that plays this role must be comfortable with baritone and tenor voice ranges and must be a commanding and imposing presence on stage. There should be a sharp contrast between the Zacchaeus character and Ezra’s character.

**Rachel**

Rachel is a good mother. She is loving and protective of Zacchaeus, but also loves her husband. When Zacchaeus is born small, weak and not expected to live, she boldly cries out to God and prophetically names her sickly son “Zacchaeus” which means “righteous”. She prays that God will heal him and make him a man who points to and declares the righteousness of God. This is significant, because of the obvious irony of a righteous man becoming a very unrighteous tax collector. But it also foreshadows that fact that Zacchaeus will ultimately come face to face with Righteousness Himself and be transformed in the process. We get the impression that Rachel has to be the peacemaker between the intelligent ambitious but unrealistic Zacchaeus and the physically powerful Ezra, the man with a bad attitude but a great work ethic.

The person who portrays Rachel needs to be comfortable in the alto to mezzo range and must project a kindness coupled with a strong but frayed quality because of clash of personalities within her home.

**Phineas**

Phineas was once a Torah observant Jew and respected part of the Jericho community. But when his wife died an agonizingly slow death, having never given birth to any children, Phineas became bitter towards God and at the other people of Jericho who had it better than him. He became a Roman collaborator and tax collector and was immediately distinguished by the Romans for his efficiency and cruelty. It did not take long for him to ascend through the tax collecting ranks to become the Chief Publican of Jericho, but along the way, he was injured permanently by a butcher who viciously slashed and cut the muscles in his leg. Unable to walk unaided, he uses a very expensive cane that is covered with precious stones and is a symbol of his authority as Chief Publican. He has no friends. Even the Soldiers that work with him do so only for the money. Even the other tax collectors have little time for Phineas because a significant portion of all their collections are owed to him. Phineas feels a strange kinship with Zacchaeus because he can sense in him the same bitterness of soul he possesses. The only thing that can change Phineas is a miracle and eventually those miracles come to him through Jesus.

The actor portraying Phineas must be able to project a sinister sort of sadism that is fueled by bitterness in his interactions with people. But he must also be able to show himself to be completely transformed by Jesus. He must be comfortable singing in a high baritone range, possess a very steady sense of rhythm and elocute with excellence, as he has several challenging raps to execute.

**Jachim**

Jachim is an assistant to Zacchaeus who is sent to collect from the family of Bartimaeus. He is typically harsh and uncaring, but something about this large family’s poverty touches his heart. He tries to persuade Zacchaeus to abandon his ruthless and incessant collections from this family. He also becomes fascinated with the mysterious “healing Rabbi” that Debra, daughter of Bartimaeus, describes to them. The actor portraying Jachim should be comfortable singing in a high baritone range and project a strong sense of inner conflict.

**Bartimaeus**

Bartimaeus is father of six children. He became blind after a mysterious illness. When we first see him, he has been blind for four years and resorts to begging on the streets of Jericho. His faith filled daughter Debra, the oldest of his children, is a constant encouragement to him, but he grows more despondent each day he remains blind. His own father, Timaeus, lives in his home and does his best to take care of his family. His name Bartimaeus simply means “son of Timaeus” and when we hear Bartimaeus tell his backstory we can see that he feels that he has become a non-person in his community. He once had a name of his own, but now he is simply the son of his father. He feels that he is no one, but his father’s son. The story spirals towards his meeting with and healing by Jesus. His story is intertwined with his delightful daughter Debra. The family of Bartimaeus is related to Matthew (Levi) the apostle of Jesus. He sends word to them that he will be traveling through Jericho with His healing Rabbi, Jesus, whom he believes to be the promised Messiah, the Son of David. Debra hears of this and confidently proclaims it to her father and also ultimately to Zacchaeus and Jachim. She is proven to be right when Jesus comes through the town and stops when he hears Bartimaeus crying out; “Jesus, Son of David…have mercy on me!” Jesus heals Bartimaeus and the city of Jericho catches on fire with faith. There is so much rejoicing by the people of Jericho until Jesus interacts with the next broken person on the road…who just happens to be the chief publican.

The man who portrays Bartimaeus must be comfortable singing in the baritone to tenor range and should project a tragic brokenness that turns to joy when he is healed. Before he is healed, he is not bitter, but he is depressed. He trusts his daughter though, and he responds positively to her encouragement.

**Debra**

Debra is the daughter of Bartimaeus. She is a strong believer and often spends time in prayer in the same tree that once was a place of refuge for Zacchaeus. She holds her family together and encourages her father. Debra prays constantly for her poor family and when she hears from Levi (Apostle Matthew, former tax collector) about Jesus and His ministry of healing, she is convinced that her father will be healed. She is not disappointed. She even befriends Zacchaeus, the man who abused her poor family. She can be a young lady between the ages of 9 and 14 and she must be comfortable singing in a mezzo soprano range. The actress portraying Debra must project inner confidence tempered by prayerful purity. She, like Miriam, sees the potential good in Zacchaeus and disarms him with her bold witness.

Judah the Merchant

Judah loves business and loves working with Ezra. They have been partners in the lumber business for about 10 years and have made a lot of money together. They have also been cheated out of lots of money by Phineas together, so they share a common hatred taxes. Judah is not quite as militant as Ezra, but he gets worked up talking about the Romans and tax collectors as well. Judah is a seeker and is actively awaiting the Messiah, just like Ezra. Judah went to the Jordan to be baptized by John, like thousands of others, but when he saw that John was preaching to Gentiles and even soldiers, he wrote John off as a false prophet.

The Actor who portrays Judah should be happy to contrast Ezra’s sort of gruffness. He should be comfortable in the baritone range and project an intelligence in business and affection for Ezra and the other business owners of Jericho.

**John the Baptizer**

His role is limited, but very powerful and important. His is a big scene and he must be comfortable singing in the high tenor range. He must show a wildness tempered by a mysterious holiness. John is looking at the people when he preaches, but is always looking for “another”. That “other” shows up as Jesus of Nazareth. Their interchange is quick but powerful. Neither John nor Jesus sees Zacchaeus who frantically tries to find a way to see through a tall crowd that will not let him in. The actor portraying John must project great power and a scary sort of holiness that softens as soon as he sees Jesus.

**Rabbi Samuel**

The beloved Rabbi of the portion of Jericho where Ezra lives. He hires Ezra to do wood work on the local synagogue and is very pleased with the work. No sooner does he pay Ezra than Phineas appears out of nowhere to take a huge cut of the money. Rabbi Samuel also officiates at the wedding of Zacchaeus and Miriam. He should be comfortable singing in the high baritone range and project a quiet strength.

**The 2 Midwives**

They are only in one scene, but it is the opener and it is important. They sing in the mezzo range and sing words of encouragement to Rachel, while “whispering” their grave doubts concerning the survival of the sickly newborn Zacchaeus. They sort of alternate between singing to Rachel, trying to prepare her gently for the death of her prematurely born son, and to each other about the inevitability of these tragic circumstances. Their voices are pleasant and encouraging and yet they are singing of something very sad about to happen.