**Book of Mormon – programme notes Act 1**

Good afternoon, and welcome to Theatre Royal, Plymouth for “The Book of Mormon”, the award-winning musical comedy from the creators of South Park, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, and Bobby Lopez, co-writer of “Avenue Q” and “Frozen”. Directed by Casey Nicholaw and Trey Parker, the show follows the adventures of a pair of mis-matched Mormon missionaries.

My name is Gwen and I will audio describe Act 1. After the interval, Denise will describe Act 2.

As we wait for the show to begin, a vast front cloth hangs in front of the stage, showing a view of towering roseate clouds partly obscuring planets and stars in a deep blue sky. A proscenium arch, above and to either side of the front cloth is reminiscent of the architecture of a modern Mormon church, lined with stained glass windows of a modern design, set in windows of elongated hexagon shape. Along the top of the arch are 5 low turrets, the centre one bearing a golden statuette of the angel Moroni blowing a trumpet. As the show begins, this statuette is illuminated with golden rays of light bursting out from it.

To set the scene, a narrator tells the story of Mormon, the characters seen behind gauze. It is 326AD and the background portrays the dwellings of the Nephite people in America. Mormon himself has long blonde hair with a gold headband. He wears a teal and gold knee-length robe. His son, Moroni, also has long blonde hair. Jesus puts in an appearance. His pure white robe is threaded around the edge with a strip of light.

Now for the young Mormon elders, training at the missionary school in Salt Lake City, in readiness for their 2 year mission. Each young man is clean-shaven with short hair. They dress identically in white short-sleeved shirts with a name badge on the pocket, a black tie, black trousers and belt, and polished black shoes. They all have broad smiles and white teeth. The odd one out is Elder Cunningham, who is shorter and chunkier with dark curly hair. He wears black-framed glasses, and his tie is shorter than the rest. Elder Cunningham is hyperactive and frequently makes expansive gestures with his arms.

For their first number, as they practise their missionary techniques, the stage is dark blue with a raised platform across the centre, so the elders appear at the 2 different levels. Then the scene changes to an outside view of Salt Lake City, dominated by the towering spires of the Mormon temple. A sign to the left says “Missionary Training Centre room 7B”. Around the temple are colourful gardens, and the city is backed by a mountain range.

Next is the airport scene. The departure lounge has floor to ceiling windows, with a view of mountains beyond. There are two seats to the right, and a sign for the departure gate hangs above. To the left, a circular stand is hung with hats for sale. Families gather to say goodbye to our two main characters, Kevin Price and Arnold Cunningham. The mums have long hair, and wear cardigans and long skirts. The dads wear jacket, shirt and trousers. A colourful Lion King character in an elaborate fringed costume and feathered headdress arrives to sing an African song to the boys. She turns out to be Mrs Brown, a friend of their parents.

For the rest of the show, the backdrop is an African village, in Northern Uganda. There are dilapidated huts made of wood and scavenged materials, thatched with straw. Outside the huts are piles of rubbish, including old tyres and rope. A rickety wooden walkway leads across the back with steps coming down to the stage. The sky beyond changes according to the time of day, but starts off with an orange hue. The first locals the boys come across are the bullying henchmen of the local warlord. One wears a military officer’s cap. Both have machine guns.

The Mormons’ contact in the village is Mafala. He is a slim man with dark hair and beard. He wears a woollen hat, checked shirt and striped shorts. His teenaged daughter, Nabalungi, is petite with long dark hair. She wears a short pink dress and sandals. Later, she wears a pale blue short dress. The other villagers are colourfully dressed in wrap-around robes or t-shirts and shorts. The doctor, Gotswana, wears a Che Guevarra t-shirt.

The Mormon elders already living in the village are led by Elder McKinley. He is taller than the others and has a camp manner. All the elders are identically dressed as before, white shirts and black trousers. The living-room in the Mormon mission is cosy, with a pale blue sofa to the right and a side table with a lamp. At the back is a desk, with shelves of books, and a chalk board on the wall. The mission building has a corrugated roof and straw-lined walls. The room where Price and Cunningham are to sleep has two single beds, side by side, each with a pillow and thin blanket. When they get ready for bed, they strip to their underwear, which consists of an all-in-one vest and long johns.

As the Mormons tell the villagers the story of the origins of Mormonism, the characters appear on the stage. Joseph Smith wears an outfit of the 19th century, a teal jacket over a frilled white shirt, mustard coloured trousers tucked into long brown boots. He has short blonde hair. The angel, Moroni wears a pale green robe with a gold waistband. They are joined by 4 men and two women in the garb of 19th century American settlers. Brigham Young wears a black suit with long jacket, a white shirt and black necktie.

The last character to appear is the General, the bullying warlord. He wears a wide-brimmed hat, dark glasses, a sleeveless camo jacket, black shorts and cowboy boots. He wears ammo bandoliers over each shoulder, and a flashy wristwatch.

A live orchestra provides the music and includes trombone, violin, flute, guitar, keyboard and drums. They are in the orchestra pit in front of the stage.

Some colourful language of a sexual nature is used by the Ugandans, adding to the sense of culture-shock experienced by the young missionaries. There are some lighting effects, including, as the boys wait for their flight to Uganda, a proliferation of white lights like snow flakes whirling around the walls and ceiling of the whole theatre, as well as across the stage backdrop. Toward the end of Act 1, plumes of flame shoot out from either side of the stage. Act 1 lasts for 60 minutes, after which there is a 20 minute interval.

The Cast:

Elder Price is played by Adam Bailey

Elder Cunningham, Sam Glen

Elder McKinley and Moroni, Tom Bales

Mafala, Kirk Patterson

Nabalungi, Nyah Nish

The General, Rodney Earl Clarke

Joseph Smith, Will Barratt

Cunningham’s dad, Daniel George-Wright

Mrs Brown, Olympia Curry

The doctor, Daniel David-Griffith

Other parts are played by the ensemble

The Book of Mormon Programme Notes – Act Two Audio Description Performance Saturday 25th January 2025 @ 2:30 pm

Audio Describer Denise Reeves

Good Afternoon Everyone and welcome back to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for this rather lively and somewhat unorthodox satirical musical of The Book of Mormon.

I am Denise your audio describer for Act Two which lasts for 60 minutes.

*Please note there continues to be strong language relating to references of a sexual nature, sometimes reflected in comedic actions, together with flashing bright lights, flashes of lightning and the sound of thunder.*

As the audience return to their seats the vast front cloth is the same as the opening of Act One as is the proscenium arch.

As the orchestra begins to play a brief medley of songs from the show, the lights around the proscenium change colour in time to the music and the statuette of the angel Moroni is illuminated with golden rays of light bursting from it.

The gauze lifts and the story begins on The Hill Cumorah. The Narrator reveals who discovered the Book of Mormon and what exactly it is all about. With a backdrop of houses and the hills behind, the spotlight falls on Joseph Smith holding up the Book of Mormon standing on a raised platform. Beside him is Jesus in a white robe and members of the Hebrew tribes stand side by side. Two Nephites and two Lamanites – wearing Hebrew dress.

We continue in The Village with Elder Cunningham trying to teach the Book of Mormon to the villagers who are sat on wooden benches. When they get frustrated and begin to leave he panics and quickly invents stories mixing his imagination of what he knows of the Latter Day Saints doctrine with that of science fiction and fantasy, We are introduced to the Hobbits, Mormon, Angel Moroni, Joseph Smith, his own father and Uhura from StarTrek.

Meanwhile the dreaming begins as Elder Price appears in front of a very colourful backdrop depicting Orlando, but quickly realises that he is in fact dreaming his childhood nightmares of Hell which he recounts and sees Jesus, Satan, Genghis Khan, Jeffrey Dahmer, Adolf Hitler and Johnnie Cochran. All of whom admonish him for abandoning Elder Cunningham. The set is a vision of red with a backdrop depicting that of a cave in Hell where we are introduced to four figures dressed as skeletons holding a large donut and a chorus of spooky devils dressed in all-in-one red costumes covering their pointed hands and feet, with tails and horns, each carrying a pitchfork as they join in a lively and raucous song and dance routine, finishing by breaking into vaudeville style dance with their top hats now edged with a gold band, and sparkling silver pitchforks.

The dream now over, Elder Price is lying down at the village Bus Stop – a simple wooden signpost with the names of several other villages. He is woken by his fellow elders and decides to re-commit to his mission through expressing his beliefs from childhood. He gives a powerful rendition of a song entitled “I Believe”.

We then join The General who sits on a couple of empty machine gun crates in front of a plain camouflage backdrop. On the other side are a couple more crates with a shield and ammo resting on them. Two of the General’s henchmen each carrying machine guns tell him that they have an intruder in the camp. Elder Price runs into the camp still singing I Believe and draws the bewildered General out front into a somewhat comedic last verse as he tries to convert him. But the General is not impressed and drags Price away.

The story then moves to the River near the village. Elder Cunningham, having finished his preaching to the villagers, shares a rather tender moment with Nabulungi - the first of the villagers to be baptized – as they sing Baptize Me. The rest of the villagers – now dressed in white - then become baptized amongst the reeds of the river by the missionaries dressed in white shirts, white trousers and white shoes.

The elders then celebrate their success with the Ugandan people through the song “I Am Africa”.

Meanwhile, Elder Cunningham finds Elder Price at the “Kafe” beverage booth bar, drowning his sorrows in copious cups of coffee at the loss of his faith.

Back at the village the Mission President congratulates them all on their amazing success. However, Nabulungi and the villagers by way of a welcome put on a special pageant for the President. Their wonderful entertaining and somewhat colourful interpretation of the story of Joseph Smith and the Mormon doctrine as taught to them by Elder Cunningham, is littered with misunderstandings, reflections and demonstrations – such as having sex with a frog to cure their Aids – leaving little to one’s imagination.

The Mission President shocked at the villager’s interpretation and appalled at the Elders teaching of the Mormon Doctrine, orders the missionaries to leave and go home and informs the villagers they are not members of the Mormon Church.

The moral to this story is that scriptures do matter, but the method of getting the message across – especially to the people of a remote Ugandan village – does not always follow the true path of the Mission’s teaching.

For Elder Cunningham and his fellow Elders, there is more to come as The Ugandans – now dressed in white shirts and ties over their African dress - and the Missionaries dressed in black suits – now work together and join forces in a rousing finale each one introducing themselves and extolling how “This Book Will Change Your Life.”

*It is at this point that I will leave you to enjoy the finale of the show as this very talented company break into song and invite the audience to participate as they go from door to door to evangelize with the song “Tomorrow is a Latter Day” ….and hold up for all to see …*

*…The Book of Arnold…HELLO!!!!*