

Rocky Hock Players put new perspective on Easter

By Rebecca Bunch

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EDENTON — The Easter story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is a familiar one to most. In many retellings of the story the focus is on the final days of his life.

But when playwright and lyricist Gloria Emmerich wrote “Come, Follow Me” the Christian-based musical that will be the Easter production at the Rocky Hock Playhouse March 23-April 13, she decided to broaden the scope of her work to include more events from Jesus’ life, culminating in his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection from the dead.

Emmerich said that doing so has allowed her to focus on the relationships that Jesus had with those

around him — including his disciples — and how he influenced their lives.

“I have tried to bring out the story of Jesus’ disciples, to show them as more human,” Emmerich said.

Emmerich said that in doing so she believed that people in the audience would relate to the various characters in a more deeply personal way.

“In all the shows I write I want to lead people into a closer relationship with Jesus, to help them see him in a different way and maybe even see themselves differently,” Emmerich said.

Among the stories shared in the production are those of two sisters, Martha (portrayed by Mariah Schierer) and Mary (played by cast newcomer Suzanne Brown), who find very different ways to express their love and support for Jesus when he visits their home.

As they host a dinner for Jesus, Martha continues to work and attend to details while her sister Mary sits at Jesus feet and listens. When Martha objects that Mary is not helping her with the preparations, Jesus tells Martha that Mary’s focus is on what is most important and declines to chastise her.

Another compelling character in the production is Jesus’ disciple Peter, portrayed by Darryl Stallings.

Director Jeff Emmerich describes Peter’s betrayal of Jesus as “very powerful, very personal.” In the hours before Jesus’ crucifixion Peter denied three times that he knew Jesus at a time when

Jesus needed him most. But the story turns from one of shame to one of redemption after the resurrection when Jesus tells Peter that he is forgiven, Stallings said.

In contrast, the show also shares the story of Leora (played by Holly Emmerich), a woman of great faith. She was just a woman in a crowd when Jesus passed by one day and in faith she reached out to touch the hem of his garment believing that she would be healed of the chronic illness from which she suffered. And she was.

Jeff Emmerich will portray Jesus. He said that having to memorize Jesus' words and portray him as a calm, patient man allowed him to relate to Jesus on a different level. Jeff Emmerich acknowledged that he found the thought of that "humbling" adding that he doesn't consider himself as patient a man as he would like to be in his own life.

Nathan Schierer, who portrays the disciple known as John the Beloved, said the thing that struck him about Jesus' story as shared in the production was that Jesus was able to relate to people in a very down to earth way despite being without sin himself.

"Jesus met people at the level of their faith," Schierer said.

Music plays a key role in the production, the Emmerichs said, with songs that are upbeat and uplifting.

"Music is important to me, it always has been and in this show it helps move the story along," Gloria Emmerich said.

The Rocky Hock Playhouse is located at Leon Nixon's Catering, 749 Virginia Road, Edenton. Each show will be preceded by a buffet meal that starts at noon.

Ticket prices are: Adults, \$29.95; Seniors (age 62 and older), \$28.95; Children (ages 6-12), \$22.95. Group rates are (10-24 people) \$27.95 per person or (25-plus people) \$26.95 per person.

Reservations are required by calling (252) 482-4621.