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Designing a Miracle for David Javerbaum's *An Act of God*

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DESIGNING A MIRACLE FOR DAVID JAEVERBAUM'S *AN ACT OF GOD*

by

Haley MacKenzie Williams

A THESIS

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DESIGNING A MIRACLE FOR DAVID JAVERBAUM’S AN ACT OF GOD

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University of Nebraska, 2018

Advisor: Jamie Bullins

This thesis describes the pre-production, production and post-production processes for the Mainstage production of the play An Act of God by David Javerbaum, adapted from Javerbaum’s The Last Testament: A Memoir By God, performed at the Lied Center’s Johnny Carson Black Box Theatre on September 26 thru October 14. Directed by Michael Mendelson, the production was a collaborative effort with Haley Mackenzie Williams serving as Costume, Hair and Make-up Designer, Jill Hibbard as Scenic Designer, Jamie Mancuso as Lighting Designer, Daniel d’Egnuff as Technical Designer and Emily Callahan as Sound Designer.
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CHAPTER 1:

Overview of An Act of God

As the Nebraska Repertory enters into its 50th year, Artistic Director of the Nebraska Reparatory Theatre, Andy Park announced the 2018-2019 season exploring major moments in human history and recapitulating them on the stage. The season opened with An Act of God, a satire adapted from David Javerbaum’s The Last Testament: A Memoir By God based on his popular Twitter feed @TheTweetofGod that has 3.74 Million followers from the Almighty. An Act of God is a 90-minute one-man show in which the Lord has decided to make an intervention to the city of (insert play location). By taking on the form of an actor, God attempts to address some pressing human concerns. Flanked by two Archangels, Gabriel and Michael, the Almighty One speaks of how creation was accomplished in six days, gives the inside scoop on some popular bible stories, and updates the Ten Commandments with ones that include "Thou shalt separate Me and State," and "Thou shalt not tell Me what to do." Gabriel provides context for God’s presentation with quotes from the Bible while Michael field’s questions from the audience and poses some of his own like "Do you answer prayers?" and “What came first: the chicken or the egg?”

This play previewed for its initial run on Broadway at Studio 54 on May 7, 2015 and opened officially on May 28 for a limited run through August 2. Jim Parsons starred as God, Tim Kazurinsky as archangel Gabriel, and Christopher Fitzgerald as archangel Michael. Joe Mantello directed this first production with
Jeffrey Finn producing and costumes designed by David Zinn. The show returned to Broadway at the Booth Theatre for a limited engagement starring Sean Hayes. The production began previews on May 28, 2016, with an opening on June 6 and closing on September 4, 2016 after 90 performances. The New York Times called the play "a gut-busting-funny riff on the never-ending folly of mankind’s attempts to fathom God’s wishes through the words of the Bible and use them to their own ends."

The TheaterMania reviewer of the Hayes production called the play "still just mildly amusing . . . the major difference in this presentation comes in the form of Hayes, who brings an extra touch of frivolity to a play that really calls for it." The role of God was initially casted as male but directors have taken the role and given it versatility by casting women in recent years. Paige Davis played God at the Herberger Theatre in November 2016 and Kathleen Turner essayed the role at the George Street Playhouse in December 2017. The practice of casting females in the role of God disturbs somewhat the initial gay impulse of the play, since playwright Javerbaum conceived it originally as an all-male production. Much of the show’s humor furthermore derives from a “camp” sensibility, as Susan Sontag described it.¹ In her essay, Sontag asserted that “camp” is a certain mode of aestheticism. “It is a way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization. Camp is often decorative, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of

content. Most important, it is non-political, or at least apolitical."2 Seen in this light, casting a female as the role of God contains an inner, unresolvable contradiction, because casting God as female is both political and ideological. This production certainly imagined an emphasis on the decorative and the sensuous, as the illustrations of my thesis bear witness. In doing so, however, they betrayed an inner, almost irreconcilable incongruity. The gay actor Jim Parsons, who created the role of God for the Broadway premiere, played the character as a gay deity “rebooting the universe with a devilish grin.”3 “It's a mental romp around the Old and New Testaments refracted through a gay sensibility,” wrote the critic for the website TheatreMania, “And it doesn’t pretend to be anything more than it is.”4 Javerbaum himself said, “I couldn't bear to have God be anti-gay, even ironically.” Gays are eager to be accepted, he noted, despite nearly 4,000 years of religious proscriptions against homosexuality. Gay men are trying to have their campiness become a normal, accepted thing. “And the fact that religion is used so much to condemn homosexuals is truly upsetting and unfortunate.”5

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2Sontag 173-174.
An Act of God – (Left to Right) Jim Parsons, Sean Hayes, Paige Davis, Kathleen Turner played God in the last five years since An Act of God debuted on Broadway.
CHAPTER 2: THE PRE-PRODUCTION DESIGN PROCESS

Director & Designer Design Conceptualization

Michael Mendelson, guest Director, greeted our productive team with this statement:

“A lot of people have a relationship with “God.” Many people consider themselves spiritual. We all have our notion of what “God” is and why we look to or explore a spiritually deep within or outside ourselves is very personal. And our belief in its presence is to help us be the very best human possible and give context to the happenings in our lives. We ought not judge this in others lest we be judges ourselves. However, I do believe, that “belief and faith are no excuses for abandoning sound judgment.

We are living in a very complicated and divisive time. A time when those on either side of the aisle couldn’t be further apart. We feel it as we walk down the street, We see it on the news. And we sometimes even doubt those who we believe to have been on our side. Distrust in our fellow man, our neighbor, is at a fevered pitch. A time when the Ten Commandments, the Word of the Lord, is used as a weapon to inflict emotional pain or a shield behind which hypocrites are allowed to hide. One critic wrote: “An Act of God is for anyone in the mood for making life laughable.

David Javerbaum is a 13-time Emmy Award winner. He has a Grammy Award, three Peabody Awards and a Television Critics Association Award for best comedy and best news show. I could go on however I will simply say it is no surprise An Act of God easily lives up to its hype as a truly witty, urbane comedy that delivers new meanings to the intervention of the Divine in daily life. At the same time creating an altogether new Ten Commandments to appreciate.

Although the script is seen and promoted as a lighthearted new comedy I find it to be sarcastic, clever, full of biting wit and underneath the surface, quite serious. It is actually one of the most vehement takedowns of the deity ever to reach Broadway.

Oscar Wilde is quoted on God: “I thing that God, in creating man, somewhat overestimated his ability.” On morality: “Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike.” On life and love: “Keep love in your heart. A life without it is like a sunless garden when the flowers are dead.”

I have to admit I found myself laughing out loud reading this play, full and hearty laughs, while at the same time thinking, ‘oh my god! I cannot believe he wrote that!’ Audacious! Loved it!

So that’s our job, in this topsy-turvy world in which we live, our job is to make life laughable and maybe through the laughter we’ll change hearts. I truly believe that is the power of theatre. To change hearts and minds...or at least begin that process.”

-Michael Mendelson
Our production’s team initial design concepts were consistent throughout the production process. Scenic designer, Jill Hibbard wanted the set to appear as if the heavens are integrating into the world of the Theatre and wanted the area to have a relaxed, talk-show environment as God tells his/her side of the story. Jamie Mancuso, our Lighting Designer, was eager to reflect God’s awesome power through dramatic light and atmosphere changes.

*Jill Hibbard’s Set Design Research Images and Set Model*
ACT OF GOD

STAIRWAY

FURNITURE

RESEARCH IMAGES
Jamie Mancuso Light Design Environment Research and Inspirational Images

An Act of God

An Act of God

Jaime Mancuso Research Plate 1

Jaime Mancuso Research Plate 2
COSTUME DESIGN CONCEPTUALIZATION

Before my first initial meeting with the director I researched past costume designs of *An Act of God*, as well as God and Angels depicted in Art, Film and Television.

God in Art

Jews, Christians, and Muslims regard God as the Supreme Being, creator deity, and principal figure of faith. Some religions describe God without reference to gender, while others or their translations use sex-specific terminology, using terms such as “Him” or “Father” for the sake of convenience. In art prior to the 10th century, no attempt was made to use a human to symbolize God in Western art other than Byzantine icons, which honored only religious figures like priests and saints. Early Christians believed that the words of Book of Exodus 33:20 ”Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see Me and live” and of the Gospel of John 1:18 ”No man hath seen God at any time” were meant to apply not only to the Father, but to all attempts at the depiction of the Father. At first, only the Hand of God, often emerging from a cloud, was portrayed. Gradually, portrayals of the head and later the whole figure was depicted, and by the Renaissance artistic representations of God were freely used in the Western Church.

Western art symbolized God as a man beginning in the 10th Century, following the belief that God created the soul of Man in the image of his own, so he too is man. When early artists of the 10th Century represented God the Father, fear and awe restrained them from depicting the whole human figure. So they used only
a small part would be used as the image, usually the hand. The Hand of God, an artistic metaphor, is found several times in the wall paintings of the Dura Europos Synagogue (mid 3rd Century), the only ancient synagogue with a large surviving decorative scheme. It was common during Late Antique in both East and West, and the Hand remained the main way of depicting the actions or approval of God the Father in the West until about the end of the Romanesque Period.

Through the 12th and 15th centuries, depictions of God had started to appear in illuminated manuscripts, which were a less public form of art could often be more adventurous in their illustrations. Initially, the head or torso was shown in some form of frame of clouds or light at the top of the picture space, where the Hands of God appeared from the heavens; the 1118 Baptism of Christ on the famous baptismal basin or font in the Liege of Rainer of Huy is an example. Gradually the amount of God as a human increased to a half-length figure, then a full-length, usually enthroned. The 1430 Rohan Book of Hours of also included depictions of God the Father looking down from the heavens in the corner of illustrations. In the early 15th century, the Limbourg Brothers painted many narratives of the bible with God depicted in the Tres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry manuscript and other illuminated manuscript; an elderly but tall and elegant full-length figure chastising Adam and Eve for their sin in the Garden of Eden and above the Holy Family in the Nativity adorned in red robes, a crown and holding a Globus Cruciger, respectively. The 1425 Gates of Paradise of the Florence Baptistery by Lorenzo Ghiberti uses a similar full-length symbol for the Father being uplifted by angels.
At the end of the 15th century, the human form of God was becoming the new standard and the Hand of God outdated. There was also a brief trend for depicting all three persons of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as similar or identical figures. Giovanni d'Alemagna's Coronation of the Virgin (1443), God is depicted using the symbol of a patriarch, with kind, yet powerful presence and with long white hair and a beard which consistently used by other artists later in the century. This patriarchal symbol was derived from the description of the Bible's Daniel 7:9: “...the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.” Benvenuto di Giovanni's Annunciation (1470), God the Father is portrayed in a red robe and a hat that resembles that of a Cardinal. However, even in the later part of the 15th century, the symbolic representation of the Father and the Holy Spirit as the "hands and dove" continued like in Verrochio's Baptism of Christ (1472).

In Renaissance paintings of the Trinity, God may be depicted in two ways, either with emphasis on The Father, or the three elements of the Trinity. The most usual depiction of the Trinity in Renaissance art depicts God the Father using an old man, usually with a long beard and patriarchal in appearance, sometimes with a triangular halo (as a reference to the Trinity), or with a papal crown (worn by popes since the 8th century). In these depictions The Father may hold a globe or book to symbolize God’s knowledge and as a reference to how knowledge is deemed divine and the ultimate power. He is usually behind and above Christ on the cross in the Throne of Mercy iconography and a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, may hover
above. In a Trinitarian Pieta, God the Father is often symbolized using a man wearing a papal dress and a papal crown, supporting the dead Christ in his arms alongside the Virgin Mary.

In the most famous of Renaissance art endeavors, God is symbolized in several Genesis scenes in Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling, most famously *The Creation of Adam* whose image of near touching hands of God and Adam is iconic of humanity, being a reminder that Man is created in the Image and Likeness of God. Similarly, in Titian’s Assumption of the Virgin in the Frari of Venice, God is depicted as a powerful figure, floating in the clouds, and is long admired as a masterpiece of High Renaissance art. Many narrative paintings of the Coronation of the Virgin also depicted God the Father as a white bearded patriarchal figure in robes matching or mirroring Jesus Christ and Mary.

Despite the evolution of depicting God in various forms (physical and symbolized) through the centuries his clothing is quick consistent. He’s always dressed in draped articles similar to a Greek Chiton or Roman Toga in colors associated with royalty or power: reds, blues, purples. This visually sends the viewer back in time and associates God with ancient power. His portrayal as an older man with a long white beard is similar to depictions of the Greek God Zeus in works of art. Many religions, especially Christianity, take traditions and specific dates to make conversion less shocking, which is called transmutation, and help people adjust to the new faith. When the early Christians converts abandoned their former deities (pagan gods, Roman/Greek gods, etc.) and questioned what their new Christian God looked like, the Church choose an iconic, familiar face: an old man
with a long white flowing beard, suggesting wisdom and power while unconsciously associating it with an ancient, ever-present entity.
Duras Europos Synagogue – 3rd Century, Syria. The Hand of God is seen at the top of several paintings, outstretched to the central character of the scene.

Liege of Rainer of Huy Batispam font – 1118, St. Bartholomew’s Church. The Hand of God shines down as John the Baptist bless Jesus Christ. The three rays could possibly represent the Holy Trinity.
Rohan’s Book of Hours (1430) – God appearing to look down among the dead and the Holy Family, while dressed in robes with gold trim (similar to Byzantine cloaks and cleric vestments) and holding the Globus Cruciger.

Limbourg Brothers (early 15th century) illuminated manuscripts – God and members of the holy family dress in vibrant colors to stand out amongst the scene and indicated by halos.
Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise of the Baptistry of Florence’s Main Gate (1425 - 1452) – God in the panel named the Garden of Eden dressed in Papal regalia lifted by angels as he creates the universe.

Giovanni d’alemagna’s Coronation of the Virgin (1444) – Jesus Christ crowning the Virgin Mary as God and the Holy Spirit look on. Jesus and Mary are wearing mirrored colors while God is adorned more brilliantly in white and gold.
Andrea del Verrocchio’s Baptism of Christ (1472 -75) – Jesus Christ being Baptized by John the Baptist as God’s hands and the Holy Spirit blest them from above.

Michelangelo’s Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel (1512) - God breathes life into the first man in a simple tunic and lifted by angels.
Titan’s Assumption of the Virgin (1515-18) – God dressed in mirror colors of the Virgin Mary about to be handed a crown by his angel attendant.

Peter Paul Rubens’ The Coronation of the Virgin (1625) – God and Jesus Christ complimenting each other in Warm Color robes in the light of heaven as Mary sits atop dark clouds in cool colored robes.
Diego’s Velazquez’s Coronation of the Virgin (1635-1648) - Jesus Christ and God dressed identically but compatible with the Virgin Mary.

William Blake’s The Ancient of Days (1794) – considered one of the most powerful depictions of God’s power in a modern narrative of the 20th century.
God has been portrayed in movies since the days of silent cinema; from Biblical epics to comedies and casted as a youthful woman to an entirely off-screen presence. However, portraying God is not without some controversy and is a rather difficult role to cast. In silent movies, the voice of God was simply an on-screen written caption, but as movies and sound developed, vocal tones and accents carry associations with certain class, gender, personality and race. While in both the Bible and the Qur'an God speaks, but his voice is never described to decipher tone, pitch, etc. In film epics, God’s voice is generally cast as deep, resonant, and masculine to give the audience a sense of power and authority. Some portrayals of God are entirely off-screen. In Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments* God who gives the stone tablets to Moses in is noted in the screenplay "off-screen to the right," and visually depicted as a radiating bush of light to the audience. Such biblical epics have less trouble with this characterization than non-biblical works, because while there is no visual representation of God as a man in the source text (i.e., the Bible) that movies like *The Ten Commandments* are based upon, there are visually representable elements that can be used, from burning bushes to rolling clouds to fire to add to the dramatics and spectacle of an epic storyline.

At the turn of the turn of the 20th century, Directors began to think outside the box when depicting the Heavenly father; changing race, gender, and age. In the 1975 comedy *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, God is a static, puppeteer image of 19th-century English cricketer W.G. Grace entering from the clouds in rays of light. He instructs King Arthur and his knights with their mission in a booming, irritated
voice. “One thing I can’t stand is groveling. And don’t apologize. Every time I try to talk to someone, it’s sorry this and forgive me that and I’m not worthy.” Similarly, George Burns in 1977’s Oh God! is like a crabby, old man thinking that the world (which is a “crap shoot”) no longer respects His word, fitting the aesthetic in a fishing captain cap, a navy windbreaker, a plaid red shirt, and horn rimmed glasses as he asks Jerry Landers (John Denver), an assistant supermarket manager, to spread His message among the masses.

Singer Alanis Morissette played God in the cult classic Dogma (1999). Although brief, depicted the Almighty as bemused and mute with Metatron (Alan Rickman) serving as her translator. Her entrance at the end of the film is angelic in a beige silk Grecian dress with flowers in her long flowing hair, but she soon changes into a 1980s style Christian Lacroix tulle cocktail dress with a silver, metallic jacket when she smites Ben Affleck’s fallen angel Bartleby with a single, soundless yell.

Casting of African American Morgan Freeman as God in Bruce Almighty and Evan Almighty took the movie stereotype of a “black angel” to a new level. Freeman appears genial and favors a simplistic lifestyle, preferring elegant white suits and black shoes, though he doesn’t mind the humble utility wear of a janitor to fix a heavenly office light. William Keighley’s 1936 film The Green Pastures had an opening prologue of that included a disclaimer to make the movie agreeable to the white audiences in the United States. Everyone, including God, were played by African American actors. White actor Dick Powell, intoned in the opening frames: “God appears in many forms to those who believe in him. Thousands of Negroes in the Deep South visualize God and Heaven in terms of people and things they know
in their everyday life. *The Green Pastures* is an attempt to portray that humble, reverent conception.”

God is mentioned and intervenes in Season 5 and 11 of the CW television show *Supernatural* (2005 - 2020), personified by actor Rob Benedict. He is portrayed as a loving yet serious, strategic, all-seeing father, who observes events play out but ignores them unless he absolutely needs to fix something. In the television series *Joan of Arcadia* (2003 - 2005), God is portrayed as a proverbial "stranger on a bus" taking on human forms in a wide variety of occupations, from a piano tuner to a telephone repairman. The creator of the show, Barbara Hall, characterized this portrayal as “an unknowable but visible God, who sees and is seen, is among us always, in all kinds of forms, participating in our everyday life but not interfering with humanity’s free will, and who nonetheless calls us into service". This portrayal was criticized in the first season for being universal, almost to the point of being nonspiritual. A more abstract portrayal of God occurs in the television series *Wonderfalls*, where God appears not as a person, but as a series of inanimate objects that lead the protagonist of the series to perform good works in other people’s lives. However, the word "God" is never mentioned in the show in relation to these encounters. Steve Buscemi is the latest depiction of God in TBS’ new sitcom *Miracle Workers* of the “low level workers” in Heaven. He plays a version of the Almighty who’s so thoroughly exhausted that he’s one bad day from just blowing the whole job off (and the world) while walking about in sweats and Birkenstocks.
Charlton Heston knelling before the Burning Bush in The Ten Commandments (1956)

God appearing in the clouds in Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975), although we can’t see anything below the beard he wears a cushioned crown illuminated from behind.
George Burns in 1977’s Oh God!

Alanis Morissette brief costume change in 1999’s Dogma
Morgan Freeman as God in 2003’s Bruce Almighty alongside Jim Carrey.

Oscar Polk and Rex Ingram playing Gabriel and God, respectively, in 1936’s Green Pastures
Rob Benedict playing God (while hiding as Prophet Chuck) in the CW's Supernatural

The many faces of God in Joan of Arcadia – a child, an old woman, and a goth.
God takes many forms of tchotchkes to guide a sales clerk into help people in need in the short lived 2003 series Wonderfalls

Steve Bushemi, as God, decides to blow up the earth dressed in a collection of sweats, 1980s dressing robes, and man jewelry in Miracle Workers.
Initial Research of Angels in Art, Film and Television

In the context of the play I looked into Christian depictions of the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Michael is paired with Gabriel multiple times in film and television, but they tend to occupy their own separate narratives within art. Visually, angels are human beings of extraordinary beauty and sometime androgyny and often identified with bird wings, halos and light. The Christians concept of an angel usually features an angel as a messenger of God, but angels are often depicted as benevolent celestial beings and intermediaries between God/Heaven and humanity. By the late 4th Century, Roman Catholic Church theologians and writers agreed that there were different categories of angels, with missions and responsibilities assigned to them. There was also the idea that fell into three hierarchies; archangels occupied the third. They function as heavenly guides, protectors, and messengers to human beings, nations and institutions.

In terms of their clothing, angels, especially Michael, were depicted as military agents of God who came to Earth wearing military uniform of Late Antique. This uniform could be the normal military dress, with a tunic to about the knees, an armored breastplate and pteruges (a defensive skirt worn among Greek and Roman soldiers, usually featuring layered straps of linen and leather anchored at the waist and descending to mid-thigh). Michael often appears in Byzantine art as the bodyguard of the Byzantine Emperor, with a long tunic and the loros, the long gold, jeweled pallium restricted to the Imperial family and their closest guards. The basic military dress of angels was shown in Western art into the Baroque period and up to the present day in Eastern Orthodox icons. Other angels came to be depicted in long
robes, wearing vestments of a deacon, a cope over a dalmatic. This costume was used especially for Gabriel in Annunciation scenes. In comparing Michael and Gabriel, Michael is more striking at a first look, reminiscent of Ares, the Greek God of war, while Gabriel presence is more ethereal and calming to the people he is giving the world of God.

*Francesco Botticini’s The Three Archangels and Tobias, is a rare narrative depicting both Michael and Gabriel (along with Raphael in the center, guiding Tobias).*
Michael

Michael the Archangel (the only one to be called an “archangel” in the Bible) is mention through the New Testament in the Book of Revelation as the leader of God’s armies against Satan’s forces during a war in Heaven and the conqueror of Satan himself. Christian sanctuaries dedicated to Michael appeared in the 4th Century, where he was first seen as a healing angel. Soldiers gave the care of their sick to him, since he was their protector and the leader of God’s army against the forces of evil. In Roman Catholic teachings, Michael has four main roles or offices. His first role as the leader of the Army of God and the leader of heaven’s forces in their triumph over the powers of hell. He is viewed as the angelic model for the virtues of the spiritual warrior, with the conflict against evil at times viewed as the battle within one’s self. The second and third roles picture Michael as the angel of death carrying the souls of all deceased to heaven, descending at the hour of death and giving each soul the chance to redeem itself before passing and then weighs souls on his balanced scales. His fourth role is the guardian of the Church. Most artworks and sculptures depict Michael slaying a serpent or dragon dressed as a warrior saint with helmet, sword, and shield. In other depictions, he’ll hold a pair of scales and the Book of Life, to show that he takes part in the judgment over death. Michelangelo depicted this judgement scene on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel.

John Travolta’s depiction of Michael the Archangel in the 1996 film Michael may be quite contradictory to the divine warrior of the Bible. In Michael, three journalists from a national tabloid go to Iowa to investigate a claim that an old woman is keeping an angel as a tenant. Upon arriving, they meet Michael,
a cigarette-smoking, foul-smelling man with a beer belly and mischievous disposition. While he doesn’t seem very angelic, Michael does have large wings and claims to be on a much-needed “vacation” from his heavenly duties. Over the course of the film, Michael’s real purpose on earth is revealed: he hopes to get Dorothy and Frank back together. In the 2010 film Legion, Michael is portrayed the warrior of humanity as he cuts his own wings off at the beginning of the movie and becomes mortal to protect an unborn child who is the mankind’s savior in a world of sin. Michael disobeyed God’s order to kill the baby and destroy the human race, and helps fight alongside patrons of a diner against hordes of people possessed by the Archangel Gabriel carrying out God’s Order. Michael dies at the hands of Gabriel and disappears, giving the survivors time to escape. Eventually Gabriel corners them and is about to kill them when Michael descends from Heaven, an Archangel again and fully armed to fight. Paul Bettany portrays Michael and his features gives an etherealness and exoticism one might associate with someone angelic. He arrives in a sleek white trench atop a leather jacket fully armed in a police cruiser and skin tattooed in the angel’s cryptic language. His smooth, calm English accent is also a stark contrast against the Southern drawls of the supporting cast.

In the television series Supernatural, Michael was the first angel ever created as well as one of the oldest and most powerful beings in the universe. During a catastrophic war in Heaven which ended with Michael banishing his brother Lucifer from Heaven on God’s Command, later restricting him to a cage bound by 66 Seals. In God’s hiatus from his heavenly duties, he acted as Viceroy of Heaven and Commander of the Angels. Michael was destined to slay Lucifer when he escapes his
cage to end the Apocalypse and bring about Paradise of Earth but was ultimately thrown into a prison in Hell with Lucifer. Although acted by various actors, Michael is a rather complicated being, having many sides of his personality. He is a strong but strict leader, having set up a rigid and sturdy hierarchy in Heaven, along with strict rules and punishments; likewise, his rule was described as by fellow angel Castiel as "corrupt." Despite this, he kept his brethren in the dark on many important matters, including God's absent, and killed anyone who displayed disobedience. To his father God, however, Michael is fanatically loyal and blindly follows God's orders without question, as sees himself as a "good son", and that is what matters most to him. He loves his father dearly and, despite having not seen him in thousands of years, never lost his faith or his love for him. Due to his zealous trust in his father's commands, Michael doesn't believe in free will, not even for himself, believing everything that occurs is how his father planned it. When it comes to humans, Michael seems to be somewhat uncaring; he does not care if or how many he kills as long as it gets to his goals.
University of Boon Michael defeating the Devil statue and Guido Reni’s Altar piece of St Michael the Archangel
John Travolta cleans up in Michael (1996) to help an estranged couple.

Paul Bettany portrays Michael as both a Mortal and Angel in Legion (2010)

Michael takes over many human vessels in Supernatural to execute God’s mission despite his absence in heaven.
Gabriel

Gabriel is known as the angel of revelation or announcement and acting as a messenger for God. He appears only twice in the Bible in the Gospel of Luke with the story of the Annunciation, where the angel appears to Elizabeth and then the Virgin Mary foretelling the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, respectively, and is most often portrayed in the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary in works of art by several artists. Daniel 8:15 describes Gabriel as appearing in the "likeness of man" and in Daniel 9:21 he is referred to as "the man Gabriel." Some recent written articles on angels consider Gabriel to be female or even androgynous.

In the 1995 horror film The Prophecy, Gabriel is portrayed by Christopher Walken who searches for an evil soul on Earth amidst an end-of-days angelic civil war. Walken as Gabriel he's genuinely creepy in a slimy, psychopathic way and the audience can never really tell what he's thinking. Is he genuinely angry with the humans he encounters (the "monkeys", as he calls them), or is he just toying with them? It's difficult to tell, and this makes his performance so unsettling.

In the action-horror film Van Helsing, the anti-hero Gabriel Van Helsing (Hugh Jackman) suggested that he is the archangel in human form. In this storyline, Gabriel was once one of God's mighty angels in heaven as the "Left Hand of God" and served as a messenger of God. At some point, Gabriel descended to earth and took on living flesh, becoming human. During his time on earth, Gabriel fought many great battles, and in the 1460s he was under the service of the Knights of the Holy Order when he met Count Vladislaus Dracula (Riochard Roxburgh), with whom he became close friends. However, during a great battle, and for reasons unknown
(possible Dracula trying to resurrect his dead lover with dark magic), Gabriel murdered Dracula in 1462. For this crime, God erased Gabriel's memory. Gabriel spent the next 400 years wandering the earth until one day after a battle, he was found half-dead crawling up the steps of the Vatican, to The Knights of the Holy Order. Van Helsing is a gruff, lonely silent man, always on edge and although he hunts without question and has his slight contempt for the church, he asks the church for forgiveness for his murderous hands and a devout man who does God's work.

In the 2005 film Constantine, Tilda Swinton portrays an androgynous version of the archangel Gabriel, resentful of God's favoritism towards humans. Gabriel planned to unleash demon kind on Earth to weed out those deemed of "unworthy" God's love. Swinton’s portrayal of the 'half-breed' angel was described as “immaculately decadent” by Time magazine.

"Gabriel is God's right-hand man, his messenger, his bouncer, and he's dedicated 1,000 percent to getting souls into heaven. I think there is something quite extraordinary in the story of this film that places the emissary of good as the one who tortures the world in God's name. It felt like the most radical thing for the film to do... [it is a departure from the Bible] but it is absolutely not a departure from real life as we are living it today, in the grip of people who are dressing themselves up as God's right hand and taking us into war. The challenge was to make sure Gabriel never turns into an evil demon, that we see how he engineers this extraordinarily violent apocalypse out of love. Which is sort of the situation we're all in now."

-Tilda Swinton, New York Times, 2005

In the popular TV series Supernatural, Gabriel is a runaway archangel posing as the demi-god Loki who kills people he deems evil with a sense of humor.
Acting as a demi-god, Gabriel behaves in a mischievous manner, enjoys toying with his victims, humans he believes should be brought down a notch. He embraces a hedonistic lifestyle, including the "sweet tooth" for which that type of demi-deity was known. Even after revealing himself to be an Archangel, he still used misdirection to achieve his goals and to protect himself. He was often sarcastic. Gabriel's manner was the most human of any of the angels so far, perhaps because of his long sojourn on Earth. He holds humans in high regard, despite their many faults, something the other Archangels did not, like Michael. Despite however long Gabriel had been running and hiding from his father and siblings, he still confesses concern for lesser angels and still has love for his archangel brethren, including Lucifer. However, because he couldn't bear with the fighting going on in Heaven between Michael and Lucifer, Gabriel just wanted the fighting to stop not caring if Heaven or Hell would win, he didn't want any part in the fight and all he wanted was for it to be over. However, after re-gaining his faith in humans, he eventually sided with them as he came to the aid of the Winchesters after Lucifer attacked after his escape from the cage.
Many painters depicted the Annunciation with Gabriel and the Virgin Mary including: Jan van Eyck (1434), William Waterhouse (1914), and Leonardo da Vinci (1472).
The dark side of Gabriel as depicted by Christopher Walken (The Prophecy 1995) and Hugh Jackman (Van Helsing 2004)

Tilda Swinton changes significantly in Constantine (2005), from a dark masculine suit with wavy hair then in all white with hospital restrain straps and lighter, curled hair.

Richard Speight Jr. portrays Gabriel as a cunning trickster in Supernatural.
CHAPTER 3: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

Finalizing Costume Design Concepts

After reading the script, watching the auditions, and discussing the characters personalities with the director, I was able to finalize the visual appearance of the characters. We were all in agreement, director and designers, that we wanted the set and costumes to be white but I wanted to add metallic and beaded elements as well as mix different fabric textures to give them costumes contrast to their all-white costumes by changing buttons to gold or silver or giving them accessories that would stand out against the white color. There were many aspects that I had to take note of while reading the script: God has taken over the body of the actor, so when God departs at the end of the play she should be in a colored version of her white costume; Michael’s wing breaks as a result of God’s rage, then mending in the next scene.

Michael (undergraduate Grace Debetaz) questions God’s actions through the play, being the voice for human kind and calling out God on occasion. With the rebel mentality I wanted her to look like the warrior that she is depicted through history, I designed her costume to have a punk aesthetic with a military jacket, motorcycle pants, zippered sneakers and taller, rugged wings. I was inspired to give her different shoulder epaulettes to add to her punk aesthetic, making one structured and military-esque and the other more organic and feminine with lace and beaded appliques. For added humor, I wanted a graphic T-shirt with a slogan or image associated with Christianity as she changes into An Act of God T-shirt; we settled on a black and white T-shirt that said: “Mary is my Homegirl” with Mary cupping the
words with her hands. Gabriel (Nick Prior), on the other hand, I found to be the peacekeeper and the talk show announcer through God’s address, keeping a very genial and upbeat attitude through God’s tirades. Announcers like Steve Higgins and Andy Richter, who worked with Jimmy Fallon and Conan O’Brien, respectively, are able to add to the moment without taking the moment away from the host. He personality is quite genial and positive through the play and I wish to give him details that are whimsical and humorous, like a bow tie, pocket watch, gold patterned socks and cherub style wings.

A majority of the costume pieces would be purchased to save on time, and we would be allocating our time to building the wings and God’s coat with a budget of $2500. Our shop manager, Christine Duncan, has done extensive work in tailoring and worked on several tailored suits and jackets for men and women through her career and was assigned to take on the patterning and sewing of the God’s coat based on my designs. I hired Rebecca Armstrong to build the structure and the rigging of the wings, given her experience in building head and backpieces for drag performers. Michael’s wing has a “wing break” in the script as a result from God’s anger, and to add to the comedy of the moment will still be attached and hang from the harness.

The wings build, up until the last day of rehearsals, were a tremendous project. At this moment, I believe that I did not give enough attention to them myself as I believed Armstrong had adequate time and the skills to dedicate and accomplish this project herself. Although the design, armature and harness of the wings were accomplished to the design specifications, the attachment of the wings to the
harness and the rigging of Michael's broken wing was not accomplishment or tested in a timely manner. The initial design to attach the wing to the harness was industrial strength Velcro, however given the weight of the wings on a small point of tension they did not hold up and caused the wings to fall and wilt. A linchpin had to be utilized to attach the wings and harnesses and a hinge and linchpin was used to make Michael's wing break. The linchpin was tied to a string that went through Michael's jacket sleeve and a pull with the opposite hand released the linchpin from the hinge. This change to the wings made the wing break effect more efficient and stable as the show went on.

Mendelson was adamant to cast God as a woman, and therein lay one the production's design contradiction to which I referred above. In our initial meeting we didn't know who was going to cast in that role but he enjoyed the idea of a "power suit." The term “power suit” became standard jargon in the 1980s as clothing for women who began to establish their authority in professional and political environments dominated by men. It was a suit jacket (usually paired with pants) characterized by sharp cuts, wide shoulder pads with stiff rigidity. A power suit nowadays has been associated with well-tailored jackets and a little less shoulder-pad action. The costume design of God was definitely going to be determined by several factors, i.e. the actor’s body type, how the actress wanted to play the humor, and how we wanted to portray God to the audience. I began researching women of different sizes and personal styles, leading me to women like Ellen DeGeneres, Diane Keaton, Jane Lynch, Emma Watson, and Melissa McCarthy. I then sought information about how various designers had imagined the “power
suit” and made it unique. Once Mendelson cast Trisha Miller in this role, I was able to design a costume that would be flattering, comfortable and still give her power as a female interpretation of God. The problem was, where was the campiness so essential to this play.

Given that God/Miller in this play is quite the showman and moves about the stage, interacting with the audience and her “wingmen,” I wanted to give her a long coat that has enough volume in the skirt that will give her power and flare; combining the aesthetic of the power suit and the drama of a cape or robe as seen in previous play productions’ costume design. We paired it with a linen trouser pant and snakeskin wedges; a little campy homage to the Garden of Eden and the Devil’s temptation. The top for God I initially designed as a draped, to add an edge of femininity to contrast against the tailored pieces. Mendelson did not like the draped top after signing off on my design, having an idea of a draped top with structure, inspired by a Diane Von Furstenberg silk top from the mid-2000s but in a silk dupioni\(^6\) which while has a wood-grain texture and a sheen is easily wrinkled and stiff. Jamie Bullins and I spent a week and a half trying to combine my design with his needs, but Mendleson was adamant that this was the top he wanted God to be in and he didn’t see why it was taking this long to accommodate his vision. I was very frustrated with this situation as the style of top didn’t suit Miller body type, she has long legs and a short torso; given the design would make her body seem short and

\(^6\)dupioni is a silk fabric which uses a fine thread in the warp and an uneven, somewhat tangled thread in the weft. The irregularity of the weave gives it an iridescent, almost regal look. Dupioni can also be also heavy fabric, strong enough for some manufacturers to use it for furniture. The name of this fabric derives from *dupon*, which is a cocoon made simultaneously by two silkworms. It derives etymologically from the French *duion*, meaning “double.”
the material would be distracting as it would constantly be wrinkled. Although I explained all this to Mendelson, he wanted to see it. I took two days to drape, mockup and build a variation of the top to Mendelson’s vision. After wearing the top through the first two days of Tech and Dress rehearsals, Mendelson saw that the top was not working, Miller’s movement about the stage and throwing her arms up caused the top to ride up and wrinkle. The next afternoon, Mendelson, Miller, Jill Hibbard and I spent the day shopping to replace the top. I was not aware that Jill Hibbard was joining us on this excursion and thought that she overstepped her position as the set designer by joining us. She made comments about the clothing pieces, which I as the costume designer found somewhat unwarranted and clearly uninformed. I had responsibility for what actors wear, and I did not know if Mendelson had asked Hibbard to join or if she came of her own volition, but my hope had been that this little excursion could have been a moment to mend my position with Mendelson. Instead it was a situation in which I felt pushed aside. We found a cowl neck sleeveless top through White House Black Market, yet I still had reservations about it. The top pulled across Miller chest creating a series of wrinkles even through the drape of the cowl. It was at this point that I believed that it was better to let the director have what he wanted and let the show go on. To quote Falstaff, I “let discretion be the better part of valor.”

MICHAEL'S COSTUME INSPIRATION
Final Sketch of Michael

Michael
"The Warrior"
MICHAEL’S FITTING PHOTOS
GABRIEL COSTUME INSPIRATION
FINAL SKETCH OF GABRIEL

Gabriel
"The Peacekeeper"
MICHAEL’S FITTING PHOTOS
INITIAL GOD/TAILORED WOMEN'SWEAR INSPIRATION

Above: Many designers have taken a spin on the classic suit for women's wear, especially Yves Saint Laurent.

Right: German-American actress Marlene Dietrich had a very androgynous personality and exotic sexuality which led her to become one of the highest-paid actresses of the 1930s and 40s.
Celebrities have continuously put their own spin on a suit flattering their body type, matching their personal style and personality.

(Left to Right) – Adele, Emma Watson, Melissa McCarthy, Diane Keaton, Jane Lynch, Ellen DeGeneres
FINAL GOD COSTUME INSPIRATION
FINAL GOD SKETCH

God
"Our Heavenly Host"
(Left to Right) – Mendelson’s Top Inspiration; A top we found a sewing pattern that we could make in multiple colors; this top we can make and take out some of the fullness in the peplum and put on a regular sleeve; A top we can add sleeves; this top was available in white and we could make the belt wider; we could cut the back of the shirt tail to shorten it.
GOD’S FITTING PHOTOS
CHAPTER 4: POST PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION PHOTOS
**FINAL BUDGET BREAKDOWN**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
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<td>haley</td>
<td>banana republic</td>
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<td>8/14/18</td>
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<td>pattern</td>
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**Total** $ 1,899.31  
**Money Left** $ 600.69
CONCLUSION

This process of working on *An Act of God* was insightful and I will not deny that I could have done some things throughout this production differently, but I accept my failures and accomplishments to learn from them. Communication with the Director during the production phase was very difficult; I tried to accommodate both my costume designs and his vision, but I believe that he isn’t used to hearing the word “no” nor did he seem fully comfortable with the idea of compromise. We initially wanted to focus on the angels’ wings and God’s coat. The problem of changing God’s top shortly before opening, along trying to find options in a timely manner pulled my attention away from the technical aspects of the production.

With everything pulled together (at the last second), on opening night I was happy with the visual appearance of the costumes. The context of the play wasn’t at times well-received by the audience, but the spectacle of the design elements was miraculous, and I was happy to have created a part of it. Besides the negative moments of this process I felt that I received the support I needed in the last couple years to feel confident and to continue to perfect my skills as a designer and artisan.