



Stones

two plays about sacrifice
by **J. Scott Bronson**



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STONES

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PRODUCTION NOTES:

Stones in its entirety was first presented in a reading on October 10, 2000 at Provo Theatre Company with the following cast:

Narrator	Tim Slover
Father	J. Scott Bronson
Mother	Tayva Patch
Son	Alan Stark

Redbeard Productions presented the first fully staged production of Stones at the Little Brown Theater in Springville, Utah from November 23 through December 6, 2001 with the following cast:

Father	J. Scott Bronson
Mother	Kathryn Laycock Little
Son	Elwon Bakly

Joel Bronson ran lights and sound. The director was J. Scott Bronson.

A Note About Color-blind Casting

Let me explain that a little. My support for this has nothing to do with being politically correct. Rather, I exhort you to consider color-blind casting because I think the roles should go to the actors best suited to perform them. I would hate to think that some director didn't cast someone simply because they didn't think the audience would accept the idea of an occidental and an oriental (or any other combination of races) as being blood kin. I believe (most) theatre-going people are sophisticated enough to get beyond that type of thinking. At least I hope so.

A Note About Punctuation

Actors performing or reading this play should pay special attention to the punctuation idiosyncrasies I employ. Perhaps a brief explanation is in order:

- Ellipses (...) indicate a brief moment of clarifying or reconsideration of the idea in process.
- M-dashes (--) indicate an interruption, usually by another person, though it is possible for one to interrupt one's self.

It is possible, also, that you may find these indicators used in conjunction with one another. I leave it to you to figure out what that means. And, whether or not they are followed by a period or a comma should also be a consideration in your interpretation of the dialogue.

ALTARS

For Barta, because she asked for it

CHARACTERS

The Father Old, but looking younger
The Son Around Thirty
The Mother Old, and still beautiful

SETTING

The Place Is the Top of a Mountain
The Time Is Past

THE SET

I think the play will best be served on an arena or thrust stage, the smaller the better. Intimacy is vital. Several blocks of irregular geometric shapes should be placed in apparent randomness to represent stones. Everything is black except for the gleaming silver of the knife's blade, and the hands and heads of the actors.

THE COSTUMES

These should definitely not be flowing robes and sandals, the type of thing you would normally associate with a biblical period. I suggest something nondescript timeless if you will--like long sleeves and no collar for the shirts, no pockets or zippers or buttons on the pants.

ACT ONE -- ALTARS

(Lights up. Pause. The SON enters carrying a bundle of sticks upon his back. He drops the bundle and sits on one of the stones to catch his breath. Soon the FATHER enters wearing the knife in a leather sheath and carrying the vessel which contains the fire. He sits opposite the SON to catch his breath as well. Pause.)

FATHER: I won't be able to make a climb like that too many more times.

SON: As many times as you need to.

FATHER: I pray it is never again.

(Pause.)

SON: How is the fire?

FATHER: Burning still.

SON: Fortunately there is no wind here for it to contend with.

FATHER: Yes. Fortunate.

(Pause.)

SON: Shall we begin?

FATHER: No. Not yet. Rest.

(Pause.)

SON: Father?

FATHER: Yes?

SON: What will the sacrifice be? You haven't told me yet.

FATHER: I said --

SON: You said that the Lord would provide.

FATHER: Yes.

SON: There's nothing here --

FATHER: We are here.

SON: -- to sacrifice.

FATHER: Not yet.

SON: When?

FATHER: Patience. The Lord will provide.

(Pause.)

SON: Father, are you that tired?

FATHER: What?

SON: You look ... defeated.

FATHER: It was a long walk for this old body.

SON: And for this young body.

FATHER: It's a healthier body.

SON: It serves me.

FATHER: Good. May it serve you for ... for --

SON: What is it?

FATHER: I am tired. More than I thought.

SON: Rest then. I will build the altar.

FATHER: Wait. It will wait. Sit with me.

SON: I'd prefer to finish this. I'm hungry.

FATHER: You're supposed to rejoice in fasting.

SON: Well, normally I do.

FATHER: I know. So rejoice with me for awhile.

SON: Yes, Father.

FATHER: Don't be so sullen.

SON: Yes, Father.

FATHER: That's my cheerful boy.

(Pause.)

Besides, you never liked building altars.

SON: It's hard work.

FATHER: But that's not why you don't like it.

SON: No, I suppose it's not.

FATHER: Does it still embarrass you?

SON: Well ... yes, but...

(Pause.)

FATHER: But?

SON: It's not pride.

FATHER: How do you mean?

SON: I mean ... It doesn't matter to me that everyone knows I was afraid of the blood.

FATHER: I think every child is afraid the first time he spills the blood of a lamb.

SON: I don't know why it embarrasses me, but, sometimes, after all these years, I still ... I pity that little lamb.

FATHER: Oh, that shouldn't embarrass you. You should pity the lamb.

SON: Yes, I suppose I should.

(Pause. Light change. The SON is now in darkness while the FATHER is isolated in a small area of light.)

SON: *(Off. As a young boy.)* I'm ready, Father.

FATHER: What?

SON: *(Entering the light.)* I'm ready.

FATHER: Oh, are you?

SON: Yes.

FATHER: Bring the wood over here.

(The SON drags the bundle center.)

That's good right there. Have you brought the lamb?

SON: Yes, Father. Here.

Stones by J. Scott Bronson

(The SON drags a [pantomimed] lamb into the light and the FATHER inspects it.)

FATHER: This is the runt, isn't it?

(Pause.)

Well?

SON: Yes, but --

FATHER: What did I tell you?

(Pause.)

What?

SON: That I should bring ... the choicest lamb.

FATHER: Correct.

SON: But, he's my favorite, Father.

(Pause.)

FATHER: He's my favorite too.

SON: Then --

FATHER: Bring him.

(The SON leaves the light. The FATHER sighs.)

Why did I choose to be a father?

(The SON returns. Pause.)

Good. Let me hold him.

(The SON holds his lamb, unmoving.)

Son.

(Pause.)

I won't hurt him.

(Finally the SON gives up his lamb.)

Now place some wood on the altar.

(The Son pushes a stone into the light and places a few sticks upon it, then stands back and stares at the altar. The FATHER offers the lamb to the SON.)

Here.

(The SON holds the lamb for awhile. . . The FATHER offers the knife to the SON who turns from it and places the lamb upon the altar. Pause.)

SON: He is silent.

FATHER: Yes.

SON: He does not fight.

FATHER: He trusts you. Hold him like this.

(The FATHER helps the SON get a good grip on the lamb. The SON holds it down for some time then holds his hand out for the knife. The FATHER places the knife in his hand.)

Cut here.

(Pause. The SON cuts then immediately drops the knife and cries out staring at his hand in horror.)

SON: Oh, Father! Look!

(He looks down at the lamb and cries out again. He backs away from the altar.)

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It's so hot. Oh, father, it burns me! Take it off! Please take it off. I hurt him! I hurt him! Why did I hurt him?

(The FATHER is holding the SON now.)

Why? Why? Why? It's his blood he's bleeding I made him bleed -- I made him bleed. Take it off -- wash it off!

FATHER: *(Holding the SON, overlapping.)* Stop now. Hush. Hush. No. No more. No more. That's it. Quiet now. Yes. Now. Now -- look at this. Look. See this? This hand too has spilled blood. Has been bathed in blood. But it washes off. It does wash off. Do you understand? Yes? Now go. Wash your hand.

SON: Yes, Father.

(The SON leaves.)

FATHER: Oh, why did I want to be a father?

(Light change. Pause.)

SON: I slept that night with my hand buried in the sand.

FATHER: I remember.

SON: Now that I think about it though, it's not the lamb I pity at all. It's myself. And that's wrong.

FATHER: I think you pity the lamb as well. That's not so wrong.

(Pause.)

SON: Well, enough about my childish past. Let's build an altar.

FATHER: You build, I'll watch.

SON: Of course.

FATHER: Of course.

(Pause.)

SON: Are you really just going to watch?

FATHER: I'll supervise from over here.

SON: All right.

FATHER: That stone will start a good foundation.

SON: Thank you. I thought so too.

FATHER: That stone over there looks like it will fit well right here.

SON: Thank you.

(The SON picks up the indicated stone and brings it center to the foundation stone.)

FATHER: You are still young and strong.

SON: You're not so frail yourself.

(Pause.)

FATHER: I'm proud of you. I've always been proud of you, you know that.

SON: Yes.

FATHER: It was the greatest day of my life when you were born.

SON: It was the greatest day of my life too. Though I imagine if I ever have a son of my own my outlook might change.

FATHER: If?

SON: Nothing is certain.

(Pause.)

FATHER: No, you're right, nothing is certain. Your mother certainly believed she'd never have a son, and yet,

here you are.

SON: Here I am.

FATHER: Until you were born, I don't think your mother really believed that she was actually going to have a son. She'd waited so many years, and was long past her birthing age. You truly were a miracle. An answer to so many desperate prayers.

(Pause.)

She loves you more than she loves anything else in this life.

SON: More than you?

FATHER: Maybe.

SON: I love her.

FATHER: I know you do. And that's more important than any feelings you have for me.

SON: I love you too, Father.

(Pause.)

FATHER: I know. But your mother ... is more important.

SON: Yes, Sir.

(Pause.)

FATHER: I'll help you.

(The FATHER struggles to lift another stone. The SON hurries to help him. Together they fit it to the altar.)

Thank you.

SON: You're welcome.

FATHER: I need to rest.

SON: Are you all right?

FATHER: *(As he sits.)* No.

SON: What is it?

FATHER: Your mother --

SON: What?

FATHER: She will -- she won't ...

SON: What, Father? Please --

FATHER: God has required ... of me ... of you ... a most difficult thing.

SON: Is Mother all right?

FATHER: Yes. For now.

SON: Is something going to happen ?

FATHER: Not -- Not to your mother.

SON: To whom then?

(Pause.)

FATHER: The sacrifice ... today .

(Pause.)

The lamb for the altar ... is ...

(Pause.)

It is you, my son.

(Pause.)

SON: I thought --

(Pause.)

Why?

FATHER: I--

(Pause)

If the lord should require even all that we have ... then we must give it.

(Pause.)

You are all that I have.

(Pause.)

SON: And the Lord has required it.

FATHER: Yes.

SON: Then we m ...

(Pause.)

We must ... do ... what the Lord requires.

FATHER: Yes.

SON: Yes.

(Pause.)

Oh! --

FATHER: Son --

SON: You did not tell Mother.

FATHER: No. Oh no. She would not have let you leave.

SON: I wish I hadn't.

FATHER: It is God's will.

SON: But why? Why does he will this?

FATHER: I don't know.

(Pause.)

SON: It seems ... capricious. I'm sorry.

FATHER: I understand.

SON: Do you? How? How is it you're able to understand how I feel?

(Pause.)

Will Mother understand when you return with nothing more than ashes and my blood on your hands and on your garments?

FATHER: Your mother -- Your mother's heart will break. As mine has broken a thousand times already. A thousand times since we left your mother I have watched myself draw this knife across your throat. A thousand times I have seen your blood pour out upon the stone and the sand and felt it, hot and sticky, upon this hand. A thousand times I have died when I killed you. A thousand times I have wished that I were already dead so that your soul might have passed through this day in the light of life rather than the shadow of death.

(Pause.)

But God has willed otherwise.

(Pause.)

SON: Your devotion is greater than mine, I fear.

FATHER: Not likely. Already I have held in my heart thoughts even your brother would deem unworthy.

SON: They must be evil thoughts indeed.

FATHER: Thoughts that should have rent the veil between me and the adversary and cast me into his midst.

SON: How can this be, Father? How can I believe that this is necessary?

(Pause.)

Do you believe it? Or is this just a test?

FATHER: I believe it, and it is a test. That must be won. By performing the deed.

SON: Will you force me if I refuse?

FATHER: No.

SON: I must go like the lamb, silent and trusting.

FATHER: Yes.

SON: Except that I know what the knife will do.

FATHER: Yes.

(Pause.)

SON: I am not ready.

FATHER: Nor am I.

(Pause.)

SON: I will finish building the altar.

(Light change. All is dark except for a pool of light around the altar. The FATHER and the SON are both out of the light. The FATHER'S voice is heard in the darkness.)

FATHER: Hurry, Son.

SON: What?

FATHER: I said, hurry.

SON: I'm busy, Father.

FATHER: Busy?

SON: Yes.

FATHER: *(Stepping into the light.)* Too busy to help your father?

SON: Yes.

FATHER: Come out here, Son.

(Pause.)

Now.

SON: *(Stepping into the light.)* Yes, Father?

FATHER: I need your help.

SON: Is there no one else?

FATHER: It is time to build the altar. I want you to help me.

SON: I thought --

FATHER: Your brother is hunting.

SON: Why?

FATHER: He thought we needed more meat.

SON: We have plenty.

FATHER: I know.

(Pause.)

SON: He wanted out of building the altar.

FATHER: More than likely. He doesn't like building altars any more than you do.

SON: You let him go?

FATHER: I did.

SON: Why?

FATHER: Because I knew that you were still here.

(Pause.)

I hoped that you would help me.

SON: You expect a lot of me.

FATHER: Yes, I do.

SON: Why?

FATHER: Father's always expect a lot of their sons.

SON: But you expect more of me than you do of him.

FATHER: Yes.

SON: Why?

FATHER: I want you to be better than your brother.

SON: Why?

FATHER: You are my son.

SON: My brother is not your son?

FATHER: He is not your mother's son.

SON: Doesn't that already make me better than him?

FATHER: It makes you my birthright son. You have to earn "better."

SON: How?

FATHER: By helping me build an altar.

(Pause.)

SON: I don't like building altars.

FATHER: I know that.

SON: I just want you to know that.

FATHER: Thank you.

(Pause.)

SON: If we stayed in one place and stopped moving around we wouldn't have to do this so often.

FATHER: You're right. But this is difficult land. We must go to where we can survive. And so, from time to time, we must move. And we must build an altar wherever we go.

SON: I suppose if I have to --

FATHER: No. You don't have to.

SON: I don't?

FATHER: Not at all.

(Pause.)

But I will be happy to receive your assistance if you are willing to give it.

(Pause.)

SON: I think I should be willing.

FATHER: Are you willing?

SON: If I must --

FATHER: No.

SON: What?

(Pause.)

FATHER: God has made a promise to me that through me a nation would be born. That means that through you a nation will be born. As a patriarch you must learn to serve. I know you are still young, perhaps too young to grasp this, but you must learn to serve willingly, giving freely, begrudging nothing of those you serve.

(Pause.)

Would you like to help me?

(Pause.)

SON: Yes.

FATHER: Thank you.

7 more pages in ACT ONE

Tombs

For My Mother

The first miracle of my life.

CHARACTERS

The Mother Middle Aged
The Son Around Thirty
The Father Just Past Middle Age

SETTING

The Place Is a Tomb
The Time Is Past

THE SET

Same blocks from Altars; different configuration. A low bench and lower portion of entrance to the tomb.

THE COSTUMES

The same as for Altars. Without the sashes.

Tombs was published in *Irreantum: A Review of Mormon Literature and Film*, the official publication of the Association for Mormon Letters, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2005)

ACT TWO -- TOMBS

(Lights up. The MOTHER is sweeping the floor. After a time she moves to the bench and dusts it with a small white cloth. Then she sits on the bench. She runs her hand along the edge of it. She stretches out on her side almost in a fetal position. Then she rolls to her back and stares at the ceiling. She places the cloth over her face. Pause. The SON appears in the entrance. Pause.)

SON: Mother.

MOTHER: *(Sitting up suddenly)* What?

SON: I frightened you. I'm sorry.

MOTHER: No. No. Stay. Please stay.

(Pause. The SON sits next to his mother and takes her hand. Pause.)

I was -- I just -- It's so cold. Hard.

SON: Mother, his body will feel none of it. And his spirit ... right now his spirit feels nothing but joy.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: Truly?

(The SON nods. Then she nods.)

He was a good man, wasn't he? He deserves that kind of joy.

SON: Yes. He was -- is, a good man. A very good man. Father put me into his care ... trusted him to rear the Son of Man.

MOTHER: The Son of Man.

(Pause.)

What about the Son of Woman?

SON: One in the same.

(Pause.)

It's not like you to be bitter.

MOTHER: I'm not bitter. Not really. I just don't want you to forget that you also have a mother.

SON: The best mother any son could have. How could I possibly forget you?

MOTHER: You may be the son of God, but like all men -- people -- you can become preoccupied to the point of excluding other concerns. Or, perhaps you inherited that from me.

SON: What could so infect me that it would push my mother from my mind and my heart?

MOTHER: Oh, I know I'll always be in your heart. Even if you weren't a god I think your heart could hold all the world. But not your mind. Your mind holds only one thing at any given time.

SON: That's true of everyone. I hope you have noticed however that your influence on me has taken deep root. I have learned a great deal from you.

MOTHER: Really. I know it must be true, but at this moment I feel as empty as an ancient desert well. As if I have always been.

SON: Mother --

MOTHER: Your deep-rooted learning was not watered from my well.

SON: It was. It is.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: Bitterness and self pity. All in one day. Aren't you pleased you were here to witness it?

(Pause.)

He's been gone for such a short time. I remember every hour I spent with him. But now, none of it seems real. As if the memories are someone else's, and I never really knew him at all.

SON: It's a terrible, hollow feeling to lose someone so dear.

MOTHER: It is. You feel the same way?

SON: I understand your feelings.

MOTHER: But you don't share them.

SON: Not quite.

(The MOTHER takes a deep breath.)

MOTHER: I'm ready.

SON: No. No sermons.

MOTHER: Actually, I could use a sermon right now.

SON: Time enough for sermons later.

MOTHER: But that's not what I meant. You have something to tell me. What is it?

SON: I miss him too, Mother. And, like you, my memories of him already feel like shadows.

MOTHER: That wasn't it.

(She looks him deeply in the eyes.)

You're hiding something. When did you begin this practice?

SON: When I was certain that I was about to hurt someone I love quite dearly.

MOTHER: And perhaps you feel that I am too fragile at this moment to hear whatever news it is that you have for me.

SON: Perhaps. I was counting on it.

MOTHER: Fine. You'll tell me when you're ready. But, don't for a minute think that we will get out of this tomb before you have confessed all.

SON: Whatever you say.

MOTHER: That's right. Your mother has spoken.

(Suddenly, she breaks into tears and the SON holds her until she stops.)

I'm sorry.

SON: For what?

MOTHER: Oh, admit it, Son ... you want to teach right now. You can't help yourself, you are a teacher. Isn't that why Father sent you?

(Pause.)

Aren't you going to tell me that my grief is pointless? That it profits me nothing in the long run? That I should have a broader, more eternal view of my husband's death?

SON: Never be ashamed of expressing your grief. There's no sin in feeling sorrow. Especially for a lost love.

MOTHER: But he's not lost, is he? I've heard you speak on this very subject before. He'll be mine again one day ... I'll be his ... forever. And if I could express my faith in that as well as I express my grief, I wouldn't feel the grief at all. My soul would be comforted by a divine peace. Isn't that what you want to tell me?

SON: No, Mother. I meant what I said ... no sermons just yet.

MOTHER: Don't hold back, Son. What is it?

SON: The sermons will come. Soon. Soon, too, will come the time when your faith, if it is sufficient, will allow you to throw your griefs upon another who will bear them for you. I wish that time were now. But, it cannot be. I am not yet ready.

MOTHER: What are you saying?

SON: I --

MOTHER: Actually ... what are you not saying?

SON: I'd rather not say just yet. I'm not ready for that either.

MOTHER: Don't do that. No. Perhaps I am too fragile right now. Too fragile to know that something ... portentous is about to happen ... to you perhaps ... and not be allowed to know what it is. I will not permit you to drop ominous statements like that and let them lie. It fills me with more dread than I can bear. Especially now. Oh, this is worse than when we lost you at the temple.

SON: I wasn't lost.

MOTHER: Your father and I didn't know where you were.

SON: As I told you then, I was about my Father's business.

MOTHER: Yes, without indulging in the courtesy of informing your stepfather and your wet nurse.
(He shoots her a look. Pause.)

SON: I apologized for that.

(Light change. The FATHER appears suddenly.)

FATHER: Apologies, no matter how sincere, can't heal some wounds.

MOTHER: He's already explained himself.

FATHER: Yes, yes ... he's about his Father's business. I'm sure that it's terribly important that this brilliant twelve year old prophet who has been put into our care be about the business of disabusing these doddering old fools of their unworthy traditions.

SON: They're not fools.

FATHER: Then they're foolish.

SON: Why?

FATHER: Because they won't listen to you.

SON: What?

FATHER: They think you're a curiosity. Do you suppose even one of them will change because of the things you've been teaching and expounding for the last three days? If they actually believed any of the things you've told them they would be plotting your death right now.

(Pause.)

They think you're quaint.

(Pause.)

SON: I thought you were going to lecture me.

FATHER: I'm getting there. But first I want you to know that I know just how truly brilliant you are. I know that what you taught them is true, and comes from God. I know who you are, what you are, and why you are here. I know what your mission is ... will be. And for a long time it intimidated me. Frightened me. But now, I know who I am. I know what I am. And why I'm here. It's a blessing and an honor for God to have put you into our care. But he did so because he trusts us. He chose us because He knows we can teach you something. As brilliant as you are, you have much to learn. And you are teachable. I know that you talk with Father every day, and I'm sure that He communicates with you ... somehow. Whether through visions,

dreams, or angelic manifestations, I know he is teaching you. My sense is that those teachings have more to do with ... the eternities. The verities of heaven. If I'm wrong, don't tell me. I rather like believing that I'm right.

SON: You are.

FATHER: Really. Well, then. That makes what I'm going to say now even more pertinent. This is the lecture you were waiting for.

SON: I'm listening.

FATHER: Some things can be learned only through experience. I'm sure you understand that ... in theory. What, perhaps though, has escaped your understanding is that despite these angelic tutorials, you still need the experience of living and growing with a family. With a family is where you will best learn the practical application of such concepts as respect and courtesy -- two things that you failed to exhibit when you left us to be about your Father's business. Your mother has been sick with fear for three days. That's not just an expression. She has been sick. So much so she can hardly stand now without aid.

SON: Mother, you have no need to fear. I am in Father's hands.

FATHER: Don't tempt God, young man. You may have angels attending you but that doesn't allow you the privilege to blithely stroll along the brink of a cliff. Your enemies may throw you off and if God wants to save you, you will be saved. If you throw yourself over the cliff, just to see what God will do, He will let you fall. We are the subjects of the test. God is not. Do you understand?

SON: Yes, sir.

(Pause.)

FATHER: We love you so very much. One day you may understand just how much. I hope you will.

SON: I will.

FATHER: Good. Because then you will understand why we were so frightened for you. And why that fear has turned to anger. And why that anger will be set aside. We are so grateful to have you back with us. So grateful that you are safe.

(Pause.)

Please forgive my sharp words.

SON: No. You are right. It is I who must apologize. I must try to ... learn to ...

(Pause.)

... to include ... more people in the decisions I make.

FATHER: Yes. Good. Thank you.

(The SON kisses his mother on the cheek and exits. Pause. Mostly to himself.)

I just yelled at the Son of God.

MOTHER: Why did you say they would be plotting his death?

FATHER: What?

MOTHER: Don't play this game with me. Please just answer my question.

FATHER: I just wanted to frighten the boy a little.

MOTHER: Do you really think I'm going to believe that?

(Pause.)

Why do you think those men would be plotting his death?

(Pause.)

What did he say to them? What was he telling them?

FATHER: The truth.

MOTHER: About himself?

FATHER: Very nearly. He was speaking in hypotheticals. He was leading them to the truth.

MOTHER: What is he thinking?

FATHER: He's thinking that he will change the world.

MOTHER: By getting himself killed?

FATHER: I believe that's the plan

(Light change. The FATHER disappears.)

MOTHER: I have never been so frightened. Not before or since ... until now. What's going to happen?

SON: Mother, you have no need to fear. I am in Father's hands.

MOTHER: You've said that before ... and I believe it. But, for some reason, it doesn't comfort me.

SON: Comfort will come. In its own time.

MOTHER: Everything in its season. Is that it?

SON: Yes.

MOTHER: Is your season upon us?

SON: Yes.

MOTHER: What does that mean?

SON: It means I will be leaving soon.

MOTHER: To do what?

SON: Teach. As you said, I'm a teacher.

MOTHER: Where will you go?

SON: Everywhere Father leads me.

MOTHER: Will I ever see you again?

SON: Oh yes. You will see me.

MOTHER: When will you leave?

SON: Soon.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: Please don't.

SON: Mother --

MOTHER: I don't want you to go --

SON: This is what I was born to do.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: I know.

SON: Do you?

MOTHER: Yes.

SON: You know the purpose of my existence?

MOTHER: Of course.

SON: How do you know?

MOTHER: You're not the only one to receive visitors.

SON: HI know that, but ... I thought -- I was told ...

MOTHER: What?

SON: That I was the only one who knew about ...

MOTHER: That you're the Mediator? That you will be despised and persecuted of men? That you will bear the burden of the world and men will want to kill you? Yes, I know about that. I've heard you and others read the scriptures. I know what they mean. I know who you are. And what you are. At least I think I do. Maybe there's more to it.

(Pause.)

I love you. You can't know how much I love you. You can't know how badly I need you right now. You can't leave.

(Pause.)

You say nothing.

SON: I don't want to hurt you, Mother.

MOTHER: Oh, you could never hurt me. There was a great deal of pain when you were born ... but never has there been an ounce of hurt.

(Pause.)

It's strange to think about, but I imagine some day people will celebrate your birth. There will be songs written about the beauty of that holy night. About the angels who sang. About the shepherds and the inn -- the kings from the east. But no one will sing about the blood and the pain and the sweat and the pain and the tears and that incredible pain. But it was all a part of it. They'll sing about the manger and the gently lowing cattle, but they won't sing about the hearty scent of animal dung. About the grunting and the groaning. They will see your birth as a miracle and they will assume that it was silent and easy. They won't ever imagine that you came into this world just like every other babe that is born, through the bloody, watery womb of a screeching, straining mortal woman of flesh and bone. The miracle of your birth is who your father is, not your mother.

SON: No, Mother. No man could have done what you did. Not even the Eternal Man who is my father. If he could have he would have.

(Pause.)

Only a woman. And he chose you. Do you know what it means in all Father's creations He chose you to bear the son of God? That He trusted you to raise him to be a god?

(Pause.)

You are the greatest miracle of my life. Believe that.

MOTHER: I'll try.

(Pause.)

I wish your brothers and sisters felt the same way.

SON: *(Laughing.)* Some day they will. Give them time.

MOTHER: Oh yes, on my death bed they'll all be gathered around uttering whispered prayers assuring God and me that they honor me as the greatest miracle of their lives.

SON: Yes, I believe they will. And they'll mean it. Just as I do, with all my heart, mind and soul.

MOTHER: Thank you.

(Pause. She kisses him. Touches his face, his hair.)

You are a miracle too.

SON: Yes, well, a child born of a virgin is a rather miraculous thing.

MOTHER: That's not what I mean. To me you were the most ... I don't know. It's impossible to describe. Just to touch your perfect, smooth skin. To look into your eyes and try to imagine what you were thinking. To

watch you crawl around picking up everything in your path and putting it in your mouth. Everything about you was, still is, a miracle to me.

SON: Even if I were not the Son of God you would feel that way. A mother's first child ... well, if you can't describe it, how can I?

MOTHER: Perhaps you're right. Perhaps the miracle is in discovering how to be a mother.

SON: Then every mother everywhere could know that miracle if they would follow your example.

MOTHER: I don't deserve that.

SON: Of course you --

(She stops him with a gesture.)

MOTHER: Please don't. I appreciate and cherish your honor for me. It is a wonderful gift, especially coming from you. But, any more than that is ... too much. I'm afraid I wouldn't believe even you if you were to bestow me with more praise than I deserve. I could never live up to it. I may allow you to call me a miracle or even an angel ... maybe. But never ... never the perfect mother.

SON: But to me --

MOTHER: Don't!

(Pause.)

Listen, if you're going to begin teaching people, there's something you need to understand about people. We don't love better by reaching for perfection. We approach perfection by loving better. Does that make sense?

SON: Perfect sense.

MOTHER: Was that meant to be funny?

SON: Possibly.

MOTHER: Now that I think about it, I suppose it is possible that to you I might have seemed like a perfect mother because I did love you so very much. But it was easy to love you. So easy.

SON: More than the others?

MOTHER: It must seem that way. But not really. It's just that ... my heart went out to you so much. I was always so afraid for you.

SON: Why?

MOTHER: Because ... because ... you're so submissive. To a parent, that's ... a dream come true, a completely obedient child. Who couldn't be grateful for that? But you tended to let people take advantage of you. I hated that. You always seemed to be in so much pain. And I can't bear to see you in pain.

SON: And yet, every pain that I brought to you over the years -- every cut, scrape, bruise and hurt feeling that I had was soothed, treated, kissed and healed by your love.

(Light change. The SON gasps in pain and holds his hand out to his MOTHER.)

MOTHER: What's this? What have you done now? You're bleeding.

(Using her white cloth, she begins to wipe at the wound on his hand.)

How did you do this?

SON: Working with father in his shop.

MOTHER: Well, I assumed that much. But how? What made this hole?

SON: A nail.

MOTHER: How did you manage to impale yourself with a nail?

SON: Daydreaming, if you ask father.

MOTHER: *(As she wraps his hand, turning the cloth into a bandage.)* Mm-hm. It's not very deep. You'll be all

right.

SON: Thank you.

MOTHER: You're welcome. And what were you daydreaming about?

SON: I wasn't.

MOTHER: No?

SON: No. Not really.

MOTHER: I see. So then, what distracted you?

SON: A vision.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: Of what?

SON: A wooden cross. Nails. And a man wearing a crown of thorns.

MOTHER: What man?

SON: I couldn't see his face.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: Thorns?

SON: Yes. It appeared to be quite painful. There was a great deal of blood.

MOTHER: There was no more to the vision?

SON: No.

MOTHER: What do you think it means?

SON: I don't know.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: That poor man.

(Pause.)

How did you do it?

SON: I had dropped a nail ... I bent to pick it up ... and ... the vision came. When it was gone I felt pain in my palm. My hand was gripped in a tight fist over the nail.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: And your father accused you of daydreaming.

SON: Yes.

MOTHER: Did you tell him it was a vision?

SON: No.

MOTHER: Why?

SON: I ... don't know.

MOTHER: Are you afraid of him?

SON: No.

(Pause.)

No.

MOTHER: What are you afraid of?

(Pause.)

Your father is a wise man. He could help you to understand these visions. He knows that you commune with angels. He doesn't chide you for that. Why do you think that he would chide you for having visions?

SON: It's not that. I'm certain that he can help me understand them. I think that ... I think that I don't want to

understand them ... yet.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: Ah. I see.

(Pause.)

When you're ready ... go to him, tell him of your visions.

SON: I will.

MOTHER: In the mean time, always bring them to me, and we'll wonder about them together.

(Pause.)

SON: Yes.

(Light change.)

MOTHER: Who else was there to help you bear the pain?

SON: Not many. Not many that I trusted.

MOTHER: Your father --

SON: Yes ... but not until I was ready to know the full weight of the pain that they brought. You understood what my visions were before I did.

MOTHER: Yes. And no. I knew they were given to you to prepare you -- to strengthen you. For what, I didn't know. I still don't.

(Pause.)

SON: You let me work through all that by myself. You helped me carry the weight of the confusion of not knowing. And when I was ready, father helped me carry the weight of certainty.

MOTHER: Yes.

SON: How did you do it?

MOTHER: I don't know.

(Pause.)

SON: Well, it's not over.

MOTHER: I know. It's just about to begin. Isn't it?

SON: Yes.

MOTHER: Without your father to help you.

SON: My true Father will be with me.

MOTHER: Of course. I simply meant ...

SON: I know what you meant. I'm sorry. I shouldn't be so quick to correct.

MOTHER: But you are correct.

SON: Yes, I'm correct, but, so what? That doesn't mean I need to be insensitive to the memory of the man who raised me as if he were my true father. I owe him more respect than that. Besides, you are correct as well. His wisdom and calming influence would be great comforts to me now as I prepare for my mission. I am sorry he is gone.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: Thank you.

(Pause.)

SON: I was sent to bring you home.

MOTHER: Were you?

SON: Yes.

MOTHER: Why?

SON: We all know that this tomb will never be just right. It will never be clean enough or comfortable enough for the remains of such a good man. You will never be ready to lay him down.

MOTHER: That's true, I suppose.

SON: But he is gone.

MOTHER: Though happy, you said.

SON: Yes.

(MOTHER closes her eyes. Long pause.)

Mother --

MOTHER: What will you teach?

SON: What?

MOTHER: What will your message be as you go about teaching? That you are the Son of God?

SON: That we must all love one another.

MOTHER: Then you won't tell them who you are?

SON: Oh yes. I will. It is by that authority that I will teach them.

MOTHER: You'll put yourself in so much danger telling people that.

SON: Be that as it may, I will tell them.

MOTHER: Why?

SON: Because my message must come from a position of supreme authority.

MOTHER: 'Love one another' is such a radical idea that it can only be taught by the Son of God?

SON: The depths to which I will ask them to go in order to practice true God-like love for their fellow beings is indeed a radical concept. Very frightening in fact for those of insufficient faith.

5 more pages of ACT TWO

An Afterword About Design

In the Spring of 2001 these plays were scheduled for production with Actors Repertory Theatre Ensemble at the Castle Theatre in Provo, Utah. I was to direct and act, but because of illness the entire thing was called off. However, in preparation for that production I had done quite a bit of thinking about incorporating some symbolism into the design. I'm perfectly content, still, with my belief that the nondescript black costumes and simple black blocks will work for this script. But in recent years I have seen some amazing things done with motifs in architectural designs and in other plays and films. There is no shame in letting the audience use more than one of the five senses in acquiring the message I am determined to deliver. Sure, I set this play up to make the actors do all the work. I'm an actor, I like to write for actors. But having children has taught me that there are lots of ways that we as individuals learn things, and we don't all learn the same things the same way. It might be wise to give the audience more to work with. And I knew that if I looked hard enough and thought hard enough about it I would find thematic motifs in the text of the play that could be helped a little with design. So that the visual elements of the play could support the auditory elements. My first thoughts along these lines went to geometric shapes to represent the three characters, the most obvious being a square, a circle and a triangle. Every other kind of shape is based on these three forms, are they not? My second thoughts went something like this: That's just too obvious and I want to be more subtle than that. Let's start somewhere else. What about color, I thought. Well, there's red, yellow and blue.

The primary colors of course, but that too is just as obvious as it can be. Try something else. Elements. Instinctively, I suppose, I realized that in dealing with people concrete entities (and these characters are not only based on real people, they feel like real people to me) one should begin the symbology with concrete symbols. As I suspected, the answers were in the text. The Father enters carrying fire. His purpose in *Altars* is to kill and burn his son. These are good places to start, but that's just on the surface. In both plays the Father's role is to find and disseminate knowledge and truth. These things are often referred to in scripture as the light of knowledge and truth. Light is represented with fire. Well, this is sort of obvious too, but it's true and it feels right. The Mother is the giver and sustainer of life in *Tombs* and the means to effect change in *Altars*. She breaks down her son's resolve and makes way for a new direction in his life. Life came from the waters of the earth according to scripture, and is the most important element of our lives. It is also the most powerful solvent on the planet. Given enough time, and with the right kind of motion, water will dissolve anything. Again, obvious but true and correct for my purposes. The Son represents all flesh, and all flesh lives because of the blood that courses through their veins. And all flesh can live forever because of the blood that flowed from the veins of the Son. What else could I do? It is the only option. So, fire, water and blood. What are the best colors to represent these elements? Yellow, blue and red of course. There's no escaping that. What about shapes? What kind of visual symbols are used to represent these elements? I went out into the big wide wonderful world of the web and found a site with all kinds of symbols. Fire was represented almost always with a triangle. The one I liked best had steep sides with a line bisecting the form from the apex straight down to the base. This line is meant to invoke the idea of divinity or authority. Well, that just makes sense, doesn't it? Water had a lot of different representations as well, most of them incorporating wavy lines in some manner. The most striking for me was three waves in a vertical arrangement enclosed within a box. My square comes back to me. This symbol was said to represent water, movement and life. There was only one symbol for blood. The same symbol used to represent male and Mars. A circle with an arrow protruding from it. The circle. Unavoidable I suppose. And appropriate considering that the words used to describe this symbol included passion (the Passion of Christ),

and liquid fire (the Father and the Mother flowing through his veins). So, my conclusion is that on a cosmic level these things all tie together so well because ... well ... they are true. And they have meaning for us on levels that we probably can't even define, but somehow they resonate. And I would like to see them resonate with the audiences of these plays. Of course, as I said earlier, I think it can still work as an 'actors' play,' with a minimum of visual stimulus. This will work if the actors are exceptional and can hold the audience's attention by merely breathing, which is possible, but difficult. I think I would employ these design motifs even if I had exceptional actors. Make it a feast for the eyes as well as the ears.

Reviews

STONES is the recipient of the 2001 Award for Drama from the Association for Mormon Letters.

“STONES is a perfect example of the three keys to playwrighting: Story, Character, Dialogue. Both acts thousands of years apart in real time, appear outwardly to tell two different stories. But the similarities in the themes of faith and family reach across the years to bind the play into one coherent story that is relevant today and will always be as long as humans walk the Earth.

Playwrights of lesser ability would have seen the task of putting thoughts in to the mind and words into the mouth of the Savior of Mankind as somewhat daunting, if not downright sacrilegious; yet Bronson’s Christ speaks words that are simultaneously human in their pain and divine in their solace.

No less expertly delineated are the characters of Abraham, and especially Mary. The scene where she becomes aware of her Son’s eventual sacrifice on the cross is one of great dramatic and spiritual power. Bronson’s dialogue successfully and seamlessly bridges two worlds. His characters speak plainly in the modern syntax and vernacular and yet slip effortlessly into lyrical soliloquies of great poetic force.

STONES sets a new standard for Mormon drama in the universality of its theme, the depth of its characterization, and the poignant beauty of its words.”

Stones

a play by J. Scott Bronson

performed at the Center Street Theater (2002)

"Competition for General Conference"

As I write this, the next installment of General Conference is less than twenty-four hours away. Millions of Latter-day Saints will turn to those sermons for spiritual inspiration and insight.

This April, General Conference has some significant competition.

Not that competition is the best word to use. It's not like it's an either/or proposition. Go ahead and drink in the spiritual nourishment of the Conference sessions. But you would be a fool--yes, a fool--if you pass on an extra helping of nourishment that's available to anyone who can get to Orem, Utah, and back within one evening's drive.

I'm talking about the Center Street Theater's production of J. Scott Bronson's play *Stones*. This play could be described as good, it could be described as moving, powerful, or even great. It could be, but every one of those descriptions would be inadequate.

To adequately describe *Stones*, you must resort to words like consummate, brilliant, archtypal.

This play is transcendent.

Bronson has written a quintessential piece of LDS drama that does what all pieces of LDS drama should aspire to. It presents two scenes from Biblical times, one between Abraham and Isaac, and one between Jesus and Mary. Both scenes involve common themes: obedience to God, sacrifice, death, understanding, the love between parent and child.

But I will give no synopses of these two plays-within-a-play. I won't attempt to steal their thunder by spilling any more beans than I already have. I will only say that *Stones* has everything you could possibly want from a play.

You want emotion? Deep, powerful, significant emotions will ooze from the walls and drench you in a monsoon of them. Don't leave home without your kleenex.

You want insight? You will think thoughts you've never thought, realize things that never occurred to you, understand familiar stories in ways that will make them--not feel new--but 'be' new.

You want symbolism? *Stones* reeks of symbolism. *Stones* gives Isaiah himself a run for his money on symbolism.

You want irony? Mind-bending irony skitters out of the woodwork where you never saw it coming.

You want good acting? You will discover superlative acting.

You want to care? You will care about Abraham, Isaac, Jesus, and Mary in ways you never thought of before.

You want redemption? It's there for the taking, but at a hefty price. You'll understand the price, and you'll rejoice in those that paid it.

You want spiritual fulfillment? There'll be enough there to give General Conference some competition.

Humor? There's even a few laughs. But not many. They don't belong there.

You'll even get fine music that accentuates the experience perfectly, specially written for the performance. But only between the two plays. No mortal music could enhance the power of the simple, direct performance that will blow you away. It can only punctuate it as you contemplate the transcendent experience you just had.

If you don't get any of this out of experiencing *Stones*, check your pulse. You are dead.

Stones by J. Scott Bronson

Stones is a masterful example of how vital art is to one's emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development. *Stones* works on you in ways that worship services never could, important as they are. *Stones* shows all LDS playwrights how it's done. For a couple of hours, Bronson is the master.

DO NOT MISS THIS PLAY.

Am I selling *Stones* too much? Am I building it up so high that it cannot meet expectations, as so often happens? No, not this play. It can't be built up too much. It will transcend any expectation.

Every member of the church should attend *Stones* like every member of the church should view General Conference.

-- D. Michael Martindale

Stones by J. Scott Bronson

Stones offers solid storytelling and acting

By Sharon Haddock -- Deseret Morning News -- Published: April 7, 2008

Stones through April 26, Covey Center for the Arts, Provo (852-7007), running time: 2 hours (one intermission)

PROVO — *Stones* is an apt name for the two original one-act plays written by J. Scott Bronson.

Not only do the stories take place at the top of a rocky mountain and inside a tomb carved out of rock, the stories are tough to watch and hard to bear.

Yet they are important stories, stories based on scriptures about sacrifice, love and faith.

They're powerful.

It's not easy to watch Abraham tell Isaac he's the sacrificial lamb in a story titled "Altars." It's painful to watch Isaac deal with what he and his father believe God is asking.

It's equally heart-wrenching to watch Mary deal with Jesus' future and his impending sacrifice for mankind in "Tombs."

It's not easy to watch but riveting.

Bronson did well writing these plays. The doctrine is basically sound. The dialogue is believable, and the characters come alive with insight and human frustrations.

Bronson plays Abraham in "Altars" and Joseph in "Tombs," while Elwon J. Bakly plays Isaac and then Jesus. Kathryn Laycock Little is Isaac's mother and then Mary.

Each does an excellent job as they move from rage to tears to bitterness to acceptance without being simplistic or maudlin.

Little is especially fine at playing a loving, kind mother who can't bear that her son will bring out his enemies by preaching for men to love one another.

Bakly has a huge job in playing Isaac and then Jesus because he's onstage the entire time. But he does well, making the subtle shifts in personality and bearing that make him believable, especially as Jesus, confident in his assignment as the son of God.

These two plays are intense.

They are also done almost entirely without props or a real set, only cinder blocks, rushes and timbers.

The result is a very intimate setting, one that's almost harsh but one that works for these two stories.

The transition in lighting is the only signal for "time travel" moments, and the actors move about in the dark.

These plays deserve just a little more in the way of a stage and a curtain. Nevertheless, they are worth seeing.

Blogged by Darlene Young

Last night I got to see one of my favorite plays again, *Stones*, by my friend Scott Bronson. I saw it for the first time seven years ago and it blew me away. It was even better this time. First, because I am seven years older and wiser, and brought seven years more experience to the viewing. And second, because he has made a couple of quite small changes that actually dramatically altered the play's impact for me. I'd like to recommend the play to everyone—but I can't. It's not for people who want their entertainment to be easy or relaxing. It challenges you. It is not a "downer," but it is a true "upper" similar to true joy: it can only come when you have had your soul harrowed a little; it encompasses pain and growth. Also, one of the characters is Jesus, so if you are uncomfortable with the concept of Jesus being acted out (and some of his humanity becoming apparent), you might not like this. And yet I can't help thinking that it would be good for you, even you who are uncomfortable, to see it. You don't have to agree with Scott's interpretations in order to grow closer to God through viewing this play. Because it generates thoughtfulness (the mark of great art!), and will cause you to ponder and clarify your own beliefs.

I'd like to get into more detail about the things I learned from the soul-searching this play inspired, but I don't want to step on the possibility of your learning your own things from it. But in general terms, I'll tell you that I learned a lot about submission to God's will, about parenting, about the ways we learn (through experience, through "going through stuff" as much as through any direct lessons), about how God requires things of us that lead to our growth, about how we communicate spiritual knowledge to others who depend on us.

I can't say too much about how I think art should be like this: a little bit uncomfortable, yet deeply satisfying and faith-building (optimistic, ultimately), something that makes you think and talk all the way home and for days afterward. This is the kind of art that we Mormon artists should be producing and are capable of producing (with a little guts). The trick, now, is to support it, to build the audience for it, to show each other that this is what Mormon art looks like, to convince the people around us that it is important to foster it.

So I'm writing this in hopes that you'll go see it, if you're in the area. It's playing every Thursday, Friday and Saturday through April 26th at the Covey Center for the Arts in Provo (425 W. Center, 852-7007) at 7:30 p.m. It's in a fantastic little theater in which there are no bad seats and in which you are just feet away from the actors—actors who, by the way, will knock your socks off. Tickets are \$10 each (and worth it). If you go, let me know what you think.

Stones by *J. Scott Bronson*

Blogged by Nan McCullough

Scott Bronson's *Stones* is an unforgettable stunningly written and produced play. I am one of the lucky theater-goers who has seen the play three times. I saw it first at Center Street Theatre in Orem produced by The Nauvoo Theatrical Society. Next it appeared at The Little Brown Theater in Springville. Finally *Stones* opened at the new Covey Center for the Arts in Provo. Last night when the play ended, the audience couldn't bring themselves to clap. None wished to intrude on the silence and that very sacred moment, but we were torn by our desire to show appreciation to a splendid cast and crew. For this same reason I have not chosen to review this play; I couldn't do it justice. I am glad others have reviewed it so well, expressing their appreciation with respect and sensitivity. Last night, I felt that I was a part of something important. A sense that this play showed greatness and would some day receive the acclaim it deserves. Thank you Scott for this beautiful work. It is obvious that you went through much thinking and feeling to provoke us to do the same. Thank you for giving a voice to mothers and to a step-father and for respecting these sometimes ignored and not fully appreciated parents. When ultimate courage was required of the young men, it was a mother and a step-father who provided the crucial support. Thank you Scott, Kathryn and Elwon for the passion, the pathos and the humor that made *Stones* unbelievably believable.

STONES

by Cheri at Segullah blog -- Posted by [Cheri](#) | April 12, 2008

Stones

Covey Center for the Arts, Provo -- April 3-26, 2008 -- Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays -- 7:30 p.m.

Saturday evening I had an unexpected chance to see J. Scott Bronson's two side-by-side plays, together titled *Stones*. It's not surprising that *Stones* won AML's best drama award in 2001. The play's literary complexity begins with the titles and settings, with the first play, *Altars*, set on a mountaintop around the Old Testament altar of Abraham and Isaac, and the second play, *Tombs*, inside the cave-tomb of Jesus' father-guardian, Joseph. One high and open, the other deep and enclosed. The centerpiece for both is a flat black, low stone table—the altar and the resting place.

Before seeing *Altars*, I always imagined the Abraham and Isaac story mythically, a kind of ritual whose main purpose was to prophecy of Christ. *Altars* made it real. A father and a son (the characters are never named in either play) trying to come to grips with what God is asking them to do. How does a father give his son such news? How does a son take it? The close, bare stage (I sat only a few feet from the actors) invites the audience to join their journey through anger and bitterness to unsparing acceptance. Miraculously, they avoid any hint of sappy. While the story stays true to ancient texts and times, the dialogue is always current and real. I believed in their love, their anger, their fear, their faith, their incomprehension. And I believed in their acceptance.

In *Tombs*, both parallel and opposite to *Altars*, the son (also never named) brings his mother the difficult news that he is to begin his ministry—the beginning of the end. Like *Altars*, this play zooms in on one small moment in one small place, enriched by memories and flashbacks that might naturally weave in at such a time. A simple, effective change in lighting signals the time switch, and the dialogue transitions smoothly between the current and the memory. Elwon Bakly, who plays the son in both stories, deftly treads the delicate line between Jesus' divinity and His humanity. Kathryn Laycock Little gives us a Mary who is loving, strong, tender, humble even as she wrestles with bitterness at one of the worst moments of her life. She holds up all these complex emotions with incredible dignity.

Stones is hard to watch. But, as art should be, it's a satisfying, enriching challenge. It's worthwhile to feel the reality of these people who are often just stories to us. To find more in their stories by setting them side-by-side. To imagine who they might have been, and how they might sometimes have been a little bit like us. And then to be awed that they gave us the gifts that they did.

Stones by J. Scott Bronson

‘Stones’ Makes a Utah Stop en Route to San Diego

April 27, 2010 by Jacob Porter

PROVO — Normally, I am reluctant to see a show like *Stones* which has a religious subject matter. I have been know to hate “Jesus Plays.” I feel it is impossible to write a successful play about Jesus. However, the production *Stones*, directed and written by J. Scott Bronson, at the Covey Center for the Arts was a pleasant surprise.

A true gem amongst other cheesy and over done religious theatre, this drama really explored the themes of doubt, guilt, sacrifice and God’s will without being preachy. I greatly appreciated this theatrical experience.

My surprises began when I walked into the “theater,” which was just a little room that was being used as a theater. They had simple lighting and costumes that consisted of various, simple black clothing. The stage was set with black cinder blocks scattered across the space, and a couple platforms. Right before the show opened, the director/actor/writer stood up and gave the announcement that this show was in preparation for them to take the show to San Diego to perform. This was their warm up for that trip.

The script is divided into two acts with two separate, but complementary, stories. The first act follows Abraham and Isaac at the alter. We see the struggle of a father trying to tell his son he is to be sacrificed because it is God’s will. The second act focuses on Mary and Jesus right before Joseph’s burial and we see the struggles of a mother knowing what is to become of her son, the savior. Both the acts share similar motifs and conventions, such as flashbacks to the characters’ youth and teaching the children what is right and wrong. These choices worked for me. There was a symmetry to the show that I appreciated. ... The script, however, achieved its goal of balance and spirituality, and at moments was even beautiful. The comic touches to the show made these people real to me, and it was easier to watch because the show wasn’t entirely dramatic.

J. Scott Bronson played both Abraham and Joseph. He gave such a subtle and solid performance. He left me saying “wow,” especially after the first act ...

Elwon Bakly played Isaac and Jesus—perhaps the most difficult duo in the cast. He not only had the most lines, but the different ages of his characters proved an extra challenge. Bakly played both characters well ...

Katherine Laycock Little portrayed Sarah and Mary. Little as an actress is spunky, spry and charismatic. I appreciated her performance. While excelling in each role, I especially appreciate her performance as Sarah in the first act—probably the most honest performance of the night.

Will this show relate to audience members outside the LDS faith? Yes. The show has a strong LDS feeling, but it speaks to more than just religion. This piece was about the inner workings of a family and the difficulty for a father and a mother to perform God’s will. *Stones* was of excellent quality and actually brought me and others to tears. I was glad to attend the show.

'Stones' a cathartic, enriching experience.

November 29, 2001 5:00 pm • Eric D. Snider -- The Daily Herald

SPRINGVILLE -- "Stones" uses carefully considered poetic license to flesh out the biblical cases of Abraham being asked to sacrifice his son Isaac, and Jesus' relationship with his mother Mary.

It is two plays, actually, "Altars" and "Tombs," each using the same cast and set and written and directed by J. Scott Bronson.

"Altars" takes place on Mt. Moriah, where Abraham is supposed to kill his son as a sacrifice to God. The focus is on theology more than psychology, with a lot of emphasis on why God would require this. There is the distinct feeling that a parable is being taught, that what's happening here should make us consider our own feelings. It succeeds at this.

Bronson's script effectively brings to the surface the feelings inherent in this situation.

"Tombs" is set after the death of Joseph, with Mary grieving for her husband and Jesus comforting his mother. The affectionate relationship between Jesus and Mary rings gloriously true.

The performances are spectacular throughout. Bronson plays Abraham with gentle but realistic frustration, and also appears as Joseph in a "Tombs" flashback, vividly portraying the difficulty in being foster father to the Son of God.

Kathryn Laycock Little's performance as Mary is breathtaking. Mary is sensitive, dignified, lovely and humble, and "Tombs" is as appropriate for Mother's Day as it is for Christmas and Easter.

Finally, Elwon Bakly pulls double duty as Isaac and Jesus, and excels in both roles. Jesus is a terribly difficult character to play -- you want him to be human, but not TOO human, or it seems blasphemous -- but Bakly rises to the challenge. Where most portrayals of Jesus make him impossibly cryptic, Bakly -- and Bronson's script -- makes him emotionally accessible and sympathetic.

I have only two issues with the scripts. First, "Altars" needs more closure. We know what happens, of course, but the play needs to tell us in order to be complete in its storytelling. (*Reviewer's opinion.*)

Second, "Tombs" has a flashback to Jesus' childhood in which he accidentally runs a nail through his palm -- the only time in either play in which the symbolism is so smack-in-the-forehead obvious. (*Again, Reviewer's opinion.*)

Even though the script uses no character names, these are still clearly the stories of Abraham and Isaac, and Mary and Jesus, and no one else.

This is not a shortcoming, however; a thoughtful play about biblical figures is as desirable as one about Every Family. The emotional intensity is palpable, and "Stones" is a cathartic, enriching experience.

Should you go? Yes. Such fine acting and insightful writing are rare, as is a show as uplifting as this one.

J. Scott Bronson is a middle-aged man from San Diego with one wife, five children, a cat and a dog. He studied theatre at Albert Einstein Jr. High School, James Madison Sr. High School, San Diego Mesa Jr. College, and BYU. He has written a dozen plays or so including a couple of Mayhew Award winners and the Association For Mormon Letters' 2001 best drama, *Stones*. He is a published playwright, and fiction writer, a stage director who has served on the boards of two theatre companies in Utah County, one of which he co-founded and for which he was the Artistic Director. He has acted in scores of stage, television and film productions. He is a cancer survivor and a couch-potato. He likes Jazz, Blues, Classical and Rock-and-Roll music. He loves Big Macs, pizza and Cap'n Crunch and it shows.

STONES

by J. Scott Bronson.

ALTARS -- 2M1W. Open Setting. **TOMBS** -- 2M 1W. Open Setting. Time for each: Just under an hour.

STONES is the recipient of the 2001 Award for Drama from the Association for Mormon Letters. "*STONES is a perfect example of the three keys to playwrighting: Story, Character, Dialogue. Both acts thousands of years apart in real time, appear outwardly to tell two different stories. But the similarities in the themes of faith and family reach across the years to bind the play into one coherent story that is relevant today and will always be as long as humans walk the Earth.*"

ALTARS is the story of Abraham, Isaac and Sarai.

TOMBS is the story of Mary, Jesus and Joseph.

These plays can be presented separately but it is recommended by us and preferred by the author that they be performed in tandem.

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