

Reclaiming Art for God's Glory

Featuring Rich Garnaat

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TRANSCRIPT

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, welcome back, everyone, to the Cornerstone University Wisdom and Influence podcast. I'm so honored and privileged to have our guest today, Mr. Rich Garnaat. He's the founder and president of Arise Collective Theatre, no stranger to Cornerstone University. He's one of our fine alums. He just received this year's Alumni of the Year award.

Rich, thank you for being with us, and thank you for your love for the Lord and your partnership with Cornerstone University.

Rich Garnaat: Oh, it's such a privilege to be here. We are so excited to partner with Cornerstone University and just seeing what God has in store both now and in the future.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: So thank you. Well, Rich, thank you so much. I remember several years ago attending one of the wonderful productions of Arise Collective Theatre, related to John Bunyan's classic work, Pilgrim's Progress. And I remember one of your team coming up to me and saying, "You know, I've been wanting to meet with you and talk with you about this."

And then she shared with me the vision and the desire to partner with us and to bring what you do and your team does, which I want you to tell our whole audience. And that's how I first met you and saw the work, and I was deeply moved. I said, "Yes, let's do it, let's do it, let's run, let's run with it."

And so I'm very grateful. On behalf of our entire university, thank you for partnering with us, and thank you for your faithfulness to the Lord and the Gospel. That's what it's all about. That's the most important message we have.

Rich Garnaat: Amen. I agree. That was an amazing moment. What was that, five years ago?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah.

Rich Garnaat: I remember where we were standing when we met that first time, and sort of cast a vision — what would it look like to bring this story, Pilgrim the Musical, to Cornerstone University to reach that age, the college-age generation and beyond. And it's been exciting to see the fruit that's come from that.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, Rich, thank you so much for being with us today and all that you do. One of the first questions I have for you is oftentimes Christians, I think, have either a love-hate relationship with art, or they don't know what to do with art. They don't know how to deal with it, approach it as Christians, as faithful believers.

So oftentimes it's easier to say no, right? And to stay away from it, and yet it's such an integral part of who God made us. God created — the very first revelation of Himself to us in Genesis: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth." And you see God's incredible artistry, right, creativity at work.

So I wanted to begin to speak with you about art, as a Christian and what you do, and your family, and colleagues in this wonderful Arise Collective Theatre. Give us a sense of your approach as a believer, as a leader in the space of art, and how we as Christians should engage with it, especially since it's everywhere.

Popular art, high art, middlebrow — I mean, everywhere. It's all around us. And how do we engage it? How do we talk with our kids about it? How do we speak about it in our churches? Just if you can share your thoughts, and we'll begin our conversation that way, Rich.

Rich Garnaat: Yeah, I would love to. We're very passionate about art here at Arise Collective, obviously. And you stated it: God created art. It was an original part of creation. The scriptures even talk about how Lucifer was created as the angel of light, and with musical notes and different colors and different things. And I personally believe that Satan knows the power of art and what it can do to bring glory to God, and therefore he has perverted it in a way to try to bring glory to himself, or really just bring perversion to what God created as good.

And so what you have now is what we have as the standard for Hollywood and for Broadway and even Nashville and even the pornography industry — a twisted form of art. And I believe God is calling a generation right now, for those that have ears to hear, those that are authentic believers of Jesus, and He's saying, "I want to reclaim art back for my purposes, my kingdom, and my glory." And so we at Arise Collective, that's our calling — to use art as a way to bring honor and glory to God and to advance His kingdom.

There's so many different versions of art in the Christian community, and unfortunately, especially in musical theater and film, there's what everyone thinks is kind of a subpar approach to it, a quality that just doesn't equate to the world's standards. And we believe that we want to take it beyond that. We believe God has the answers and the revelation that we need to do art, perform art, produce art at a level of quality that far surpasses even what the world has to offer. So of course, clean, God-honoring messages of truth, but done with excellence that goes beyond.

And so that's what our approach has been to musical theater. It's also the approach that we're taking to film and visual art and the different things that God is revealing to us to take on. So it's exciting.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Rich, talk with us about the beginning of Arise Collective Theatre. Tell us the story behind it.

Rich Garnaat: Yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: How'd it come into being? I've seen the productions many times since we first met, and I'm always moved. It's beautiful. It's done with excellence. It's just fantastic work, so congratulations to you and your wife and your whole team. It's really phenomenal work. But give us the story. How did it come into being, from sort of a conception to reality?

Rich Garnaat: Yeah. It really started with our daughter, our oldest daughter, Grace. She's a fellow founder of Arise Collective. She graduates from high school several years ago and was involved in musical theater all through middle school and high school, and just had a passion for art, for musical theater. My second daughter also is very passionate about visual arts and music and everything that has to do with art. And so my daughter, Grace, basically graduates from high school and looks at, what are the options for me to do now? She's asking this question. She's not interested in going to Broadway.

I think it's actually interesting that the term Broadway itself is a term that I think says this is the broad way that leads to destruction, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it. I won't go off on that tangent just yet. But Broadway needs Christian artists that are missionaries there, of course, but she wasn't interested in that road. That wasn't the direction she wanted to go to put herself sort of in that worldly setting.

And then we looked at the different Christian options out there. We love Sight & Sound Theatres. We've even connected with them, met with them several times. But that wasn't quite the direction she wanted to go. There's Logos Theatre. We're actually finding more organizations out there now than we ever knew existed before. But she basically came to us and said, "What if we start something?" We've been an entrepreneurial family in the past, we've been deeply involved in ministry, and we said, "You know what? Let's try it."

And so in 2019, we did our first version of Arise Collective produced musical theater of Pilgrim the Musical. And while we all look back at that and cringe as an early start, God used it so profoundly that we saw final performances at that first church location in Byron Center of standing room only, people coming up just weeping afterwards, God completely changing people's lives through this. And we looked at each other and we said, "The Lord is doing something here. God, where do you want to take this next?"

And that kind of started the journey. Actually, 2020, 2021, during COVID, is where God actually launched us and said, "I'm going to take you on the road and touring." When everything of the world, all theater organizations, everything is shut down, that's when God says, "I'm going to do something in my upside-down kingdom, and I'm going to launch you and send you out." It was pretty exciting, and I believe it was one of those first performances, actually, in Hudsonville that you saw.

But that's the beginning. It comes from Isaiah 60:1–2, which says, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." And so Arise Collective — we're not about individual people receiving individual recognitions or praise. We are about collectively arising and shining to bring glory to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Oh, that's beautiful. That's beautiful, Rich. Thank you. I remember my parents and I and my brother, we immigrated to the U.S. 45 years ago in 1980, and I remember, up until that time in Colombia, South America, we'd been attending private schools. My parents always enrolled us in private schools, and I had never seen a musical at all, ever.

So then we come to the United States, and we were enrolled in public schools. I think we spent six months at a Christian school, and after that it was public education until I graduated from high school. And I remember in seventh and eighth grade that we had music class. And for music class we'd watch musicals, right? So the teacher would go up there. What a great music class. I remember thinking, "This is great. I just sit here and watch TV for class," right? As a seventh grader. And that's where I first saw my first musicals. So I'll tell you the first two that I remember. The Sound of Music, right? And I, as a seventh grader, I just fell in love with that musical, right? And the story and everything was just so neat and tidy, right? And then the second one I saw was The Music Man. Right? And I remember watching those musicals, and so that was my introduction to Broadway, to these musicals as a seventh grader.

But fast-forward now, in the last year or so, there have been some significant Broadway figures who've passed away, right? I did not know them. I am not a follower of Broadway. You hear about the musicals and so on, but I don't follow the people behind it who create the musicals or the plays or the sound and so on and so forth.

But I did read this particular op-ed of this individual who was responsible for creating a significant large portfolio of music for musicals over three or four decades. So he was very, very famous, and Barbra Streisand, Liza Minnelli, all these folks just praised him, his music and so on. And I said to myself, "I need to hear — I need to go listen to some of this stuff to see if it's worthwhile," right? So I did that. I remember I spent one evening listening to these songs and pieces that he had written for these musicals, and then exploring the musicals themselves and the plays themselves, too. And I'll never forget, after hearing a number of these pieces of music and then studying the musical or the play, I walked away thinking, "What a perverted, dark, godless worldview."

I mean, some of these musicals or plays praised debauchery. They praised breaking the limits of what's right and wrong. They praised secrecy and being able to do what we want to do behind closed doors, and that's what people were singing about and reveling about and praising, and I thought, "This is what the world sees as worthy," right?

Rich Garnaat: That's right.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: A tremendously talented individual, tremendously gifted and creative, no doubt about it. But the worldview was so rebellious, so dark, so prideful, right? So antagonistic to Christ or the Christian worldview, what is right and wrong. And thus to your point before about Broadway and the Broadway leading to destruction.

And that's one of the things that as I reflect on the contemporary art world, and in music and theater, there's so much of that now where art is used as a vehicle to emphasize, to champion darkness. To champion darkness, to champion the human spirit in resistance against God and His Spirit.

It may not be spoken in those ways, but when you read the animus behind this material, that's what it is, right? So if you'd be able to comment on the beautiful work that you're doing with Pilgrim the musical, but how do we engage art that's not, quote unquote, "overly religious" or Christian, right?

How do we do that? Because as you know, in Christianity, there have been debates about this for a long, long time. I grew up in a church where going to a movie theater was the wrong thing to do. You didn't go to one. And I grew up in a church where there were people who said, "We're throwing our TV out. We're not even going to have one." Now, my father's not a Christian, so we had TVs all the time, and I couldn't imagine throwing my TV out growing up, right? So how do we wrestle with this — you have families who are really wrestling with this now, right? And if it's not Pilgrim, then how do we engage the other art out there?

Rich Garnaat: It's a great question, and that's one thing that we're so passionate about. It's interesting, we so often have individuals that will come up to us after a performance, or they'll send in a contact form, and they will say, "I love music, I love acting, I love dance," whatever it is, and they'll say, "I didn't know something like this existed." Where you could actually use the giftings and the calling on your life of the Spirit of God, and then have it be utilized in a way in performance that not only brings glory to God, but actually moves people's hearts to respond to Him for kingdom purposes. We have it constantly. People just don't know that this is even possible or that it exists.

And one of the things we love — of course there's all kinds of Bible stories. That's what Sight & Sound performs. That's what lots of other films are depicting. You've got David in so many different films and musicals right now. We love Bible stories. That's just not the bent that God has given us a vision for. For us, it is allegory. It is using different types of stories, which is interesting. That's what Jesus did. He told parables. He used allegory to bring about kingdom understanding, and that's what we feel called to. Pilgrim's Progress, of course, is a beautiful allegory of the walk that someone has walking with Jesus through their whole life.

And being able to present that live on a stage stirs hearts in so many ways because everyone can put themselves on that path somewhere on the journey. But we use other things. We have a short film that we produced a few years ago called Prisoners — a spoiler alert — it ends up being a husband and a wife that are in individual prison cells because of unforgiveness. They've put themselves into a prison, and the king sends a messenger offering them keys to their freedom, and those keys are forgiveness. And we have different organizations right now, ministries that do marriage conferences, and they're showing this film in marriage conferences. So hundreds of different husbands and wives are getting able to partake of this. And through the use of story, through the use of art, it ends up — I had one person say this to me one time, and it so resonated: it enters through the back door of the imagination. And you don't even realize it, but you're being presented with truth. The enemy, Satan, he does it in the same way. He enters through the back door of the imagination to pervert. But the way that God is also doing it, it's the way Jesus told parables. So we love the use of allegory to bring about kingdom revelation.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, and I saw your recent one on the Declaration, America's 250, right?

Rich Garnaat: Yeah, we're so excited about the commitment—

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Tell us about that one. That was fantastic. Tell me about that one, please.

Rich Garnaat: Yeah, so we just released it, and of course, right now is the July 4th time, the America 250. So we use young actors to portray a story of the original drafting of the Declaration of Independence. I'm amazed at how incredible it was, how it was pulled off. And so you basically have, of course, Thomas Jefferson. He's the one who originally drafted it. You've got Benjamin Franklin there, John Adams, and then a couple of lesser-known founding forefathers, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston. And it tells the story of how the Declaration of Independence was actually drafted. It does it creatively, with humor, and yet with deep insight into what may have happened during that time, with a lot of historical accuracy.

It's a 20-minute short film. It's on our website at arisecollectivetheatre.com. It's also on our YouTube page. We're very excited. We're hoping that gets into — we've already got it into government organizations. We believe it's going to go into many schools across this land, to help students remember this is how we came to be here. This is our legacy. This is what we need to hold onto, our freedom that God has given us. So, yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Very excited about that. It's a beautiful piece. I saw some of it, and the young people there did a fine, fine job. And you can tell who the founders were they were trying to emulate. Congrats on that. It was fantastic.

Rich Garnaat: Thank you.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You know, I wanted to ask you — one of the things that I've always wondered about is actors and the roles and characters they embody, right? And that process. I always think of Daniel Day-Lewis, this famous, famous Hollywood actor who embodies the role for months at a time. He wants to live that life so he can really fulfill this role, right? And I remember being in one of the productions of Pilgrim, and one of the individuals that's part of the group spoke about his own journey to faith and his own walk, and how that had a deep impact on him in the role he was actually playing, right?

So if you'd be willing to share with us, and the listeners of our podcast here at Cornerstone, that process. For you in the role that you play, in the role that the other actors play, how does the private personal life connect to the role they're playing and the influence back and forth between those, and how does that make the musical really come to life?

Rich Garnaat: That's a great question. So it's interesting. The process of bringing a character to life, as we're going through rehearsals and the acting side of things, is called character development. That's actually what we call it, and that involves a lot of what you're talking about — studying who the character is, working on lines, emulating that character. But the term is so interesting to me that it's character development. And at Arise Collective, we're so strong on how important discipleship is within our team. Discipleship, generationally and just within our team. And the foundation of that is worship, word, and prayer.

And so through worship, word, and prayer, and the avenue of proper discipleship, I believe that's where true character development takes place. So as we walk in deeper intimacy with Jesus and we develop the character of the Spirit of God within us, simultaneously studying the character that God has given us the opportunity to portray on the stage or on the camera, through that process, I believe God will give us the revelation we need to be able to portray that character the way He wants us to do it. Again, we put the work in, we put the study in, and yet we need God to touch it. It's a spirit and truth reality. And through that we really go out and when we perform, we believe that God is going to do that, He's going to come through and be faithful to what He's called us to.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You know, one of the things that I've always wondered about is when I see a actor play the role of a villain — the degree to which that role affects him or her life, right? Because you have to dive deep to be a villain, you know? There are some characters that are so good at this that you think, man, they're in the dark, right? Really deep, right? And what's the effect of this?

I remember when Jack Nicholson warned Heath Ledger about playing the role of the Joker for Batman. That conversation he had with him that this is a very dark, dark role, and you have to be really, really careful. And many argue that that may have contributed to his demise. We don't know. But I've always thought about that interplay, right? Of playing a role and the impact of a dark character, a sinful individual and so on.

So how do you and the team work with the actors, for example, during *Vanity Fair*, right? Which is one of the darkest parts of the musical. But one of the parts that you feel as a human, you know — I'm reminded of Romans chapter 7 when Paul speaks about the things I love I don't do, and the things I hate I do. And he talks about, "O wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God — Jesus Christ," right?

But you see this tension going on with Paul, and we all are familiar with that. So how do you and your team, as you think about worship, the word, and prayer, and discipling each other — how much of the dark do you have to go into to understand that role and play it well, and how do you protect yourselves?

Rich Garnaat: Yeah. So there's certain characters, a character like Apollyon specifically, like our staff member Troy Shaffer plays that role. And we're very careful with that role because somebody needs to have a maturity, a spiritual maturity about them to be able to portray that role and do it very well and effectively, and yet in the back end have the maturity to be able to handle that.

Similar as we go to some of our younger actors, specifically for *Vanity Fair*, we're very careful to hand those particular roles to certain people. We don't just do auditions or tryouts. We actually pray through, "God, who do you want to portray these certain roles?" And then worship, word, and prayer, and discipleship sets in. As a team, we've made a commitment — and it's not always this amount of time in every performance, but it's our goal, it's our aim — that we'll spend almost an hour as a whole team before every performance just in prayer. It's key. In prayer over the audience that's going to come, in prayer over each other and our roles, in prayer over the technical aspects.

And I really think that is an important part, that we literally bathe everything in worship, word, and prayer. And from there, there's protection. There's the endurance we need. All that we need for life and godliness is there because God is so faithful to give us what we need for what He's called us to.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Rich, share with us a little bit about the culture and the spirit behind all the performances and the team. You've done so already, but one of the things that I've appreciated in every performance, in my conversations with you and with other team members — and I believe this is very, very genuine — there's a real sense of humility, of reverence for God, of the importance of prayer and of listening to the word and being led by the Spirit. I just always sense this in conversations with you and others of the team, so praise the Lord for that.

But how do you nurture that and continue to nurture that amidst a repetitive performance, right? When you're doing it over and over and over, there's always a temptation or the tendency perhaps that in human life for these things to become rote. And how do you guard yourself and your team from that? How do you guard yourselves in all of this? And I say that especially for those watching and who will listen to our podcast and watch it, for those who are in ministry.

It's easy to put on a performance during the weekend, right? And then during the week it's not the same, and that can happen to any of us. But certainly there's a possibility for ministry leaders involved in the work of God. So how have you done it, and how do you continue to nurture that and hold each other accountable and help each other when the temptation to be rote is there at times perhaps, and other temptations, and how do you keep that fire burning?

Rich Garnaat: So first of all, it's very encouraging to me to hear you testify to that about our team, so thank you for that. I receive that and I'm excited to hear that. The scripture that is so often spoken to us, over us, individuals that don't know each other over the years, is, "Do not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time you will reap a harvest if you do not give up."

And we are constantly repeating that to each other because it does — we're approaching our 200th live performance over this next year, and there is a temptation for that. But that's where the discipleship comes in. One of the things we've made a commitment to is at the end of the performance, we do not do a standard Broadway-style curtain call. We don't bow at the end. We don't want it to be about us. Instead, we do a collective moment of worship to the true King of Kings, and then we testify as to what God is doing in our lives, and then we spend time doing ministry and praying with others in the audience. And then that, combined with our prayer times before the performances, helps to create a culture where it's not about us.

We so often remind ourselves within our team — we pray and even speak what John the Baptist says, and that's that His name will increase and our names will decrease. We don't want it to be about us. And I am amazed that night after night, performance after performance, again, God is faithful to keep it fresh every single time.

We will have all of us talk about it, and I'll just testify for myself — almost every performance, there's a new layer of truth, of God revealing Himself to us in a new way within our character or within the story that we haven't experienced before. It blows me away that it continues to happen over and over again.

Just at a performance back in April, we were performing to students, and there's this moment in the story where the role that I play of the king is weeping as he's going to the cross, and he's weeping over Christian on the journey. And the Lord brought somebody to my mind and to my heart in that moment, in reality while I'm portraying a character, and for that entire scene, I was praying in character over that individual. I'd never had that happen in 150 performances before. But in that moment, God brought that

revelation to me, and I believe that entire scene was enacted prayer on that individual's behalf. That's just one example. All of our team can testify to certain situations like that.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Rich, I think, share with us some of the memorable performances when it comes to the gospel and the kingdom message going out and the impact on the audience, right? I remember hearing, you know, Johnny Cash in Folsom Prison Blues at Folsom Prison, right? I mean, I have that record actually. And I always — every time I hear it, I focus on the audience because it's part of the recording. And you hear these men cheering at the wrong things, right? You know, the anger, the frustration, the pain, and that's sort of the impact moment for that.

But what's so beautiful about your work is the impact moment is — it's to Jesus, it's the cross, it's the gospel, it's redemption, it's forgiveness, it's the mercy of God. And so share with us about those high-impact moments with the audience, some of the most memorable ones that you have had to testify of God's greatness and goodness through the work that you're doing.

Rich Garnaat: It's been pretty amazing to travel across — I don't even remember how many now, nine or 10 states that we've been able to travel across and tour. And we see audience sizes of almost 1,800 in Branson, Missouri and 1,200 every night at Cornerstone University. But then also the 300 at the small theater or church venue in Wisconsin or Colorado. But the highlight for almost all of us on the team has been the opportunity to perform in the Florida prison system.

We've been able to do prison ministry in a handful of different prisons where they have thousands of inmates in a small chapel that only seats 150 inmates. And by God's grace, miraculously — and it truly is miraculously — we've been allowed to bring all of our equipment into the prison: LED screen, lighting, costumes, believe it or not. It is truly miraculous. And through that we've been able to perform — I don't know how many now, it might be 20 or 25 different performances across five different prisons — and we're looking at going back again this next year.

But the response from these inmates who are literally held captive — first of all, for them to say, "Why would you come here?" We're certainly not doing it for the money. "Why would you come here and serve us in this way?" And yet when we share with them the performance, the truth, the gospel going through the back door of their imagination, the response is overwhelming. Hundreds and hundreds of inmates that have made decisions to follow after Jesus as a result of that, or have said, "I have gotten on the path. I'm ready to get back on." We've been able to be a part of baptisms after those, in the prisons.

And then the response we get, just from contact on our website, from family members of those inmates who have said, "This group came to us, my life has changed," and the family members are saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you for being willing to go in." So that would be some of the most memorable right there.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Rich, that's beautiful. Praise the Lord for that, and may the Lord keep opening up phenomenal doors for you, for some of the most forgotten populations. That's one of them, right?

Rich Garnaat: That's right. Some of the most forgotten populations.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: The other thing I want to ask you about is what do you see — what's your sense of what's happening in our churches in our country? I mean, you've been traveling through a number of them in nine states. I just spoke to a leader, a state leader here in the state of Michigan, who's a believer, who's sharing with me what they are seeing in churches and communities across Michigan.

And so give us a sense of what you're seeing — areas of significant concern, areas of significant breakthrough for the kingdom, the Gospel. What's your sense of what's happening?

Rich Garnaat: I definitely think there is a great shaking going on right now. We are in the last days. Jesus' return is so close. We personally believe that's a part of our calling. As God is reclaiming the arts, He's doing that as He's preparing the return of Jesus for His bride, and there is a shaking. We can definitely sense and discern when we're going into a church or a different location and trying to connect with the churches, and they really don't want to have anything to do with it. They're fine just going under the radar.

Then there are those churches or communities where they're saying, "No, we want revival. We want to see God move in a powerful way in these last days." There's definitely a shaking. Of course, we're seeing Christian leaders falling left and right. We're seeing the remnant truly rise up, the dross being brought to the top.

And so that's part of what we're excited about, because as we get to tour and communicate with pastors and leaders, we get to hear — and there are a number of true, authentic leaders that want to honor God, want to help shepherd the flock or shepherd their churches into a place of deeper intimacy with Him. Really, it is about preparing the bride for the return of Jesus.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: It's so interesting that you mention that. The theme — here at Cornerstone, we have a theme every year that we select, and the theme for this year is "Jesus Is Coming Again." I remember that. And the theme — I mean, we're so convinced of that. We know it's true, and it's one of the things that most people don't talk about. Most churches don't talk a lot about the return of the King, right? And we wanted to focus the entire year on this beautiful truth, a powerful truth, if we let it be that in our own life, that Jesus is coming again, and He's coming again soon. And thus the importance of the gospel and preparing ourselves for that.

So what is in store this year for Arise Collective Theatre? Give us a — maybe a special VIP look into what's ahead.

Rich Garnaat: Absolutely. So we've taken a little bit of a break from touring Pilgrim. We are excited about being on board again at Cornerstone University in December, so we're going to be there in December performing again. We're actually working on finalizing those dates in the next few weeks to where we can go public with them. We're also having conversations on prison tour again down in Florida during the late January, February, March months. We have a number of different locations that we've previously been to asking us, can we return again in 2027, and that's — we're in the process of praying through that right now.

In the meantime, we still feel very called to film. We've got a handful of short films that we've produced that we're very excited about the impact potential of, that are on our website, on our YouTube page. We have another one we're currently working on that'll probably come out in the next month or so. And so, yeah, working on the live musical productions, writing new material is always in the background. We're still in the process of working out details for filming the live musical of Pilgrim. So, yeah, lots going on in the back end. So thank you for that question.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I'm always wondering because you're artistic and creative, and I'm wondering, are there other musicals in store in the future? There are some amazing allegories in scripture, and certainly Pilgrim is one of these wonderful ones from John Bunyan. I remember encountering it as a teenager, the book itself, and going through part of that. It was hard reading for me as a 15-year-old. But being captured by this allegory, and then my wife and I would read Pilgrim's Progress to each of our kids. There are some wonderful children's editions of it, and to this day, they still remember it fondly. I mean, it had a deep impact in their thinking. And so it's still a part of their thinking, and it's a very important reference point for us at times during our conversations to have.

But are there other allegories? If someone came to you and said, "Rich, could you — would you be willing to do X or Y?" — what would be the allegory, other ones that you've thought about that you'd want to produce as a musical?

Rich Garnaat: Yeah. Well, a lot of them are things that we are coming up with ourselves. For instance, one I spoke on, Prisoners. There are other books, other allegories that we have looked at, that we have considered. We have been so focused and so busy or full-plate focused with Pilgrim the musical because we have a large number of locations that are saying, "Can you come? When can you come?" And so it's been a full plate just to keep up with that, but we are considering other things. I'm talking with someone right now down in Branson about even a story from the Revolutionary War and a musical that could be produced there. And what we really love to do is collaborate with others. So we love to write, but we also love to take what other people have written, collaborate together to produce something of excellence. That's part of where the collective comes in. That's where I would say one of our strong suits is. So we would love it if people would come and say, "Hey, I've got an idea." We've had several come. Some of them are good. Some of them are not, but we always have an open ear to hear.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, I have an idea, but I'm not sure it's good, so I'm not sure I'm going to tell it to you.

Rich Garnaat: Very good. We'll talk offline.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, no, I'll tell you what it is. I was thinking of the Book of Revelation and John on Patmos.

Rich Garnaat: There you go. Right? Absolutely. I actually saw a musical from Missouri based upon that several years ago, and it was powerful. So that's a great idea.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah. Well, in closing, one of the beautiful things I remember — when you received the Alumni of the Year award, and congratulations on that, very well deserved, Rich. It was a real honor and pleasure to give that to you and to be there with you as you spoke to our students. When you spoke about Pilgrim the Musical and the Arise Collective Theatre, and you asked the students, "How many of you have been to it," there was a significant number of hands that went up from the graduates. My wife and I talked about that afterwards. We were shocked how many. It was a large contingent. It was great.

That was wonderful because that's one of the things that we always speak about here at Cornerstone. We work very hard to bring mission-centric, Christ-first opportunities to our students, whether they're Christian thought leadership ones like the Wisdom Conversations, or Arise, and many others. And our goal is not just to bring them so we can tell people we're doing it, but the ultimate goal is let's get students there, for them to engage with the gospel and with the truth and wisdom of God for transformed minds and hearts. And so it was a real blessing for me as president to see so many hands go up when you mentioned it, and I praise God for that, that our students have been coming to your wonderful productions.

Rich Garnaat: Amen. And I'm excited because I've been invited to speak at chapel in the fall, so I'm going to be there, being able to speak with them, and then of course there in December as well, so we get to engage with the students quite a bit more this year.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, Rich, thank you for all you do. Thank you for being a part of today's podcast, Wisdom and Influence. Blessings to you, your spouse, your family. Thank you for keeping Jesus first. May the Lord continue to bless you and guide you. And I'm so grateful, we're so grateful for your

partnership with us and our partnership with you, and may it forever endure. It's a wonderful opportunity for the gospel of the kingdom to be preached with thousands who come.

Rich Garnaat: Well, humbled and grateful. Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you, my brother.

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