

FEATURE

Who Is Esther – the story behind the new musical

Submitted by Linda Craig

Like many of you, one of the joys of my life is singing: ever since high school I've been involved in choral music: choirs, the occasional CAMMAC readings, and over the last year, "choir camps". And now I am co-producing a musical, along with my husband, Randall Craig. It's quite a musical leap, as we both have a business background: this is the story of how it came to be.

In 2017, I stood beside my husband Randall's bed at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, as he was being treated for leukemia. His doctors had just told us that chemotherapy was no longer effective and would be stopped. A bone marrow transplant was his only remaining chance – and a donor had yet to be found. Our family and friends had gathered, and I was trying very hard to hold everything together: the survival rate for the transplant – assuming a donor could be found – was slim.



I didn't expect what happened next. Randall looked up and announced that he was going to write a Broadway-style musical. And I thought: he is going to do it.

He ordered books from Amazon (choral arranging, jazz voicings, and more) and a friend rented a digital piano for the hospital room. Every day, for hours, he played. The music that would become *Who Is Esther* came to life in that room, and I genuinely believe it helped keep him alive. He was in the hospital for seven months.

When he got out, there were years of writing and rewriting the manuscript. And learning new tools, like Logic Pro to write and arrange the music. My choir friends and I recorded early versions of the songs. There were moments of doubt, including the night COVID shut down the entire theatre industry and we wondered what would happen. That's when we launched *Sing With Esther*, an initiative to bring the music

to choirs around the world – and I say "we" deliberately, because somewhere along the way, this became my project too.

The musical is based on a 2,500-year-old story, complete with heroes, villains, love, intrigue, and a heroine, Esther. In our telling, the ancient Persian royal court becomes a present-day corporate boardroom. Mr. Verious, a buffoonish CEO, recruits Esther, a street-wise young woman from the ‘hood, as his new VP. Ham, his conniving advisor, sets out to destroy her and everyone like her. The themes will be immediately familiar: #MeToo, rising intolerance, and the quiet courage it takes to speak truth to power.

The music itself is very diverse, from ballads, to Latin, funk, blues, and even rap. There is something here for every ear (and every voice).

A couple of years ago, we did a “musical preview”. You could not imagine the feeling, when about 100 people in the audience spontaneously sang the finale together. It was electric. I saw in that moment exactly what music is designed to do: move you.



Sing With Esther: In our *Sing With Esther* initiative, we arranged two songs from the musical – *Corner Block*, an opening ballad with a funk-hip-hop bridge, and the *Finale*, with its seven-part harmony. These are available to choirs at no cost, complete with SATB sheet music, guide tracks, and support materials. If you are involved in a choir and might be interested, please reach out to me at Linda@WhoIsEsther.com, and I can get you set up. And of course, it would be pretty cool to sing it at a CAMMAC reading...

PS: The global premiere of *Who Is Esther* will be at the Kingston Fringe Festival August 6-16th – hope to see you there! More info at www.WhoIsEsther.com, or follow us at [Instagram.com/whoisesthermusical](https://www.instagram.com/whoisesthermusical). (And if you can't make it, look for *Who Is Esther* on Spotify or Apple Music.)

PSS: For opportunities to be involved with *Who Is Esther*, including the Director/Musical Director position, please visit www.WhoIsEsther.com