

The Cross and the Switchblade

Detailed Character Analysis

By Ashley Hazzard: Writer, Composer and Lyricist of the musical

Older David: Our consummate narrator. With years of wisdom under his belt and a front row seat to God’s miracles throughout his life, he implores his younger self to “Wait on Him”. He has a wry sense of humor and must have good physicality as he is present in all scenes. In a pivotal moment in Act I, he also steps into the shoes of Grandpap, encouraging David with uncanny, sage advice he needs to forge ahead. 60’s, white (Baritone).

David: A young man of faith and fear of the Lord. His mild mannered temperament shouldn’t be mistaken for weakness. He has the grit and sense of adventure that accompanies all Biblical heroes who, on the merit of God’s voice alone, conquered giants. It is this desire to discover the deeper things of God that leads him to sell his t.v. and his reliance on Holy Spirit is the only constant he grips with white knuckles. He is empathetic and humble enough to see past the superficial stereotypes that accompany the New York gangs, ridden with crime and addiction. His heart for these communities is a picture of Jesus’ character. Late 20’s, white. (Tenor/Baritone)

Gwen: The anchor. As a young preacher’s wife and mother, this walk of faith is nothing like what she anticipated. From accepting the role of first lady in a roach-infested, Pennsylvania church, to watching her husband leave her side for an insatiable calling to help the youth of New York. She witnesses God’s hand in all of it, her fears cushioned in a masterful sense of humor that takes away the sting of hard moments. Her change of heart is every bit as tangible as the kids David is sent to help. Her motif is infused with his as she learns that marriage cannot provide a life stability, only God’s presence can. If not for her encouragement, David might not have continued the journey. Mid-late 20’s, white. (Mezzo-Soprano)

Nicky: A unique blend of spite, vitriol and chaos accompanies this troubled youth, known by every gang in New York as the most violent and bloodthirsty. Still, his humor and charm shine through. His past of abandonment haunts him, where no love was present to guide him. His mother and father subjected him to the occult at a young age and those demons cause him to act in ways that scare even him. David’s Holy Spirit-inspired omission that he is loved, sets him into an internal battle of flesh and spirit that makes the darkness within him go crazy. His radical transformation is a result of only what God can do. Early 20’s, Puerto Rican (Tenor/Baritone)

Maria: A beautiful flower persisting through the concrete of New York. When she became president of the GGI Debs, a prominent girl gang in the city, they violently jumped her in. Since she was used to this from her troubled homelife, she took it like a champ and rose to the top of the group. Her battle with addiction is the show’s foremost introduction to the plight of heroin which was so prevalent and one of the realities that grieved David the most. His up close view of Maria’s unshakable struggles, despite her quick wit, beauty and tough, sharp edges, is his main catalyst to starting his rehabilitation center. Maria’s despair at the turn her life has taken against her will, with addiction leading to prostitution, soiling any dreams of an otherwise bright future, lead her to almost take her life. (*content warning?*) Early 20’s, Puerto Rican. (Alto)

Jo-Jo: He’s as New York as it gets. Jo-Jo is a strange and brilliant combination of matter-of-factness and vulnerability. A need to protect himself goes against his natural emotional inclination. It’s not safe to be who he is in a jungle that takes, giving nothing back and asks kids to do the same in order to survive. There’s no room for emotions on sleeves. Instead they are buried or unleashed in fits of rage. Jo-Jo has learned to regulate his feelings, while still reserving space for them. He has empathy, which makes him the perfect candidate for a companion for David. David’s kindness in offering the shoes off of his feet wins him over and earns the preacher a glimpse into his life that is as transformative for David as it is for Jo-Jo. Even though Jo-Jo is literally walking in David’s shoes, metaphorically David is walking in Jo-Jo’s because he has none anymore. His feet are bare. In learning to navigate all the obstacles around them, he gains a deeper appreciation for the plight of these kids. Jo-Jo’s song, “In My Shoes” is a rousing tap sequence with some choreography. In helping David navigate the rough terrain he tells about his life, pointing out the landmarks that made him. And for him it helps even the playing score. He doesn’t like handouts or what is expected from those that receive it. But an exchange of goods for services he can do. His line “You’re trying too hard, Preach” leads David to surrender. Adolescent (or can play young looking teen), Black. (Tenor)

Miles: David’s ride or die and a major source of comedic relief throughout Act I. When these two country preachers set out on their road trip into the unknown landscape of New York, like a true buddy comedy, hilarity ensues. His loyalty to accompany his friend and pastor into the city when no one else would speaks volumes about his character. He is also the proxy that gives us a glimpse into the mindset of the parishioners of the country church, one of confusion about David’s bizzare request and loyalty to the man they’ve come to trust whom they know fears the Lord. Late 20’s/30’s, White (no solo, but must carry a tune (baritone)

Israel: A jolly young man, described as handsome. Fearless President of the Mau Maus. A natural leader, the first to recognize the man in the paper as “one of us” and to see the good in him. If not for his open-mindedness, determination and persistence, Nicky and the Mau Maus would not have attended the rally that led them all to salvation. Early 20’s, Puerto Rican. (Tenor)

Vincente Ortez: In many ways, Vincente is a New York, Puerto Rican version of David. They share the same motif “Wait on Him” as both ministers live by faith. Along with his wife, Delia, he provides the supportive infrastructure that becomes David’s homebase in the city. His ripple effect is felt when he and Delia persistently call their network of believer friends to enable David to headline the rally that wins countless people to God. Early 30’s. (Baritone)

Delia Ortez: Salt of the earth. Like David, her heart is broken by the plight of the city she used to love and the teenage gangs and addicts that don't know God's plan for them. She welcomes Jo-Jo and Maria with the warmth and softness of Jesus, even at the risk of danger. It is her prayers and insistence that “God can help you” that causes Maria not to take her life. Early 30's, Puerto Rican. (Mezzo-Soprano)

Buckboard: President of the Chaplains. He is even-keeled, yet commanding enough to quiet a room. He encapsulates New York swagger and his status as a gang leader is purely circumstantial. It's evident that he's made for more. His salvation as David is preaching in the street is one of the first new births of David's New York adventure. And his transformation into a soldier by the time he returns speaks to his eagerness to make a better life after God reminds him of his purpose. Early 20's, Black. (Baritone/bass)

Stagecoach: Buckboard's right hand and best friend. He experiences a similar transformation from gang leader to soldier as he responds to David's unusual request to kneel in the street and accept Jesus as his savior by turning to Buckboard with the question: “Buckboard? You want to? I will if you will.” Early 20's, Black.

Nancy: Friends with Maria. (potentially Israel's girlfriend) Leads David across town and introduces him to their underground world, where he preaches for the first time. Black, Early 20's.

Ensemble: Nosy Neighbor/Policeman 1, Police Officer Dilenna, Judge, Courtroom guards, Parking attendant, New York church reps, Pennsylvania church's Mr. Meyers and Mrs. Williams, Debs: the girl gang, Chaplains: the Black gang, Mau Maus the Puerto Rican gang.