

CANTICLE OF THE SUN
By Jonah Niemann and Dale Ahlquist

Cast of Characters

7 Males; 12 Females; 1 Either

<u>FRANCIS:</u>	Son of Pica and Pietro.
<u>BERNARD:</u>	Francis' friend.
<u>PIETRO:</u>	Pietro Bernadone, Father of Francis.
<u>BISHOP:</u>	Bishop of Assisi.
<u>FAVORINO:</u>	Favorino Sciffi, father of Clare, Beatrice and Agnes.
<u>LEO:</u>	A rich man.
<u>POPE:</u>	Pope Innocent.
<u>CLARE:</u>	Daughter of Favorino.
<u>FELICIA:</u>	A lady in love with Francis.
<u>PICA:</u>	Pica Bernadone, Mother of Francis.
<u>ORTOLANA:</u>	Ortolana Sciffi, Mother of Clare, Beatrice and Agnes.
<u>MOTHER SUPERIOR:</u>	The Mother Superior of the Benedictines.
<u>SISTER MARIA:</u>	A sister of the Benedictines.
<u>LUCIA:</u>	A leper and beggar.
<u>BEATRICE:</u>	Clare's sister.
<u>AGNES:</u>	Clare's sister.
<u>MARSALA:</u>	A gossip.
<u>CATERINA:</u>	A gossip.
<u>BETTA:</u>	A gossip.
<u>INNKEEPER:</u>	A grouchy innkeeper.
<u>TOWNSPEOPLE:</u>	Extra townspeople part of the crowd.

FRIARS: Extra friars that go with Francis to visit the Pope.

ANGELS: Angels who appear to Francis in a dream.

ACT I

Scene 1 - Francis' family home.

Scene 2 - A tavern, that same night.

Scene 3 - Bishop's residence, a few days later.

Scene 4 - The marketplace, the next day.

Scene 5 - Francis' family home, that evening.

Scene 6 - Marketplace, one year later.

Scene 7 - Tavern, a few months later.

Scene 8 - Abbey, a few weeks later.

Scene 9 - An inn several miles from Assisi, about the same time.

ACT II

Scene 1 - Marketplace, a few months later.

Scene 2 - Clare's family home, later that day.

Scene 3 - Marketplace, about a month later.

Scene 4 - Clare's room, a few days later.

Scene 5 - The Church of San Damiano, a few weeks later.

Scene 6 - Town square, a few days later.

Scene 7 - Rome, several months later.

Scene 8 - Clare's room, a few weeks later.

Scene 9 - The scene begins in a solitary place outside of Assisi a few days later, and concludes in the same place several years later.

Scene 3

Setting: Marketplace.

At Rise: The place is filled with people. Francis emerges from the crowd, begging for stones from the people who pass by him. Either they ignore him or shake their heads in bewilderment or disgust.

FRANCIS

Stones! Do you have a stone, please? Excuse me, Sir, could you spare a stone? A stone please? Do you have a stone? Could someone give me a stone?

(To BETTA, who is walking by)

Madame? A stone?

BETTA

A what?

FRANCIS

Do you have a stone you could give me?

BETTA

Do I look like I'm carrying stones around with me?

FRANCIS

I'm sorry to have bothered you.

BETTA

What do you need a stone for?

FRANCIS

The Church of San Damiano. It is crumbling to pieces. I am rebuilding it.

BETTA

(hands him a coin)

Here. Buy yourself a stone.

FRANCIS

Thank you, Madame! The Lord bless you!

(She moves on, he continues begging)

Stones! Please, anyone who can spare a stone...

(A woman hands him a stone.)

Oh, thank you, my lady! You are very kind...

(He looks up and sees that it is FELICIA. He freezes. Pause.)

FELICIA

Am I your lady?

Felicia. FRANCIS

You once pledged to marry me. FELICIA

That was another man. I am not that man anymore. FRANCIS

Is that how you betray a woman? By claiming to be someone else? FELICIA

But...I really am someone else. You can see that, can't you? FRANCIS

Francis! What has happened to you! FELICIA

Christ told me to rebuild his Church. And now you have helped me do it by giving me a stone. FRANCIS

I always knew I would lose you. FELICIA

But today you have found me. And you can find what I have found. FRANCIS

Still the weaver of words. Why don't you sing for your stones, Francis, and the world will bring a mountain to you. FELICIA

(She turns and leaves.)

FRANCIS
(watches her leave, and then returns to his task)

Stones! Will anyone give me a stone?
(more people pass him by.)

A stone, please? A simple gift for God. Stones!
(Suddenly he finds himself face-to-face with his father. A pause, as they recognize each other.)

A stone, Sir?

PIETRO
(with utter contempt)
What are you doing?

FRANCIS

Please, Sir, stones for the church at San Damiano. It is crumbling, and needs to be rebuilt.

PIETRO

A beggar. A beggar for rocks. This is what my son has become?

FRANCIS

I am not your son, Sir. God is my father.

PIETRO

What kind of God leaves a man scrounging for rubble?

FRANCIS

The God who loved the world so much that he gave his son to die for it.

PIETRO

You pathetic, miserable little wretch.

FRANCIS

No, Sir. I am not miserable. You are looking at a happy man. You are the one who seems to be unhappy.

PIETRO

How dare you!

FRANCIS

I am happy rebuilding the Church.

PIETRO

Let the Church rot and you along with it!

FRANCIS

You cannot even spare a stone?

PIETRO

I will give you a stone.

(picks up a rock, and suddenly strikes FRANCIS with it, FRANCIS reels, then turns, steps forward, and is struck again. He falls this time, but spits, picks himself up, and stands again facing his father.)

FRANCIS

If you would rather give me a coin to buy a stone...

PIETRO

(seething)

You fiend of a boy! I am going to knock your senses back into your head!

(PIETRO strikes FRANCIS again, knocking him down, and then begins to pummel him. Bystanders gather around and some even join in. Enter BERNARD in a costume bespeaking wealth and rank.)

BERNARD

Stop! Let that man go!

(Crowd disperses before BERNARD's powerful presence)

PIETRO

(surprised to see BERNARD)

Bernard! Do not interfere! This man is getting the punishment he deserves!

BERNARD

Master Bernardone. I expected better things from you. Francis is ill.

PIETRO

Step aside, Bernard –

BERNARD

No, you will step aside! And you best be gone, or you will be the one punished, Bernadone!

PIETRO

Who do you think you are, talking to me that way?

BERNARD

Working many years in the office of the bishop has paid its dividends. I am a viscount now, and thereby you owe me the respect of a nobleman.

PIETRO

(still steaming)

And what do you plan to do with Francis when I am gone? Let him run amok, causing havoc and stealing like a gypsy?

BERNARD

I plan to do nothing, Pietro. I do not see any evidence that Francis is dangerous. But either way, it is not your concern.

(PIETRO's anger prevents him from leaving. BERNARD shouts with the air of authority)

Bernadone! Go! Now!

(PIETRO tries to kick FRANCIS one more time, but is restrained. He finally exits. BERNARD then rushes to FRANCIS, who is moaning.)

BERNARD

Francis! Francis! Oh God, I hope I wasn't too late!

(FRANCIS, still moaning, tries to pull himself up, and his moaning dissolves into laughter.)

FRANCIS

Haa...oh Bernard my...ugh...friend. You are so emotional. I'm alright, I just need...
(collapses again.)

BERNARD

Francis, you need help.

(with some mock sarcasm)

You need a lot of help. What has come over you? Why did you let him beat you?

FRANCIS

I wanted stones, Bernard. He was not going to grant me any without a few hard knocks to go with them. Look at this! See, he left me a stone!

(picks up a bloody rock)

(BERNARD helps him up.)

BERNARD

I see you have not lost your good humor. But you seem to have lost everything else. Your home, your family...and your mind! What happened to you, Francis?

FRANCIS

I had some time alone with God. Only God, nothing else.

BERNARD

(with skepticism)

And did God talk to you, Francis?

FRANCIS

Why yes, he did.

BERNARD

And what did he say?

FRANCIS

He said what he has said to everyone in the words of his Son. There are two commandments. And if we love God and love our neighbor, we will keep every other commandment. And so I have taken to the streets, living with my neighbors the beggars, loving them as I love myself and treating myself the same.

BERNARD

I thought that the commandment meant, “treat others as well as you would wish to be treated,” not, “treat yourself worse than others so that they will feel better.”

FRANCIS

Bernard, everyone keeps telling me what the Gospel *means*, but everyone seems to ignore what the Gospel actually says. Why would the Gospel not say what it means?

BERNARD

Because...

(pauses as he realizes he doesn't know)

FRANCIS

It is actually easier to obey the Gospel than to explain it.

BERNARD

But Francis, you should not have let yourself take such a beating. That cannot be what the Gospel means.

FRANCIS

You are wrong, my friend. To fight back would have been to rob myself.

BERNARD

Rob yourself!

FRANCIS

Rob myself of a blessing. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Humility, poverty. This is the blessed life.

BERNARD

(pause, almost in shock)

You...you are living the beatitudes literally.

FRANCIS

I am only taking Christ at his word. It is a simple rule.

BERNARD

I still don't understand what happened to you, Francis. What about your quest for Lady Victory?

FRANCIS

I found her...in Lady Poverty.

BERNARD

Insane.

FRANCIS

The first shall be last. The last shall be first. I suppose the world would find that insane, Bernard. But I tell you, poverty...it frees a man.

BERNARD

I have never heard of such a thing.

FRANCIS

But you have now, old friend. Think upon it. Does your wealth benefit you to eternal life? And can it gain you greater happiness than I now feel?

BERNARD

You are a bloody mess, dressed in filthy rags, and you are telling me how happy you are?

FRANCIS

Bernard, what makes you think that virtue is complicated?

BERNARD

(pause. BERNARD gives his head a shake, as if to break a spell. Takes a fresh breath.)

Francis, I must be going. I...

(doesn't know what to say.)

FRANCIS

May God go with you, Bernard.

BERNARD

Um...thank you, Francis.

(starts to leave)

FRANCIS

Bernard?

BERNARD

Yes?

FRANCIS

Could you spare a stone?

BLACKOUT