

A Life in the Arts

by Kai Jansson

Multi-talented actress, singer, and musical theatre director Lalainia Lindbjerg Strelau shares her thoughts on creativity and being a woman of faith in the secular arts.

When I was 10, my cousin saw an ad saying that a local production company would be putting on the show *Annie*. My mom took me [to an audition] and I got into that show, and that was it — that's all I did from that point on. Theatre was it for me.

You know the idea of a fish in water? I remember having a real joy in my heart and thanking God that I was able to do this. It's still that way for me with directing. I feel so lucky, so blessed, to be able to do something that I love.

On being a Christian in secular theatre

Trying to stay holy or focused on Godly things can be hard when you're doing a musical that's all fluff or deals with dark issues. I've really struggled with that in my career. For example, I actually ended up quitting my film and television career because I couldn't handle having to face those choices all the time. For a woman my age — I was 25 when I quit — it was all about sex, all about something to do with showing your breasts. It was ridiculous — you'd have an amazing part, but it required

nudity or a love scene. I couldn't balance it any more and I felt okay giving it up. I thought I gave up my theatre career at the same time, too — I gave it all up. It was great that God brought back the things that he knew I could handle.

On directing Fiddler on the Roof

Fiddler scared me originally because I have a lot of Jewish friends. I thought, if I'm going to do this, I have to do it right. I don't want to miss any of the little nuances of the Jewish culture. Just on Friday we actually did a Sabbath meal together. With a Shabbat manual we went through all the prayers and the

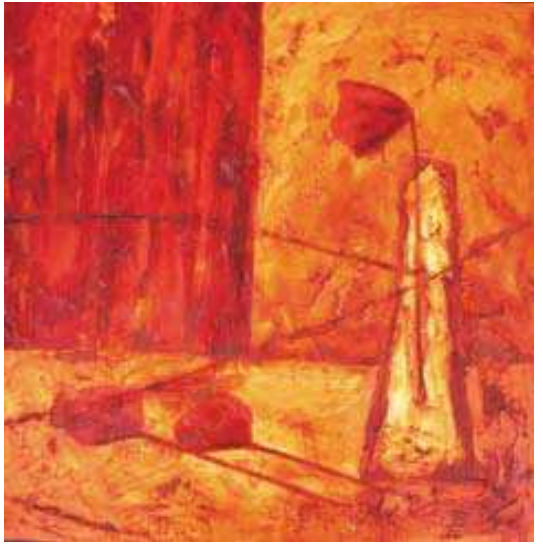
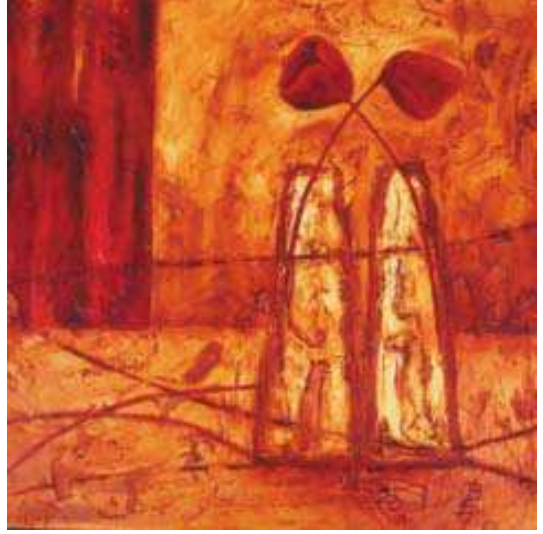


blessing of the wine and the bread. For me this has been an amazing experience, because I don't usually get to have much spiritual depth to what I'm doing — it's usually fairly whimsical and even a little silly.

On purpose, creativity, and faith

There's just this sheer joy and gratitude that happens when I'm performing, because I just feel like I'm doing what I was meant to do. What was interesting was when it followed me into directing. I love people, and I love interacting with people, and directing is the perfect mix of all of that. I get to create. And I have such a heart for people — particularly people who don't know God. It's bizarre, because I could be directing *Cinderella*, which is not deep, and God opens doors for me, like the relationships I established during that show. If I have any talents in directing and performing, it's nothing I've earned — it's been given to me by God. The only thing it's to be used for is to open doors. The talent is irrelevant — it's the places that it takes you that's relevant.

Sometimes I think, "What am I doing? I direct theatre — it's so frivolous, it's not changing the world." But the relationships that I've formed through theatre have changed my life and others' lives, and I wouldn't have had those opportunities if it weren't for "frivolous theatre." †



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