

Sight And Sound: A Dream That Keeps Growing

BY LOU ANN GOOD

MANHEIM - Sight and Sound Auditorium is a popular family entertainment place for both local and out-of-state people. The 700-seat facility near Strasburg shows weekly productions that blends live acting, film, song and dance with special effects and animation to dramatize the Gospel.

Last year, more than 2,700 tour buses in addition to thousands of carloads attended the five major shows that Sight and Sound produces. Glenn Eshelman, the man who masterminds the productions, is often referred to as a "creative genius". His success is no small feat for a man who has had no art, theater, or photography training.

Glenn attributes his farming background as training ground for his productions that now attract millions. "Everything I learned stemmed from the things I learned on the farm," he said. "My daddy was creative in making things that were needed around the farm." The carpentry and mechanics that he learned on the Mount Joy farm have enabled him to build and mechanize stage props and sets. He considers the time management his father instilled within him as vital importance to running his present organization. But most important, "I learned to love the beauty of nature."

In between chore time, Glenn began capturing the beauty that surrounded him by drawing with crayons, pencils, pens, watercolors and paints on scraps of paper. No matter where Glenn was—in church, in the barn and, later, even on his first date—he couldn't keep his pencil still. Constantly, he sketched faces, rural landscapes and animals. His dad often said, "If anything can be drawn on, Glenn will find it."

His talent did not go unnoticed. As an eight-year-old, he won a blue ribbon at the Mount Joy farm show.

Although he never laid his art work aside, he still found time to

be active in 4-H and FFA as president of his chapter and as state officer.

After marrying Shirley, Glenn worked on an Allentown dairy farm. He recalls, "The pay was minimal, so I went house to house, showed them some of my art work and got many orders." During his second year of marriage, Glenn returned to the county to attend the Manheim Farm Show where he set up a display of his art work. In that one week, he received enough orders to keep him busy for a year.

Even though he painted several farms weekly, Glenn was so swamped with work he begged his employer to give him two weeks off so he could catch up on his painting. At the end of two weeks, he had so many more orders that he never returned to dairy farming.

By coincidence, Glenn's painting evolved into photography. His method in painting farmsteads was to go to the scene and sketch it, then return home and paint it. But sometimes, he forgot the color of a mailbox or a shed and would need to return or call the owners. To solve that problem Glenn bought a camera and snapped a picture of each scene so he could refer to it while painting. Glenn recalls, "My creativity went wild." His eye for color and composition led him to experiment with photography, mostly farm scenes on which he kept extensive files. He and Shirley branched out into portrait and wedding photography as well. Later, Glenn began traveling worldwide to capture the breathtaking beauty of the world.

Soon he was asked to show his slides at a local banquet hall. Glenn was hesitant. He remembered too many boring missionary slide shows where people fell asleep. But the coordinator was insistent. So Shirley and Glenn put together a slide show incorporating music, narrative and slides showing the breaking waves of the rocky coast of Maine to the towering peaks of the Rockies. They



A scene from "Behold the Lamb" shows the realistic portrayal of the life of Jesus.

borrowed a slide projector and built the program on the principle that "the art of God can lead people to the heart of God."

From that audience, Glenn was booked to show a repeat at churches, civic groups, and schools. The demand for his photography was so great that four teams traveled across the nation showing his slide shows under the original title and several others like "Our Father Planned It All" and "Where the Mountains Reach the Sky."

Locally, in the summer of 1974, more than 30,000 people viewed his show that incorporated 15 projectors and an eighty-foot screen at a local college auditorium. And from this, Glenn got the idea to build Sight and Sound, so that people could come to them instead of them going to the people.

It started out as a 3-dimensional computerized slide show that created breathtaking panoramic views on an 80-foot screen. Dancing fountains complete with colored lights produced a spectacular display. Only later did the stage get added in bits and pieces. And then live acting and choreography was added. Although Glenn had no formal training in theater, art or photography, he designed and built the props and wrote the script.

Glenn credits his wife for much of Sight and Sound's smooth running. "Because she does much of the behind the scenes duties, people often do not notice her abilities," Glenn said. "Although she is not as creative, she builds upon my ideas and makes them better. She's my biggest critic. Shirley also manages the business end.

From the beginning, the Eshelman's four daughters helped with acting and other things that needed done. Now their son-in-laws and grandchildren are becoming involved. Glenn said, "Being involved in Sight and Sound teaches them responsibility, discipline and how to work just like farm work taught me."

He sketches his ideas and the staff makes the props and animated figures from foam and casts them in a hard mold. "I'm most effective at the drawing board," Glenn explained so he tries to keep that foremost as the organization grows and he relies more and more on his



Throughout the years, art has remained at the heart of Glenn Eshelman's productions.

staff. Several seamstresses stitch the hundreds of costumes used for the shows.

Of his employees that number as many as 80 during the peak season, Glenn said, "They're a great team. Once they have an idea they can run with it." Glenn said he has learned to release his ideas, trust his staff and check in on them occasionally rather than hover over them. He finds it exciting to see people come into the team and use their abilities in a creative way. Most thrilling to him is watching and hearing people's responses to the shows.

With the success comes a lot of decision-making and problems. He mentioned, "If I'm not careful, the everyday problems can knock the cutting edge off my creativity. And it takes faith to trust that my decisions are the right ones."

Looking back over his life and seeing how things progress still amazes Glenn, but he shrugs off his success by saying, "It's the grace of God. We do everything through prayer."

He added, "The Bible says, 'You have not because you ask not. So we pray about everything. I realize that if the next show depends upon Glenn Eshelman, it will be a flop.' He pauses then adds, "Shirley and I started out poor as paupers in part of a rented farmhouse with an outdoor toilet. We built on the dream God gave us

and this is only the beginning of what we expect to see. God just keeps giving us more ideas."

Glenn stresses, "Our shows are not just a performance, but a tool to challenge others to discover God."

Scheduled shows

Happiness is Easter Time — shown March 15 through May 14. waltzing Easter eggs, dancing flowers, Easter rabbits, an 80 ft screen show and live stage performance portraying the agony of Gethsemane, suffering of Christ on the Cross, the triumphant resurrection and the meeting of Mary and Jesus at the empty tomb. **Behold the Lamb** - shown June 18 through August 20. Scenes unfold in panorama as the life of Christ is portrayed with startling reality. Cast requires 70 people.

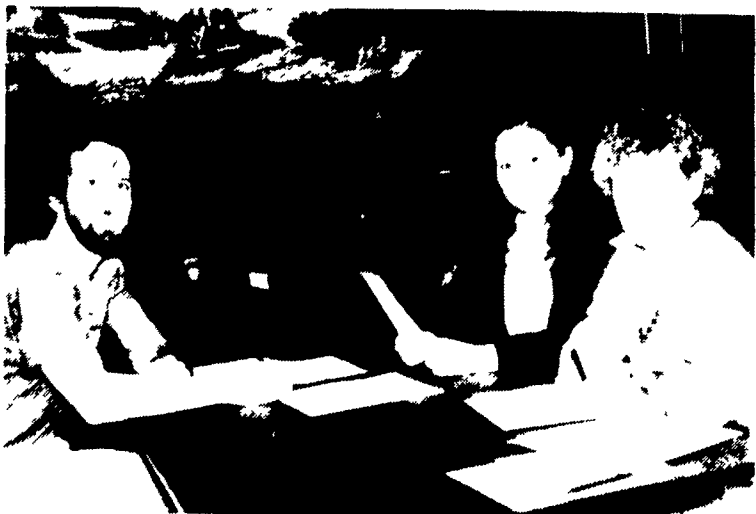
Glory of Autumn - shown September 10 through October 1. A harvest celebration, animated vegetable garden, and falltime activities.

Joys of Christmas - Christmas dreams come true with dynamic toy soldiers, parade of toys combined with waltzing Christmas trees, fountain and light shows. All live nativity including live animals, flying angels.

For times and reservations, contact Sight and Sound at their mailing address: 630 Penryn Road, Manheim, PA 17545. 717 665-6633.



Glenn and Shirley Eshelman



Cast members review some upcoming script for a show. From left, Bob Love, Sameck Germain, and Linda White.