

The Passion of the Antichrist

by Marlon Hurt

Jesus Christ Superstar

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That the antagonist of a story is often more intriguing than its hero is nothing new. From its inception, Western drama has enjoyed titillating its audience with a view from the other side of the moral divide—witness Euripides's raging Medea and, later, the abiding allure of Shakespeare's Richard III and Marlowe's vicious Tamburlaine.

It was inevitable, then, that the story of the Christ would at some point come in for the same treatment. But who knew, prior to the 1971 premiere of Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyricist Tim Rice's classic *Jesus Christ Superstar*, that arch-betrayer Judas Iscariot would finally get his time on the world stage at the head of a high-octane rock band?



Judas (*Tim Quinlan*) betrays the Messiah to *Kyrst Hogan* as Caiaphas and *Joseph Torello* as Annas in *LiveStage Performance's* modernized JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR.

(Photo Doug Thoms)

The success of LiveStage Performance's often witty revival—updated to the modern day and slapped with the tagline "What Would Jesus Do NOW?"—can be credited to the production's use of brushstrokes as broad as those employed by the show's creators. The social commentary, often admirably impish, is delivered undisguised: Jesus (Mike Faraci) is now an electrician who, in one of the more mischievous moments, is forced to repair the electric chair that he is subsequently strapped into; the high priest Caiaphas (Kyrst Hogan) is recast as a woman and made into a demagogic televangelist with a Texas accent; and King Herod (Richard Kent Green) is here a gangster pulled straight from an old Warner Bros. movie. Not even the suicide of Judas (Timothy Quinlan) escapes director Doug Thoms's puckish touch.

Thank the Lord the production is easy on the ears. Though his Jesus is charismatically challenged—he comes across as such a blue-collar man of the people that he's practically anonymous—Faraci makes good use of his strong chest voice and stronger falsetto, even if he does not always make the transition between the two entirely gracefully. Quinlan, as Judas, has similar trouble physically conveying his character's torment. Still, his upper range, with its shades of the role's originator, Murray Head, often picks up the slack. (Both are bolstered immeasurably by guitarist Dan Barnhill's excellent six-piece rock band.)

But other than a few wonderful moments on the part of Hogan's snotty Caiaphas and Melissa Robinette's perky Simon—and the often strong choral work from the ensemble—the standout performances undoubtedly belong to Bridget Beirne as

Mary Magdalene and Jay Pierce as Pontius Pilate. Beirne's is, quite simply, the best voice I have heard in the role. Coupling her commanding pipes with a palpable sensuality—a less strident Janice Joplin meets a slightly more girlish Marlene Dietrich?—Beirne wears the music, as the saying goes; it never wears her.

Pierce, on the other hand, uses his large presence and larger voice to perform a kind of alchemy in the role of Pilate: taking what are otherwise straightforward rock songs—no different than any other numbers in the score—he transforms them into something bordering on gospel music (not inappropriate, given the subject matter). His passion serves to underscore Pilate's dilemma as the one authority figure with any semblance of a conscience.

Despite the sometimes slapdash feel of LiveStage's show—four revolving panels are put to good use as canvases for various two-dimensional backgrounds, even as the free-floating set pieces and occasionally clumsy lighting call to mind a kind of poor man's rock concert—the production does indeed give some idea of what Jesus would do: he would kick back and hum along.