

Not the stars but the cast carried the show

by **Maven Gates**

Right from the start I must confess that I had misgivings when I heard that the Dal Drama Society were planning to do *Jesus Christ Superstar*. It seems that once you have heard a song done a certain way a couple of dozen times by some specific artist that any subsequent variation in interpretation often does not sound right and the audience would be much more familiar with this material than they were with *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

Well, despite my fears, Glenn Walton and crew, inspired by the

success of *Joseph*, brought *J.C., Superstar* to the S.U.B. and pulled mike the soloists". This apology is puzzling as it was his decision to assemble a 16-piece orchestra and to seat them on top of the audience. His apology smacks of someone arranging a candlelight dinner and then complaining that it is difficult to read.

More regrettable than the presence of the microphones was the obtrusive presence of the sound crew. Situated in the centre of the audience, rather than at the back of the house, they distracted those sitting around and behind them with

table lamps and the constant flipping off even if there were a few major flaws.

Walton's direction was imaginative but would often be better suited to another medium. He frequently refused to work within the confines of the space he was allotted and, by so doing, denied most of the audience the full spectacle he appeared to be attempting to create. For example, hardly anyone noticed Mary's agony on the floor in the centre aisle at the back of the house during the crucifixion.

In the program Walton remarks about "the regrettable decision to

ping of script pages. One would think that with all this conspicuous attention to what was going on that the soloists would not often have had to wait until they had sung three or four words before their mikes would be turned on.

Judas (Brian Tomie) seemed to have particular problems with being heard. Only about half of what he sang was audible. When this persisted even though he had changed mikes and never reached equal severity with anyone else I decided that it must be a problem with the way he was singing.

Tomie put a lot of energy into

his facial expressions and what little I heard of his voice made it understandable, at least, to see how he could win the part in an audition. I imagine he studied a video-cassette of the film over and over until he got the movie Judas' gestures down. It was unfortunate that Tomie did not make the part more his own.

He lacked emotional intensity. Awaiting his cues, Tomie would stand in plain view, shaking himself like a gymnast about to attempt a difficult vault. When the time came he would spring into action then suddenly deflate when his part was over. His performance was an intermittent shotgun instead of the sustained fury of a flamethrower.

Jim Petrie (Jesus) also lacked the ability to deliver a sustained demonstration of emotional power. The purging of the temple was especially flaccid. Petrie put much more effort into crooning than into emoting although he did show a good deal of potential. Drama lessons would certainly enhance his career when coupled with his strong, rich singing voice.

How could a *Jesus Christ, Superstar* with a Judas and a Jesus who do less than knock your socks off be enjoyable? Solid performances from the rest of the cast carried the show.

Elizabeth Beeler was superb as Mary. She sang the songs we knew best and conquered them as her voice filled the hall. Her duet with Blair Jarrett (Peter) was particularly memorable. For me, her performance alone was worth the price of admission. Beeler is very active in local theatre and I emphatically recommend that she is worth following.

Outstanding as well were Doug Carrigan (Pilate), William MacLellan (Caiaphas) and Barb Glencross (Annas). Matching good acting ability with excellent singing voices they put life and finesse into the characters they portrayed. Their scenes were a treat and worthy of the best professional theatre.



Jesus Christ Superstar, played the McInnes Room to packed houses for its ten-day run.

Jesus Christ Superstar beautifully performed

by **Jim L. Power**

The rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* played at the McInnes Room in the Dal SUB during the last week. The play, under the direction of Glenn Walton, resurrected the spirit of the original work. At times the production approached a synthesis of dance, music, drama and visual beauty. The costumes and choreography were nothing short of incredible. The cast, arrayed in colourful and gaudy garb, constantly mingled with the audience; one felt more a participant than an observer in the drama.

The story unfolds in a multitude of intricate, original and poignant levels. The people are looking for a military leader; the Pharisees are

looking to maintain political power; the Apostles are seeking fame; Pilate is looking for answers; Mary is looking for love; Christ is searching for faith; and Judas seeks to avoid the terrible mission only he can fulfill - to betray Christ.

The play belongs to Judas as much as to Christ for the two are on a parallel level of spiritual torment. Judas loves Christ to death: without his betrayal there would be no crucifixion and without a crucifixion there would be no resurrection and with no resurrection there would be no Christianity as we know it. To Judas, Christ is a prophet gone mad with ambition and self-importance and a man who must die to fulfill himself. It is the originality of the play that

whereas Judas is resurrected Christ dies on the cross and that it is Christ who betrays Judas! Both men fulfill their mission and die a martyr's death: Judas dies out of despairing love and Christ dies from love for humanity.

Brian Tomie played Judas very well and he captured the hopeless drowning sorrow that drove Judas to suicide especially well. It is a pity, however, that his delivery was sometimes too rapid and that he did not savor his pain with us more thoroughly.

Elizabeth Beeler, as Mary Magdalene, was a nightingale who stormed Christ's crumbling kingdom with the weapons of kindness and compassion and a soft embrace. Peter, played by Blair

Jarrett, accomplished his goal: he made us realize how easy it is to deny Christ. Doug Carrigan played an inspired Pilate and Ann Johnson, as Simon Zealots, has one of the most beautiful and involving voices I have ever heard.

The Pharisees were wonderfully despicable and Ian Clifford (Herod) true to the original. Herod's function in this play is superfluous: there is something extraordinarily perverse in laughing at his gay style after the Passion Play; I find it difficult to justify as comic relief.

Jim Petrie, as Jesus, played an exceptional role. What can I say: I died with him. It is difficult to squeeze the life of the world's most famous man into two hours, but the cast did it - and convincingly.

One easily felt Christ's spiritual conflict, the intense relationships he had with everyone he touched, and his death that became life for countless millions.

The props on which his drama was enacted were simple but made effective through the interplay of light and shadow and really wonderful acting. It was a beautifully performed work and as the crowd dispersed there was a sense of having experienced something moving and unforgettable. As I was walking out, with a stranger beside me, someone to our rear asked his companion, "Well, what did you think?" The stranger and I muttered the word 'beautiful' simultaneously.

And it really was beautiful.