



NICK BRANNAM
DIRECTOR | CHOREOGRAPHER

PRODUCTION	<i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i>
COMPANY	Basingstoke Amateur Theatrical Society
PUBLISHED BY	Farnham Herald
DATE OF PUBLICATION	23 rd May 2014

Basingstoke Amateur Theatrical Society is bravely attempting to stage this difficult production at the beautiful Haymarket Theatre in Basingstoke and, as the programme says, it is rare for an amateur company to be allowed to perform the show and they need to do it some justice. It has therefore been a year in the making and the cast and crew have worked extremely hard to make this one of the society's best ever productions.

The director, Ray Jeffery, brings the musical back to its original 70s roots with cast members dressed as hippies and the Romans wearing modern military greens. The approach is minimalistic, but highly effective. The stage is set sparsely with a simple metal framework at the back with a top platform accessed by a metal stair- case to one side. In the centre of the stage is a small slightly raised wooden area where Jesus stands much of the time. Props are brought on and off as needed.

The role of Jesus is played by Jamie Trick and clearly his experience of performing the song Gethsemane in London's West End has given him the insight he needed to make this title character his own. Jesus is an immensely difficult role to play, given some of the notes the performer has to hit, but Jamie did this with ease. Gethsemane was amazing as were all the other songs he performed.

The singing, of course, needed to be accompanied by some powerful acting, and Jamie's performance as Jesus brought the depth and quality needed. The final few scenes, where Jesus is beaten and dragged off to be crucified, were among some of the most emotion-ally charged I have seen performed. The final crucifixion scene left the audience stunned into silent incredulity before they erupted into appreciative and spontaneous thunderous applause. His portrayal of Jesus was as near a professional performance as you are likely to get in an amateur production and maybe in the future should consider applying for a full- time West End role.

Judas, performed by Stephen Westwood, is also another notoriously difficult character to play and almost impossible to get right. Just ask Tim Minchin. Since the character is racked with guilt and emotional indecisiveness throughout the show, all of his songs are, by necessity, sung heavily laced with deep anxiety and ambivalence. Hence Judas should never properly hit his notes, but instead always sing them as slightly broken, while at the same time remain vaguely in tune with the orchestra. This is a difficult trick to pull off, but Stephen clearly thought long

and hard about these ideas over the past year and managed to incorporate them successfully into a strong performance.

Essential to any successful staging of a well-loved rock musical is, of course, the music. Musical director Rachel Glover and her band of eight unsung heroes and heroines worked hard down in the pit to provide the audience with what was a near professional standard performance. An array of horns, guitars, drums, key-boards and drums were all brought to bear on the show to give it what can only be described as a strong West End feel.

This is undoubtedly a top-drawer production of one of Sir Tim and Sir Andrew's best loved musicals. Whether you are unfamiliar with the show or a seasoned fan, this interpretation is a must-see experience and will probably go down in the annals as one of the best shows the amateur group has ever staged.

Paul Bowers