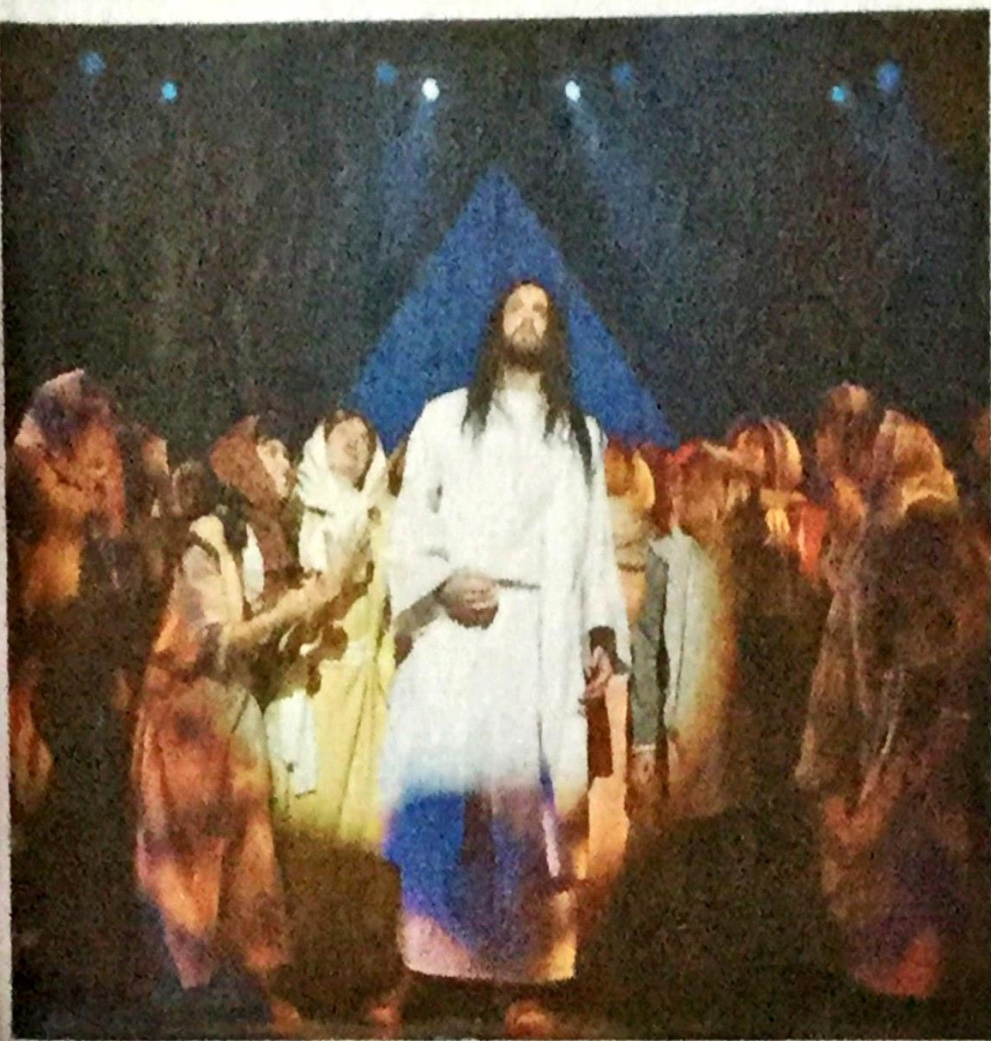


MICHAEL GRAY'S ARTS BLOG

"the gross and scope of my opinion ..." Hamlet 1.1

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2014

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR



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CAODS at the
Civic Theatre
27.09.2014

Lloyd Webber's
rock oratorio, a
passion play for
the heavy metal
generation,
gets a
powerful,
largely

traditional staging at the Civic.

The opening prologue sets the tone – Jesus's early life is played out like a fast-forward Biblical epic, with costumes and tableaux worthy of De Mille.

The show itself, originally a concept album, focuses on the last days of Christ, and on the role of Judas, the troubled outsider, given a compelling performance here by Simon Bristoe. The chorus is inventively used, spilling out over the vast steps which, with a perspex pyramid, make up the set. The energy is palpable – in the Temple, in the Garden of Gethsemane, in What's the Buzz.

Subtlety is not notably part of director Ray Jeffery's toolbox, and heartstrings are shamelessly tugged, while the title number, with its assorted Angels, is high camp kitsch, as is the decadence of Herod's entourage. The red capes and plumes make a strong visual statement before the uncompromising Crucifixion. Only in the reflective John 19:41 is the movement something of a distraction.

Excellent performances, vocally and dramatically, from Stuart Woolner as a handsome, charismatic Messiah, and Karen Kelleher as a dignified Magdalene.

This is a demanding show musically, literally an opera, with big arias and complex ensembles. Under CAODS new MD Rob Wicks it is given a great performance; only occasionally are the words lost under instrumental enthusiasm or tortured screeching.