



J E S U S C H R I S T
SUPERSTAR

50TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR

STUDY GUIDE



THE
NATIONAL THEATRE
FOUNDATION

J E S U S C H R I S T SUPERSTAR

The National Theatre

May 17–19, 2024

Lyrics by Tim Rice
Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber
Directed by Timothy Sheader
Choreographed by Drew McOnie
Packet prepared by Dramaturg Lindsey R. Barr

Celebrating its 50th Anniversary, a new mesmerizing production of the iconic musical phenomenon returns to the stage. Originally staged by London’s Regent’s Park Open Air Theatre and helmed by the acclaimed director Timothy Sheader (*Crazy for You*, *Into the Woods*) and cutting-edge choreographer Drew McOnie (*King Kong*, *Strictly Ballroom*), this production won the 2017 Olivier Award for Best Musical Revival garnering unprecedented reviews and accolades. Appealing to both theater audiences and concert music fans, this production pays tribute to the historic 1971 Billboard Album of the Year while creating a modern, theatrical world that is uniquely fresh and inspiring.

With lyrics and music by Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony winners Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Jesus Christ Superstar* is set against the backdrop of an extraordinary series of events during the final weeks in the life of Jesus Christ as seen through the eyes of Judas. Reflecting the rock roots that defined a generation, the legendary score includes ‘I Don’t Know How to Love Him’, ‘Gethsemane’ and ‘Superstar’.



For almost 200 years, The National Theatre has occupied a prominent position on Pennsylvania Avenue—“America’s Main Street”—and played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Washington, DC. Located a stone’s throw from the White House and having the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as its “front yard,” The National Theatre is a historic, cultural presence in our Nation’s Capital and the oldest continuously operating enterprise on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The non-profit National Theatre Foundation oversees the historic theatre and serves the DC community through three free outreach programs, *Saturday Morning Live! At The National*, *Community Stage Connections*, and *Teens Behind the Scenes*. These programs provide the greater Washington area with access to high quality performing arts experiences while promoting and employing local and regional artists.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE FOUNDATION
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Written and Curated by Lindsey R. Barr, Dramaturg
Designed by Carolyn Donarski

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NOTE FROM THE DRAMATURG

Growing up in a devoutly Catholic household, I was made to attend church multiple times a week. There was the standard Sunday church service, of course, but I was also heavily involved in other aspects of the parish: youth bible study, Sunday school, and various volunteer obligations. As a family, we held true to the Catholic traditions. On the high holy days we fasted, we had palms given out on Palm Sunday throughout the house and in the car, and we exchanged very few presents for Christmas, in deference to celebrating the “real reason” for the holiday. To say that the story of Jesus’ life, crucifixion, and resurrection were cherished in my house growing up would be an understatement. So, while we did not have explicit family conversations about *Jesus Christ Superstar*, as soon as I learned what it was, I knew it was a piece of theatre that I would only see of my own accord.

Immersing myself in theatre while in college led me to hear about *Jesus Christ Superstar* time and time again. I knew about the show, but not much else, and I certainly didn’t know about the cultural importance of this 1971 rock musical. When, in 2018, *Jesus Christ Superstar* was added to the roster of musicals performed live on television, I knew I had to see it. To my delight, I not only watched the performance that night—with John Legend starring in the titular role—but I thoroughly enjoyed it. I finally had the necessary context to understand why this work

was so pivotal to the American musical theatre landscape. It was the first time I was confronted with a narrative that butted up against how I was raised. On the other hand, I recognized the incredible cultural value the story held not only for musical theatre, but also for conversations about religion in the mainstream. Though I am no longer religious, and didn’t identify as such in 2018 when I saw the staged television performance, I found myself battling conflicting feelings about the show.

Ultimately, I arrive at the show today as someone who is deeply compelled by not only its content, but also its impact. It feels really important to me that the musical humanizes Jesus of Nazareth and views his story through the lens of “the villain” a group of mainstream Christians protested so fervently. What is it about seeing the human in someone we idolize that begets defensiveness and condemnation? What does that mean for how we make sense of each other’s stories? And what does it reveal about us when we potentially get uncomfortable hearing a story from a new perspective, even one that we might vehemently disagree with? While I’m not sure *Jesus Christ Superstar* sets out to answer these questions at all, the musical provides a jumping off point for us to think about them. After all, what musical is better served to have us consider “what’s a-happening” around us?

~ Lindsey R. Barr, Teens Behind the Scenes Dramaturg



Jack Hopewell in the North American Tour

Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMace

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