

Jesus christ superstar
original show
research



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Smash Hit Musicals of the Past Century: Jesus Christ Superstar Jesus Christ Superstar was a hit long before it became a musical. The musical was a rock opera concept recording produced as an album before it was staged on Broadway. It is based loosely on the Gospels' story on the last week of Jesus Christ's life showing the struggles between Judas and Jesus. The story follows Judas who is not please with Jesus' rise in popularity because Judas believes Jesus is just a man, not a God and that Jesus being a threat to the Roman Empire will bring trouble to Jesus, his followers and to Judas.

Judas eventually ends up giving away the location of Jesus on a specific day helping the Roman soldiers find him and go forth to crucify him. The original production of the Broadway show was back in 1971. It was composed by the ever famous Andrew Lloyd Webber and the lyricist was Tim Rice. The show was directed by Tim O'Horgan and choreographed by Tom Stovall. The producer was Robert Stigwood. The original city for the performance was New York City at the Mark Hellinger Theatre. The original set designer is Robin Wagner and the original costume designer is Randy Barcelo.

The four main characters were Mary Magdalene played by Yvonne Elliman, Jesus Christ played by Jeff Fenholt, Judas played by Ben Vereen and King Herod/Merchant/Leper played by Paul Ainsley. The four most well known songs from this musical include " Superstar", " Simon Zealot Poor Jerusalem", " Gethsemane" and " Everything's Alright". The show first opened on October 12th, 1971 and closed on July 1, 1973 with a total of 711 performances within that time. The length of the show was approximately an hour and fifty five minutes.

The setting of the musical is Jerusalem, house of herod, garden of Gethsemane and many other places during the time Christ was thought to have lived and was preaching the message of God. There were mixed responses from critics but the loudest were those that thought the show went against religious morals and ideas. " We've had some people that feel like it's in some way sacrilegious because it's not a traditional robes-and-sandals telling," was a quote from an executive producer. South Africa went as far as banning the entire show from performing in their country when it first debuted on Broadway.

Despite some negative responses, the show went on to be nominated for numerous awards such as the Tony award, the Drama Desk award and the Theatre world award. It won the awards for Most Promising Composer for the Drama Desk award and won the Theatre world award. For the Tony awards it was nominated for best performance by a featured actor in a musical, best original score, best scenic design, best costume design and best lighting design. The film was overall received very well by the public.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the show was the way it was portrayed, the hippie movement and the Jesus movement being put together in one show. Numerous sections of the musical have Judas in groovy outfits with dancing hippie show girls backing him up in choreography and vocals. The original vocalists and actors for the show are seen as the best so far for Broadway versions. The musical also had a hit movie produced with stunning cinematography, wonderful choreography just as seen in the musical and riveting vocal qualities for each song.

The film adaption was released in 1973 and was the eighth highest grossing film of that year. It was shot in Israel and other Middle Eastern locations. Ted Neely (playing Jesus) and Carl Anderson (playing Judas) both were nominated for Golden Globe Awards for their acting in the movie. It is obvious why they were nominated when one watches the film and sees their perfect ability to play their fragile characters in a way that show their musical talent, their power and yet the slight comedy behind each scene.

They were truly able to show the rising “celebrity” status of Jesus in a way that somehow still manages to fit in historical information about the betrayal of Judas to Jesus. One may have been worried that the movie might be a slight bit boring in some parts but when I watched it I was not bored at all, in fact I found myself quite captivated by the choreography and the songs. Neely and Anderson kept me very focussed as well because I found their acting quite extraordinary. It is not hard to find yourself singing along to “Superstar” or “Poor Jerusalem” or being awestruck by the dance moves done by the mobs.

A third film adaption is expected to be released in 2014 set to be directed by Marc Webb. In conclusion, it is quite obvious what made this show such a hit. The elements of small comedy, dance and the storyline made this a musical that was impossible to miss. Whether you loved it or hated it, you had to go see it and tell others about it. The show was able to tell a historical event and turn it into multiple dance and song numbers and even made it fun to watch which the key thing was.

It was not the type of musical that would get you on your feet dancing but singing along and being captivated by the characters and their human

elements. The relationship between the characters was a big part that played into the success of this show. Not to mention the costume design, that played a huge role as well in setting the stage and idea for the show. It was not a typical show of what Jerusalem looked like but rather a more “hippie, fun natured” version of it which is what made the audience enjoy it so much.

It was not telling biblical stories, it was just a show which made the audience feel like they did not have to have any religious ties or issues with it (even though some chose to anyways) and they could just go and watch it. Perhaps it was the idea that no matter what anyone thought of Jesus, an underlying concept this musical showed was Jesus’ celebrity-like identity and what being a celebrity can do to the celebrity themselves and to their lovers and followers (betrayal, confusion, glory, death) and that just might be the real reason why nobody could seem to get this musical out of their mind.