

Review: A brisk 'Jesus Christ Superstar' marks the return of Broadway at the Paramount | The Seattle Times

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Aaron LaVigne, Jenna Rubaii and the company of the North American Tour of "Jesus Christ Superstar." (Matthew Murphy)

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The first indication that this was not just any performance at the Paramount Theatre was the roar of applause before the show even began. The enthusiasm Tuesday night was aimed at technical director Mike Miles, who welcomed the audience and thanked everyone who helped make sure the nonprofit theater was able to reopen after 19 months and four days without a Broadway performance.

Fittingly, the show kicking off Miles' 50th season at the Paramount Theatre is the 50th anniversary tour of the rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber. The show will play eight performances in a run that ends Oct. 10. Originally planned as part of the canceled 2020-21 Broadway at The Paramount season, Seattle is the relaunched tour's second stop after a run in Portland last week.

The rock opera

"Jesus Christ Superstar" follows the last days of Jesus. Significant biblical events like the Last Supper, praying in Gethsemane, Judas' betrayal and Jesus' crucifixion are all

since seen multiple Broadway revivals, concert presentations and record releases.

50th anniversary tour

Marking the 50th anniversary of the concept album, the North American tour is produced by Stephen Gabriel and Work Light Productions. It is directed by Timothy Sheader, who premiered the Olivier Award-winning production at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in London in 2016.

The stark, industrial set resembles an unfinished skyscraper, with most of the action on the stage floor, and the orchestra spread out on the second level. The top-level I-beams form crosses echoed by a sloping section of what looks like collapsed ductwork on the floor. Bright white lights shifting from harsh backlighting to halo glow help tell the story. The apostles' dingy athleisure is even more timely now than it was in 2016.

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gave emotional detail to the quiet moments and in-between lines.

Aaron LaVigne duplicates the heavy-metal scream of Ted Neeley's Jesus in the 1973 film, but also brings a smooth tenor to more reflective moments. His version of "Gethsemane" (accompanying himself on guitar) is now my favorite. As Judas, James T. Justis has even more to do and the versatility to do it. His death deserves a place among bel canto's best mad scenes, while Jenna Rubaii's voice captures Mary Magdalene's sweetness to tearful effect. Unusually, the Pharisees injected humor into their sinister corruption. Alvin Crawford demonstrated much more range than is common for Caiaphas' bass, while remaining delightfully subterranean when suggesting "a more permanent solution." Paul Louis Lessard's Herod provoked cheers and laughter before he even sang a note.

Pandemic-adapted theater

'Jesus Christ Superstar'

Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, lyrics by Tim Rice; Oct. 5-10;
911 Pine St., Seattle; \$35-\$100; masks and proof of vaccination
required; negative coronavirus PCR test taken within 48 hours of
show start time required for those unable to be vaccinated;
206-682-1414, stgpresents.org

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