

A Good Way to Spend The Last Days

by Michael Bettencourt

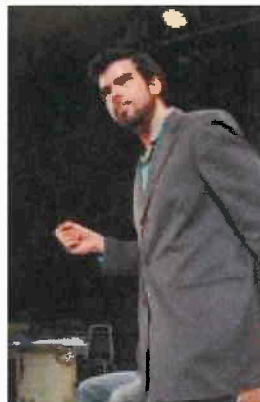
The Last Days of Judas Iscariot reviewed January 14, 2010

Wide Eyed Productions presents a competent production of Stephen Adly Guirgis' talky but clever *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, the purported narrative of a trial in present-day Purgatory about whether Judas should be forgiven for his betrayal of Jesus Christ.

The play opens in the midst of recent efforts to rehabilitate Judas, covered well in Joan Acocella's *New Yorker* article of August 3, 2009, where Judas is now seen as Jesus' best friend and a man deserving of the redemption and salvation offered by Jesus to all humans. This is certainly Guirgis' take: what we see of his Judas is a soul in torment, ready to recant his actions to save his friend, and, by the testimonies of others, such as Mary Magdalene (Brianne Mai), the man who kept Jesus honest and focused on his mission.

The trial, which has been authorized by God himself, pits prosecutor El-Fayoumy (Sebastian Cintron), a lavish-mouthed suck-up ready to flatter his way forward, against defense lawyer Fabiana Cunningham (Lisa Mamazza), whose failed life has landed her in Purgatory. It's never clear why the trial comes to pass, since Judas has not requested it (he is in a perpetual catatonic state in the deepest circle of Hell), but nevertheless it proceeds, with each side running through a roster of witnesses that includes Mother Teresa (Joshua David Bishop), Pontius Pilate (Okieriete Onaodowan), Caiaphas the Elder (Andrew Harriss), and even Satan himself (Jason Loverde).

The script mixes high purpose and low humor, careful research and camp (witness Johnny Beachamp's drag performance of St. Monica). The court procedural is ornamented with testimonials, jokes, personal reflections, and soulful recollections, many of them rendered in Guirgis' signature style of street-infused



Sebastian Cintron as El-Fayoumy
Photo Credit: Paul Newland

THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT

Richmond Shepard
Theatre

Category: Comedy
Written by: Stephen Adly Guirgis
Directed by: Rebecca Hengstenberg
Produced by: Wide Eyed Productions
Opened: January 14, 2010
Closed: February 7, 2010
Running Time: 2½ hours

Theater: Richmond Shepard Theatre
Address: 309 E. 26th Street
New York, NY 10010

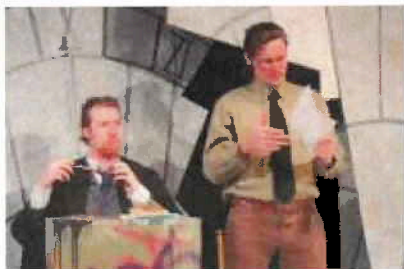
BOX OFFICE

Tickets: \$25.00
\$20 for students

CREDITS

Creative Team
Written by: Stephen Adly Guirgis
Directed by: Rebecca Hengstenberg
Produced by: Wide Eyes Productions (Kristin Skye Hoffman and Justin Ness)
Light Designer: Joe

declamation and intelligent analysis (used to great effect in *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train and Our Lady of 121st Street*).



Andrew Harriss (Judge) and Billy Dutton (Bailiff)

Photo Credit: Paul Newland

In the end, Judas is denied forgiveness and thus entrance into Heaven, which leaves the initial question unanswered: why is Judas' act of betrayal (if, indeed, it was betrayal at all) denied the amnesty that Jesus promised to all willing to confess their sins and follow him? The answer will have to come from each audience member's entanglement with the

issues about compassion and tolerance that the play raises.

Director Rebecca Hengstenberg makes excellent use of the odd-angled space of the Richmond Shepard Theatre. The set (by Joshua David Bishop) is made up of segments of a smashed Roman-numeraled sundial, with various ruined-looking pediments and columns scattered about. Joe Novak's lighting design does a good job of shifting from a general wash to focused spots for the individual testimonies, and Jill Wetzel's costume design reflects the dingy, down-at-heel environs of Purgatory.

Though the entire cast does a fine job, several members stand out. Okieriete Onaodowan's steely Pontius Pilate gives one the feel of just how tough the Romans must have been. The smarmy aplomb of Jason Loverde's Satan parallels an equally practiced vicious streak, and Andrew Harriss as Caiaphas the Elder and Lincoln Hayes as Judas give affecting performances of unrepairable people who nonetheless face themselves squarely without flinching.

The Last Days is a big canvas covered with big ideas (it runs 2½ hours), a welcome respite from domesticated pieces about internalized self-struggling or snarling family gatherings. The questions raised by the play may not get answered in the play, but they linger in the mind as worth considering, as one will no doubt do on the walk home from the theater.

Novak

Sound Designer:

Trevor Dallier

Set Designer: Joshua

David Bishop

Costume Designer: Jill

Wetzel

Assistant Director:

Melissa Johnson

Assistant Costume

Designer: Kelly Homan

Cast

Ali Gilbertson as

Henrietta/Sister

Glenna/Soldier 3

Lincoln Hayes as Judas

Iscariot

Trevor Dallier as

Mathias/Jesus

Andrew Harriss as

Judge

Littlefield/Caiaphas the

Elder

Billy Dutton as Bailiff/St.

Peter

Johnny Beachamp as St.

Monica

Mavis Martin as

Gloria/Soldier 2

Sebastian Cintron as El-

Fayoumy

Lisa Mamazza as

Fabiana Cunningham

Colin McFadden as

Butch Honeywell

Brianne Mai as

Loretta/Mary Magdalene

Sage Seals as Simon the

Zealot/Soldier 1

Okieriete Onaodowan as

St. Matthew/Uncle

Pino/Pontius Pilate

Joshua David Bishop as

Mother Theresa/St.

Thomas

Jason Loverde as Satan

Crew

Production Stage

Manager: Sara

Troficanto

Assistant Stage

Manager: Chad

Erickson

Construction Crew

Head: Justin Ness