



Chiasso, Cinema EXCELSIOR

18.15

Friday, 1st April 2022**JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR****1973****106 minutes**Directed by **Norman Jewison**,

Starring: Ted Neeley, Carl Anderson, Yvonne Elliman, Berry Dennen

Jesus Christ Superstar tells the story of biblical Jesus in the final days leading up to his crucifixion. A rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, the musical has no spoken dialogue and is sometimes considered a modern rock-opera. Loosely based on the Gospels, *Superstar* focuses on the personal conflicts between Jesus, his disciples, the people of Israel, and the leadership of Rome. Special attention is played to the relationship between Judas Iscariot and Jesus, as well as Jesus' relationship with Mary Magdalene. The musical is unique among biblical retellings in that it focuses on both Judas' struggle making the decision to betray Jesus and Jesus' human psychology, fear, and anger in understanding and accepting his role as both leader and martyr. The show is a product of its era, permeated with 1970's rock, gospel, folk and funk themes, modern language and colloquialisms, and high-energy dance numbers.

It recounts the last days of Jesus Christ from the perspective of Judas Iscariot, his betrayer. As Jesus' following increases, Judas begins to worry that Jesus is falling for his own hype, forgetting the principles of his teachings and growing too close to the prostitute Mary Magdalene. After Jesus has an outburst in a temple, Judas turns on him.

Judas laments that if Jesus had returned as the Messiah today, he would have been more popular and his message easier to spread. Judas also wonders what Jesus thinks of other religions' prophets. He ultimately wants to know if Jesus thinks he is who they say he is, possibly meaning the Son of God ("Superstar"). Judas' questions go unanswered, and Jesus is sent to die ("The Crucifixion"), with ominous atonal music, with Jesus saying some of his final words before dying.

As the film ends, the performers, now out of costume, board their bus. Only the performers Barry Dennen, Yvonne Elliman, and Carl Anderson who had played Pilate, Mary Magdalene and Judas notice the actor Ted Neeley, who had played Jesus is missing. A shepherd and his flock cross the hillside beneath the empty cross ("John Nineteen Forty-One").

Critics' comments:

Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* is brought to the big screen in this most unusual adaptation. Shot as a contemporary play, a theatre troop drives out into the Israeli desert and proceeds to put on a production of the Gospel Story. There are no real sets as it's all shot on location, and the costumes bare all of the trademarks of '70s fashion (from bell bottom pants to rose tinted sunglasses). And, there's a little bit of disco in the choreography. Yet this all ends up giving the film a bombastic energy that's a lot of fun. Plus, the music is incredibly catchy and has a light-hearted humor to it. Though it's a bit dated, *Jesus Christ Superstar* presents a unique vision and has a sort of a kitschiness that makes it tremendously entertaining.