

The Last Days of Judas Iscariot

A review by Lloyd Eby
June 5, 2014



Melissa Blackall – Julie Garner, Maboud Ebrahimzadeh, Brian Hemmingsen and Scott McCormick in “The Last Days of Judas Iscariot” at Forum Theatre.

We just saw a wonderful play this afternoon (Sunday, June 1) at the Roundhouse Theatre in Silver Spring, MD. It is “The Last Days of Judas Iscariot,” by Stephen Adly Guirgis.

The reviewer of this play in the Washington Post, Nelson Pressley, writes that it “...is a splendid storm of a play, a full three hours examining the proper fate of the man who betrayed Jesus and, by conspicuous extension, the fate of unforgiven souls everywhere. It is a holy courtroom drama and a brazenly irreverent farce, set in Purgatory and animated by slangy, gritty, foul-mouthed characters who insist on keeping the stakes very real.”

The reviewer continues, “If three hours of Bible analysis as rehashed in the language of gangsters isn’t your thing, so be it. ... Guirgis’s style is unabashedly in-your-face and sometimes slapstick silly, yet he establishes his startlingly deep earnestness right at the top. The play opens with a quiet, piercing monologue from Judas’s mother, and her pain commands respect.” He concludes, “The play demands everything from whiffs of burlesque to the intensity of chapel and ... [the] actors routinely turn it on a dime.”

I agree with every word of that review. This is the best theater I’ve seen in some time. The play deals with the great issues – grace and forgiveness, heaven and hell, Satan vs. God and Satan vs. humans, whether the Jews were responsible for the killing of Jesus, the role and behavior of Caiphas, the role and behavior of Pontius Pilate, the role and character of the individual Apostles, Judas vs. Jesus, the reliability of the Bible and the Gospels, belief vs. evidence, and much more.

Those people who think that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were lovers or were even married, or those who think the trouble between Jesus and Judas was over the woman Mary Magdalene may be disappointed because in the play Mary explicitly denies that she and Jesus were married or were lovers, and there is no hint in it that Jesus and Judas were in contention over a woman. But, then, there is nothing about those speculations or beliefs in the Gospels either.

I recommend this play without reservation, except possibly for those people who are offended by coarse language and the ‘f’ word.